

SERMON THOUGHTS ABRIDGED

**MATTHEW 27:15-26** (selected verses)  
**TRADED**

*Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to releasing to the multitude one prisoner whom they wished. And at that time they had a notorious prisoner called Barabbas. Therefore, when they had gathered together, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release to you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?" For he knew that they had handed Him over because of envy. . . . But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitudes that they should ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus. . . . Then he released Barabbas to them; and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered Him to be crucified.*

What is a "wheeler and dealer"? A "wheeler and dealer" is someone who operates fast and loose in business or politics, not afraid of playing the big game, making rapid moves, shrewdly aware of how to come out on top, be it financially or politically. If you were a pawn, a board piece in a wheeler-dealer's game—jerked around like a chip on a game board or like a commodity on the farm market or the stock exchange, how would it feel?

We have seen Jesus "Bound," "Maligned," "Assaulted," and tonight "Traded" like a chip in a board game—easy come, easy go. I don't know if we can really call Pontius Pilate a wheeler and dealer, but he certainly played loose with Jesus to his own advantage, Jesus, stood before Pilate, vehemently accused by the leaders of the Jews as a bad man and malefactor, one who opposed paying taxes to Caesar in Rome, one claiming to be a king—in opposition to Rome. Pontius Pilate was not a simpleton or a naïve potato that just fell off the truck. There was no evidence against Jesus, nothing—just the words and charges, "If He weren't a bad man, we wouldn't have handed Him over to you." Pilate saw the emotion and the steam of the Jewish leaders. He saw the silent harmless conduct of Jesus, in response to their vehement charges. There was no emotional outburst from Jesus, standing quietly and composed. Pilate marveled. Had he perhaps heard of Jesus in the months prior? Perhaps. But he had gotten to know the Jewish leaders—a difficult, hard-headed bunch that resented foreign control in every way, shape, and form. The Jews were difficult for the Romans. Pilate could see plain as day, and *knew*, as our text says, *that they had handed Him over because of envy*. Jealousy. They did not envy Jesus because of wealth, or His army, or His miraculous powers. They envied the place He held in the hearts of the countrymen. The people looked to Jesus with respect, love, and faith. The people looked to Him for leadership. Their own status was in trouble with Jesus around.

Pilate had a puzzle to solve:

- #1. To keep the peace for Rome, furthering the interests of Caesar and the Empire.
- # 2. To keep peace with the leaders of the Jews, lest the nation become a hot spot for war.
- #3. To uphold the common people, who really were the nation being ruled.
- #4. To uphold truth and justice--even for falsely-accused—lest lawlessness thrive.
- #5. To keep his own job and position safe.

Pilate wanted to do all five of the above, but he couldn't see how to do it. He definitely had to keep safe the interests of the Roman Empire, which meant getting along with the Jewish leaders, as much as absolutely passible unless an out and out rebellion developed. He did not want to make life bitter for the common people, and he wanted to keep his job. He wanted to do right by Jesus whom he knew was not guilty of anything worthy of death.

What were his choices?

- #1. Perhaps he could appeal to a higher Roman authority for help. But then he would look like he couldn't handle his job.
- #2. Perhaps he could stand for Justice, let Jesus go, force the leaders to like it or lump it, call out the soldiers to stomp and kill off any opposition to this sentence and decree. But then the leaders would report to Rome that he was supporting a competition throne and kingdom.
- #3 Perhaps he could simply give-in to them and crucify Jesus. But then they would be riding roughshod over him and taking the reins of government out of his hands for themselves. He would become a pushover, and Rome would end up with a bigger problem on its hands, and he would be out.
- #4. Perhaps he could in some clever way, without looking like he was responsible, get the Jewish leaders to calm down, to think more reasonably, less emotionally, and decide that all could co-exist, without rocking the boat. This was his plan. It was weak.

