

Scripture: Mark 15:1-15

Text: Mark 15:15

From Gethsemane to the Cross:

Jesus Before Pilate: Trial and Sentence

Beloved in Christ, we continue our journey with Jesus from Gethsemane to the cross – through His Word. He enters deeper and deeper into His humiliation: betrayed, arrested, and tried before the 71-member council (Sanhedrin), the religious authorities.

He is charged and found guilty of blasphemy. He is deserving of death for making Himself equal to God.

They now reach a decision to hand Jesus over to Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea. Why so? The Sanhedrin cannot put Jesus to death on their own authority. Rather than kill Jesus illegally, they would prefer to have Him executed by Rome.

So Jesus has another hearing and trial – before Pilate. Pilate will always be remembered in history. Every Sunday, we confess in the Apostles' Creed with the church around the world, He *"suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried..."*

This is the same Pilate whom we meet in Mark 15. In this trial, Pilate sentences Jesus to death. Jesus takes the place of Barabbas. We see

1. Pilate releases Barabbas
2. Pilate delivers Jesus to be crucified

1. Pilate releases Barabbas (v.15a)

It's early Friday morning. Under the direction of the chief priests, Jesus is bound, led away and they delivered Him to Pilate (v.1). They bring other charges before Jesus, charges that will stick. The charge of blasphemy is a law peculiar to the Jews, not the Romans. They want to make sure He is killed.

That's how much they hate Jesus!

What new charges are brought before Him? No doubt, the Sanhedrin tells Pilate that Jesus claims to be King, King of the Jews. This charge, if true, is high treason, deserving death. If true, this is also a threat to Pilate, who was appointed governor over Judea by the Roman emperor, Tiberius.

Remember Herod, the ruler over Galilee? Remember his response when the wisemen inquired, *"Where is He who has been born King of the Jews"* (Matthew 2:2)? Herod plotted to kill Him!

Now Pilate asks Him, *"Are You the King of the Jews"* (v.2)? Literally, however, it should read as a statement with a question: *"You are the King of the Jews?"* How does Jesus answer? *"It is as you say."* The sense of Jesus' response is, *"You say so."* Jesus neither affirms it nor denies it.

Jesus is not the kind of King that Pilate is thinking of. Jesus, the Son of God, came to this world to break the reign of sin in our lives – hatred, envy – and graciously reign over the hearts of men, filling hearts with His love and peace. No king can do this but Christ!

See the unwilling hearts of the chief priests in **verses 3-5**. They continue to accuse Jesus of many things. Mark does not specify what these things are. But Jesus answers nothing. Three times we hear this. Pilate asks Him again, *"Do you answer nothing? See how many things they testify against You? But Jesus still answered nothing so that Pilate marvelled."*

Jesus remains silent in the face of hatred, abuse and cruelty. But His silence is not a silence of defeat, but a silence of surrender to His Father's will; in obedience to His Father! He treads the awful path for the salvation of sinners!

Jesus' silence amazes Pilate. He begins to see that they have roped him into this. *"For he knew that chief priests had handed Him over because of envy"* (v.10).

What happens next reveals what sort of king the mob in Jerusalem would prefer. We see that in **verses 6-14**. Pilate is not happy with giving in to the priests' jealousy. So he decides to present the crowd with a choice between Jesus and Barabbas: whom do we release?

It was a custom that the Roman governor would grant the release of one of the prisoners, whomever they requested every Passover. It fits the theme of redemption. That's what the Passover was all about - God redeeming, setting His people free from Egypt. And now the crowd is demanding that Pilate *"do just as he had always done for them"* (vv.6, 8).

Barabbas, as we know from verse 7, was in prison with his fellow rebels; *"they had committed murder in the rebellion."* He was a man who committed murder in an uprising against Rome. The choice was easy. Pilate asks, *"Do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews"* (v. 9)?

Both the priests and the people reveal what sort of deliverance they are looking for. The same accusers who tell Pilate that Jesus must be executed for claiming to be king are siding with a murderous revolutionary against Rome. Why? They wanted a king who would give them freedom they want: freedom from Roman rule and independence.

Jesus was not the kind of king they were looking for – the one who liberates from sin and death, the one who gives life. We read in verse 11 that *"the chief priests stirred up the crowd, so that he [Pilate] should rather release Barabbas to them."*

Why would they act like this? Do you understand all this? God anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil (Acts 10:34). How do you explain this hatred?

It's our rebellious sin-nature. What's so hard about giving it up? We want it our own way rather than someone else ruling us. That's us! We want a king of our own making, not one we need.

