

Mark 15:1-15

Jesus Before Pilate- The Roman Trial

In the Apostle's Creed, Pilate is one of two people named (who are not connected with the Trinity)
"Born of the Virgin Mary"
..."Suffered under Pontius Pilate"

Pilate goes down in history because of his connection with Jesus, and here in Mark 15 we have an abbreviated version account of their interaction. Last week we saw the trial before the Jewish Sanhedrin. Today we get the Roman Trial before Pilate.

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.

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.

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!"

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

v. 1 Early in the morning

This underscores the illegal nature of this trial. They led him to see Pilate, the Roman governor of the region.

Normally he would reside up in the seaport built by Herod the Great, but Pilate was in Jerusalem because of the Festival; not to celebrate but to keep an eye on things.

They led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the praetorium" (John 18:28). The praetorium was located in the Antonia Fortress, the Roman garrison constructed by Herod the Great. It included the Roman governor's residence and public spaces for conducting official business. The Antonia stood in a strategic location: on the northwest corner of the Temple Mount overlooking the Court of the Gentiles. Roman soldiers kept constant watch over the large open courtyard and kept watch over the crowds.

The Romans were always worried about the Jews getting rowdy, especially during one of the large festival events.

The empire had various forms of governments and jurisdictions with differing forms of self-administration in the different provinces.

The Jews also had their own laws and independent courts where Jews pursued justice and settled disputes. In fact, the Sanhedrin was performing precisely that function and was within its legal rights to put Jesus, a fellow Jew, on trial.

A governor, such as Pilate, would arrive in the province as the emperor's representative, bearing the authority of the emperor himself. A governor's powers were extensive but not unlimited during his two year term. A governor heard both criminal cases and ordinary civil cases. Pilate held office for 10 years, AD 26-36. He had a lot of experience dealing with the Jewish leaders. There was a sense of mutual cooperation, and the Sanhedrin would expect Pilate to rubber stamp their request to execute Jesus. (E. Constantinou)

There was probably a lot of exasperation as well. The Jews were not easy to rule, and Roman leaders did not find Judea to be a prime spot for a long-term career. The fact that Pilate was there for 10 years tells us something about his career path – it wasn't going up.

The Roman governor's authority included "the right of the sword," the authority to execute anyone in his province. This power of life and death extended to virtually every person in the province, whether he was a citizen or not, although the governor could not *summarily* execute a citizen. Roman *subjects* could be executed without a trial, but if the accused were a Roman *citizen*, proper judicial procedures would be observed since citizens had special legal rights and privileges. The Jews did not have the legal right to administer capital punishment.

Given the significance of the Passover – a celebration of the Exodus, you can see why Rome feared disruption during the festival. Jewish crowds excited by religious passions made the Romans nervous.

v. 2 Pilate asks a direct question, pointed and theologically loaded question, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

Jesus gives a short but loaded response.
He is saying "Yes" by affirming what Pilate just said.

It seems like Pilate is just repeating something that he has heard and doesn't really want to get involved in the in-fighting among the Jews. This title or issue of "King of the Jews" would have been floated by the Jewish leaders to get Pilate's attention. Simply saying that he is an evildoer (Jn 18) wouldn't grab Pilate's interest. Did he really care if Jesus called himself or if others called him the King of the Jews? Would it matter? Pilate knew who Rome recognized by that title – Herod.

This badly beaten Jewish rabbi would not appear to be such a threat... EXCEPT...The chief priests continued to harshly accuse him (v. 3) and Jesus made no answer. THAT got Pilate's attention. {Edersheim p.1540}

Pilate was amazed. He couldn't fathom being accused this way and not responding. He is amazed and he's getting a sense that there's more here than meets the eye. Pilate seems to be looking for a way out of the tangled web being spun by the Jewish leaders.

The four gospel narratives give a picture of a befuddled and conflicted Roman governor. He is being squeezed into a tight situation by the Jewish leaders who bring him a prisoner in the early morning hours. It doesn't seem that he knows much about Jesus, but he does have a sense that the chief priests hand Jesus over because of envy (v. 10)

Jesus and his followers had posed no threat to Rome. Jesus posed a threat to the religious establishment but that would not get Rome's attention. If Jesus had been on Pilate's radar as an insurrectionist, then Rome would have arrested him and had a trial. They were pretty efficient at getting rid of political threats – leaders and their followers.

We learn from Matthew's gospel that he is warned by his wife to have nothing to do with this man, but the Jewish leaders are at the courtyard of the Praetorium and they are beginning to draw a crowd. Luke notes that Pilate sends Jesus to Herod because he is over the region of Galilee and Jesus is said to be a Galilean.

Herod is in Jerusalem for the Passover, so Jesus goes before Herod. Again, a ruling official found no guilt in Jesus. Herod had his own contingent of soldiers who would have been aware of Jesus, but he wasn't seen to be a threat. Also, we should remember that Herod Antipas had John the Baptist killed and that greatly displeased the people. Killing Jesus would have been a risky move politically for Herod.

As Luke reports (ch 23) when Jesus appeared before Herod he was treated with contempt and mocking. He did not appear to be a kingly threat to Herod.

Herod and Pilate pass Jesus back and forth and 'become friends that day.'
It's the old "The enemy of my enemy is my friend" concept.

