

Mark 15:1-20 — Jesus Before Pilate

October 18, 2020

Open your Bibles to Mark 15. We are studying through the Gospel of Mark. We are close to the end of the book. Last week, we studied Jesus' trial before the Jewish Sanhedrin. Today, we will look at Jesus' Roman trial, which was in front of a ruler named Pilate. In one sense, Pilate was the man who held all the cards. The Jews didn't have the authority to take anyone's life. Only the Romans, specifically Pontius Pilate, had the authority to take life. On the surface, it looked like Pilate was the one that killed Jesus. In reality, God the Father was the true executioner. God was the one who planned in eternity past to send his son to die as a substitute sacrifice for our sin. While Pilate was humanly responsible for Jesus' death, God the Father was ultimately responsible for Jesus' death. Jesus died exactly the way God the Father planned in eternity past. Jesus died as a substitute for our sin to save you and me. This morning, while it looks like everything is out of control, nothing is out of control. Everything happened exactly the way God the Father planned to save you and me. Let's read the text.

And as soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. And they bound Jesus and led him away and delivered him over to Pilate. And Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" And he answered him, "You have said so." And the chief priests accused him of many things. And Pilate again asked him, "Have you no answer to make? See how many charges they bring against you." But Jesus made no further answer, so that Pilate was amazed. Now at the feast he used to release for them one prisoner for whom they asked. And among the rebels in prison, who had committed murder in the insurrection, there was a man called Barabbas. And the crowd came up and began to ask Pilate to do as he usually did for them. And he answered them, saying, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" For he perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had

delivered him up. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release for them Barabbas instead. And Pilate again said to them, "Then what shall I do with the man you call the King of the Jews?" And they cried out again, "Crucify him." And Pilate said to them, "Why? What evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify him." So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified. And the soldiers led him away inside the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters), and they called together the whole battalion. And they clothed him in a purple cloak, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on him. And they began to salute him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" And they were striking his head with a reed and spitting on him and kneeling down in homage to him. And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. And they led him out to crucify him. Mark 15:1–20 (ESV)

Before we study the text, let me give you two brief comments by way of introduction. First, as we go through these verses, since they are talking about the beatings Jesus endured, realized they are not pretty verses. This is not a feel-good chapter. To faithfully teach the text, I will need to explain the text. For those of you with weak stomachs, at times you may be uncomfortable. That being stated, while I will teach the truth, I will use tact while teaching the truth, attempting to not be any more descriptive than necessary. Second, Mark gives us the briefest account of Jesus' trial before Pilate. All the other Gospels have more details. To give us a better understand of what Jesus experienced, as I teach these verses, I will insert portions of the other Gospels at appropriate places along the way to give us a more robust chronological picture of all Christ went through in those early Friday morning hours. While this will make for a longer message, I think is is the best way to do us spiritual good so we know what happened at what time early on Friday morning.

I want to begin by remembering where we left off last week. Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane some time between midnight and 1 a.m.

Jesus was brought before the Jewish Sanhedrin, which was the Jewish Supreme Court, for a trial between 1 a.m. and 3 a.m. Last week I told you that Jesus faced two trials before the cross. The first trial was before the Jewish Sanhedrin. The second was before the Romans. Each trial had three parts.

Last week, we looked at the first two parts of Jesus' Jewish trials. The first part was when Jesus was brought to Annas. He was the godfather, the mafia boss behind the Sanhedrin. He was in his 80s. He tried to question Jesus to get him to incriminate himself. Jesus refused to speak so a frustrated Annas sent Jesus to Caiaphas, Annas' son-in-law, who was high priest that year. Annas sent Jesus to Caiaphas without any charges deserving death. That was the end of the first part of Jesus' trial. The second part began with Caiaphas. While Jesus was at Annas' house, Caiaphas assembled a quorum of the Sanhedrin at his house in the middle of the night in a second-floor room. He also bribed a number of false witnesses that would be willing to lie about Jesus. The problem was all of the false witnesses failed the test. Under cross-examination, it was obvious they were lying and their false testimonies were inadmissible.

