

Intro - Open to Romans 1:16-25

As we read Romans 1 already this morning, I want to really quick make some points that will be helpful to our time in John. What John records in Jesus' trial, Paul makes explicit in his teaching in Romans.

In Romans, Paul's gospel message is the power of salvation. It is (v18) salvation from God's wrath poured out against ungodly and unrighteous men who suppress the truth. This is what Romans 1 makes clear for us: our sin leaves us without a defense in our guilt. If you look in verse 22 (implicitly) and verse 23 and 25 explicitly, Paul explains what our sin is: we exchange the creator God for created things. Verse 22, exchanging the wisdom of God for the foolishness of men (2). Verse 23, exchanging God for earthly rulers (3). Verse 25, exchanging truth for lies (1).

The last two weeks we have focused on truth revealed and embodied by Jesus. He is clearly God by his teaching and his actions but, the unrighteous will suppress the truth and exchange the God-Man Jesus in three ways in our text. Their sin has blinded them and their sin is the rejection of Jesus, and rejection of the God himself. We too, by our sin reject Jesus and I hope you will see with me that... **We exchanged the King for created things. This sin leaves us guilty of his death.**

Turn to John 18:38b-19:36a – PRAY

One – Exchange King for Criminal

Read John 18:38b-18:40

Pilate has done his interrogation. Asking Jesus about his crimes and kingdom, there was nothing to charge. Jesus, he decides is a king (at least claims to be one), but is not a political threat. Yet Pilate is not after justice otherwise he would have heard enough and dismissed him already.

He turns to the crowd that is growing as the day brightens and he tries to use Jesus as a bargaining chip to play both sides. He tells them that he will release one man at Passover as was his custom each year. In other gospel accounts, he provides a choice: Barabbas, who was a zealot, a nationalistic Jewish terrorist and murderer OR (just to antagonize them), Jesus their King. Will they exchange a King for a Criminal?

We have discussed how crazy Passover week could be in Jerusalem. Jews from all over would flood Jerusalem and the national or ethnic pride would be at its peak. National pride would be used by the priests to their advantage. Barabbas had incited an insurrection against Rome and had murdered. They fueled their nationalistic fervor to have them choose Barabbas over Jesus. Country over King. Criminal over King.

Even you don't worship Jesus, you see how foolish this is. We look back through history and think, "why would you choose Barabbas over innocent, peace teaching Jesus? How could this happen?"

It happens because good (Jesus) has been disguised as evil. And Evil (Barabbas) has been disguised as good. Romans 1, truth exchanged for lies. Isaiah 5:20 says

Woe to those who call evil good and good evil,
who put darkness for light and light for darkness,
who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!

When good gets disguised as evil, it begins to make sense why the crowd chooses it. For ourselves, when we get angry, we don't call it yelling, we call it raising our voice. When we poison our bodies with cigarettes, alcohol or a myriad of other things, we don't call it self-hatred, we call it our little bad habit. When we kill our child in the womb, we don't call it murder we call it pro-choice or women's healthcare.

This can take on very subtle forms when language gets twisted to pervert evil. We cannot cede ground on words and their truthfulness. We must be clear about good and evil. To not do so, is to get so confused that when our King stands before us, we follow the crowd and say "give us Barabbas!"

As Christians we can call sin, sin. We can call a murderer a murderer. Even when it is in our own heart! Even when it is our favorite politician or friend. We don't have to disguise sin; it is foolish to lie before an all-knowing God. We must, with clarity in our own life and in the public square, call sin "sin" because there is forgiveness and payment for sin available. We should not take on the world's ways because it disguises good and evil.

This exchange for Barabbas, is an exchange of good for evil. It is as Paul said, the Jews exchanged the truth about Jesus for a lie, they believed the false charges, condemning themselves in the process.

But that's just the first exchange. An exchange of good for evil. The next more subtle: an exchange of authority. Exchange of King for Crown.

Two – Exchange King for Crown

Read John 19:1-11

So far Jesus had been arrested and falsely tried by the Jewish Sanhedrin. He is interrogated by Pilate; it's omitted by John but Jesus is then sent to Herod to see if Herod will deal with Jesus. He is interrogated and mocked by Herod but Jesus refuses to answer questions so he sends him back to Pilate.

