

W@W181

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Read Mark 14:48-50 *"Am I leading a rebellion," said Jesus, "that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I was with you, teaching in the temple courts, and you did not arrest me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled." Then everyone deserted him and fled. (NIV)*

Jesus often taught by asking questions. "Am I leading a rebellion?" in the NIV is better translated, "Have you come out as against a robber ... ?" (ESV). He was no thief, but He came to reclaim what had been stolen and spoiled: the authority of the law by the religious rulers, the covenant relationship with God by the nation, and the souls of men by Satan. His tactics were not stealth or duplicitous words, but the open proclamation of truth with signs of God's power. The contrast with the covert and self seeking burglar should have been obvious: but the hit squad was blind to their part in the greatest robbery on earth - taking away the priceless Son of God.

It was no part of their plan to endorse their crime by fulfilling the Scriptures - but they did. [Isaiah 53:8](#) shows how God knew what would happen, 700 years before Gethsemane. But it was more than that. This prophecy was not just God's telescope into the future, but His plan for Satan's henchmen to do their worst, so that heaven could display its best. The 'home team' will also be a disappointment, and [Zech 13:7](#) predicted the weakness of the disciples as they melted into the night (as Jesus had just reminded them in [Mark 14:27](#)).

This sordid little episode highlights at least two important truths: firstly, nothing escapes God's notice (even hundreds of years before it happens); and secondly whenever God announces His plan in His Word, it will always happen! The extraordinary sovereignty of God is so breathtakingly amazing for all who will trust Jesus, and devastating for those to who do not. What a confidence we can have, today, that the Lord's will is going to be done! He even uses His enemies to bring His glory.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father. I am so glad that You know everything and will do whatever pleases You. Please settle this truth in my heart today, so that I may trust that all Your purposes will win through. For Christ's sake, Amen.*

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Read Mark 14:51-52 *A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment, was following Jesus. When they seized him, he fled naked, leaving his garment behind. (NIV)*

This is probably a very personal aside from the author: a way of identifying himself at the scene. Although it is unwise to try to join up Bible dots that are too widely spaced, there is enough evidence to suggest that the Last Supper may have been held in Mark's family home and that he rushed out in his linen sleeping cloth, on hearing of a disturbance at Gethsemane. The importance of this verse, is to identify the writer as a participant (even if briefly), rather than a mere observer of historical details.

Involved, sympathetic or even a convinced follower of the Lord Jesus, this young man showed no greater loyalty than the disciples when it came to the test. He too ran away, with nothing to hide either his modesty or his conscience. However much this gospel urges us to see Jesus for who He really is, this fleeting act reveals that not even Mark understood at the time. He too needed the conviction and conversion by the Holy Spirit before he could be useful. Even then, he was a big disappointment to the Apostle Paul. But Mark found his special space as a writer, rather than a front line pioneering missionary.

However, it was not to boost Marks' literary success that Jesus died, but to pay for his failure. At the crucial point, all his supporters fled ... and so would we had we been there. It was for such weakness and many others that Jesus Christ had to die. Mark's personal contribution to the sins of the world was etched upon the body of Jesus, and he knew it. However, as Jesus said, those who know they have been forgiven much, love much ([Luke 7:47](#)). Mark's experience of failure and forgiveness seems to have put great energy into his God-appointed ministry - it was designed to do that for him, and for you too!

Prayer: *Dear Lord. As I contemplate my failures, I also see the cross on which You died to bear their punishment for me. Help me to serve you in humble gratitude, willing to share my love of Jesus at work, at home and on holiday. In Your Name. Amen.*

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Read Mark 14:53-54 *They took Jesus to the high priest, and all the chief priests, elders and teachers of the law came together. Peter followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. There he sat with the guards and warmed himself at the fire. (NIV)*

It seems all wrong. And it is! The King of kings is brought before a kangaroo court. Those who were supposed to teach others about God could not even recognise Him when they saw Him. Peter who promised to be right up in the front row supporting Jesus is firmly in the back row. The one who was hot headed about his ability to endure hostility went cold on his promise, and needed the fire to warm him up.

That is the way that sin affects things. Once the first wrong decision is made, there is a domino cascade of error. Nothing can stand up any more. The trail of warped values and broken trust litters this story. But in the middle of it all is the Lord Jesus who has never changed - since He first created the people who now are seeking to destroy Him. Jesus will eventually be seen as King; His pledge of support is never broken; and He will fulfil every promise. And the fire is reserved for those who refuse to bow to His sovereignty.