In desperation because his late-night murder trial set up to kill Jesus was falling apart, Caiaphas went for his hail-Mary pass. He tried to get Jesus to publicly incriminate himself by claiming he was the Son of God while standing right in front of them. If Jesus did, they could accuse him of blasphemy and take his life. Caiaphas put Jesus under oath and said, "Tell us the truth about your identity. Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" Finally Jesus spoke. He answered honestly saying, "Yes, I am." Jesus then said, "I am not just the Son

of God, but I sit at the right hand of God. One day I will return on the cloud from heaven. Right now you are judging me, but one day, I will return and judge you.”

As you can imagine, a straight honest answer like that sent the entire Jewish Sanhedrin into a frenzy demanding that Jesus die. The Bible tells us that they started beating Jesus in the face. They put a bag over his head and pounded him with their fists. It was not just the older men of the Sanhedrin striking him in the face, but the young strong men who were the temple guards and Roman soldiers began pounding his face with all their might leaving him bruised, disfigured, and bleeding. That is where we left off last week, the end of part two of Jesus’ Jewish trial before the Sanhedrin. As we begin Mark 15, Mark briefly covers the third and final part of Jesus’ Jewish trial before telling us about Jesus’ next trial before the Romans.

Jesus was silent before Pilate when facing accusation.

And as soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. And they bound Jesus and led him away and delivered him over to Pilate. Mark 15:1 (ESV)

This is the third portion of Jesus’ trial before the Jews. The Jews knew it was illegal to hold a trial at night and that their decision to kill Jesus, which was reached during the night in darkness, was not legally binding. As soon as the sun came up, they gathered together to quickly run through the trial from the night before, making it legal since it was now daylight. The time this took place was likely 5 a.m., just as the sun peeked over the horizon.

Jewish law required they wait 24 hours after a death sentence before carrying out the death penalty, but they ignored that rule. They had to work fast.

Jesus' needed to be crucified and dead before the Passover that evening. They needed to work fast so they ran their hurry-up offense.

Let's jump to the Gospel of John to see more details of what happened next.

Then they led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the governor's headquarters. It was early morning. They themselves did not enter the governor's headquarters, so that they would not be defiled, but could eat the Passover. John 18:28 (ESV)

I find this funny. The members of the Sanhedrin were such hypocrites. They were attempting to have Pilate execute an innocent man because they were jealous of him but they wouldn't go into the governor's headquarters because they were worried about becoming ritually defiled so they couldn't eat dinner that night. They were OK with murder but worried about missing dinner. They were completely out-of-touch with what was important in God's eyes.

So Pilate went outside to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?" John 18:29 (ESV)

Since they refused to go into Pilate's house so they could still eat dinner, Pilate agreed to come out of his house and meet them. Pilate thought they needed his help as a judge to decide a legal matter. It quickly became apparent that they didn't want him as a judge. They wanted him as an executioner. They didn't want Pilate's help on deciding a case. They only wanted Pilate to kill someone for them and they didn't want him asking a lot of questions about it.

They answered him, "If this man were not doing evil, we would not have delivered him over to you." John 18:30 (ESV)

They said to Pilate, "Don't you trust us? We wouldn't bring somebody to you to be executed unless we had a good reason. We brought to you a terribly evil person named Jesus."

They were so manipulative. They were presenting Jesus to Pilate as if he was a terrible criminal deserving death. Pilate wasn't stupid. Do you think Pilate knew anything about Jesus? Pilate had heard about Jesus and his healings for the last three years, especially when he entered Jerusalem. I am sure Pilate was responsible for the security detail during Jesus' Triumphal Entry on Monday. Pilate's soldiers were watching Jesus all week long as he taught. Immediately, Pilate recognized Jesus and that the Jews were trying to manipulate him into treating Jesus like a criminal and taking his life.

Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law." The Jews said to him, "It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death." John 18:31 (ESV)

Pilate quickly recognized Jesus' case as a Jewish matter and wanted nothing to do with it. He tried to avoid getting involved with Jesus's legal trial because after watching Jesus for three years, he knew Jesus was not a criminal. The problem was, the Jews wouldn't take "No" for an answer. They insisted on Jesus dying.

In the Gospel of Luke, we see the charges they leveled against Jesus and presented to Pilate.

