

Notes abridged from "Saint Matthew" by J.C.Fenton - Pelican Gospel Commentaries

Chapter 27 .11 - 44 (The events of Friday)

Chapter 27 .11 - 14 (= Mark 15 .2 - 5) **Jesus accused before Pilate**

Jesus has told the Sanhedrin that he is the *Christ*. Now they take him to *Pilate the governor*, presumably on that charge. Having explained to Pilate that *Christ* means *King* he asks "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus' reply, as Matthew understands it, is affirmative but Jesus makes no reply to other questions asked of him.

- verse 11 - "Now Jesus stood before the governor". A link phrase introduced by Matthew to return the action to Jesus (after focussing on Judas).
 "The King of the Jews" A term used by the Gentiles as equivalent of "The Christ". The Jews referred to themselves as *Israel* and use "King of Israel" (see 27.42)
 "You have said so" (see also 26.25,64). This is an affirmative (not so in Mark)
- verse 12 - See also Jesus silent before the Sanhedrin (26.62f)
- verse 14 - "Not even a single charge". The meaning may be "not even one word".

Chapter 27 .15 - 23 (= Mark 15 .6 - 14) **The crowd choose Barabbas**

A prisoner was released by Pilate at Passover. There is a *Barabbas*, some manuscripts say *Jesus Barabbas*. Pilate asks the crowd to choose *Jesus Barabbas* or *Jesus the Christ*. Pilate wants Jesus released; because he feels the Sanhedrin have acted out of envy and also because his wife has had a dream about the innocence of Jesus. The Sanhedrin persuade the crowd to choose Barabbas. When asked by Pilate the crowd demand Jesus' crucifixion. Matthew wants to show the responsibility for the crucifixion lay with the Sanhedrin rather than the Romans. Scripture being fulfilled.

Matthew has added the account of Pilate's wife and her dream and also the information that Barabbas was also called *Jesus*. Matthew has omitted Mark's description of Barabbas "among the rebels in prison, who had committed murder" (Mark 15.7)

- verse 15 - There is no other reference for this custom except Matthew, Mark and John.
- verse 16 - "*Jesus Barabbas*" is in the older texts and likely therefore to be original. As time passed the name *Jesus* became more sacred and would be likely to be removed (as v17 and v21). *Barabbas* = Bar Abba (Son of the Father).
- verse 17 - Matthew depicts a choice between *Jesus Barabbas* and *Jesus called Christ*. Mark simply has "Do you want me to release the King of the Jews?"
- verse 18 - For the *envy* of the religious leaders see 21.15f and 21.45.
- verse 19 - Added by Matthew to emphasise Pilate's reticence.
- verse 20 - "*the people*" is "*the crowds*". Matthew adds "*destroy Jesus*". He's a threat.
- verse 21 - Matthew adds Pilate's second question and answer to crowds. "*Jesus who is called Christ*" distinguishes him from *Jesus Barabbas*.
- verse 22f - Mark's "*crucify him*" is changed to "*let him be crucified*". The responsibility is that of the Sanhedrin, not Pilate.

Chapter 27 .24 - 26 (= Mark 15 .v5) *Barabbas released*

Pilate wants to declare Jesus innocent but can't risk the peace of Judea. He disclaims all responsibility, releases Barabbas, scourges Jesus and hands him over for crucifixion. Matthew has added extensively to Mark's text, which is just one verse (Mark 15.5)

- verse 24 - Washing hands as a sign of innocence is a Jewish custom rather than Roman. See Deut 21.1ff "*all the elders nearest the slain man shall wash their hands... Our hands did not shed this blood*". It's unlikely Pilate did this. "this man's blood" = "life" (as in 27.4ff). "*Righteous*" may be added (v19) "*see to it yourselves*" cf 27.4
- verse 26 - "*scourging*" A regular Roman practice before crucifixion. Jesus has predicted it at 20.19.

Chapter 27 .27 - 31 (= Mark 15 .16 - 20) *Mocked as "King of the Jews"*

The soldiers mock Jesus, dressing him in a soldier's cloak as a substitute for the emperor's purple robe, and give him a crown (of thorns) and a reed as a sceptre. They kneel in 'homage' but also spit and strike him. Then Jesus is taken away for crucifixion. The power of this passage is the combination of truth and ignorance. Jesus is what he is mocked for claiming to be.

- verse 27 - The *praetorium* is the Roman procurator's official residence in Jerusalem. The *whole battalion*, or *cohort*. A tenth of a legion; normally 600 men.
- verse 28 - *They stripped him*. The Greek is *ekdysantes*, but some manuscripts have the similar *endysantes* meaning '*they clothed him*'. He was already stripped for the scourging in v.26.
A scarlet robe. Mark has a *purple cloak*. The emperor's was purple but the soldiers would have used one of their own scarlet ones.
- verse 29 - *Plaiting a crown of thorns*. Roman coins of the period depict the emperor wearing a crown with spikes. The soldiers imitate this with thorns.
A reed, or staff. Again the coins show the emperor with a staff in his right hand as a sign of his power to rule.
Hail, King corresponds to the Latin greeting to the emperor of *Ave Caesar*.
- verse 31 - The Gospels agree that clothes were restored to Jesus because they will be mentioned again, in v.35, when Psalm 22 is fulfilled by the soldiers dividing them by casting lots.

