

Luke 23:6-25; Matt. 16:13-17; The Choices we Make I. The Crowds Choose Barabbas II. The Civic Leaders Choose Injustice III. Barabbas Chooses?

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we all make various choices every day. Some of our choices are small- like what to eat for breakfast and what color socks to put on. Other choices are larger- like what job to take and even which person you marry. But there is one choice that is more important than any other- what to do with Jesus? What is our response to this man? Knowing who Jesus claims to be means that we all have to choose- what will we do with this man? So today as we consider Luke 23 we find various choices- how people view and respond to this man. Now we will be looking at this text from a human perspective- we know that God is sovereign over all- that God's ordained will is being carried out. We know that God chooses some to be His own and it is these elect that will come to know and confess the truth about Jesus. But in our text, Luke 23 reads more like a journal- recording man's decisions and the consequences to that choice. To be clear, it is not that man chooses God first- or that God chooses man based on the future choice of man. God chooses us- and therefore we are saved. But today we are not in the realm of predestination- but rather we are in the realm of gospel presentation. Today we are focussing on how all men must choose what to do when they meet Jesus. So what is man's response to Jesus? Who is this man- and how do we choose to see Him and relate to Him? We look at this theme: the trial of Jesus Christ forces all men to choose their allegiance.

I. The Crowds Choose Barabbas

In our first point we consider what the crowds have decided to do now that Jesus has been arrested and placed on trial. These crowds are referenced in 23:1 and again in v. 13 and in v. 18. As a group, they are led by the chief priests, Scribes and Pharisees- the religious rulers of the people. But they have been slowly adding to their numbers as the crowds have gathered- so now this number is a swelling mob. It is a crowd made up of Jews from all walks of life- being instigated by their leaders. And we find in these verses that this crowd makes 3 choices- or they have three responses to Jesus. The first response is that they reject Jesus

outright. We already saw this last week in v. 1- they do not want this man to be their leader- they do not acknowledge him as their king- and they want Him accused and condemned. The second round of response is found in v. 18 where they shout- get rid of Him. Away with Him- remove Him from our sight! We want nothing to do with man- He is not welcomed here and He has no place in our midst! Crucify Him, crucify Him- as v. 21 reads. This rejection culminates in v. 23. Upon being asked by Pilate- why are you so adamant in your desire to see this man killed? What has He done to deserve death? They respond by becoming more vocal and even violent. As v. 23 states- they were even more adamant. They were obstinate, insisting to the point of violence. They are on the verge of revolting! They were demanding- urgently asking, repeatedly calling for with a great craving- they were set on this one outcome! And they raised their voices- crying out at the top of their voices- shouting with all their might- get this man out of here- crucify Him! Such is the hatred of these! Sinful man by nature hates God, the truth and the light! By nature, all men will reject God's anointed one and choose to remain in the darkness because their deeds are evil. This is a humbling point- no one in their own strength will choose to believe and obey God's Word- it is only if the HS opens our eyes and softens our hearts that we choose anything else but rejection and denial of Christ! That is why we need to pray for the lost- and pray for our own families- that we might not do what comes naturally and choose the path that leads to death! And finally, at the end of 18 we find their final choice- give us Barabbas! Now in this choice of Barabbas over Jesus- a murderer instead of the author of life- the people are making their allegiance clear! Do they want a humble King who preaches of righteousness or a violent rebel who instigates riots? Their choice is clear! Give us Barabbas! Now Barabbas had been convicted of insurrection- he had started a violent riot aiming to overthrow Rome. Children, do you remember seeing those riots on TV these past months- when people take to the streets to smash and steal- while throwing bricks at the police? Well, Barabbas started a riot just like that! He was a thief and a murderer- and that is the man that the Jewish people choose! A notorious criminal over a miracle worker who lived a holy life! Now the sins of Barabbas were in fact capital offenses- Barabbas deserved to be put to death for his crimes. But instead, the

innocent Jesus would be hung on a tree and the wicked rebel set free! In choosing Barabbas the crowds make it clear- we have no allegiance to this Jesus! We want someone who thinks and acts like we do- not someone whose kingdom is not of this world! So the crowds side with a violent insurrectionist and they reject the Lord of Glory! This choice remains today- do we choose to follow men like Barabbas or submit to the true King? There is a world of difference between the two- and eternity in the balance!