On different occasions Pilate tries to get out of the corner he's been backed into. He would assume that Herod would render some sort of judgement on these issues of Jewish law and religion. When Jesus is sent back to him, Pilate wants to wash his hands of Jesus and have him flogged, but the Jewish leaders keep working the crowd.

v. 6-11 Barabbas instead of Jesus– A Different Jesus??

Pilate's custom – What a guy; so gracious, right?

One interesting item I learned this week came from Dr. Sproul, but he's not alone in this view. Nor is it a slam dunk among Bible scholars and textual experts.

Who was Barabbas? Barabbas was his last name. It was not his first name. Do you know what his first name was, according to the gospel of Matthew? Jesus.

** There is textual evidence in some ancient manuscripts that Matthew uses the first name "Jesus" for Barabbas. The name "Jesus Barabbas" is found in some ancient manuscripts of the Gospel of Matthew, though not all. The NIV includes the name Jesus Barabbas in its translation of Matt 27:16-17. Other translations exclude it. Fortunately, it doesn't impact the significance of the narrative.

Let us take that irony a step further. What does the name Barabbas mean? The Spirit enables us to address God as Father, by which we say, "Abba, Father." Jesus was called Jesus Bar-Joseph. Bar means "son of." Barabbas means "son of the father." Here was a murderer standing before them, and Pilate said, "Do you want Jesus of Nazareth, or do you want this other Jesus Barabbas?"

On the one hand you have the 'son of the Father' who represents all fallen men from Adam.
On the other hand, you have THE SON OF THE FATHER who remains silent and is willing to die as a ransom for many.

The inclusion of the name "Jesus" for Barabbas in these manuscripts adds a layer of irony and contrast between the two figures presented to the crowd. The choice between two men named Jesus—one a political insurgent and the other the spiritual Savior—emphasizes the misunderstanding and misjudgment of the people regarding the nature of Jesus Christ's mission.

You see, the option for amnesty was Jesus Barabbas or Jesus of Nazareth, and Pilate asked the Jewish leaders, "Which one do you want?"

v. 12-15

Rayburn – Pilate and the Jewish leaders were blind to the meaning of what was happening. This world changing event was in their hands and they did not even realize it. But Isa 53 was a big hint. Yet it was ignored.

Isa 53:7

"He was oppressed and afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth. He was led as a Lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth."

Pilate's role, in the providence of God, was to ensure that Jesus was condemned in a court room, by a judge, and sentenced to be executed for crimes that he had not committed. Pilate, however unwittingly, played his role to a "T." He condemned Jesus to death without once suggesting that he thought Jesus had actually done anything deserving punishment of any kind, much less death.

****There is a sense in which you are never more Christlike than when you suffer for the sins of others. Jesus was mocked, ridiculed, maligned, beaten and killed for our sins, not his own. If we are to be conformed to his image (Rom 8), then there will be times when we will experience some of those to varying degrees.**

The sacrifices for sin in the OT were public as was the death of Jesus. He was seen as cursed in the eyes of the public. That was part of the plan of the chief priests and it suited Rome as well. It was a very clear plan to humiliate Jesus in public and totally demoralize his followers.

Jesus publicly made a payment for sin, but the plan of wicked men backfired...

Col 2:14 having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. 15 When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.

What they thought would be a humiliating end of Jesus and His movement became the foundation of the Good News proclaimed by his followers.

Why was Jesus silent?

Jesus is silent because he is content to fulfill the will of the Father. His silence does not mean that he accepts the accusers or his trial as being just and righteous. But he does accept the Father's will as one that will demonstrate his Justice, righteousness, and Grace.

Rom 3:21-26 God publicly displayed his righteousness and is the Just and Justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

**Pilate lets a guilty man go free and an innocent man is killed. That is the core of the gospel. When we hear the name Barabbas it should remind us that we are just like him. Barabbas did eventually die. We don't know how or when, but he died. Pilate died. Caiaphas died. Annas died. All the disciples died. We all die. The world tries to give a message of hope by singing the Circle of Life. Other religions offer some sort of Karma or reincarnation where you get what you deserve in the next life and try to work your way to a better life next time.

Friends, I DON'T WANT WHAT I DESERVE. Neither should you. As Christians, we offer the world the GOOD NEWS that Jesus got what we deserved and that through faith in him we can get what He deserved. In a world that is increasingly leaning toward a culture of death, we have a message of hope.

Jesus paid the price for our hope and that price is spelled out in the narratives of his suffering. Our hope and comfort are in Christ alone.

Heidelberg #1

1. Q. What is your only comfort in life and death?

A. That I am not my own, but belong with body and soul, both in life and in death, to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with His precious blood, and has set me free from all the power of the devil. He also preserves me in such a way that without the will of my heavenly Father not a hair can fall from my head; indeed, all things must work together for my salvation. Therefore, by His Holy Spirit He also assures me of eternal life and makes me heartily willing and ready from now on to live for Him.

Who could ask for more?

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Discussion Questions:

What stood out to you in the passage?

What questions remain unanswered?

If Jesus had been primarily interested in avoiding execution, what defense might He have offered before Pilate? Why did He remain silent?

What were Pilate's concerns regarding Jesus' trial?

What did the Sanhedrin hope to accomplish at Jesus' trial?

How does the inclusion of the Barabbas narrative relate to the message of Good News?

What role did the Sanhedrin's instigation of the crowds play? Have you ever been in a situation where a group did something the individuals in it later regretted? How did this get started? How could it be avoided?

What is the value in contemplating the appalling enormity of Jesus' suffering?