

The Heat of the Moment

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[0 : 00] Thank you very much indeed, Colin. Well, I'd like us to turn together to the passage that Colin read for us in Matthew, chapter 27.

We're going to look together at this whole passage, but we can just read again from verse 11 as we begin. Now, Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, are you the king of the Jews?

Jesus said, you have said so. But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he gave no answer. Then Pilate said to him, do you not hear how many things they testify against you?

But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed. Our title today is The Heat of the Moment, and I'm sure that's a phrase that you are likely to be familiar with. It captures the fact that there are certain times in life when the pressure is on, and at that moment decisions are made, steps are taken, and momentous things happen.

[1 : 12] Sometimes the heat of the moment is when our greatest triumphs come. So maybe a job interview where you excel and exam where you're able to perform really well.

You rise to that challenge, maybe in the heat of a penalty shootout, David Marshall saves, and wonderful things happen.

Maybe in the heat of the moment you ask out a girl that you really like, and she says, yes.

Sometimes these moments bring out the very best in us.

But I think that it's probably the case that more often the heat of the moment is when our biggest mistakes are made. It's when crimes are committed.

It's when relationships are broken, when arguments flare up, when lasting damage is done. So we might lose our temper at work.

[2 : 09] We might have that drink that's just one too many. We might give into that temptation to look at pornography or to get the latest juicy gossip about someone.

And when we face a challenge, we might just give up because we're afraid of failure. The heat of the moment can bring out the best in us, but it can also bring out the worst.

The passage that Colin read for us in Matthew 27 is a moment just like that. The tension is very high. For the past three years, Jesus has become more and more well known in Jerusalem and in the surrounding region.

He's gained followers, but others have very much become his enemies. And this is the moment when it all comes to a head.

This is the moment when Jerusalem is going to decide what to do with Jesus. And in the heat of this moment, we hear two things, voices and silence.

[3 : 21] And that's our two headings for today. So first of all, voices. There's a lot of voices in this passage. I want to pick out four of them.

The first is Judas. Judas was one of the 12 disciples. He'd been with Jesus for these past three years, but it seems to be the case that he grew increasingly disillusioned with Jesus and his mission.

It's quite likely that Judas had expected Jesus to lead a revolution against the Romans. And the fact that Jesus didn't do this was becoming more and more frustrating for Judas.

And it culminates in the previous chapter, chapter 26, when Judas approaches the Jewish leader and agrees to betray Jesus into their hands for a fee of 30 pieces of silver.

Judas then led a crowd of men and swords, men who had swords and clubs to where Jesus was. And he agreed that he would identify Jesus by kissing him.

[4 : 27] And in doing so, he betrayed Jesus into their hands. But verses three to five tell us what happened to Judas after that.

When Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the 30 pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders saying, I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.

They said, force that to us. See to it yourself. And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed and he went and hanged himself.

Here Judas' voice is a voice of despair. And you read those words and they're tragic. Here's a man who took the devil's bait.

He took action that he thought would fix things once and for all. But here in the aftermath, he is left totally empty and filled with agonizing regret.

[5 : 26] And if you look at Judas' life, you can see that he made many mistakes. He got it wrong in terms of what he expected Jesus to do.

He got it wrong when he decided to go to the chief priests and agree to 30 pieces of silver. Even then, Jesus had warned him. If you look back in chapter 26, you'll see that Jesus says to him, you are the one who is going to betray me and it's a terrible idea.

But Judas did not listen. He got it wrong. But I think that the biggest mistake that Judas made was in terms of where he went with his regret.

Because when he realized his mistakes, he went to the chief priests and in desperation and he said to them, I've made a terrible error of judgment. But they replied by saying, what is that to us?

See to it yourself. And in the heat of that moment, he took his own life.

[6 : 33] And the tragic mistake is that if he had taken his remorse to Jesus, then things could have been so different. In Judas, we see the horrible destructiveness of sin and we hear a voice of desperation.

The second voice we hear is Pilate. Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea and in many ways he was an embodiment of the fact that the Jews were under imperial rule at this time.

So although in the previous chapter, the Jewish leaders had already agreed that Jesus should be killed, they weren't actually allowed to carry out that sentence without Pilate's consent.

So Jesus is taken to Pilate and he questions Jesus and he hears the numerous charges that the chief priests have against him.

Pilate's conclusion is that none of the charges stand up and when the crowd calls for Jesus to be crucified, Pilate says to them, why? What evil has he done?

