

Jesus on Trial, Pt 2
Mark 15:1-15 (12/27/15)
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The magi from the East asked Herod the Great in Matthew 2:2, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?" Thirty-three years later, Pilate asked Jesus, "Are you the King of the Jews!" That's the issue, isn't it? Is the Jesus of Christmas the resurrected, reigning, and returning King of Kings of Revelation 19? And should we worship Him as King, as those magi did that day in Bethlehem? The answer is a resounding, "Yes!" Pilate was indeed standing before the King of the Jews when the Jews brought Him bound that dark morning for final approval of His execution.

Let's track the last 12 hours leading up to Jesus' trial before Pilate. It began the evening before in the upper room. Jesus washed the disciples' feet. Judas left to betray Christ. Jesus ordained the communion service and gave extended teaching on the promised Holy Spirit. They left for the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus agonized in prayer as He submitted His will to the Father and agreed to drink that dreaded cup of wrath. Three times He found His closest earthly friends sleeping when they should have been watching and praying. Soldiers and religious officials came to arrest Jesus and take him to the chief priests. At Caiaphas house they charge Him with blasphemy, spit on Him, beat Him, and mock Him. Meanwhile Peter denies his Lord three times in the courtyard. Jesus turns and looks at Peter; Peter is crushed and rushes out in convulsive tears and deep repentance.

Now we continue at Mark 15:1. After an early morning consultation to agree on their charges and make their trial legal since it was not legal to conduct trials at night, the entire Sanhedrin leads Jesus through the narrow streets of Jerusalem as the day is dawning, probably around 5 or 6 AM, and over the Mount of Olives to Pilate's Jerusalem residence. And so begins the civil trial of Jesus which divides into three parts: first before Pilate, then over to Herod, and finally back to Pilate.

What is most amazing about all this, and especially where this final trial leads us, is that this actually happened! That this Man, who was virgin conceived, God in human flesh, the God-Man, who humbled Himself to live among us, who did only good, who was absolutely pure and holy, is actually going to be delivered over by this spineless politician Pilate to be whipped mercilessly and then hung with two other criminals on a Roman cross! How can this be? And yet it happened! To move our hearts along, let's track this second trial before Pilate in five parts.

Jewish leaders level false charges against Jesus – 1-5

1 Early in the morning the chief priests with the elders and scribes and the whole Council, immediately held a consultation; and binding Jesus, they led Him away and delivered Him to Pilate. 2 Pilate questioned Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" And He answered him, "It is as you say." 3 The chief priests began to accuse Him harshly. 4 Then Pilate questioned Him again, saying, "Do You not answer? See how many charges they bring against You!" 5 But Jesus made no further answer; so Pilate was amazed.

They bring Him to Pilate because the Jews didn't have authority to impose capital punishment. They could pronounce the death sentence, but couldn't carry it out. Pilate was Judea's Roman authority answerable to Caesar for about ten years and happened to be in Jerusalem at this crucial moment. He lived in Caesarea, but during the Passover came down and resided in Jerusalem to keep a lid on these zealous Jews. Pilate was known for being ruthless and despising the Jews, but he made sure he got along with them as best he could. He was a classic establishment politician.

So they came early in the morning because this was when civil trials were held and they wanted to be the first to get to Pilate. And, they wanted to get rid of Jesus before 6 PM when the Sabbath began. John 18:2 says they didn't enter Pilate's residence so they wouldn't defile themselves. These religious rulers were so holy, you know. They don't like Pilate, but he's the only one who has the authority to impose the death penalty of crucifixion. They wanted Jesus to die the most disgraceful, horrible death possible, the

Roman cross! But of course we know from Psalm 22:16 where God foretold they would pierce His hands and feet that Jesus would die on a cross. God's invisible hand is at work here. He could not be beheaded or stoned to death. Jesus *must* be crucified; God will see to it.

Now the Jews do their best to paint Him as a dangerous political figure to Pilate – He stirs up rebellion against Rome, teaches people to refuse to pay taxes to Rome, and claims to be a king, which was a charge of high treason and deserved immediate execution! Their accusations flew like hail, bouncing off Jesus blameless character! Verse 3 says they accused Him harshly or much. All kinds of lies! Pilate knew they were lies. In the world of religion and politics, truth doesn't matter. You can lie all you want, and they did. As we go through this trial, Pilate will three times declare to the Jews, "I find no fault in Him!" You can read it in Luke 22:4, 14, and 22. Pilate knows Jesus is innocent and works hard to find a way to get around these rabid Jews and release Him.

Stop for a few moments. Think about how many charges are thrown against Jesus today!