II. The Civic Leaders Choose Injustice

But what about the civic leaders- will Pilate and Herod do any better than this crowd? During the trial, what will their allegiance be to? Truth and justice- or to the lie and deceit? Throughout our text it becomes clear that these rulers will not uphold the law, rather they will allow injustice to reign. After Pilate has questioned Jesus, he declares him innocent no less than 3 three times. In v. 4, 14 and in 22- he states that this man- Jesus- has done nothing deserving of death. Jesus is innocent- and thus He must be released. And in v. 7 Jesus is sent over to Herod- now this would be the Herod the Great's son. So the Herod of our text was the son of the man who tried to kill Jesus at His birth. This Herod is the one that beheaded John the Baptist. But in our text, Herod is happy- excited to see Jesus in v. 8 because he expects Jesus to do some miracle for him. But Jesus would have none of this- Jesus refused to use His power to perform tricks and be entertainment. So Jesus says and does nothing in Herod's presence. So Herod finds no grounds to accuse Jesus- and thus sends Jesus back to Pilate after abusing and mistreating Him again. After this point, Herod and Pilate become friends- and in our text they share a lot of similarities. As Pilate did- so Herod also declares Jesus innocent as v. 15 teaches. So both Herod and Pilate interview Jesus, find Him innocent, proceed to beat and abuse this man they declared innocent- and still fail to release him. After repeated trials and repeated innocent verdicts, these men refuse to acquit and release him. They ignore justice, and choose to hand Jesus over to the crowds- giving the people what they want. They choose public opinion and their own position over truth. Remember that it was Pilate who said in John 18- what is truth? The question at hand is this- to what are Herod and Pilate committed to? Where does their allegiance lay? Neither man stands for what is right and

true. If you do not know the truth- or if you think there is no truth- how can you stand firm and remain consistent? This rejection of the truth is what I would call the spirit of this age. It is called relativism- that there is no truth beyond what you think. It is very common in our colleges and in our media- the thinking that there is no standard for right and wrong- only the shifting sands of public opinion. We find this with our political leaders as well- a policy that I once rejected I now endorse and defend because that what the people want! But without truth there can be no justice- without a firm standard of what is right and wrong, you will never have equality. The laws of the land must be built on an enduring principle and applied to all equally! And as Christians, we must stand firm lest we be tossed to and fro by the various waves of false doctrine and the teachings of man. As Eph. 4:14 puts it, we must be mature and not childish- lest we be carried about by every wind of doctrine or the craftiness of deceitful schemes! If you do not have God's Word as your standard, then you will be easily convinced of falsehood and your life will topple over. So these men care only about their own necks- they have an allegiance to themselves and no one else. They choose falsehood over truth- injustice over righteousness. They twist matters so that the people do not get upset with them. So the order is given. Jesus is to be crucified and Barabbas released- the innocent condemned and the guilty set free.

III. Barabbas Chooses?

But before we close, there is one more choice that we will consider. And that choice is the choice of Barabbas. Now you might be asking- what did Barabbas choose? He is silent in our passage. Well, we do know quite a bit about Barabbas from v. 19- he was in prison for murder and insurrection. He has started a riot- killed a person and stole from others. He was caught and waiting for his execution. We would say that he was on death row- waiting for his day on the cross. It would be a criminal like this that would be hung on a cross- made to be an example to all. This is what happens to those who start riots and kill people- a sign would be nailed to the cross above his head- here is Barabbas the leader of an insurrection. Learn well and don't act like this! Well, instead of being crucified, Barabbas is released. Someone else- someone innocent -takes his

place on the cross. So the question is raised- what will happen to Barabbas? How will he respond to this new lease on life? Will Barabbas go back to his old way of life- or will his heart be changed? Will his allegiance to the criminal underworld prevail- or will he start a new life? We do find an example of the guilty criminal who repents on the cross- the thief on the cross does repent and seek life in 23:41- asking Jesus to remember him. But about Barabbas, we do not know. The Bible does not say! We are left to wonder- whatever happened to Barabbas? Did he, as one tradition states, follow Jesus to Golgotha- did he watch as Jesus was hung on a cross in his place? Or did he go back to his old life as another tradition states- to start another riot in a few years only to be killed by the Romans? We don't know? But the question stands- how do those who are guilty respond when someone innocent takes their place? It is not hard to see how we fit in this exchange as well. What happens to us is this- by nature we are guilty- we hate God and hate our fellow man- by nature we are all murderers and thieves. But instead of being condemned- killed because of our guilt- Jesus the innocent one takes our place! We are set free- and He is condemned to die! This is the Glorious Exchange- He died on the cross in our place! He is our substitute- as the sinner is set free and the righteous one condemned. So we come back to our initial question- where do your allegiances lay? What do you choose to say about this man who died for you? Do you confess the truth about His identity- do you embrace Him with your heart and acknowledge Him as your true king? If so, then you like the thief on the cross will be welcomed into the Kingdom of God! The truth is important- so let us all align with the truth and be set free!

To conclude, times of trial reveal what we really think. Does the center hold- do we remain committed to the truth- does our heart and our mouth align with God's Word? The trial of Jesus Christ forces all men to choose their allegiance. As Joshua stated- choose you this day whom you will serve! Who is this man- who is He to you? Is He your savior and Lord- the way, the truth and the life? Then you have received the gift of the Spirit and the wisdom from on high! This truth has not been revealed to you by flesh and blood but by the Father in heaven! So as Dt. 30 states, choose life so that you may live!