And they began to accuse him, saying, "We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king." Luke 23:2 (ESV)

As we saw last week, none of these charges were true. They were all made up that morning in the mock trial the Sanhedrin had just after dawn. They condemned Jesus to death because he claimed to be the Son of God. That may have been a charge worthy of death in their minds, but Pilate wouldn't even

entertain that charge. They needed charges the Romans cared about, which was why they made up this new set of accusations..

They told Pilate Jesus was telling people to not pay their taxes. "Pilate, we love our taxes. We won't tolerate anyone that is telling people to not pay every last penny." In addition, they said Jesus was claiming to be a king. They had no king but Caesar. Jesus deserved to die because he was a threat to Caesar's reign.

What we just read happened between Mark 15:1 and 2. Let's return to the story in the Gospel of Mark as to how it unfolded.

And Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" And he answered him, "You have said so." Mark 15:2 (ESV)

Pilate ignored the claim that Jesus was telling people they shouldn't pay their taxes. He knew that was bologna. Pilate went to their last accusation. That one interested him. "Jesus, are you the king of the Jews?" Can you hear the sarcasm in that question?

What did Jesus' face look like at this point? For the last few hours, it was pounded to a pulp by the Jewish Sanhedrin and the soldiers who put a bag over his head and repeatedly struck him. Jesus' clothes were covered in sweat and stained in blood from praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus did not look kingly. He looked pathetic and helpless. Pilate thought, "Is this the way the Jews treat their king?"

Jesus, who was silent through most of this, answered Pilate's question with these words, "You have said so." Jesus' answer is a little difficult to translate. In essence, Jesus admitted to being a king but claimed he was not the kind of

king that Pilate expected. He was not a king with power, soldiers, and a crown. He was a king that came to suffer and die for his people.

Let's look at this same scene in the Gospel of John which gives us more details of what was spoken in this exchange between Pilate and Jesus.

So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?" Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?" Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world." Then Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice." Pilate said to him, "What is truth?" After he had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, "I find no guilt in him." John 18:33–38 (ESV)

Do you see how Jesus admitted to being a king but a different kind of king? He is not a king of this world. After hearing this, Pilate was satisfied. He declared he found absolutely no guilt in Jesus. Now, back to the Gospel of Mark.

And the chief priests accused him of many things. Mark 15:3 (ESV)

Some translations say the chief priests were accusing Jesus harshly. Luke 23:5 tells us the Jews were urgently saying to Pilate that Jesus stirs up people everywhere, even all the way to Galilee. They claimed Jesus was a major problem that needed to go. Matthew 27:12-14 tells us the Jews had a long list of accusations against Jesus. All of them fabricated, truly false charges.

And Pilate again asked him, "Have you no answer to make? See how many charges they bring against you." Mark 15:4 (ESV)

Like Matthew, Mark tells us the Jews made many false charges against Jesus. It almost sounds like modern politics. If you can make up enough false

charges against your opponent, you can discredit your opponent, even if none of the charges are true.

But Jesus made no further answer, so that Pilate was amazed. Mark 15:5 (ESV)

Why was Pilate so amazed? He couldn't believe Jesus didn't bother defending himself against the lies. The word amazed means to be completely stunned. Pilate had never seen anyone like this. The Roman judicial process relied on the accused defending themselves from the accusations leveled against them. Pilate had never seen anyone refuse to defend themselves. But the more accusations the Jews made against Jesus, the more obvious it became to Pilate that the charges were false. The Jews were lying to him to manipulate him into killing Jesus, but Pilate knew Jesus was innocent. What was Pilate going to do? How could he escape the pressure to execute an innocent man? Mark doesn't tell us what happens next, but the Gospel of Luke does.

And when he learned that he belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him over to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time. Luke 23:7 (ESV)

When Pilate sent Jesus to Herod, that ended the first of the three parts of Jesus' trial before the Romans. Jesus' trial before Herod was the second part of his Roman trial.

Let me tell you about Herod. There are many Herods in the Bible. Let me explain their family dynasty. The original Herod was Herod the Great. He was an amazing builder. He built the temple in Jerusalem and many other building projects. He controlled lots of real estate. He died in 4 B.C. He divided his kingdom in four pieces and gave them to his four sons. The area of Galilee fell to his son Herod Antipas. He ruled that area for a long time, from 4 B.C. to 39 A.D.

