

**DIVINE DETOURS**  
Matthew 27:16-25  
By Raymond White

**Question:** Why did the crowd come to crucify Jesus? **Answer:** They didn't.

On the morning of the Passover, the day of the crucifixion, the crowd gathered to the Hall of Judgment. They did not come to crucify Jesus, indeed, they didn't even know he was there under arrest. The reason they came had nothing at all to do with Jesus.

*Mark 15:6* Now at that feast he [Pilate] released unto them one prisoner, whomsoever they desired. :7 And there was on named Barabbas...:8 And the multitude crying aloud began to desire him to do as he had ever done.

Jesus had been arrested secretly in the middle of the night only a few hours earlier. The public could not have known that (unless they had a telephone tree or texted each other which of course they didn't.) But there was a prisoner, one prisoner (actually three), which everyone already knew about: Barabbas (and his two friends). The crowd did not come to crucify Jesus, they came to free Barabbas.

*Matthew 27:16* They had a notable prisoner, Barabbas. :17 Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas or Jesus which is called Christ?

Now the plot thickens. We might ask, why was Pilate willing to take Jesus into custody at all. He knew this was all trumped up and bogus, *Matthew 27:18* For he knew that for envy they had delivered him. And he had even received a divine warning, *Matthew 27:19* ...his wife sent unto him, saying, Have nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him. So Pilate had every reason to pass on this. So why did he allow himself to get involved? Here's what I think happened.

Pilate saw an opportunity. Barabbas and his two insurrectionists friends were Roman killers. The thought of having to release a Roman killer in the morning had to have really rankled Pilate. He was probably fretting, "What can I do to get all three of them on crosses tomorrow?"

Then in the early AM, Jesus conveniently fell into his lap. "Well, what have we here?" Pilate thought. "This is made to order. All I have to do is offer Jesus to the crowd tomorrow and surely they will release Jesus, their Christ, their king, and I'll have Barabbas on a cross where he belongs." But something went wrong. Pilate had not accounted for every possibility.

*Matthew 27:20* But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus.

There's the proof that the crowd did not come to crucify Jesus. Pilate's plan almost worked. When Pilate offered Jesus to the crowd, that caught the crowd by surprise and confused them. "What? Jesus is here? Under arrest?" they asked themselves. And they would have changed their minds and allowed their plans to be detoured except that the mood of the crowd caused the chief priests and elders to panic. When they realized what Pilate was about to pull off, the priests and elders moved into the crowd to dissuade them from changing their minds.

“You’re not going to change your mind now, are you? Remember why you came. Free Barabbas, right? That’s who you want. The patriot, the zealot. That’s why you’re here. Forget that Jesus fellow. He’s nobody.” And it worked.

*Matthew 27:21 They said, Barabbas.*

In spite of the new circumstances, the crowd decided to stick with their original plan: free Barabbas. And Jesus?

*Matthew 27:22 Let him be crucified.*

In order to save the guilty Barabbas, they had to sacrifice the innocent Jesus. That was an act of cold blooded murder. But then what would you expect from a crowd who would gather to save a killer? These were not ordinary Jews, these were people interested in Barabbas, these were terrorist sympathizers. And in their hands lay the fate of the nation.

*Matthew 27:25 His blood be on us, and on our children.*

And so it was that a small crowd of zealots made a decision that affected everyone, and it was the wrong decision. They rejected the man of peace, the Son of God, and accepted instead the man of war whose name Bar-Abbas which means Son of the Father. He was the perfect counterfeit. That decision set in motion the chain of events that led to the destruction of Jerusalem. God gave them a choice: the life giving Savior, or the life taking killer. They chose the killer. The innocent died so that the guilty could go free.

Over the next thirty years, Jerusalem moved increasingly toward revolution until finally the Romans responded by destroying it. In 70 A.D., General Titus and his 10<sup>th</sup> Roman legion, attacked and destroyed Jerusalem and crucified over a million Jews. (Perhaps God avenged that ruthless act by erupting Mount Vesuvius in 79 A.D. destroying two Roman cities, Pompeii and Herculaneum. A stretch, I know, but an entertaining thought anyway. From my perspective, the Romans had it coming.)

The point (well, my point anyway) is that there are times when we are bound and determined to do a thing that seems to be the right thing to do — marriage, business, whatever. But then suddenly circumstances change, and that change nudges us to reconsider our original objective. At that moment we should be most circumspect. Maybe we should stay the course or maybe we should change our plan. The problem is inertia. In that situation we are most likely to stay the course simply because it’s the easier thing to do. And that may result in total disaster.

The crowd that appeared in the Hall of Justice that Passover morning, fell into just that trap. A choice was presented to them: stay the course or change the plan. And they made exactly the wrong decision: they stayed the course. Unwilling to rethink their objective, they crucified an innocent man, set free a killer, and plunged their nation into revolution and destruction.

There’s a saying: “There is nothing so unstoppable as a great mistake whose time has come.” Well, their mistake was a doozy.

Lives are like that. You plan your life, chart your course, and maintain that course come hell or high water. But sometimes God grabs you by the neck and says, “turn!” The path you choose then, your path or God’s detour, will lead you to your destiny.