In our crazy, topsy-turvy world, where truth is described as bad and evil is celebrated; there is no possibility of righting millions of capsized people without a powerful external Saviour. Western culture, originally based on Biblical values, has now degenerated to just the kind of mess that was around Jesus as He was led to the cross. Religious teachers are making up their own rules of morality, and believers are falling at the first hurdles. So you see, it was for us and for this generation that Jesus had to die; as well as for His own. Please don't think that contemporary godlessness prohibits the gospel - that is just where the gospel is needed! And in your workplace too!!

Prayer: *Dear Lord. I am so grateful that You are the only effective Saviour, and that I know you as my friend. Please help me to proclaim You as Lord in the darkest places, because that is where the Light is most needed. In Your Name. Amen.*

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Read Mark 14:55-56 *The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death, but they did not find any. Many testified falsely against him, but their statements did not agree. (NIV)*

Law, if it is to be just, demands evidence of wrongdoing. Here we have the best brains of the Jewish civil service and seventy two of the top religious academics - on the horns of a dilemma. They had arrested a man who did no wrong, with no evidence - except that He did nothing wrong! The false witnesses who were put under cross examination found that their statements were contradictory and worthless. The more stooges they brought into the witness box, the more obvious their lies. That is because lies have no resting place, they chase themselves around in circles, until they fall over like dizzy dogs.

You may ask why the prosecutors did not look at all the evidence for Jesus being the Messiah, the anointed Son of God. Mark has presented us with much of it in this gospel. But they did not want objective truth or justice. They simply wanted Jesus out of the way so that they could continue to have their own way. If they could have found fault with him, they would have smirked, but not hated Jesus: but they did hate Him, because His righteousness was impenetrable.

How these verses show the darkness of the self-obsessed heart. And that was why Jesus wanted to die - so that the proud might be released from bondage by bowing, the wanderer might return and the spiritually blind, see. Today, gospel men and woman are still subjected to hateful prejudice ... just because they love Jesus. But don't forget that Jesus died for their persecutors too! So, don't back down from Jesus when the going gets tough - He is the only hope for those who taunt you!

Prayer: *Dear Lord. I often want to retreat when people get at me because I love You. Please forgive me and help me to have Your compassion, as they are so lost and have no hope apart from You. In Your Name. Amen.*

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Read Mark 14:57-59 *Then some stood up and gave this false testimony against him: "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this man-made temple and in three days will build another, not made by man.' " Yet even then their testimony did not agree. (NIV)*

Jesus is still in the courtroom, and now another twist to truth is about to come out. Any intention to destroy Herod's temple would have been terrorism; and that is how the false witnesses presented what Jesus had said. But John tells us what really happened. [John 2:18-22](#) says: *Then the Jews demanded of him, "What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?" Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." The Jews replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" **But the temple he had spoken of was his body.** After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken. (NIV)*

They had heard the words from Jesus' mouth, but not understood the meaning from His heart. The disciples did not do much better; it was only after the resurrection that they were able to join the dots and understand what He had meant. So, why did this 'terrorist confession' fail to bring a conviction? Mark says that the eye/ear witnesses all said something different! This is as important as it is fascinating. Words are very important, but only if hearers get the right meaning. We do not just listen to words, but we interpret them according to the context and our understanding of the speaker. Those who were determined to resist the Lordship of Jesus, would never understand Him; and so they had no way of receiving His message. It is the same today!

So keep on saying what is true about Jesus! You may be misquoted, misunderstood, and maligned - but you are in good company with the Old Testament prophets (cf [Matthew 5:11-12](#)), and Jesus. But you must keep on saying it, because there is no other way for people to be saved ... and despite your doubts, some will listen and bow to Jesus, even in your workplace!

Prayer: *Father God. Although I get discouraged when people speak against me because I love You, please help me to understand how much You love them and want them to believe in Jesus. In His Name. Amen.*

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Read Mark 14:60-61a *Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, "Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?" But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer. (NIV)*

The right to silence has been enshrined in many of the world's legal systems, but not in Jesus' day. The High Priest's question had a more commanding edge, more like, "You are going to answer these accusations!" The bullying tactics of the kangaroo court were met by a wall of divine silence. Jesus had no intention of defending Himself against liars, logically to strip out the prosecution case, line by line. After all, He had come to die for liars: He loved them so much that He knew they could not be saved by Him saving His own life. Remarkable!