- Atheists charge Him with not existing. They may allow Him to be a good teacher, but not the eternal God.
- Humanists charge Him with providing a salvation we don't need; we can save ourselves.
- Materialists charge Him with doping the masses about eternal heaven and hell.
- Moral relativists charge Him with imposing an absolute standard of right and wrong, raining on their parade of sexual liberty.
- Secularists charge Him with claiming life is a sacred gift and man bears the image of God, thus forbidding abortion, and that marriage is strictly between a man and a woman.
- Liberals charge Him with claiming to be deity and that His Word carries absolute authority. Some even charge Him with being delusional, insane, thinking He was God.
- And cultists and religions charge Him with insisting He is the eternal Son of God and the only way to God!

So lies fly like hornets against Jesus. And in verses 4-5, Pilate is totally amazed that Jesus says nothing to defend Himself. He just stands there in His majestic silence. "See how many charges they bring against you!" When we are falsely accused, it's almost impossible not to defend ourselves as our thoughts cry out, "Say something, man! Defend yourself!" But Jesus understood the big picture. In John's Gospel Pilate says to Jesus, "Don't you know I have authority to crucify or release you?" To which Jesus answered, "No you don't. You only have as much authority as My Father in heaven gives to you!"

Jesus doesn't have to defend Himself any more than the sun needs to defend its existence. Jesus' own life is His defense. It was clearly evident to those who knew Him who He was. And so it is with the gospel; it too needs no defense. It is based on history and revealed in Scripture and brings new life to all who receive Christ. All the gospel needs is to be proclaimed! God proves it's true as He transforms hearts, and brings true forgiveness and the gift of eternal life. Only He gives true hope and peace and even joy in the face of all kinds of afflictions and death! Every one of us sitting in this room knows Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, and the only way to God. If you refuse to receive Him, you only have yourself to blame.

Let's go back to verse 2 for a moment -

When asked by Pilate, Jesus frankly confesses His spiritual kingship – 2

2 Pilate questioned Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" And He answered him, "It is as you say."

This is the only charge Pilate is really concerned about. "Are you the King of the Jews?" And you'll notice, Jesus answers him. But He doesn't come right out and say, "Yes I am." If Jesus really does claim to be a rival king to Caesar and was arrested by the Jews for stirring up an insurrection, then Pilate has good reason for quickly having Him executed. This would be high treason. But Jesus answers in such a way that Pilate knows Jesus isn't a rival earthly king. "I am a king, but not as you might think." In John Jesus clearly says, "My kingdom is not of this world, or else my followers would be soldiers. You haven't seen that, have you?" Jesus was no Mohammed with barbaric soldiers. Jesus is the Son of God concerned with truth. And this is where Jesus counseled Pilate to seek truth. Pilate asked, "What is truth?" Here was

the King of the Ages on trial before a worm of a king in time who didn't know what to do next. So Pilate went out and told the Jews, "I find no guilt in Him."

Frankly, I feel sorry for Pilate. He is in a tough position. When the Jews charge Jesus with spreading his teaching from Galilee to Judea, Pilate sees an out and he sends Jesus over to Herod, who was over Galilee. Herod gladly receives Jesus, as if He was an entertainer. He wants to see some of Jesus' tricks. But Jesus is stone silent before Herod, the man who murdered His cousin and forerunner John the Baptist! Herod dresses Jesus in a gorgeous robe and sends him back to Pilate as an innocent man. About that time, early on this Passover morning, a fresh mob of Jews surges in before Pilate for something special – the freeing custom.

Pilate offers to release Jesus according to the freeing custom – v. 6-11

6 Now at the feast he used to release for them any one prisoner whom they requested. 7 The man named Barabbas had been imprisoned with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the insurrection. 8 The crowd went up and began asking him to do as he had been accustomed to do for them. 9 Pilate answered them, saying, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" 10 For he was aware that the chief priests had handed Him over because of envy. 11 But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to ask him to release Barabbas for them instead.

Barabbas was well known. He was probably a hero among many of the Jewish zealots. He was guilty of insurrection, murder, and robbery. I'm guessing his robbery was of wealthy Romans, not of Jews. A huge crowd, perhaps thousands, is now gathering and things are quickly getting out of hand for Pilate, which he cannot allow and maintain his governorship. Pilate must have known his offer wouldn't work, but he offers to release Jesus according to this custom of amnesty. He even calls Jesus "The King of the Jews." "You don't like Roman rule; here's one who claims to be the King of the Jews. I'll release Him!"

What happens? Agitators span out through the mob inciting them to call for Barabbas' release. Instead of the sinless Son of God, release for us Barabbas! It didn't take much. Their hatred of Rome, their fiery nationalistic zeal was quickly inflamed. Here were Barabbas' associates, his family, his friends, as well as the mindless mob, who cry out for Barabbas. Was Barabbas scheduled for that third cross waiting for its victim outside the city walls this morning? This makes sense to me. He would deserve crucifixion for his crimes, just like those other two criminals. Mass hysteria breaks out as these agitators stir them up to call for Barabbas. "Give us Barabbas instead of this Jesus of Nazareth."