[7 : 42] But confronted by a crowd that's calling out for Jesus' death and while at the same time knowing that they really had no grounds for doing that to Jesus, he falls under increasing pressure.

He then gets a warning from his wife who says, have nothing to do with that righteous man. And in the heat of that moment, Pilate tries to claim personal innocence.

When Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing but rather there was a riot beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the clergy and I am innocent of this man's blood, see to it yourselves. Pilate like so many other people was trying to claim a position of neutrality in relation to Jesus and God.

And yet that neutrality is a myth because in supposedly having nothing to do with Jesus, he effectively condemns him. He releases Barabbas and he hands Jesus over having scourged him.

[8 : 49] So if you have the image of traffic lights in your mind, I think that deep down a big part of Pilate wanted a red traffic light. He wanted to say, stop this, this man's innocent, we're not going to kill him.

But in order to keep the crowd on side, he kind of tries to make out that he was giving an amber light, that he was sort of neutral, that the decision wasn't really his.

But in reality, Pilate sets the traffic lights to green. He was desperate to avoid a decision about Jesus.

He wanted to hide behind claims of neutrality, but in Pilate we see that that neutrality just does not exist and we hear the voice of someone desperately trying to escape responsibility.

The third voice is the crowd. In these verses, we read how a crowd gathered before Pilate and they were given the choice between releasing Jesus or releasing a notorious criminal called Barabbas.

[9 : 53] They chose the criminal and when they were asked by Pilate what they wanted to do with Jesus, they repeatedly cried out, let him be crucified, as you can see in verses 22 and 23.

And the contrast here is astonishing because if you think just less than a week ago, Jesus had entered into Jerusalem and the crowds in the city had been shouting, Hosanna to the Son of David,

blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Now, the people of Jerusalem are shouting, crucify him. And here we have the voice of popular hostility. The crowd is fired up and together they're united in saying that they want nothing more to do with Jesus.

They want him dead. And in doing that, they are convinced that they're doing the right thing. That's why they say in verse 25, his blood be on us and upon our children.

They're not saying that because they're nutters. They're saying that because they're convinced that they're right. They think that Jesus is a major problem that they need to get rid of and they'll gladly take responsibility for that upon themselves.

[11 : 15] And because it's a crowd, the voice seems very strong. Everything seems so convincing. Everybody's saying it and there's a safety and a security in following the crowd.

But the thing I want you to notice is that this isn't really the voice of the crowd at all. The crowd's voice is really the chief priest's voice because they have persuaded them to say this.

They're crying, the crowd's crying out for Barabbas to be released, for Jesus to be crucified because they've been stirred up and manipulated by a small group in the background. And the result is that the crowd are shouting without thinking and in doing so they're just accomplishing someone else's agenda.

In the heat of this moment, the crowd is just going along with what the chief priests are telling them to say. They're jumping on a bandwagon that sees Jesus as a massive problem.

The crowd's voice is actually the chief priest's voice. And in all of that we see popular hostility to Jesus. We see a voice that's being manipulated and that is mindless.

[12 : 36] And the fourth voice is the voice of the soldier. So after the crowd's called for Jesus to be crucified, Pilate attempts to wash his hands of the situation and he hands Jesus over to a group of soldiers.

They are the ones who now have the king of the Jews in their hands. They are the ones who are about to drive nails into the hands and feet of the Son of God. They are the ones who are about to crucify the Messiah with the whole of heaven watching and the whole of history pointing towards this moment.

In the heat of that moment, what do the soldiers do? They decide to have a laugh.

So they strip Jesus. They put a crown of thorns on his head. They spit on him. They hit him. They mock him saying, Hail, king of the Jews.

They think that Jesus is someone to make fun of and to laugh at. And yet at the same time and in the midst of all that we see great cruelty because these soldiers are brutal in their treatment.

[13 : 45] And yet in the midst of that cruelty is the voice of laughter. So in the heat of this moment that we've been reading in the first half of Matthew chapter 27, we hear voices.

We hear the voice of Judas, which is one of desperation. We hear the voice of Pilate claiming neutrality. We hear the voice of the crowd expressing hostility. And we hear the voice of the soldiers and their hilarity.

I want to note two things about all of this. First of all, we are hearing these voices in Matthew 27 as we read it.

But we also hear exactly the same voices all around us today. So if people are confronted with the great life and death questions, like what is truth?

What happens when I die? What does God require of me? And we are confronted with questions like that in the heat of that moment, these questions mean that some people cry out in despair.