What was missing from all his reasoning and maneuvering by which he was trying to wade through this quicksand? There was no trust in the Lord of Truth and Salvation, or faith in the Lord of Power and Mercy. Pilate considered himself judge and jury, without considering the Truth of God who rescues sinners, without the help of God who saves sinners. Jesus had broached the subject of divine Truth with Pilate earlier, but Pilate scoffed it off—“What is Truth?” The only choices that are left for him or for anyone who is not a child of God in Christ are flawed choices, based on sinful reason and the lies of Satan. Without the God of forgiveness and eternal salvation in the picture, one is only faced with making decisions, none of which will be right. All lead to demise. ----- When you have difficult decisions to make, take them to your Savior God in prayer. Turn to His Word. He will help you see that under the wings of His loving forgiveness and life hereafter, that that which seems bad is not bad in the end. For example, walking away from a lucrative and badly needed job or opportunity, walking away because it is a crooked business or faith destroying situation, is a decision that the Lord and His Word will show you to be right. Letting God take the lead in finding a Christian spouse just right for you, rather than leaping ahead to suit what seems right to you. Forgetting about all that the world says regarding freedom and the idea that serving another and the Lord is weakness. Making serious medical decisions, even in potentially end-of-life situations, not based solely on cost, ease, or stubborn self-determination. Turn to your loving Father, your risen Savior, and your counseling Spirit for His direction and help. He provides the solution.

Pilate relied only on himself and tried to work out a “wheeler and dealer” solution. He sent Jesus to Herod, governor of Galilee, since Herod was present in Jerusalem for the Passover--no decision; Herod sent him back. He offered to have Jesus chastised/scourged, roughed up a little and then released—nothing doing. He put out feelers regarding whether they would take Jesus or the notorious thief, rebel, and murderer Barabbas--the leaders wanted Barabbas. He countered with having Jesus actually scourged, crowned with thorns, dressed in purple, given a reed for a scepter, and mocked—all in an appeal to their pity. No deal. Pilate washed his hands with water in front of the crowd emphasizing that he would not bear the guilt for this. They said fine, “His blood be on us and our children.” None of these deals worked. With no change in sight, Pilate traded Barabbas for Jesus, set Barabbas free and ordered Jesus to be crucified. An incorrect deal.

Pilate treated Jesus like a chip in a card game, or a commodity at the market, to be mistreated, put to death, whatever best served the day—regardless of truth and honesty. Pilate’s mistake was letting the Jewish leaders take charge and determine the shots.

Have you ever been treated like a nobody, like a commodity? What if your father and mother had said to a neighbor, we’ll trade you two of our children for your tractor, and mean it, and do it? How would you have felt? Of little worth and value, very low on the totem pole. How many stood up for Jesus? Not one. So your other brothers and sisters and relatives and friends would not have objected to the trade your parents were making. Again how would that make you feel? Alone and discarded. That was true for Jesus. That is the way it needed to be, that He would be considered and treated as the lowest of the low. That is why His own Father in heaven had sent Him to earth, to be handed over to death. His Father would forsake Him on the cross. Worthless! because Jesus was carrying all our sins, worthless and despicable, public and hidden. How grievous to consider that Jesus was traded away in Pilate’s attempts to let somebody else make his decision for him, so that he would look good!

But how blessed you are that Jesus did it for you. Do you see now that you are Barabbas. You go free, because Jesus was traded away. A blessing of pure grace from the Lord.

We never hear of Barabbas again. Did he die a scoundrel, or did he become a child of God trusting in the crucified and risen Christ as his Savior. We don’t know. It is interesting that the name Barabbas, which is a Hebrew name, means either “son or the father,” or “son of the teacher.” With his lawless living Barabbas had been the son of his “father”—the devil. Likewise, the Jewish leaders had also been sons of their father, the devil, in opposition to Jesus, the Son of the true Father in heaven. A few ancient Greek manuscripts of Matthew’s Gospel actually record Barabbas’ name as “Jesus Barabbas”! Maybe so, maybe not. The support is slim, but interesting to consider. Pilate’s words, then, “Whom do you want me to release? Jesus-Barabbas (son of his father the devil)?” “Or Jesus who is called Christ (Son of the heavenly Father)?” The choice is so clear!

Pilate the “wheeler and dealer” made a very bad offer and then followed through with the deal, trading Jesus for Barabbas, treating Jesus as nothing. Jesus willingly took this rejection and mal-treatment from Pilate and from His heavenly Father. He was the Substitute for you. In the trade, you go free! Thank the Lord that Jesus willingly was Bound, Maligned, Assaulted, and Traded for your forgiveness and eternal life before the Father!

So be it! Amen.

Pastor Kanzenbach---