Notice the little comment in verse 10. Pilate knew these Jewish hypocrites. He knew their temple schemes to make money, their lust for power and influence. And he knew they had brought Jesus to him for one reason - envy. They envied Jesus popularity. They envied His power. They envied His purity and confidence in the face of all this opposition. They feared Him. They feared He'd wrench the authority right out of their hands. He had plagued them for three years as He went around healing on the Sabbath and doing all kinds of miracles. They hounded Him all the way up to Galilee, trying to catch Him in a fault. He had been fearless before them. He never quivered in terror before their charges. They hated Him. They couldn't control Him. He must die.

The one thing these hypocrites, these serpents and vipers and whitewashed tombs could not let happen was for Pilate to release Jesus! And behind the scene, God would see to it that Pilate did not release His Son. While fully responsible for their murderous plot, they are fulfilling the secret will of God every step of the way. Ponder these words carefully:

Acts 4:27-28: 27 "For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, 28 to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur.

Now this frenzied crowd screams for Pilate to release the guilty and crucify the innocent.

12 Answering again, Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Him whom you call the King of the Jews?" 13 They shouted back, "Crucify Him!" 14 But Pilate said to them, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify Him!"

What a question! It echoes through the centuries: "WHAT SHALL I DO WITH JESUS?" As if Pilate held Jesus destiny in his hands. No governor, king, ruler or authority has the future of Christ and His people in their power. In fact, Jesus has their very existence in His hands. And right here Pilate is face to face with the only One who can save his soul.

Now envision a mob of thousands worked up to a frenzy, yelling, screaming, a deafening roar filling Jerusalem cascading over the city walls into the valley and up into the outlying areas. "Crucify Him!" Pilate yells out, "Why? What evil has He done?" It doesn't matter. Truth doesn't matter to this sin-crazed mass of humanity, not unlike all of humanity apart from the grace of God, even me, even you without God's sovereign grace melting our hearts down into humble faith. Even today, the masses don't care about the truth of Christ anymore than Pilate or this crowd did. They just follow the traditions of their church, their parents, their professors, their preachers, their priests, their own irrational and blind hearts!

So the crowd screams all the more, howling like wolves thirsting for blood, "Get rid of Him. We don't want this Man to rule over us!" They insisted, "His blood be on us and on our children." Forty years later they paid dearly when Rome came and utterly demolished Jerusalem and Jewish blood ran out of the temple and through the streets as Rome crucified masses of the children of these Jews. Plus, the chief priests roared back to Pilate, "We have no king but Caesar." They are blind and beyond reason. Romans 3:13-18 describes them, but us as well...

"Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive." "The venom of asps is under their lips." "Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness." "Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known." "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

Remember, in our depraved nature we've all sinned and come short of the glory of God! (Romans 3:23)

Pilate finally capitulates to the will of the people. Fateful Capitulation – v. 15

15 Wishing to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas for them, and after having Jesus scourged, he handed Him over to be crucified.

This is so discouraging, to watch a man who could have stood for right, for conviction, for justice and truth, who could have done the only right thing, even to follow his wife's counsel to have nothing to do with this righteous man (Matt. 27:19). But "to satisfy the crowd," he caves! He capitulates. His fatal capitulation! He's only one of many hollow men who knowingly accuse an innocent man or pass laws they know are wrong. Just this past summer this happened as five members of our Supreme Court knowing full well what the Bible and common sense teach, in Pilate-fashion to satisfy the crowd, ruled same-sex marriage as legal in all fifty states.

There's a biblical counseling diagram that illustrates Pilate's decision. You have a choice to make, sometimes under great pressure, like Pilate. You can choose to please God or yourself. Pleasing self is easiest at first, but sooner or later you pay. Pleasing God may be hard at first, but eventually you will know God's blessing. And what drives our decision is what is in our heart, what we really want. What was driving Pilate's heart? Fear. Fear of losing his position. Fear of losing perhaps even his life. What should have been driving Pilate's heart? Fear of God, love of truth, justice, to do the right thing, regardless of consequences. But that's not what politicians tend to do. They cave under the pressure to satisfy the crowd.

And so, Pilate releases Barabbas and has Jesus scourged to be prepared for Roman crucifixion. Sproul describes Pilate's decision as "one of the most wicked acts in human history." But let me remind you of something: God spared not His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all. And in releasing Barabbas and crucifying Christ we have the best picture of salvation possible. The guilty man is set free because the innocent Jesus is willing to yield to the Father's will, endure the disgrace and shame of horrible flogging, and then go to that cross, dying in the place of Barabbas. We are Barabbas – guilty with sin and worthy of death. But Jesus died in our place! Do you understand this? Do you have eyes to see this? Or are you like this frenzied crowd, you really don't care about the truth. Do you confess Jesus as your King, like those magi, who went and worshiped Jesus as the King of the Jews?