Like his father, Herod Antipas loved building things. He built 12 cities. While he could build cities, he didn't know how to build a marriage. His first wife was the daughter of King Aretas, who ruled a neighboring kingdom. It was not a marriage for love. It was a marriage alliance designed to maintain peace between two kingdoms. Herod Antipas wasn't too thrilled with his wife. Soon he began having an affair with his brother's wife, a woman named Herodias. Eventually Herod Antipas divorced his wife and convinced Herodias to divorce his brother so they could be get together and live in an adulterous and incestuous relationship. Herod Antipas was not the kind of guy you wanted meeting your wife. You may remember John the Baptist confronted Herod about marrying his brother's wife and as a result lost his head. Herod was not a nice man. Now, he added to his many sins that he was a murderer. He lived with a guilty conscious often wondering if Jesus was John the Baptist raised from the dead come back to haunt him. He had heard of Jesus but never had a chance to meet Jesus. He was excited to hear Pilate gave him the opportunity to meet Jesus and to judge Jesus, the king of the Jews.

When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had long desired to see him, because he had heard about him, and he was hoping to see some sign done by him. So he questioned him at some length, but he made no answer. The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him. Luke 23:8–10 (ESV)

Herod was hoping Jesus would perform a miracle for him, essentially giving Herod a private David Copperfield magic show. Unfortunately, Jesus turned out to be a great disappointment for Herod. Jesus wasn't much miracle entertainment. Jesus didn't go alone to Herod. The chief priests and scribes when too. They continued constantly accusing Jesus of all kinds of false crimes.

Herod also had many questions for Jesus but Jesus, whose face was beaten to a pulp and covered in blood, didn't provide much entertainment. He simply stayed silent. He didn't respond to the Jews' many accusations. He didn't respond to any of Herod's questions. He wouldn't even lift a finger to perform one miracle. Frustrated because Jesus refused to cooperate and play Herod's game, look what happened next.

And Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him. Then, arraying him in splendid clothing, he sent him back to Pilate. And Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day, for before this they had been at enmity with each other. Luke 23:11–12 (ESV)

Herod moved from interest in Jesus to getting angry with Jesus. He had his soldiers slap Jesus around and make fun of him. "This Jesus, the King of the Jews, is a pitiful loser." Eventually Herod put Jesus in a splendid robe. The word splendid means bright and shining, possibly white. At the very least, it was eye-catching. Herod gave Jesus --- the bloody, beaten, disfigured man --- one of his finest robes and sent him back to Pilate. This was a way of mocking Jesus, the man who was supposed to be the king of the Jews, who was anything but royal.

Why did Herod send Jesus back to Pilate? Ultimately, it was because he has come to the same conclusion Pilate did. Jesus was innocent. He had done nothing deserving death. Jesus looked pathetic. Jesus looked harmless. There were no valid charges against him. This brings us to the end of the second part of Jesus' trial before the Romans. The third part begins when Jesus was taken back to Pilate.

Jesus is a substitute for sinners.

Let me take a moment to give you some background on Pilate. This background will help what happens next make much better sense. Numerous ancient authors write about him. He was the governor of Israel from 25 A.D. to 36 A.D. He collected taxes, commanded the military, and judged matters related to Rome. The Jews hated him.

When he came to town at the beginning of his reign, he showed up with his soldiers carrying banners and flags that had a picture of Caesar on them with an eagle woven into the fabric. He hung those flags and banners around town. He was attempting to be patriotic. The Jews saw things from a different angle. The Romans considered Caesar a god. To the Jews, flags of Caesar hanging around Jerusalem were the equivalent of putting up idols in God's holy city. They didn't like it one bit and immediately began stirring up trouble. Pilate left town and headed for the shore city of Caesarea to get away from the social unrest. To his surprise, the Jews followed him and for five days harassed him, demanding he remove the idol flags from their city. Finally, Pilate agreed to meet with the people in the Caesarean amphitheater. There he surrounded them with soldiers and told them to give it up or all of them were going to die. Their response was, "Make our day." All of them pulled down their collars and told Pilate to go ahead and cut their throats. Knowing a large massacre of Jews would not go over well with Rome while beginning his new job, he was forced to back down. That set a tense tone between Pilate and the Jews that lasted for the next decade. News of that near disaster reached Rome and Roman authorities weren't happy with Pilate's leadership.

