

# BROKEN CRAYONS

SERIES: THE FINAL HOURS



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Matthew 27:11-32  
Fifth Message  
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*Matthew 27:11-32*

He wakes up, face pressed against the cold stone floor. As he props himself up, he feels his sore body, pained from mistreatment.

His eyes adjust to the room. There is a faint light coming from the bottom of the large wooden door that has sealed him in. His nose becomes aware of the stale air around him. As his senses catch up to his waking mind, he hears a crowd in the distance.

As he collect his thoughts he is overcome with fear. He remembers what day it is. It is the day he has feared since his arrest. He knows it will be his last, he knows what is to come will be painful, he knows what is to come will be humiliating, and he knows what is to come will be the end of him.

As he sits on the cold, damp floor, sinking into himself, someone approaches that large wooden door that seals him in. He sees the shadow of two feet break the light that shines at the bottom of the door.

He hears the creaking of a key into the lock that holds the large wooden door that seals him in. The door flings open and light pours into the cell. His eyes don't adjust to the light before he is pulled to his feet and drug through the courtyard.

He can hear the crowd grow louder and louder. Before he knows what is going on, he is pushed out onto a ledge in front of what looks like hundreds of people—angry and shouting. Confused, he surveys his surroundings and realizes he is not alone.

Two men are with him. He recognizes one, a government official. He doesn't recognize the other man who looks to be in worse shape than himself.

The official speaks to the crowd, telling them he will release one of these prisoners to them today. For a second the man is hopeful, but then he remembers the day of his arrest and he remembers his crimes and he remembers that he is guilty.

As he retreats back into his mind, silencing the sounds of the crowd, he becomes increasingly aware of the shackles around his wrists. He stands in anticipation of what feels like a second sentence. He completely has lost hope.

The man's name is Barabbas, and we are introduced to him in Matthew 27.

Today, as we continue through our series, *The Final Hours*, we will see interactions involving Jesus, a governor named Pilate, a crowd of angry Jews (including chief priests and elders), and Roman soldiers.

Jesus now faces the Roman part of his trial, which began in chapter 26, which Dan Westman taught about two weeks ago.

This trial, which started illegally, in the middle of the night, has now been brought before a Roman official.

## **Matthew 27:11-14:**

**Now Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus said, "You have said so." 12 But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he gave no answer. 13 Then Pilate said to him, "Do you not hear how many things they testify against you?" 14 But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed.**

Jesus is taken to what is called the Praetorium, which was the governor's residence in Jerusalem. It also served as a judgment hall where the governor would make judgments on matters brought before him.

Jesus is brought to Pilate at his residence very early on Friday morning—about 5 am. Remember, Jesus's trial began in the middle of the night with many false witnesses and accusations.

As you can imagine, Pilate is not pleased about being roused this early in the morning to take care of

this matter. But, given the significance of the Passover Festival and the great number of Jews in the city during this time, he concluded the matter was important enough to address.

We learn from the Gospel of Luke that at this point the accusers bring more false charges against Jesus. They state that Jesus has told people not to pay taxes and that he proclaims himself as king, not Caesar.

The chief priests and elders are trying to find something that would concern Pilate. They are not looking for a fair trial; they're looking to accuse Jesus of something that will get them the outcome that they want, namely, the execution of Jesus. I believe Pilate sees through their attempts and questions Jesus for himself.

Matthew records only a few lines of this questioning. Pilate concludes with finding no fault in Jesus; he finds no validation of the crimes brought against Jesus. However, the accusations continue to the point that Pilate asks Jesus, "Why aren't you defending yourself? Do you not hear them?" Jesus has no response, no reply to the accusations, and Pilate is left perplexed and amazed.

Most likely, Pilate has questioned hundreds of accused people, and I am willing to bet nearly all of them tried to defend themselves or make counter accusations. But not Jesus. Though his innocence is clear, he doesn't say a word.

Luke records that at this point Jesus is sent to a man named Herod who rules over Galilee, but was in Jerusalem for the Passover Festival. Jesus' interaction with Herod concludes with Jesus being sent back to Pilate, still not being found guilty of anything.

Jesus now has been through one illegal trial in the middle of the night and has gone through two phases of a second trial, questioned by both Pilate and Herod.

#### **Matthew 27:15:**

**Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release for the crowd any one prisoner whom they wanted.**

In an effort to reduce tension between Israel and ruling Rome, there was a custom of releasing a prisoner during the Passover Festival. This practice likely preceded Pilate's term as governor, but he thought that this would be the perfect opportunity to rid himself of

any guilt or involvement in the handling of Jesus. Pilate thought he had the perfect plan and the perfect person to put opposite of Jesus.

#### **Matthew 27:16-18:**

**And they had then a notorious prisoner called Barabbas. 17 So when they had gathered, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?" 18 For he knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered him up.**

We do not know a lot about Barabbas, but Matthew calls him a "notorious prisoner" and the other Gospels call him a "robber," "insurrectionist," and "murderer."