At this point, Pilate just wants to get rid of Jesus. He will try three ways. First, he tried the prisoner release. They chose Barabbas... Now he tries to rough Jesus up with flogging. Jesus will be flogged again right before he is crucified so he will be on the verge of death. This time it is just to be enough to placate the blood thirsty crowd to back off of the death penalty.

I want you to understand that this flogging would have been excruciating. It would have completely torn up his flesh as the whip is tipped with bone and metal fragments, leaving veins exposed and sometimes even organs visible.

They then twist a crown of thorns onto Jesus' head, put a purple robe on his bloodied and raw back and soldier after soldier comes up to Jesus mockingly saying "Hail, King of the Jews!" and slapping him with an open hand. Slapping him until his face would have been bruised and puffy, dripping with blood and draped with a soon to be blood-soaked purple robe.

We have to get this picture because this humiliation is what Pilate wants. He thinks that if Jesus can look pitiful enough, if he can look pathetic enough, he can put the Jews in their place and get himself out of this sham of justice. Pilate once again in verse 4 says that he finds no fault in him. Then verse 5, hear the mockery in which he says this "Behold the man!".

All of this is meant to lower Jesus in their eyes. Make them seem satisfied that he has been brought to nothing. That he could be no threat to anyone, bloodied and beaten as he is to the point where he may never recover.

Yet, what happens. "Crucify! Crucify!" They are not satisfied.

Now comes Pilate's third attempt v6, "Take him yourselves, crucify him, for I find no guilt in him." He essentially gives the Jews back the death penalty Rome had taken from them. It is almost a full concession of authority.

Authority is the theme of this exchange. Who will wear the crown of authority here? Earthly authority comes with a beautiful crown. Jesus has been brought low, mocked with his thorny crown. Pilate gives the crown to the Jews and what do they do with it? They demand death for blasphemy.

"According to that law he ought to die because he has made himself the Son of God." Now this name, Son of God, scares Pilate. He is a superstitious man about the gods. If Jesus is a son of a God, could he have the power of retribution? Could this man's father take vengeance out on him? He has just had him beaten to a pulp. He is desperate to wash his hands of this now.

He interrogates Jesus again. "Where are you from?" But Jesus does not answer. He fulfills Isaiah 53:7 "he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth". He was innocent yet he took the wrath meant for us.

This infuriates Pilate even more, flexing his authority. "Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?" Now Pilate did not speak falsely as Jesus is about to affirm, but he does not realize his authority, like all authority here on earth is derivative.

Now what do I mean by derivative authority. Well, it means that there is always a bigger boss. Or someone who can tell you no. Earthly authority always has something or someone above them.

Think of the most powerful person. Maybe the richest man, Elon Musk. Why is he so powerful? Money. Where did he get his money? From investors who have valued his companies at astronomical prices. People with their resources have given theirs to him because he is a good investment. Or elected officials in a democracy. They get their power from the people who elect them. They're supposed to be responsible to the people. Or even dictators. Where is their authority derived? It sits on the razor's edge all the time balanced between fear or loyalty from others. So even dictators do not have ultimate authority.

Let's get a little more familiar. Teachers, they get authority from parents and the community. They are hired on behalf of the people to educate children responsibly according to the wishes of the community.

More foundationally to all of this is how God distributes and gives authority. From the wealthy, to dictators, to teachers: they all derive their authority from God. Even parents are not over children simply because they birthed the child, but that God has given children to parents to shape and steward their lives. Pastors and church leaders, given a stewardship and a real authority by God not by men. Churches can get out of whack really fast when they think they are a democracy or a dictatorship rather than a people whose actions and worship are regulated by the Word of God. All authority is given by God who is the only one with no derived authority.

Now that long excursus on authority gets us to Jesus' words in verse 11.

You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given to you from above. Therefore, he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin.

Jesus puts Pilate in his place. The authority Pilate has been given is not just derivative, but it is from God and it is limited. Pilate does not have the ability to do what he wants. He has authority, to take what is handed to him in this trial. He has been trying to find his way out and Jesus shows him that far from having ultimate authority, he has been given the authority for God's purposes: to be an executioner.

Jesus equates Pilate's authority with the responsibility or sin of those who delivered him over. This is Caiaphas. The one who has known for a long time he would kill Jesus. Predicting it, and bringing it to pass. He falsified witnesses and sent lackeys to push for execution. Caiaphas had the authority from God to teach and be a priest to the people of God, but he had sinned against God and man by his false dealings and now killing God's Son.