In those days, the person who was silent at the end of an argument, was the loser (there was nothing more to say to challenge the opposing ideas). But here, there really was nothing more to say! Not because Jesus was in the wrong, but because Isaiah had already written [Is 53:6-7](#). God had said it ... it was now for Jesus to do it! Silently to go to slaughter, like a lamb.

The ranting of self-important people in public against God, demanding His response - is often disappointed. God is economical with words, when He has spoken, he does not need to repeat Himself, because His Word lasts for ever. Our popular press may applaud the self-appointed guardians of atheism, forgetting that God has already spoken, and that Jesus loves them. That is why He had to die for them! Often those who are most abusive are really frightened that the gospel might be true. So don't hide from them, come out into the open and as they pour their venom - quietly tell them that Jesus died for people just like them! Whatever they say, they have no real answer until they welcome Jesus in repentance and faith.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, I know that you love those who hate me for Your sake, so help me not to be afraid as I tell them that You love them. For Jesus' sake. Amen.*

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Read Mark 14:61-62 *Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?" "I am," said Jesus. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." (NIV)*

The trial judge now moves from the faked evidence, to the most significant question anyone can ask of Jesus: "Are you God's Son, anointed for the salvation and judgement of the world"? The word, 'the Christ' in Greek was the same as 'Messiah' in Hebrew. It is a title rather than a name: it means 'the anointed one'. In the Old Testament, three kinds of people were anointed: the kings (who were, or should have been, the pastors of Israel) - the leaders who brought the rule of God to the people; the priests - who brought the people to God by the prayers and sacrifices; and the prophets who brought the people to face up to God's covenant (usually when the kings were not ruling in a Godly way).

However, the Old Testament also kept pointing forward to the day when God would anoint a very special person, described as God's Son. He would fulfil all the roles of the kings (as King of kings); the priests (as God's great High Priest of [Hebrews 2:17](#) to make the final sacrifice for the sins of the whole world); and the prophets (He would not just speak God's word, He was the Word of God in a human body of [John 1:1](#) ... and he would not just bring people back to the old covenant, but would make a new covenant in His own blood of [1 Corinthians 11:25](#)).

When Jesus admitted His true identity, He also prophesied that He would also be the Judge on the final day. The High Priest should have bowed to Jesus, and allowed Him to be on the judgement seat. All those who do that now, need fear nothing when Jesus comes again. But the 'archbishop' wanted to be the judge, and so Jesus, as a prophet, warned that the roles would be radically reversed. Even so, Jesus would die for him! Still, today, when faced with the clearest evidence of the identity of Jesus, many will scoff at the one who so wants to save them. Nevertheless, keep loving them and telling them the truth - without it they cannot be saved.

Prayer: *Gracious Lord. You have won my heart with your truth and love. Help me to keep presenting the true identity of Jesus to my friends, and I pray that some may turn to you. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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Read Mark 14:63-65 *The high priest tore his clothes. "Why do we need any more witnesses?" he asked. "You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?" They all condemned him as worthy of death. Then some began to spit at him; they blindfolded him, struck him with their fists, and said, "Prophecy!" And the guards took him and beat him. (NIV)*

The High Priest had surrounded himself with liars in order to secure a conviction against Jesus. But when Jesus admitted His true identity, it was treated as the worst of lies - blasphemy! Blasphemy, at its least, is to belittle or defame God: at its worst it is to claim to be God when you are not. So Jesus' claim to be the Son of God, the Messiah could not have been blasphemous at all - because that was the truth! But the High Priest refused to believe it. He had such a distorted way of thinking because he had rejected the truth for so long, and wanted to accept lies instead.

With his integrity shot through, the religious judge does not make a personal decision about Jesus - he asks the 72 members of the Sanhedrin to vote. There was no considered weighing of evidence, but a unanimous call for execution. Disorder overtook dignity as some, otherwise noble men, spat on Jesus and made sport of Him with their violent games. And what the temple leaders modelled, the guards took as their licence to degrade the King of Heaven.

The masters of 'spin' always fall over in the end, so it is dangerous to keep company with liars. You see, truth is not a commodity to be traded in varying degrees of purity to achieve political ends or personal goals. It will never go away, simply because it is true. History shows that the truth may take a very long time to come out, but God can wait. Untruth was the undoing of the High Priest (and his temple that was razed to the ground less than 40 years later), and his divine judgement is still to come. So it makes sense to practise truth at every opportunity, at home and in business - however inconvenient it may be for the spin doctors ... because it will keep your moral compass true for whatever the world, flesh or Devil may throw at you. It will also enable you to be an 'early responder' when God calls you to witness for Him.