We can gather from those simple descriptions that Barabbas is not the type of man you want to bring home to meet your family. He is a convicted criminal who has been sentenced to death.

Pilate puts these two men in opposition for the crowd and asks, "Who do you want me to release for you: Barabbas (the robber, the insurrectionist, the murder), or Jesus (the man I find no fault in)?"

Pilate is aware that there are holes in this case. He knows that Jesus is not guilty and certainly not deserving of a death sentence. Pilate knows that this situation can easily escalate and that he will be held responsible for any disorder or problems it causes for Rome. And if all that wasn't enough, Pilate also receives a word from his wife that he should have nothing to do with Jesus being punished.

#### **Matthew 27:19:**

**Besides, while he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, "Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much because of him today in a dream."**

Either by God's mercy or her own understanding of Jesus's innocence, Pilate's wife realizes the magnitude of this situation and is so bold as to send word to her husband in the middle of a trial.

Interrupting Pilate at this time, on the judgment seat, would not have been a normal occurrence. The circumstances would have to be unique and pressing for this type of interruption to happen. What we need to see here is that the tensions are rising. Pilate can feel it, his

wife can feel it, and so can the chief priests and elders, who use this opportunity—this break in the trial—to persuade the crowd that has formed:

**Matthew 27:20:**

**Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus.**

We have rising tension between Pilate and the crowd of Jews—hundreds strong—who have been coerced into asking for the release of Barabbas and the destruction of Jesus. I can imagine Pilate sitting on his judgment seat, getting ready to ask the crowd the question again, “Jesus or Barabbas?” I would think that Pilate would have become very conscious of the magnitude of the situation.

Have you ever been on a first date or an important meeting where you see the person at a distance, and you become increasingly aware of yourself? You become aware of how you are walking. You feel a little clumsy in your steps. You feel your breathing; your mouth feels a little lazy.

A few years ago I was really nervous because I was getting ready to ask a question of an important person in my life. I was going to ask my now, wife, if she would marry me.

I remember building up to asking her. We are walking on the beach, and I know I need to do this. I can't back out. I remember feeling the sand beneath my feet. My knees feel a little shaky, and I finally muster the courage to ask her the question. I am holding her hands, and I get down on one knee, and I mumble some words. I don't remember what I said, but she said "yes." Praise God; I'm married!

We become very aware of ourselves during these types of interactions because we are aware that they have implications for the future—that these interactions matter for what is to come.

I imagine Pilate feeling something similar. He becomes very aware of himself—aware of his breathing, aware of the seat he is sitting on. He is very aware that what comes next matters.

**Matthew 27: 21:**

**21 The governor again said to them, “Which of the two do you want me to release for you?” And they said, “Barabbas.”**

Pilate's plan doesn't work. He thought he had the perfect plan. He thought he had the perfect man. Pilate's plan doesn't work. The crowd will not be swayed. The chief priests and elders will not stop until Jesus is condemned to death.

**Matthew 27:22:**

**22 Pilate said to them, “Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?” They all said, “Let him be crucified!” 23 And he said, “Why? What evil has he done?” But they shouted all the more, “Let him be crucified!”**

Pilate tries to reason with the crowd. He tries to explain that Jesus has not been found guilty, neither by himself nor Herod. Pilate tries to explain that there isn't evidence to support any of the accusations. He tries to speak the truth that Jesus is innocent, but the crowd, fueled by the chief priests and elders, just gets louder and louder shouting, “Let him be crucified!” “Crucify, crucify!”

The leaders of this mob did not want the people to hear reason—the truth—so they filled the air with noise. As Pilate reasoned with them, they crowd got louder and louder.

Here is what we can learn from this interaction: do not let the noise keep you from hearing the truth. Do not let the static, the noise, or the distractions keep you from hearing the truth. Pilate is speaking the truth about the innocence of Jesus, but the chief priests and elders keep making noise and creating distractions so that the people don't hear the truth.

In a time and place such as ours, it is easy for our lives to become crowded with noise. From school to work, to computers and other devices, to social media, we do not have a shortage of things to add into our lives; there's always something new. Many of these things are good, but they can still become obstacles to hearing the truth. They can become obstacles to hearing about who God is; about hearing the truth about who you are; about hearing God's calling on our life.

We need to be intentional about hearing the truth. Don't let noise get in the way.

**Matthew 27:24-26:**

**So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before**

**the crowd, saying, “I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves.” 25 And all the people answered, “His blood be on us and on our children!” 26 Then he released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, delivered him to be crucified.**

Pilate is unsuccessful in his reasoning with the crowd and out of fear of a riot, he concedes to them. But before Pilate releases Barabbas and delivers Jesus to be crucified, he chooses to use a modified Jewish practice to express his disagreement with the crowd. The tradition dictated that if the elders of a certain town could not determine the identity of a murderer, they would wash their hands to absolve their guilt. This tradition is explained in Deuteronomy 21.