The second thing that got him in trouble with the Jews was when Jerusalem had grown so large, its water aqueduct was inadequate. Rather than pay for a larger aqueduct himself, he had his soldiers rob the temple to pay for it. After all, the Jewish temple was like a bank. It had more money than he did! When the people protested, Pilate sent plain clothes soldiers into the crowd to club and kill them.

That bad behavior was also reported to Rome. At this point, he was on shaky ground with Rome and hoping to keep peace with the Jews so he didn't lose his job. Figuratively, he had two strikes against him and if he couldn't keep Jerusalem under control he would lose his job. Pilate was in a very precarious position with Rome. The Jews knew it so they planned to manipulate Pilate and get him to kill Jesus even though Jesus was innocent.

Luke's account summarizes where we are at this point.

Pilate then called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, and said to them, "You brought me this man as one who was misleading the people. And after examining him before you, behold, I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him. Neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Look, nothing deserving death has been done by him. I will therefore punish and release him." Luke 23:13–16 (ESV)

This is funny. If Jesus is innocent and Herod and Pilate both agreed that Jesus was innocent, why was Pilate going to punish him? He wanted to keep the Jewish leaders happy! He couldn't risk a riot or social uprising with them again.

Back to Mark 15.

Now at the feast he used to release for them one prisoner for whom they asked. Mark 15:6 (ESV)

This was a way the Romans tried to keep the nations they occupied happy. Occasionally, they would give a "get out of jail free card" to people. Pilate

knew it was the Jewish leaders that wanted Jesus dead. He and Herod also found Jesus innocent. Maybe the way to get Jesus off the hook without infuriating the Jewish leaders was to ask the people who they wanted released that year during the Passover. While the Jewish leaders hated Jesus, he was sure the Jewish people loved him. After all, weren't they singing Jesus' praises during the Triumphal Entry only a few days before? Weren't the people hanging on every word from Jesus' mouth when he taught in the temple courts?

Pilate thought he had the Jewish leaders outsmarted. He thought he had a way to get Jesus, an innocent man, off the hook.

And among the rebels in prison, who had committed murder in the insurrection, there was a man called Barabbas. Mark 15:7 (ESV)

Barabbas was a robber, murderer, and revolutionary. Luke called him a notorious prisoner. He was well-known and surely headed for crucifixion as a murderer and threat to Rome. Unlike the Jews, the Romans didn't wait to crucify people. If you tried to overthrow the Roman government and committed murder in the process, you were headed to a cross before you could write your last will and testament. The rebellion Barabbas was a part of must have taken place only a short time before. Barabbas was probably the one that was to be executed on the middle cross between the two thieves that morning. They were probably his partners in crime.

And the crowd came up and began to ask Pilate to do as he usually did for them. Mark 15:8 (ESV)

"Hey, it is Passover. Give us a Jewish prisoner."

And he answered them, saying, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" Mark 15:9 (ESV)

Pilate knew Jesus was innocent. He was trying to get Jesus out of this jam. He was trying to stop the corrupt Jewish leaders who wanted him dead. That was why Pilate suggested the prisoner they should ask to have released.

For he perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up. Mark 15:10 (ESV)

Pilate knew the motive of the Jews. They were jealous --- jealous of Jesus' power and popularity.

A little incident happened at this point that is only recorded in the Gospel of Matthew.

Besides, while he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, "Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much because of him today in a dream." Matthew 27:19 (ESV)

Pilate knew Jesus was innocent. Herod knew Jesus was innocent. Pilate's wife now knew Jesus was innocent. She told her husband to get out of this situation with Jesus as fast as he could. Jesus was innocent. Pilate was trying to get out of killing Jesus. That is why he turned to the crowds that just days before loved Jesus. He hoped they would ask for Jesus to be set free and Pilate would be happy to oblige.

But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release for them Barabbas instead. Mark 15:11 (ESV)

Remember the identity of Barabbas. He was a notorious criminal. He was a murderer. He was a thief. He led an attempted overthrow of the Roman government in Israel.

To Pilate's surprise, the people asked to have Barabbas go free. The man who was guilty of murder was set free. The man who was innocent was still slated to die.

