

## SERMON OUTLINE

- I. Jesus Is Turned Over to Pilate: Setting the stage for the crucifixion by recounting the events and making clear that this is God's plan, not that of man.
- II. The Crowds Shout, Crucify Him: Their sinful, angry cries force the issue; Pilate has no choice.
- III. Our Sinful Nature Shouts, Crucify Him: Our sinful, angry nature rejects God, and our only desire is for Jesus to leave us alone.
- IV. The Holy Spirit Brings Us to Faith: The Word comes to us, and we begin to see how hopelessly lost we are and how desperately we need a Savior.
- V. Our Redeemed Heart Shouts, Crucify Him: It must be so, because we cannot win our own salvation; we see that Christ's death is our only hope.
- VI. We Look on Jesus, Who Has Won Our Salvation: And so we look on the cross of Christ and are encouraged, built up in our faith because His death and resurrection ensures our forgiveness and eternal life.

## OVERVIEW

The author of creation hangs on the cross, wracked with pain and writhing in agony. It is almost unbearable to look on this scene, and yet without it we would be lost forever, still trapped in our sins. As we gather together tonight to remember the sacrifice that Jesus Christ made for each of us, may we focus on the One who is the way and the truth and the life, even Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

## SERMON

Last Wednesday, our Gospel tailed off with Pontius Pilate asking a cynical, rhetorical question: "What is truth?" But it turns out that he was asking the wrong question. The real question is not "What is truth?" but rather "*Who* is truth?"

Today, we look on as the truth hangs on a cross, bearing the sins of the whole world in order to reconcile us to God the Father. Truth was incarnate in Jesus Christ, and He willingly walked this path for you.

Our sermon series throughout this season of Lent has centered on God's call through Joel for His people to return to Him. To admit to your sinful nature and to come to the One who is "gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love" (Joel 2:13), the One who loves you, who provides for you, and who sent His Son to die for you, because He "relents over disaster" (Joel 2:13). His call today is for you to return to truth, to turn to Jesus Christ, for He is your life and your salvation.

The chief priests and the scribes and the whole Council had delivered Jesus over to Pontius Pilate. They insisted that He had done evil and deserved punishment, even death. Pilate was onto them; he knew they were driven by selfish motivations, but he was backed into a corner. His choice was impossible: put an innocent man to death or lose control of the town as the population erupted in a riot.

Everything was working according to plan, but it was not the plan of the chief priests. It was a plan that God Himself had put together. A plan of salvation necessitated by mankind's fall into sin at the temptation of Satan. A plan that included a battle between the offspring of the serpent and the Offspring of the woman. A plan that required that the heel of the Son of Man be bruised but would finally be complete as the head of the serpent's offspring was crushed, and death was stripped of its power. This plan would play out on the cross, and Jesus was the focus of the whole thing.

Pilate tried to placate the accusers. He had Jesus flogged and tortured, mocked and insulted. Beaten to within an inch of His life. Dressed in a purple robe in a sarcastic nod to His divinity. How could Pilate stand before the people and point to Jesus, bloodied and bruised, and say with a straight face, "I find no guilt in Him"? As if, perhaps, he had been trying to beat it out of Him.

But the plan was already in motion, and there would be no changing the outcome. Jesus had to die. "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" John tells us it was the chief priests and the officers who cried those words, but it was not just they. It was you and I.

Our sinful nature rises up even as Christ demands our attention. The Law proscribes our actions, and we want no part of that. "You shall have no other gods"? Fine, I'll have only one god, and it will be me. This man, this "Son of God," wants first place? No, He must die. "Crucify Him!"

"Do not take the Lord's name in vain"? Ha! This man has blasphemed and made Himself the Son of God. "Crucify Him!"

"Honor the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy"? You can't tell me what to do. "Crucify Him!"

Honor your father and your mother. You shall not kill. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness. You shall not covet. “Crucify Him!”

You chafe at God’s leading. Your sinful nature wants nothing to do with it, because it is “hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot” (Romans 8:7). Your sinful nature rises up before the truth and closes its ears as it shouts, “Crucify Him!”

But the truth is not so easily silenced. The truth echoes in your ears even as it hangs lifeless on a cross. The truth slips past your defenses, and the Word softens your heart. You may cry out in anger, “Crucify Him,” but the truth whispers gently in your ears, “Yes, crucify Me. For that is the only way out of this mess. Someone has to die for all you have done, and I have come for just that purpose. Crucify Me.”

Look at the cross. Look at the One who hangs on it, bearing your sins, taking your punishment.

“His appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and His form beyond that of the children of mankind” (Isaiah 52:14). “He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53:3).

Look at this man. Look at your God. Beaten. Bruised. Bleeding. Suffering.

“Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows” (Isaiah 53:4). “He was pierced for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities” (Isaiah 53:5).

He dies for you. He carries your griefs, your sorrows, your sin, your guilt.

But why? Why did it have to be like this?

“It was the will of the LORD to crush Him; He has put Him to grief” (Isaiah 53:10). “He poured out His soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors” (Isaiah 53:12).

Your Savior. Your Lord. Who died for your sins. Who made intercession for you. Who willingly poured out His soul to death so that you would have life. He is “the way, and the truth, and the life,” and “no one comes to the Father except through [Him]” (John 14:6).

And so your heart, led by the Holy Spirit, finally relents and cries out, “Crucify Him.” But not in anger. No, now it is because you see that there is no other way. “All [your] righteous deeds are like a polluted garment” (Isaiah 64:6), and you can’t fix it. You can’t be good enough. You can’t be without sin. You can’t win your own salvation. Whatever good you might manage to pull off is completely overshadowed by your sinful nature.

“With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26). With God, you can be saved. But someone must endure the penalty. God’s wrath must be satisfied. The wages of sin must be paid. Someone has to die.

And that someone is Jesus. He lived the perfect life you could not. He has taken all of your sin on Himself. He took all of it to the cross to satisfy God’s wrath. And He gives you His own righteousness in return, asking only that you trust Him and leave the work to Him.

Today, as you “survey the wondrous cross On which the Prince of Glory died” (*LSB* 425:1), may you hear God’s call to return to Him . . . to return to truth . . . to trust in the One who has promised you salvation and eternal life.

See, from His head, His hands, His feet  
Sorrow and love flow mingled down!  
Did e’er such love and sorrow meet  
Or thorns compose so rich a crown? (*LSB* 425:3)

May the peace of God, granted through the holy, innocent, bitter sufferings and death of Jesus Christ, keep you focused on the One who lived, died, and rose again to secure your salvation and eternal life. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.