Ultimately, we must see that our wisdom is insufficient. It may get us by for a bit, but Proverbs 16:25 says **"There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death."**

When we exchange the good rule and reign of Christ, for our own little monarchies we should beware. Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown. It is a dangerous thing to be king. The lesson is clear to Pilate and to us, Jesus was mocked for his crown but yet was the only one fit to wear one. We must all recognize that any authority we are ever given has been given by God. We must steward it well. We will either try to assert our authority over God like Pilate, or we will submit to God. We must not, as Romans 1 says, exchange the wisdom of God's rule for the foolishness of men.

Our last exchange serves as an extension of this one that not only are we not a good enough authority, but no earthly king is either. Will we choose a physical king, like Caesar or will they choose the spiritual King, Christ?

Three – Exchange King for Caesar

Read John 19:12-16a

Verse 12 is just saturated with irony. Get this, the Jews are taunting a Roman official that they are a better friend to Caesar than he is. "If you don't execute Jesus, you are no true friend of Caesar."

In reality these Jews hate Caesar and they have a history of rejecting God by choosing an earthly King. When Saul, Israel's first king, was chosen it was God's consolation as they had rejected him. Now Israel was choosing Caesar over him.

This claim pushed Pilate over the edge, his superstitions made him fearful of Jesus but the threat of Emperor Tiberius was enough to tip the scales of justice. Pilate's calculating was over, he needs to pass judgement and be done. He sat down on his judgement seat and as a parting insult he says **"Behold your King!"** What does Israel do, they reject their king as Jesus as John stated they would in the opening chapter, verse 11, **"He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him."** They now cry out **"Away with him, away with him, crucify him!"**

Then the clearest rejection **"We have no king but Caesar"**. Verse 16 describes not a physical deliverance over to be crucified but he delivers Jesus over to the will of the people, to crucify their king. Judgement was done. Jesus's fate was sealed. Caesar for Jesus.

This last exchange is a physical earthly king exchanged for the true spiritual king. It is easy to want the physical over the spiritual. Do we not long for Craig to be physically with us even though we know full well he is free from pain, sorrow and with the Savior which is far better?

Do we not build our lives around what is easy to accomplish here on earth like fame or money or relationships but we neglect the truer pursuit of spiritual intimacy with God? It's easier to turn on the Xbox than to pray and search the scriptures for enjoyment. I get it and I don't expect there to be a bunch of Xboxes listed online for sale after service today. But we must see that to desire the physical and ignore the spiritual is a grave error.

This is foundationally our problem. We do not have eyes to see spiritual things. We are so easily distracted and blinded to want Caesar. The Jews saw Jesus' disfigured face and bloody mess of a body and Caesar sounded so much more appealing. More often than not, we want the best the world can offer because we see that God offers his bloody disfigured son...

Conclusion

What God offers is more than enough!

The Jews, in a series of small exchanges, small opportunities chose the criminal, the crown and Caesar himself over Jesus. We can find ourselves choosing, not in one big way, but in a series of small ways choosing evil when it is disguised just right. We can choose to be the authority ourselves and spurn God's rightful authority. Or easily enough we choose the king of the physical realm rather than the King of Kings over the heavenly kingdom. **We exchanged the King for created things. This sin leaves us guilty of his death.**

When we exchange, exchange, exchange, what do we do?

William Perkins, A Puritan (16th cent. British), preached a sermon entitled: A Declaration of the True Manner of Knowing Christ Crucified
The serious consideration of this, that the very Son of God Himself suffered all the pains and torments of hell on the cross for our sins, is the...most effectual means to stir up our hearts to a godly sorrow for them...every man must be settled without doubt that he was the man that crucified Christ; that he is to be blamed as well as Judas, Herod, Pontius Pilate, and the Jews; ...his sins were the nails, spears, and thorns that pierced Him.

OUR SINS WERE THE NAILS, SPEARS, AND THORNS THAT
PIERCED HIM.

This is a Godly sorrow. I hate to admit I am wrong. I hate it, but when I consider that Christ died for my sins, and I stand condemned. I come here this morning begging God to cleanse me of my sin. Horrifying ways I have exchanged my King over to death.

If we continue in our sin, nothing can clean our blood-stained hands. The last exchange, but a good one, is that Jesus exchanges his life for ours. When we confess that his blood is on our hands, he washes them clean.