And Pilate again said to them, “Then what shall I do with the man you call the King of the Jews?” And they cried out again, “Crucify him.” Mark 15:12–13 (ESV)

This shows you the power of manipulation by the religious leaders. They spread their lies about Jesus through the crowds and the people didn't bother to examine the truth. They turned on a dime and went from fans of Jesus to hating Jesus. They wanted him dead and crucified, just like their leaders told them to ask for.

Doesn't this sound like modern-day politics? Who can tell the best lies to sway the most people in the crowd to follow them and believe them? Nothing is new under the sun. The Jewish leaders did the same thing on that fateful morning. They successfully manipulated the crowd to hate Jesus and ask for his death.

And Pilate said to them, “Why? What evil has he done?” But they shouted all the more, “Crucify him.” Mark 15:14 (ESV)

The crowd didn't care that both Pilate and Herod found Jesus innocent. They followed the will of the Jewish leaders and hoped their mob force could compel Pilate to do what they wanted. The Jewish leaders knew Pilate had to keep them happy or he would lose his job. They knew Pilate could not have another riot in Jerusalem because if he did, his job was over.

In the game of politics, it was checkmate. The Jewish leaders stirred up a crowd that was demanding Jesus die on a cross. For Pilate to fight the hostile crowd, he would have burned the last of his political capital. He collapsed under their threats.

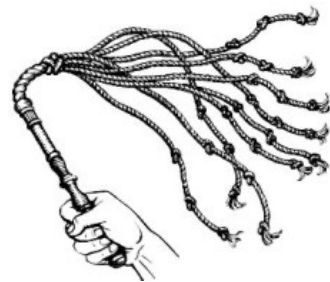
So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified. Mark 15:15 (ESV)

Did you see what happened? Pilate, as governor of the city, wanted to satisfy the crowd. He gave in to the demands of the crowd. Doesn't this sound like the way some governors handled protests in their city this past summer? They gave into the crowds. They were afraid of the mob. We see this in Matthew.

So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves." Matthew 27:24 (ESV)

Pilate again declared Jesus as innocent but gave in under pressure because he couldn't risk another riot in Jerusalem. This was dirty politics played by the Jewish leaders to manipulate Pilate into killing Jesus. Pilate knew they won. He was killing Jesus because they forced him to do that dirty deed. That is why he washed his hands of this situation.

First, Pilate handed Jesus over to be scourged before he was crucified. What is a scourging? It is a beating done with a wooden-handled whip, sometimes called a cat-o-nine-tails. The leather strands that come off the handle have metal hooks that are intended to



sink into the flesh. They also have lead balls on them to bruise and pieces of old bone to introduce infection. The two lictors that are the executioners, were on either side of the victim. The whip first went across one side of a person's back, then the metal hooks were torn through the flesh of the back, then the other lictor repeated the process with his whip from the other side. Victims were either chained to a low stump or they had their hands chained above their head. Sometimes victims were chained with both hands and feet to a table to stretch them out and lay them flat. The hooks would tear through the flesh and tear out

chunks of flesh. Historians in the ancient world talk about ribs flying out of victims' bodies. They talk about so much flesh torn off the back that ribs and the backbone were left visible to the eye. Sometimes so much flesh was torn off the body that internal organs were left draping out of a victim's back. While we have often read they limited the number of scourges to 40 lashes, this week I learned only the Jews limited this to 40. The Romans did not limit always limit their scourging to 40 lashes. This punishment could result in spontaneous death because of the pain. At the very least, it hastened death on the cross.

Our king is shamed and mocked.

While Mark 15:15 ends saying Pilate delivered Jesus to be crucified, as we continue reading, and as we look at the other Gospels, we find there is yet another attempt by Pilate set Jesus free because he didn't deserve to die.

And the soldiers led him away inside the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters), and they called together the whole battalion. Mark 15:16 (ESV)

Jesus was led into the palace. They called together the whole battalion. A battalion was 600 soldiers. Do you think they needed that many people to guard Jesus? I don't think so. After Jesus' face was beaten to a pulp, he spent a night without sleep, without food, and was scourged. The Jews destroyed Jesus' face. In the scourging, the Romans shredded Jesus' body, likely tearing off so much skin bones were visible to the eye. Why did they need 600 soldiers for Jesus? Why did the whole battalion come together? It wasn't to guard Jesus. It was to make fun of Jesus. They wanted to mock Jesus, to insult Jesus and laugh at this king of the Jews.