Chapter 27 .32 - 44 (= Mark 15 .21 - 32) *Jesus crucified and mocked*

Matthew's account is full of allusions to Psalms 22 and 69; wine with gall, dividing of garments and casting lots, derision of passers by, the mocking by the Sanhedrin and reviling by robbers. Mark has it all as a fulfilment of scripture (see also 1 Cor 15.3 Christ died for our sins accordance with the scriptures) but Matthew mentions more fulfillments. Matthew also refers back to the temptations of Jesus in Chapter 4.

- verse 32 - "*As they were marching out*" is "*as they came out*" of the city. In Mark's version of a parable (21.39) this is predicted "*they took him and cast him out of the vineyard and killed him*".
"Simon by name", possibly mentioned because it's the same as Peter's. *If anyone would come after me let them deny themselves* (Peter has denied Jesus), *take up their cross* (*take up* = *carry* in Greek) *and follow me* (16.24)

- verse 33 - *Golgotha* - The hill's shape may have resembled a skull, or simply regarded as an unclean place as used for executions. There was also a legend that Adam's skull was buried there.
- verse 34 - "*they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall*". (Mark has "*mixed with myrrh*"). See Ps 69.21, *they gave me poison* (Greek, *gall*) *for food*. Where Mark has "*but he did not take it*", Matthew has "*but when he tasted it he would not drink it*". The purpose of the drink was to dull pain, which is why the Gospel writers record that Jesus did not drink it.
- verse 35 - "*they divided his garments among them by casting lots*". The soldiers had a right to take the clothes of a criminal but it's recorded here as a fulfilment of Ps 22.18 "*they divide my garments among them, and for my raiment they cast lots*".
- verse 36 - Mark's next sentence is "*And it was the third hour when they crucified him*". Matthew changes this to "*then they sat down and kept watch over him there*". Notice also "*keeping watch over Jesus*" at v.54. Matthew has added these words about guarding Jesus during and after the crucifixion (see also vv 62-66 and 28.4.11-15). It may be to counter suggestions that Jesus was removed from the cross before death - or his body stolen afterwards. One of the gnostic sects of the 2nd Century said Simon of Cyrene was crucified in place of Jesus.
- verse 37 - It was customary to display the charge against an executed criminal. See 26.63 and 27.11. Matthew adds the words "*This is Jesus*"; (cf the voice at his baptism: *This is my beloved Son*).
- verse 38 - The mention of two robbers recalls Isa 53.12 "*he was numbered with the transgressors*". A later scribe of Mark's Gospel adds this to a version (Mark 15.28).
- verse 39 - Compare Ps 22.7 "*All who see me mock at me, they make mouths at me, they wag their heads*".
- verse 40 - The destruction and rebuilding of the temple is also mentioned at 26.61 Matthew adds, "*If you are the Son of God*" to mirror the devil's words in the wilderness 4 .3,6.
- verse 41f - The Sanhedrin would say *King of Israel*, not *King of the Jews*. They demand a miracle that they may believe cf 4 .5f
- verse 43 - Matthew adds this whole verse, using Ps 22.8 "*He committed his cause to the Lord; let him deliver him, let him rescue him, for he delights in him!*" "*For he said, I am the Son of God*". Again see the temptations in 4 .3,6.
- verse 44 - "*reviled him*". Ps 69 .9 "*the insults of those who insulted you have fallen in me*" where the same word is used in the Greek.

Week Five : Matthew, Chapter 27, verses 43 - 66
The death of Jesus - The burial of Jesus - The tomb is sealed

SYMBOLS OF THE PASSION (by Mike Claridge)

3. The Crown

Who had called you King?

The expectation of a nation had focussed on you, not of your choice, at least not at first.
Everyone expected a leader, expected their leader.

Someone to push their agenda,
someone to support their ideals,
someone to underwrite their greed.

They had looked for a King – you would do, you would do.

Politicians wanted a figurehead.
A symbol of the nation,
a rallying point to provoke nationalistic fervour against a foreign power,
fervour they could harness for their own aims.

Priests wanted a man who would tow the line.
God's line – but invented by them, not God.
A man of ritual - but not a man close to God in prayer.
A man of sound teaching – but not of compassion.
A man like them with a heart of stone – when God should be a spring of life.

You - a focus of so much expectation.
You - a Jewish carpenter and part time teacher of Israel.
You – who the already powerful wanted to call a King.

But what of those who could not voice their hopes?
The Jew trod underfoot by occupying powers and ripped off by their religious leaders.
The foreigner looked down on by authority
and looked on with suspicion by those they lived among.
For them – for both ordinary Jew and outsider – for them you would be King.

You claimed your throne as you entered Jerusalem.

Scripture had promised that the king would enter riding on a donkey – who are you to disappoint.
You the agitator, revolutionary, heretic, even blasphemous.

The people to whom you wanted to be king greeted you with hosannas.

But your coronation was in other hands and already they were crafting the crown.