

THE CRUCIAL HOURS ¹

A Part for the Whole?

In the name of Jesus, tried and found innocent by man, dearly redeemed by Christ crucified:

The writer of *The Crucial Hours* comments that Pilate here offers the Jews “a part for the whole.”

Sometimes that works in real life when folks accept a part for the whole when the whole wasn't worth that much anyway. My Granddad liked to tell the story of how he accelerated his debt reduction during the Great Depression. In the early 1930's, very few people had cash. Everyone was in debt, especially the farmers around the small town when he lived. Knowing the store owners were really in need of cash, he would go around each week to his creditors and offer **A Part for the Whole**. “I'll give you a dollar in cash, if you reduce my debt by \$5.00.” The way Granddad told the story, no one turned him down because it's better have cash in hand than *I-owe-you's* from everybody. Week by week he kept chipping away at part of the debt with each of them until everyone was paid off.

Maybe you've had to settle something similar when renting a car, “Looks like you reserved a midsize sedan, but we'll give you a compact instead.” “No, you won't!” “Well, we don't have any midsize sedans left on the lot, so it's a compact or nothing.” “Oh. Ok. Guess I'll take the compact.”

It seems that Pilate thought he was holding all the cards, and that the Jews needed to accept his offer so as not to go home empty-handed. Their charges against Jesus were obviously false as Pilate had decreed. Now he could declare Jesus innocent and let him go immediately, and there was nothing the Jews could do to overrule his decision. End of case, everybody go home with **A Part of the Whole**.

Pilate is offering to save face by whipping Jesus and then releasing him. Obviously, the Jews should take the offer and at least walk away with something. “Jesus may not be dead, but we taught him a good lesson.”

So why the immediate rejection by the Jews? They would accept no half-measures for a couple reasons. One, they believed they were holding the cards. In a way, they were right. Their thinly veiled threats to tell Caesar that Pilate hadn't taken their report of a traitorous, treasonous king seriously frightened Pilate, and the chief priests and rulers knew it. Pilate feared Caesar more than anything else because his governorship among the Jews had already been a disaster. Only a few years earlier one of his first acts as governor was to move the Roman headquarters and pagan army standards from Caesarea to Jerusalem. Many Jews rushed to Caesarea in protest. When Pilate threatened to kill them, they said they were willing to die to get the pagan images out of their temple city. Pilate had to back down. The also remember Jesus telling about how Pilate mixed the blood of some Galileans with their sacrifices. It was one thing after another with that man which meant that the Jews did not have to settle.

Also, half-measures don't work for people plotting pure evil. The Jewish leaders were intent on murdering an innocent man. Once they'd given themselves over that evil, nothing else would do.

Isn't that how it is when we are dealing with evil and the temptations by the devil? If we try to offer **A Part for the Whole**, the temptation is never satisfied. It only gets worse as we try to soothe our consciences like Pilate maybe with his. Had he convinced himself that scourging Jesus might be a little evil, but more noble than not? He'd be saving Jesus from a worse fate and maybe preventing an uprising that could harm hundreds. Nice side benefit, he'd also preserve his position as governor.

¹ Adapted from NPH 2022 Lent: *The Crucial Hours*, based on the book by William Lauterbach. (NPH: 1-800-662-6022)

A Part for the Whole in temptation? Release just enough pressure to keep from exploding into some greater sin, hurting more people? It's sick to justify committing a wrong in order to prevent a greater wrong as if we only have two choices – a little sin or a lot of sin. Doing what is right—100% right—always exists, even when we pretend it doesn't. Secondly, the thought that the devil will settle for some of your soul is as foolish as thinking that Jewish leaders would settle for just a little Jesus-pain. No, the enemy of our souls like the enemies of Jesus wants total destruction. Total destruction is Satan's goal with us. He'll not nibble around the edges. He's ***"a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."***

Offering **A Part for the Whole** is not a negotiating tactic with God either. It's like saying to God, "I know that you'd like complete obedience, but how about if you take 90% and call it a day? That's about all you can expect from me." How insulting! Would you dare offer **Part of the Whole** to your spouse? "I promise to be faithful to you – except for five days a year." Mathematically, that's a pretty big **Part of the Whole**. Yet totally unacceptable in love with God or in marriage.

Do we treat our spouse or God like some sort of beggar as if we're holding all the cards? God doesn't tell us to "be holy—but I'll take whatever you can give me." He doesn't say, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart—or at least with everything that's left over after you make a deal with the devil."

Evil is not satisfied with a little; nor God with partial obedience. There is no **Part for the Whole** satisfactory to God. Nor could the debt we owe him because of our sins be paid off like cash offers in the Depression. God is not collecting a little cash to purchase more product. Everything belongs to God, including our bodies and our souls which He created. God doesn't settle based on our ability to pay.

"The outcome of every sin is judgment. The only question is when the judgment will come. When the sinner repents in faith, the judgment comes now. The verdict of not guilty flows to the sinner from the cross where every sin was paid for. But if the judgment does not come now, it must come later when the flow of forgiveness from the cross has been halted. The proclamation of the judgment of the law now is to save the sinner from hearing the judgment of the law from the throne on the Last Day. Though no judgment or discipline is ever pleasant (even warning judgments that are for our good), disciplinary judgments now which save us from final judgments later are a wonderful blessing of love from God and from those who speak them. We need to be ready to give and receive them now."²

Thank God that Jesus stood not only before Pilate's court, and that of Herod and the two Jewish high priests. All four human courts could not find anything in Jesus' life that deserved the death penalty. Yet Jesus had to die to pay the penalty, the debt of perfection that each of us owed God. It had to be paid in full. Jesus did not say, "I'll keep seven of the commandments, maybe 70% of the time." Jesus' commitment was not a commitment in part, but a commitment in whole. The same was true when it came to his payment for our sins. When Jesus hung on the cross, He said, "It is finished." Fully, 100% Done! The full price Jesus paid was all punishment we owed God for our sins, and not just for us, but for everyone who has ever lived. ***"God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them."*** (2 Corinthians 5:19) All because of Jesus' complete surrender in love to God.

The leaders of the Jews didn't understand the concept of fully surrendering to anything except their evil purposes. Pilate didn't understand complete surrender, except for his career, everything could be negotiated. We understand surrender because we've seen Jesus give himself—not in part but in whole.

That's such a comfort in times of tragedy and loss. You may remember the lawyer, Horatio Spafford, sailing across the Atlantic to join his wife in their grief. Passing over the spot where his four daughters had drowned, where their mother was "Saved alone," Spafford wrote a poem. It later became a favorite hymn: "My sin – oh, the bliss of this glorious thought – my sin not in part, but the whole, is nailed to the cross, and I bear it not more; praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!...It is well with my soul." (CWH 850:3) Amen.

² "FOREWORD TO VOLUME 104: SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE," by John F. Brug. *WLQ*, Winter 2007, p. 9.
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