Prayer: *Dear Lord. Thank You for being the Truth, and for calling me to live and speak the truth. It is not easy to stay sharp for You every day, and I ask Your forgiveness when I have bent the truth for convenience or profit. Help me to be known as a person of truth, to Your glory and to the blessing of those I work and live alongside. In Jesus' Name, Amen.*

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Read Mark 14:66-70 *While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came by. When she saw Peter warming himself, she looked closely at him. "You also were with that Nazarene, Jesus," she said. But he denied it. "I don't know or understand what you're talking about," he said, and went out into the entrance. When the servant girl saw him there, she said again to those standing around, "This fellow is one of them." Again he denied it. After a little while, those standing near said to Peter, "Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean." (NIV)*

What a pathetic sight, the larger-than-life fisherman was trying to be brave - yet he was also trying to hide. Warming himself by the courtyard fire to take the chill off the night, Peter thought he would merge in with the crowd. No so! A servant girl spotted him and drew attention to him. The mouth that professed undying loyalty to Jesus in [Mark 14:29,31](#); now claimed he knew nothing about Jesus. As he shuffled off, everybody was watching him: they listened to a crescendo of denials in his strong northern Galilean accent.

Peter was now unexpectedly centre-stage. It was just where he did not want to be - even though he had boasted that he could handle it for Jesus. He was about to be trapped ... a thousand pictures may have been racing through his mind, but they were all about Peter. The words of Jesus had been forgotten, he was fighting for survival, and he felt sickeningly alone. Trapped like a rabbit in the headlights (but much more vocal), he forgot he was a friend of Jesus, and tried to swear his way out.

Ever been trapped by a simple question, about your relationship with Jesus? Many smiling churchgoers are not so brave at work or the family party. We may be concerned about what other think about us, or how the atheist or cynic will shred our flimsy intellectual arguments. We may just be tired of a constant barrage from those who claim to love us, or are tired by being the daily object of fun. Ducking, weaving, hiding and lying are no solutions. Just look them in the eye and tell them that you love Jesus, despite your faults; because He has loved you and does so every day!

Prayer: *Father God. Help me always to be true about my relationship with Jesus. Help me to know Your presence with me as I take Your side at work and at home. To Your praise and glory. Amen.*

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Read Mark 14:71-72 *He began to call down curses on himself, and he swore to them, "I don't know this man you're talking about." Immediately the cock crowed the second time. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: "Before the cock crows twice you will disown me three times." And he broke down and wept. (NIV)*

A curse, is a phrase that is designed to bring disaster. To curse oneself (as in the old-fashioned, "Cut my throat and I hope to die"), is to agree to terrible punishment if what we say is untrue. What a mess Peter was in now: trapped by a girl, noticed by the thugs and crowed over by a cockerel. It was that noisy bird that brought him to his senses, or more specifically to the Word of God. Jesus had spoken prophetically about Peter's next 12 hours and declared that a cockerel would denounce his denial.

All the bird did was to be God's alarm clock: to wake Peter up to what Jesus had already said - to bring him to the realisation that Jesus was right and he was wrong. It certainly worked. Peter was devastated. One minute he was in a panic, hunting for self-preservation, and the next he was distraught because he knew he had 'blown it' with Jesus ... and that His opinion mattered more than anybody else's. Big boys do cry if they are honest that they have missed the truth by miles - like Peter.

God's wake-up calls arrive with love - it is neither in His interest nor ours to remain dozy to the truth. The alarms are always by God's timing and demand a response. Like the prophetic calls of the Old Testament, God's Word is designed to bring us back to the priority of His covenant: and we usually need a jolt to let us know that God has spoken. Paradoxically, the Lord often uses failure to help us get the message that we are not what we think we are, and certainly not what we would like to be. It is all a part of His gracious way to bring us back on course before we capsize.

Prayer: *Gracious Father. Thank you for choosing to use even my failure to bring me back closer to You. I really value Your wake-up calls. Please help me to respond in ways that will glorify You and enable me to serve you better in the future. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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Read Mark 15:1-2 *Very early in the morning, the chief priests, with the elders, the teachers of the law and the whole Sanhedrin, reached a decision. They bound Jesus, led him away and turned him over to Pilate. "Are you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate. "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. (NIV)*

For many people who have been wrestling with a problem, coming to a decision is a big relief: even if the decision is wrong! The religious court had already agreed that Jesus was guilty of blasphemy by admitting to being the Messiah ([Mark 14:61-62](#)), and that according to the Jewish law, He should be put to death. But the Roman occupiers did not recognise blasphemy as an offence, and although the Sanhedrin had considerable authority to regulate Jewish society, only the Roman government could sentence a man to death.