[14 : 56] So there's people all around us who are lost and they're confused and they're broken. They look at their own lives and they just have this agonizing sense of regret.

And yet like Judas, they take their sorrow and their regret to the wrong place. So people look for comfort in alcohol, in casual relationships, in self-pity, in drugs, in gambling, and yet all of these things will just keep on leaving us empty.

Some people faced by these questions, they try to claim neutrality like Pilate did. Facing the big questions of life, people want to retreat onto neutral ground where we can say, well, I'm not too bad.

I know that I'm not perfect, but I'm maybe not that bad. I'm not going to pass judgment on others and I don't want to pass judgment on myself. In terms of my relationship with God, with the big questions of life, I'm not going to say yes, I'm not going to say no, I'm not going to judge.

And yet the one thing that we absolutely have to recognize is that that kind of neutral ground is a myth.

[16:05] Before God, neutral ground does not exist. As Jesus said, whoever is not with me is against me.

Some people respond to the big questions of life by joining a crowd that's hostile. So today there's plenty of crowds that you can join that are hostile to Jesus.

There's people who deny His existence. There's people who dismiss His authority, people who reject His morality, and who just see Jesus as a huge problem.

And yet very often that popular hostility is mindless. All too often the crowd is embracing an opinion that it hasn't really thought about.

I remember hearing an example of this not that long ago in a radio interview that was between two atheists. One was a popular radio presenter who was very openly opposed to Christianity and all things religious.

[17:04] The other was a university professor who wasn't a believer but was actually an expert in New Testament documents and in the early church period. They were talking about Galatians and the scholar mentioned something about Paul.

And the radio presenter said, oh yeah, that's if Paul wrote Galatians. As if to say, well, you know, how do we even know that Paul has written Galatians? And he'd obviously heard that and was buying into this idea that you can't even be sure that Paul has written this document.

And the scholar who was not a believer said, there is no recognized academic in the world who denies that Paul wrote Galatians.

No academic from that period. And the presenter looked like a complete fool because he had jumped on a bandwagon that he knew nothing about.

And the result is that you end up with loud voices who have absolutely no idea what they're talking about. And if you are in a situation where you're like, actually, I don't want anything to do with Jesus.

[18:09] I don't want to follow him. I'm not interested. You've got to ask yourself, do you really know what you're talking about?

Because if you don't, then surely you are taking a massive gamble. But perhaps most of all, in the heat of the moment that's generated by life's biggest questions, people respond by trying to laugh it off.

So Jesus gets laughed at. Christianity becomes the butt of jokes. And people move on as quickly as possible to the nearest distraction that they can find.

And I want to ask you the question, do you hear these voices around you? So at work, at school, among friends or classmates, are these the voices you tend to hear?

And even more importantly, we need to ask ourselves, in the heat of the moment, do you ever say the same kind of things yourself?

[19:21] One thing I want to see in these voices is that in these voices, not only do we see all these different ways in which people turn away from Jesus, we also see, or should I say, we also hear the voices of the humanity that Jesus has come to save.

That humanity is one that has repeatedly messed up in the heat of the moment. So from the very beginning, humanity faced a crucial moment to choose between obeying God or rebelling against Him.

And in the heat of that moment, we chose rebellion. And ever since, humanity has been making mistake after mistake in the heat of the moment. And yet that is exactly why Jesus has come to save us.

So Jesus has come to save those who are utterly desperate. So if that's you, if you feel full of regret, if you look at yourself and feel broken and stupid and like you've been an idiot in your life, Jesus can heal you and He will bind up every wound and He will love you forever.

Jesus has come to save those who want neutrality. So if that's you, if you're longing for that place that will give you safe ground intellectually, morally and spiritually, Jesus has come to satisfy you so that you can trade neutrality for eternal security.

[20:56] Jesus has come to save those who have been sucked in by popular hostility. So if that's you, if you've spent your life jumping to the conclusion that Christianity is a waste of time, Jesus has come to save you as well.

He's come to show you that the gospel is utterly brilliant news and that the only crowd that will actually last is the family of God.

And in that crowd, everyone is equal. Every injustice will be put right and everyone is utterly loved and everyone is invited into it.

And Jesus has even come to save those who laugh at Him. And maybe that's you.

Maybe there's been many times where the laughter of your mates was more important to you than your relationship with God. Maybe there's times when you've dismissed Jesus as a joke or you've just looked for the next distraction to take your mind off Him.