This is the problem of our sin nature. People want to be free from the standards ("restraints") of God's Word. That's not new. That's not just today. This goes back to what happened in the garden with our first parents: man, at the instigation of the devil, in willful disobedience, robbed himself and all his descendants of the ability to love and obey God.

That's what we see here. Three times Pilate lobbies for Jesus, "*Do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews*" (v.9)? "*What then do you want me to do with Him whom you call the King of the Jews*" (v.12)? "*Why, what evil has He done*" (v.14). Yet over and over again, the crowds demand in protest, "*Crucify Him*" (v.13)! "*They cry out all the more, 'Crucify Him'*" (v. 14)!

That's how much they hate Him!

But let's not think Pilate is so innocent. God uses Pilate to declare the innocence of His Son, Jesus, for all to hear! Let the world know! Even Pilate, knowing Jesus is innocent, "*wants to gratify the crowd*" (v.15). He cares so little. He lets Jesus die any way. In his wickedness, He still condemns Jesus to death. It was politically expedient for him. He did not care about justice!

Jesus is regarded and treated as worse than a murderer. If only Pilate had known that Jesus' life, His blood, was the price with which He would redeem the world! He sets a murderer free and sends Jesus away to be crucified.

This brings us to our second point,

2. Pilate delivers Jesus to be crucified (v.15b)

We read in verse 15b, "*and he delivered Jesus, after he scourged Him, to be crucified.*" In verse 1, we read that they "*delivered Him to Pilate.*" And now in our final verse 15, we read that Pilate, "*delivered Jesus . . . to be crucified.*" It begins and ends with this note.

The word 'delivered' here means 'to give into the hands of another'. It pictures Jesus as the victim in the hands of lawless men.

But behind the hands of these wicked men were the hands of the righteous God. The same word "deliver" is used in Romans 8:32, "*He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?*"

When Pilate "*delivered Jesus . . . to be crucified...*", the Judge of heaven and earth was pronouncing a verdict: Guilty. Jesus, the Innocent Son of God, took our place, the place of sinners! The Just for the unjust; the Righteous for the unrighteous, "*that He might bring us to God*" (1 Peter 3:18). We sing the song, "O the deep unbounded riches of God deserve our praise! How unsearchable His judgments, how marvelous His ways. . . "(TPH 226). How marvelous His ways . . .!

The innocent One is put to death and the guilty is set free. For one man it was a good Friday. That man was Barabbas, a criminal and a murderer.

As one author puts it, "They yanked him from his dungeon and placed him on the Pavement in the rays of the shining sun. And while his eyes were still blinking, they told him he was a free man; not he, but Jesus, would be killed. . . the Innocent was killed, and the sinner was set free."

Jesus, the innocent One is treated as the guilty One in order that the guilty ones may be treated as the righteous ones. This the heart of the good news. Whom does God justify? Does He justify the godly? No, the Bible says that He justifies the ungodly. "*To him who . . . believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is*

accounted for righteousness" (Romans 4:5). God justifies the ungodly by His grace through faith in Christ alone!

Is Jesus the kind of Saviour and King sinners want? Apart from God's grace and the working of His Spirit, no. We need to ask what kind of sinners we are. By nature, we are just as bad as Barabbas. By nature, like the mob who cried out, "Crucify Him", we are unable to come to Christ. We are not willing to come to Christ. We naturally hate Him unless He puts His love in our hearts.

This is what we see here in Mark 15.

We need the power of His grace and love in Christ Jesus. By His Holy Spirit, who raised Jesus from the dead, He makes sinners willing and able to come to Him in repentance and faith! It's a call to faith, a call to believe. His willingness is stronger than our unwillingness; His ability is stronger than our inability. Such is the strength of His love for sinners. " . . . while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom.5:8)

Remember the apostle Paul – how he hated Christ. He was not able or willing to come to Him. He wanted to continue to persecute Jesus by persecuting His followers. Until Jesus stopped him dead in his tracks – "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me." The persecutor became a preacher declaring the gospel message of Jesus, the righteous shall live by faith. The world does not need the message, "Be good!" It does not need the message of moral 'do-goodism.' The world needs God's righteousness! This is the message we need to hear and proclaim – the righteousness of God that comes by faith in Jesus Christ!

This is the answer to the rot in our lives and in society. We need to die to ourselves and find life in Christ. We find forgiveness and new life in Him by submitting to Him in faith. We need a King to rule us so that we may love and obey and live by the light of His glorious Word.

This is life; the alternative is death.

For the rest of his life, Barabbas would say, 'Jesus died instead of me.' But the Christian can say, in a much deeper sense, "*the Son of God . . . loved me and gave Himself for me*" and so '*the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith*' (Galatians 2:20). Amen.