So, they had to find a Roman offence that would achieve the fatal result. [Luke 23:2](#) tells us that they decided on treason. To support their case, they would say that Jesus preached civil disobedience and claimed to be a king. And so the Truth was twisted, the Life-giver was bound, the Way was led away. Pilate's question was truthfully answered - Jesus was the King of the Jews (anointed by God but not yet crowned by the people) and the formal trial began.

As always, the truth, when twisted, is much fouler than an outright lie. It is the hallmark of Satan's trade (cf [John 8:44](#)). We see it in business, family, friendship and even fellowship - it provides an excuse for behaviour when there is no valid reason. At its lightest, it achieves its objective by deception; often it assassinates character; and it stopped at nothing until Jesus was killed. So look for those tell-tale signs in yourself, and repent: see them in others and beware. Yet the God of truth will always have the last word - as Jesus did when He rose from the dead.

Prayer: *Father God. I know that untruth lurks inside everybody. Help me to guard against being used for Satan's purposes when I open my mouth or write, email or text. Please be my guard against the lies of others, and yet help me to always remember that whatever others may say or do, You always have the last word. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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Read Mark 15:3-5 *The chief priests accused him of many things. So again Pilate asked him, "Aren't you going to answer? See how many things they are accusing you of." But Jesus still made no reply, and Pilate was amazed. (NIV)*

'Over-egging the pudding' is a quaint expression meaning 'to spoil something by putting too much into it'. That was the problem with the religious lawyers. Once they had Pilate's ear (and the accusation of treason was not to be dismissed lightly), they then poured out the venom that was in their hearts: many lies, half truths and twisted truths. Today, the muddle of so-called evidence would be torn apart by defence counsel. And Pilate was not impressed either. Any objective observer would see that Jesus' accusers were using all the verbal sticks they could find to beat Him - it looked like a vendetta.

[Matthew 12:35](#) tells us that evil does not just pour from the mouth - it is pumped from a heart that has been storing evil. And how the religious rulers hated Jesus! He was everything that they were supposed to be, but were not. His words had authority unlike theirs. So their accusations were fuelled by envy (as we shall see in [Mark 15:10](#)). None of these could be taken seriously - and certainly Jesus was not going to dignify the venom by responding to it. There are many times when speech is silver but silence is golden.

Jesus was never panicked into defending himself. Truth is its own defence. Even though Pilate had never seen a prisoner react like this, it is a good model. Vindication rarely comes from powerful arguments but from the long term effects of truth. This is an important principle that will save many hours of fretting. [Psalm 37:1-7](#) gives similar advice (do click the link and read - it is excellent medicine for the troubled heart). Place your burden of unfair accusation before the Lord; and leave Him to deal with it. Jesus did.

Prayer: *Dear Lord. When I am unfairly treated, help me to rest in You. When I need to take matters further, may I do so only at Your command and in total reliance upon You, and not in anger or arrogance. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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Read Mark 15:6-8 *Now it was the custom at the Feast to release a prisoner whom the people requested. A man called Barabbas was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising. The crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did. (NIV)*

Power in Israel was delicately balanced between the Roman occupiers, and the Jewish leaders who were held responsible to control the people, or lose their privileges. As a part of this 'understanding' not to violate religious traditions, Pilate had agreed to an amnesty for one prisoner each year. Perhaps the Jewish leaders could foresee the possibility of Pilate solving his 'Jesus problem' by releasing Him under the terms of the amnesty - and they might have excited the crowd to ask for Barabbas (as only one jail bird would be set free).

Crowds were a threat to Pilate, especially when they got out of control. He had already been wrapped over the knuckles by Rome for overreacting to civil disputes in Israel, and he would not want things to go wrong now. As the crowd approached and stated their case, Pilate would have felt trapped between his duty, his conscience and his fear of personal failure. But his response was a massive personal moral failure, in which the greatest casualty, apart from Jesus, was truth itself.