Pilate uses this ceremony, which would have been familiar to the crowd, to symbolically deny his responsibility for the fate of Jesus. Though ultimately it was still Pilate's decision, the crowd accepts the guilt for Jesus's death.

Then, Barabbas is released. I can picture Barabbas standing in shock as the crowd shouts his name. Can you imagine the look on his face when he hears his name called?

The soldiers unlock his shackles and they push him down the steps. Barabbas is free, but the reality hasn't sunk in yet. Imagine him timidly taking steps away and looking back to see if anyone is coming after him. But no one does. As Barabbas turns the corner, his pace quickens. No one comes after him. He is free.

Meanwhile, Pilate has Jesus scourged. Scourging left its victims severely mauled. Jesus, after being scourged, would have been left with open wounds, severe blood loss, and on the brink of death.

Before we move on, I want to make a connection for us regarding this man Barabbas. We don't know much about him, but we do know that he is guilty, he has been convicted, and he has been sentenced to death. We learned that Barabbas had been set free without paying the cost of his crimes.

We know that Barabbas woke up that morning expecting to be whipped, but he wasn't going to get whipped that day. He woke up expecting to be humiliated, but he wasn't going to be humiliated. He woke up expecting to be tortured, but he wasn't going to be tortured. He woke up expecting to die, but he was going to die that day. Instead, Barabbas was freed.

On that day there were three crosses, and one of them had his name on it. But Barabbas walks away and leaves Jesus behind—a man who has not been found to be guilty of anything. When we look at this picture, we are Barabbas. Jesus is condemned, and Barabbas is set free. Jesus takes his place, just as he does for you and me. We are Barabbas because we are guilty. Scripture tells us, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). The cross that Jesus was condemned to was mine because I deserved it more than he did. That was your cross and those were your nails.

Romans 5:8 tells us, “But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Jesus takes Barabbas' place and Jesus takes our place. We are Barabbas.

**Matthew 27:27:**

**Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole battalion before him.**

After the public trial of Jesus, which occurred outside of the Praetorium, Jesus is taken inside to make a further mockery of him. They gather a whole battalion, which is 600 soldiers

**Matthew 27:28-31**

**And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, 29 and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on his head and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him, they mocked him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” 30 And they spit on him and took the reed and struck him on the head. 31 And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him and led him away to crucify him.**

The soldiers take it upon themselves to further abuse Jesus. They strip him of his clothes and in removing his garment, they further irritate his wounds from the scourging. They dress him as a “king,” giving him a robe, which is called scarlet here in Matthew, but purple in the books of Mark and John.

Purple is a rare and expensive color associated with royalty, so the soldiers use a robe that was as close to the color purple as they could find. They give Jesus a crown made of twisted thorns and they place it on his head, which is swollen and lacerated. They put a reed into his right hand, symbolizing a scepter.

After all this abuse, the group of 600 Roman soldiers, in shameful mockery, kneel before Jesus and say, "Hail, King of the Jews!" The soldiers spit on Jesus and strike him. They clothe him in his own garments and send him on his way to the cross.

As Jesus goes to the cross, he is unable to carry the weight of his cross because his body has become so weak and broken. The soldiers find a man to carry it for him.

**Matthew 27:32:**

**As they went out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. They compelled this man to carry his cross.**

What do we make of all this? I would like us to consider crayons. Yes, crayons. Like any good youth worker, I happen to have one in my pocket. As far as you can see, this a complete crayon, right? This a complete crayon and it will work just fine to color.

I happen to have another crayon. How about this one? Is it complete? No, it is broken. It is an incomplete, broken crayon. But, can you still color with it? Yes, you can. It is broken, it is incomplete, but you can still color with it. Broken crayons still color.

When Barabbas was set free, he was completely free. Though he was guilty, he had no more to pay or give for his crimes. He was free and it was up to him to decide what to do with his freedom. Jesus took his place on the cross.

The same is true for us. We decide what we do with our freedom in Christ. In Christ, we have been redeemed one hundred percent by his work on the cross. Our future is secure and set. We do not face judgment, yet we are still broken people living in a broken world.

Jesus not only frees us from judgment and punishment, he frees us to love, to give, to be agents of hope and grace. Jesus frees us, like broken crayons, to color.

Each one of us has a past. Each one of us has hurt, and yes, Jesus brings healing to those things, but we are not perfected, we are not completed in this life. But still, Jesus redeems us and empowers us to create and do beautiful,

miraculous, God-honoring things in this world and in this lifetime. Broken crayons creating beautiful things.

My brothers and sisters, let us use our freedom to mark the world with the love of God demonstrated in the life of Jesus.

I leave you with his words in John 8:31-32: "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."