[22 : 07] If that's you, Jesus has come to save you. He has come to make you so safe that when the big questions of life press upon you, in the heat of that moment, you will be so safe you will never need to distract yourself again.

I think that in the heat of the moments that life can bring, I look at myself and I think I've been all of these voices at different times. And I'm sure that you have too.

These are the voices of the humanity that we're all part of. Yet the incredible truth of the gospel is that this is the very humanity that Jesus has come to save.

And that brings us to the second thing that we hear in this passage, silence. The many voices that we hear in this passage stand in huge contrast to the silence of Jesus.

Jesus stood before the governor, the governor asked him, are you the king of the Jews? He said, you've said so. But when he was accused by the chief priests and the elders, he gave no answer. And Pilate said to him, do you not hear how many things they testify against you?

[23 : 31] But he gave no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed.

Often in life, silence can be very difficult. I want you to imagine being one of these disciples watching all of this. You see all this stuff being said about Jesus and he's just standing there in silence.

You would be thinking, come on Jesus, this is a good moment for those twelve legions of angels that you were talking about back in the garden. The men and women who were followers of Jesus at this moment must have felt like such a tiny and powerless minority in the heat of this moment. And there, Jesus is just silent. And in every part of life, when it feels as though God is silent, it is really tough.

Even Pilate is amazed that Jesus didn't speak. But what I hope we can see is that Matthew actually chose a brilliant word to describe Pilate's reaction because Jesus' silence is amazing.

[24 : 42] But when I say amazing, I don't mean in the Pontius Pilate sense of being surprised. I mean in the Thomas Davis sense of being utterly awesome and cool and brilliant.

Because Jesus' silence here is absolutely amazing. Throughout the passage that we read, there's this overwhelming sense of injustice, isn't there?

False charges are made. The crowd is manipulated and notorious criminal is released instead of Jesus. And even the Roman governor can see that Jesus has done nothing wrong.

And you know yourselves that injustice is hugely provocative. So when we see injustice around us or when we're on the receiving end of injustice ourselves, that injustice is provoking us, powerfully provoking us to respond.

It stares up a huge urge to say something. But previously in the Gospel of Matthew, when Jesus was provoked by an injustice, he always had an answer.

[25 : 48] So when he was accused of casting out demons by Beelzebub, the Prince of Demons, by the power of the devil in other words, Jesus had an answer to that injustice.

When he was criticized for mixing with sinners in Matthew's house, Jesus had a brilliant answer to that injustice. When the disciples tried to prevent children from getting near to Jesus, Jesus had an answer to that injustice.

But here, when the injustice seems to be at its greatest, when the provocation is at its height, Jesus stays silent.

And the reason he is silent is because in the heat of this moment, silence is essential.

This silence is crucial to Jesus' mission. Because at this moment, guilt is being hurled onto Jesus. At this moment, he is being condemned.

[26 : 53] At this moment, he is taking a sentence. At this moment, God's wrath is going to be poured out, and Jesus silently takes it all.

And in doing so, he fulfills God's plan of salvation. And that's emphasized to us very powerfully by all the details that Matthew gives us.

So there's a crown of thorns placed on Jesus' head. That's pointing back to the fact that Jesus is taking upon himself the curse of a fallen creation. In Genesis 3, when Adam sinned, God cursed the ground and thorns came forth.

Here, Jesus is taking that curse of sin upon himself. Jesus has given robes and a reed. The people are mocking him as king, and they are making him suffer.

And yet that is exactly what God's servant king has come to do. He's come to suffer. Pointing back to Isaiah 53, he was oppressed, he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth.

[27 : 59] Like a lamb that's led to the slaughter, and like a sheep before its shears is silent, so he opened not his mouth. And the soldiers take the reed and they strike Jesus on the head, as you can see there.

And here you can see the devil desperately trying to get rid of Jesus. Way back in Genesis 3.15, God cursed the devil and said, I'll put enmity between you and the woman, between your offspring and her offspring.

He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel. Her offspring is ultimately pointing us to Jesus. And Genesis 3.15 is saying that Jesus, the seed of the woman, is going to crush the head of the serpent.

Here, the devil is trying to do to Jesus the very thing that he knew Jesus would do to him. Jesus is confronting all that the kingdom of evil can throw at him, and he silently takes it all.

And his silence is amazing because in that silence he is fulfilling every detail of God's great plan of salvation.