Although many matters in life are sorted without difficulty, most of the big issues require a crisis point decision. Manipulators know that, and those who deviously seek their own objectives, may try to force others to make a decision, perhaps even against their better conscience. In this process, moral pressure may be applied to retain a tradition or to agree something that seems reasonable, but is not true. Church as well as government politics are littered with such ingenuous compromises; and many businesses that fail have been impaled on agreements that should never have been struck. So it may be time to set aside naivety in order to think and pray carefully about agreements that do not have the ring of truth about them.

Prayer: *Father God. I know that you are never trapped or caught out by devious people; and that Jesus went to the cross for me with a great willingness of purpose. Help me to discern those whose intentions are less than honourable as they seek agreement with me in business or elsewhere; and help me to know how to respond wisely so that my conscience and Your plans will not be harmed. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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Read Mark 15:9-11 *"Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate, knowing it was out of envy that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead. (NIV)*

Here is the anxious voice of a man on the horns of a dilemma. Pilate knew that the religious leaders did not want Jesus released, but His freedom was one of Pilate's very few options to get out of this mess with some dignity. This Roman official, who was expected to uphold the high principles of Roman justice, had heard no compelling evidence of treason, or any other crime. He could see clearly through their pseudo legal waffle, to a fleet of embittered hearts firing broadsides at Jesus. But execution was his decision alone.

Devious people are rarely honest about their duplicity: they hide behind others, and best of all - behind a crowd. When the crowd made their united demands, the chief priests merely looked sanctimonious and claimed that it was really the people who had made this decision - they were simply there to represent the people! The dreadful thing was that Pilate was not taken in at all - he could see right through the plot ... but he had no moral courage to make the right decision. Some may call that weakness, but really it was a bigger problem: Pilate wanted desperately to hold onto his own power more than be true to Jesus.

Real honesty is a rare commodity, anywhere. It is seen best where there is true love. But in this court the only love on display was that of Jesus - for His captors and His judge. He was following the way of the old prophets, who suffered for saying the truth. He had already given His blessing on those disciples who would do the same ([Matthew 5:11-12](#)). So when injustice comes to you, remember that Jesus fully understands, and has pronounced blessing over you. It does not stop evil being evil, but it certainly encourages us to make very different choices to that of Pilate.

Prayer: *Gracious Lord. When evil overflows, Your grace overflows more! Thank you for fully understanding the pain of rejection and brokenness, and the disappointment that comes as people fail to make right choices. Help me not to be one of them. For Your Name's sake. Amen.*

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Read Mark 15:12-15 *"What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?" Pilate asked them. "Crucify him!" they shouted. "Why? What crime has he committed?" asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, "Crucify him!" Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified. (NIV)*

From anxiety to desperation: Pilate's voice may have reached a higher pitch as the trap closed around him. Instead of issuing a right verdict, he thrashes around like a fish in a net and offers himself to the judgement of the crowd; and of all history. Of course, the discussion about Barabbas was a ploy to avoid the real subject, Jesus. Now the crowd disturbance, that Pilate feared, was about to erupt. All questions about evidence and law were thrown away. The mob was demanding the death sentence on Jesus; and Pilate's career was in serious danger if he refused their demand.

"Wanting to satisfy the crowd", is a pathetic legal reason for authorising a man to be flogged and hung. 'Anything for a quiet life' is never a wise decision style. And for Pilate, it was to prove a disaster. It was no honest judicial mistake, (although paradoxically, 'Barabbas' means 'the son of the father' ... one was set free and the other killed ... but it was the wrong way around), For ever after, history (and the creeds) would announce that Jesus died 'under the authority of Pontius Pilate'. Personally, that decision started the countdown to Pilate's recall to Rome three years later: his power gone.

Pilate's crime against truth and justice was monumental. The event is unique, and there are no adequate comparisons. But because the error was so blatant, it provides a very clear perspective on the lesser decisions we make in work and the community. If Pilate had loved or honoured Jesus, the bizarre decision would not have been made. No decision is simply intellectual or pragmatic: we do, what we do, because of who we love. So if our loving is Godly, our choices will follow. Something to think about, isn't it?