And they clothed him in a purple cloak, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on him. Mark 15:17 (ESV)

This is interesting. Mark says it was a purple robe but when we go to Matthew, it says they put a red robe on Jesus.

And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, Matthew 27:28 (ESV)

That looks like a contradiction. Was it purple or was it red? Is this an error in the Bible? No, it is not. The explanation is easier than you think. Roman soldiers wore a red covering, a red robe. Their dying system for clothing colors was primitive. Colors washed out over time and faded in the sun over time. When Roman red faded, it faded from red to a reddish-purple over time in the sun.

When it says they put a purple robe on Jesus, this means it was an old, faded Roman soldier's robe that they used when they dressed him up as king. Remember his back was covered in blood from having the flesh torn off. Now the blood soaked into the robe and coagulated with the fabric. When they later tore the robe off his body, they tore off the scabs, opening all the wounds.

They also twisted together a crown of thorns. These were not little thorns but long tree thorns that could be up to six inches in length. Why did they make this crown and put it on Jesus' head? It was a mock laurel wreath crown,



the kind that Caesar wore. So you think you are a king? Try this crown on for size. They pressed the crown of thorns into his head. The blood flowed down Jesus' face and down his neck. The pain to his disfigured head was excruciating. Matthew tells us they put a reed in Jesus' hand to act like a mock scepter.

...and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on his head and put a reed in his right hand... Matthew 27:29 (ESV)

Mark tells us they began to salute him like he was a king.

And they began to salute him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" Mark 15:18 (ESV)

This was constant mockery. Have you noticed how many times the phrase "King of the Jews" has occurred? It is all over the place. This is what it looks like for Jesus to be our king, the king that chose to suffer and die for us.

And they were striking his head with a reed and spitting on him and kneeling down in homage to him. Mark 15:19 (ESV)

The word for reed in the word *kalamos*. It is used to describe a hard reed, a stick. It was used to describe bamboo. It was used to describe the wood used in arrows. They struck him in the head with something like a bat of bamboo. They smashed the crown of thorns deeper into his skull. The tense of the Greek tells us they weren't satisfied to strike his thorny head once but they did it continually and repeatedly. "Hail king of the Jews!" That was followed by a whacking of his head with the bamboo night stick. How many soldiers were doing this? Do you remember? 600! They spit all over him. They covered him in their spit. How many soldiers spit on him? 600! They drenched his bruised, bloody body with flesh torn off it in human spit. While this is a surprise to many of us, it wasn't a surprise to Jesus.

Isaiah prophetically spoke about all of this happening in the Old Testament.

I gave my back to those who strike, and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard; I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting. Isaiah 50:6 (ESV)

They also pulled out Jesus' beard. For the rest of the story, we turn to John 19.

And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head and arrayed him in a purple robe. They came up to him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and struck him with their hands. Pilate went out again and said to them, "See, I am bringing him out to you that you may know that I find no guilt in him." John 19:2–4 (ESV)

Pilate again tried to release Jesus. He said to the Jews. "I find no guilt in him. Aren't you satisfied with all I have done to him?" Jesus' face was beaten to a pulp by the Jewish leaders. His body was scourged by the Romans, leaving the flesh torn off his body and torn to pieces on his body. He had a crown of thorns on his head that a bamboo bat pounded it into his skull. What do you think Jesus looked like at this point?

Isaiah prophetically spoke about the way Jesus appeared after these beatings.

As many were astonished at you— his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind... Isaiah 52:14 (ESV)

Jesus was so disfigured that the question you asked when you looked at him was not, "Who is it?" The question was, "What is it?" Jesus was beaten so bad he was barely recognizable as a human being. Jesus was a king. A king that went through all of this for his people so he could die in our places, for you and me.

So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Behold the man!" John 19:5 (ESV)

Pilate said, "This is the man. This is your king. Isn't it enough what I have done to him? He doesn't look like a threat to Rome to me. He doesn't look like a threat to anybody. He is innocent. Let him go free!"

But like wolves having tasted warm blood, the Jews did not respond to Pilate's last attempt to save Jesus. They dove in for more.