[29 : 17] Three tiny points in conclusion. One, here we are seeing that in the heat of the moment, Jesus is never stupid.

So often I am, so often we are. That's the moments when our plans are abandoned, when our intentions are forgotten, when our mistakes are made.

That never happens with Jesus. Here we see that God, Father, Son and Spirit is sovereign. He's immutable. He is wise and he's utterly committed to saving us.

And no matter how much the heat is turned up in this moment, Jesus' silence is telling us that he's never going to flinch. All the provocation is utterly powerless to shift Jesus from his mission.

To us it would seem like this is the moment when Jesus should just let rip and show all these people who he really is, but he stays silent. And to us it could look like that silence is showing us Jesus at his weakest, but the truth is his silence here is a magnificent display of strength.

[30 : 31] Because it's showing us that he'll never abandon his mission to save you. And in that moment when all of our sin is being heaped out onto him, he doesn't say a word.

He just willingly takes it all. The second thing is that Jesus' silence here means that we now have something to say.

So here Jesus is faced with a barrage of accusation. He could have so easily defended himself, but in the face of that accusation, Jesus is innocent but silent.

Innocent but silent. For us it's the very opposite. If we are accused of doing wrong before God, ultimately we're not innocent, we're guilty.

In day to day life we're maybe at times the victim of false allegations and that's a horrendous experience. But in the face of eternity in terms of standing before God, if the devil wants to accuse us, none of us can stand at that judgment and say, I have never, ever done anything wrong.

[31 : 46] So when we face judgment, we are the opposite of Jesus, we are guilty. But in terms of speaking, we are also the opposite of Jesus.

Because in him, even though we are guilty, we are not silent because we have got something that we can say. If we trust in Jesus when we are confronted with our guilt before God, we can say something, we can say Jesus is my advocate.

And that means that we don't need to desperately try and make amends for the mistakes that we've made like Judas did because Jesus has done it all. We don't need to frantically try and claim neutrality like Pilate because in Jesus we will be justified, not condemned.

It doesn't matter if we're not following the crowd around us because Jesus will bring us into a multitude of brothers and sisters that are united together in him. And we don't ever need to make a laugh out of cruelty again because with Jesus we don't need distraction anymore and we have

something far, far better to smile about.

Jesus' silence here means that we have something to say. So we see that in the heat of the moment, Jesus is not stupid. We see that Jesus' silence here means that we now have something to say if we put our trust in him.

[33 : 06] The last thing that we learn is this. This is the only moment when Jesus is silent for you.

So here Jesus is silent and the reason he is silent is for you. It's so that you can be saved. This is the only moment when Jesus will be silent for you because if you are a Christian or if you become one, he is not silent.

No. No. He is interceding for you. He's at the right hand of God speaking to God the Father on your behalf. No. He is defending you and he will always speak up in your defense and on the day of judgment he will gladly declare loudly that you are his.

Now he is guiding you and we want to listen to his voice speaking to us through his word and now he is delighting in you. He's preparing a place for you.

He's waiting for you and for Jesus, you are a wonderful person to talk about. Jesus is not silent for you anymore if you are a Christian.

[34 : 24] But what if you're not yet a Christian? Is Jesus silent? The answer is no.

He is not silent because he's calling you.

And all of that means that if we are talking about the heat of the moment, if we're talking about the times in life when we are confronted with the stuff that really matters, if we are talking about the moments when we make the best or the worst decisions of our lives, if you are not yet a Christian, all of that means that the moment that matters most of all, it's right now.

Because right now Jesus is calling you and Jesus is saying, my silence then is so that I can save you right now.

And from this moment onwards, if you do put your trust in Jesus, it will transform every other moment of your life, of your death and of your eternity because you will be safe in Jesus.

[35 : 59] And all you have to do is pray. It's not simple, it's not complicated, it's nothing fancy. All you have to do is pray, Lord Jesus, please save me and please help me follow you.

In the name of God, I say to you, this is the moment. Please just go for it. Amen.

Let's pray. Dear God, our Father, we thank you so much that you gave your son to be our Savior.

And like a lamb to be slaughtered, he did not open his mouth and on him was laid all of our sins and mistakes.

We thank you so much for the silence of Jesus in that moment. And we pray that now we would all hear his voice and we pray that by your spirit you would give us a voice as well to cry out to you and to trust in you.

[37 : 19] We thank you, Lord Jesus, for your silence. We pray that we would all hear everything that that is saying to us. Amen.