Prayer: *Dear Lord. I know that I need to love You first, with all of my heart, mind and strength. Please help me to respond in love to all You have done for me (even taking the cross instead of me), in such a way that my daily choices may be in line with Your truth; and my big decisions radiating my devotion to You. For Your Sake. Amen.*

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Read Mark 15:16-18 *The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium) and called together the whole company of soldiers. They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. And they began to call out to him, "Hail, king of the Jews!" (NIV)*

The soldiers were not part of the judicial decision-making process. They simply had to carry out the sentence on the prisoner. Yet they too contributed their heartfelt verdict on the King of Kings. They thought the whole thing was a laugh. Jesus was a quirky figure who once held the crowd, but now could be mocked and abused with impunity. The robe represented no honour, it was just for ridicule. The crown of thorns was not in their orders, but it came from their hearts. The call of worship had no integrity: it was an unleashing of Satan's sneer from hearts that also refused to submit to the Truth.

Soldiers often defend their actions by saying, "I was just carrying out orders". But that would not be true for these men. They were sinners with an inbuilt rebellion against the King of Kings. What they did simply expressed their own state before God: they declared themselves to be God's enemies, and did whatever they could to discredit the only one who could save them. What folly.

Alas the saga is not over yet. Without a love for Jesus, apparently respectable and law abiding citizens, and society's office holders, reveal the same heart as those soldiers. You see it in the blasphemy by celebrities, the godlessness of some law making, the open verbal ridicule of Christ in the media. You hear it in playgrounds, and the drunken ridicule in university bars. Any of these characters could fit the soldiers' shoes. And those of us who love our Saviour will get caught in the cross-fire (quite an apt word, when you think about it). There will be times when the clouds have no silver lining and when the barrage comes to us, full on, for Christ's sake. So for His sake, bear it: it is part of 'taking up our cross' (cf [Mark 8:34-38](#)) and following Jesus.

Prayer: *Father God, I know that the little persecution which comes to me is not personal to me, but to Jesus. Thank you for allowing me to have a glimpse of what it means to 'share in His sufferings' and so to realise the extreme lengths that Jesus chose to go to, for me. May I be faithful 'under fire' for His sake, as He was for mine. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

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Read Mark 15:19-20 *Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spat on him. Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him. And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him. (NIV)*

The repetition of abuse against Jesus showed that this was no accidental slip up; no unintentional (and therefore excusable) insult. Spitting was not just an objectionable habit - this was the Eastern way to show personal disgust - that the accused was lower than the low. Even the purple robe was too good for Jesus, in their eyes. There was no dignity left, no part of His body unstained with blood. His precious head was not just pierced with thorns, but also battered with poles. And then they still had to crucify Him.

No ambulance for Jesus, no stretcher to carry the Son of God to His execution. He had to walk, and initially to carry His own cross. Nobody helped Him, everybody deserted Him; and yet He was bearing all of our sins as he climbed through the narrow streets and up that weary hill. The sheer inhumanity is staggering. The perversion of justice had reached deadly proportions. And nobody cared ... except Jesus - who cared so much for you and me!

The jeweller's silver crosses that dangle as fashion accessories around pretty necks: they do no justice to the enormity of the atrocity that surpassed all others. The reality is that it was the most awful of all crimes, and yet Jesus chose to endure it because He loved ... the atheist and agnostic, the cynic and the blasphemer, the abuser and the sadist. Jesus loved those who perverted the course of justice, and those who manipulated in politics, as well as the millions of ordinary people who sin each day. He loved us all so much that He wanted to endure it all for us. What a Saviour!

Prayer: *Dear Lord. These accounts of Your Passion are truly shocking; but I am so grateful that You suffered for my sake, so that I might not have to endure Your wrath against my sin. How grateful I am! For Your Name's sake, Amen.*

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Read Mark 15:21-22 *A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross. They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means The Place of the Skull). (NIV)*

Cyrene has more mentions in the Bible than most people would expect (see also [Acts 2:10](#), [6:9](#), [11:20](#), [13:1](#)). Now known as Tripoli in Libya, this early Greek colony had encouraged Jewish settlement, but by Jesus' time the Jews were oppressed and restless. Although they saw Israel as 'home' they felt like aliens everywhere - a good grounding for missionary work! Simon was one of those Jews who had travelled to Jerusalem for the feast (as many others did at Pentecost (cf [Acts 2:10](#))). His experience was to change his family too.

The dreadful figure of Jesus, staggering with the weight of His own cross-piece, slowing down the march to Calvary, demanded a change of plan. Simon was probably just standing there, watching the macabre procession - when suddenly a Roman officer commanded him to take Jesus' place under the seven stone wooden beam. He would not be crucified, but how was he to know? (The Cyrenean Jews were an underclass to the Romans, and he may have feared for his life). Despite Simon Peter's earlier protests that he would support Jesus, Simon of Cyrene was the only one to physically sample the load that Jesus carried to the cross. Mark's mention of the sons, Alexander and Rufus, shows they were well known to the church in Rome (cf [Rom 16:13](#)) as believers in Jesus. Crucifixion day had transformed the family!