When the chief priests and the officers saw him, they cried out, "Crucify him, crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no guilt in him." John 19:6 (ESV)

They again insisted on crucifying Jesus. Pilate again insisted Jesus was innocent. In desperation, to distance himself from the crucifixion of Jesus, Pilate offered to give up the exclusive Roman right of execution so the Jews could kill Jesus themselves.

The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has made himself the Son of God." John 19:7 (ESV)

Finally, they spoke the truth. This had nothing to do with Jesus telling people to not pay their taxes. This had nothing to do with Jesus claiming he was a king to replace Caesar. This was about Jesus claiming to be the Son of God. The Jewish leaders couldn't stand that thought. Even though for three years Jesus had continually done things only God can do, when he claimed to be God, they considered him a threat to their power base and decided he needed to die.

From then on Pilate sought to release him, but the Jews cried out, "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar." So when Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Stone Pavement, and in Aramaic Gabbatha. Now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover. It was about the sixth hour. He said to the Jews, "Behold your King!" They cried out, "Away with him, away with him, crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar." So he delivered him over to them to be crucified... John 19:12–16 (ESV)

Pilate now knew the truth. It was out of envy they wanted Jesus dead. Notice the political manipulation the Jews were attempting on Pilate. The Jews warned him that since Jesus was king of the Jews, he opposed Caesar. If Pilate

did not execute Jesus, they would report Pilate to Rome and he would lose his job. Pilate was caught between a rock and hard place. He couldn't risk an unruly mob getting reported to Rome. He couldn't risk the Jews reporting to Rome that he released a man who claimed to be king, when there was no king but Caesar. He was caught. There was nothing left he could do to stop Jesus' execution and set him free. It was the 6 a.m. That is where we return to the Gospel of Mark.

And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. And they led him out to crucify him. Mark 15:20 (ESV)

The robe was off, his own clothes were on. The Jesus that was beaten in the face by the Jews, whose body was torn to shreds by Pilate's soldiers, that had a crown of thorns beaten into his head with a stick and was covered in human spit was led away to be crucified. That is Jesus, the one true king on the world. Yes, he was a different kind of king. We will pick up the story next week when he went to the cross.

What can we learn?

When the world was falling apart, God was in complete control. In Jesus' trial, it looked like the world was falling apart. The lying Jews were making false accusations. Jesus was beaten to a pulp and he didn't deserve any of it. Pilate knew Jesus was innocent but no matter how much he tried to set Jesus free, the Jewish leaders politically manipulated him to pervert justice. It looked like evil triumphed. It looked like things were out of control and evil had won. The truth is, everything was happening according to God the Father's plan. Everything was happening just the way the prophets claimed it would. Our God is so good and so big that he took the evil done against his son and incorporated it

into his good plan and used it to achieve his good purposes. That is not just true for Jesus, but is also true for you and me. No matter what unfairness you are facing, no matter what false accusations are leveled against you, no matter what perversion of justice and truth has taken place against you because someone manipulated and perverted the truth, like the Jews did to Pilate, know for sure, that none of that can ruin God's good plans for his kingdom and God's good plan for what he wants to do through your life. The evil done against Jesus in his trial didn't ruin God's good plans for Jesus. It was used by God to achieve his good purposes. The evil done against us cannot ruin God's good plans for us. That doesn't mean life will be easy, but evil and sin cannot destroy God's good purpose for the children he loves. God is large and in charge and nothing can stop his will and his good plans.

Jesus' Roman trial is the gospel story. In Jesus' trial, Barabbas, the hideous robber, murderer, and revolutionary was set free so Jesus, the pure and innocent one could die in his place. That is the gospel story. Each of us is Barabbas. All of us deserve to die for our sin. Jesus came so we can go free. He came to die in our places and suffer the consequences for our sin so we can become sons and daughters of God. This morning, I assume most of us have asked Jesus to die in our places. We know we are Barabbases. At CrossWinds, our mission is not just to know Jesus but to reach people with Jesus. This week, as a response of gratitude for all Jesus has done for you, will you commit to telling at least one person in your life that doesn't know Jesus the gospel story? Jesus came so people like us --- the Barabbases who deserve to die for their sin

--- can go free. He came to take our places. Let's share that good news this week.



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