The modern Western view, that children should not be impressed by their parent's beliefs and ideas, is nonsense in the majority world. It is a part of our parental responsibility to pass on the best that we have learned; and to lead our families to embrace the values we have cherished. Simon was clearly so deeply impressed by Jesus, that he took the story home. Let's get over our secular conditioning, and be real family leaders - telling the children and grandchildren the wonderful things that the Lord has done for us; and how He took the all the burden that was on our shoulders, when He died on the cross. They need to know!

Prayer: *Father God. Although my work is important to me, I know that I have even greater responsibilities to my family and close friends. Help me not to ignore their spiritual needs or assume that they will find their own way, when I know the Way and can lead them to Him. For His Name's sake. Amen.*

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Read Mark 15:23-24 *Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get. (NIV)*

"What's in it for me"? Although this is the theme-song of today's culture, it is totally opposite to Jesus' attitude at the cross. His execution was no sanitised death cell experience; that was not how He planned it. And, yes, Jesus was fully involved with the planning of this crucial moment in history. To take the sins of the world, He needed to and very much wanted to experience the entirety of His Father's wrath. The physical suffering was only a part of that wrath-bearing; but it was an essential part. To reduce the intensity of pain by alcohol or drugs was no part of that plan. And so Jesus refused any chemical comfort.

By contrast, the soldiers gambled for Christ's clothing. Unrepentant worldlings, they only had their own benefit in mind. As with any crucifixion, the personal effects of the condemned man became the perks of the job, for the executioners. Perhaps they were sold later, to boost the weekly income. Some items may have been kept as useful souvenirs. So, you can see that their mindset was totally opposed to that of Jesus. Yet it was for them that He died, too! No wonder [Rom 5:8](#) says, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

The cross remains a marker post that divides people. It separates those who are out for what they can get, from those who honour Jesus who gave everything for them. In turn, such people know they must make the choice to give everything for the sake of their Saviour. The socially religious middle road of, 'a bit for me and a bit for Jesus' really does not exist! It is a good check point to ask, "Am I looking to see what I can get out of Jesus?" A 'Yes' answer indicates that Jesus is on a different road to you.

Prayer: *Dear Lord. Please help me to see where I have become absorbed with the world's selfish agenda, that I neither value Your sacrifice for me nor sacrifice my desires to Your will and service. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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Read Mark 15:25-30 *It was the third hour when they crucified him. The written notice of the charge against him read: The King of the Jews. They crucified two robbers with him, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, "So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, come down from the cross and save yourself!" (NIV)*

The charge of treason was above Jesus' head - "King of the Jews". Yet it was only partly true: Jesus was certainly the anointed One of Israel, but He was also the King of Kings. It was Caesar's responsibility to submit to Christ, not vice versa. So in this half-truth, the Roman state wriggled out of its responsibility to bow to Jesus (as national governments in secularised Europe do today).

But the defamation of the Son of God was not only legal, but very personal. Jesus was prophesied to be 'numbered with the transgressors' ([Is 53:12](#)) - not just a part of the headcount of three executions that day, but He was counted to be a transgressor ... because He bore the sin of many. The popular vote supported this death. Public ridicule added insults to His injuries, and yet He was dying for their sins too. Misquoting Scripture (a Satanic hallmark), they continued to mock His resurrection claim, assuming that it was the nails that held Him to the cross. But Jesus was choosing the suffering because He loved them!

The ridicule of Christ and His followers has continued ever since. Now that there is little fear of God in Western culture, it's considered better that Jesus is marginalised to the outdated traditionalists or the eccentric enthusiasts. But when His claim to be King is inescapable, derision in its many forms is thought to put Him in His place. But His place is to be King; and our place is to worship and obey Him. To do so, brings blessing to us and glory to Him. Refusal brings judgement - the very thing that the death of Jesus was designed to save us from.

Prayer: *Dear Lord. Thank you for helping me to understand why some of my friends and family want to ridicule You (and me, for serving You). Nevertheless, I know that You died for a world full of those who defy Your Kingship; because you loved us. So help me to patiently endure the scoffing, in a Christ-like way, trusting that Your grace will lead them to repentance and the joy of Your service. For Your Name's sake. Amen.*

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