

## **89 Mark 15:1-15**

### **The King & the Prefect**

#### **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. 2 And Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" And he answered him, "You have said so." 3 And the chief priests accused him of many things. 4 And Pilate again asked him, "Have you no answer to make? See how many charges they bring against you." 5 But Jesus made no further answer, so that Pilate was amazed. 6 Now at the feast he used to release for them one prisoner for whom they asked. 7 And among the rebels in prison, who had committed murder in the insurrection, there was a man called Barabbas. 8 And the crowd came up and began to ask Pilate to do as he usually did for them. 9 And he answered them, saying, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" 10 For he perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up. 11 But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release for them Barabbas instead. 12 And Pilate again said to them, "Then what shall I do with the man you call the King of the Jews?" 13 And they cried out again, "Crucify him." 14 And Pilate said to them, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify him." 15 So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.

#### **Introduction**

Jesus ate the Passover supper with his disciples giving new meaning to the elements of the meal. "This is my body which is broken for you." "This is the blood of the covenant which is poured out for you." He spends some amazingly intense time in the Garden of Gethsemane crucifying, if you will, his soul and will to the Father. Having thus resolved within himself the course ahead he boldly goes to Judas and the cohort and permits them to capture him. All the disciples flee, but Peter has second thoughts and follows at a distance. Jesus is taken to the house of the high priest for a trial as corrupt as any you have seen. He is beaten and mocked and Peter, his chief disciples denies him three times.

Judas betrays him. The disciples abandon him. The religious rulers, who should have upheld him, reject and condemn him. Peter denies him. In today's text, Pilate, who should have upheld Jesus in justice, abandons him. The people, who should have hailed him as their king, reject Jesus and choose Barabbas. His rejection and abandonment is almost complete.

## The Silence of Christ

*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.*

The middle of the night trial ended with the second crowing of the rooster. It is just before day-break. Once the sun begins to brighten the sky at dawn another session is quickly held to confirm the midnight fiasco. You may remember that a capital case required two sittings to decide. They had to be on different days and both had to be during the day. Neither could be held on a Sabbath or a feast. The rulers seem to want to give some show of legitimacy, perhaps to ease their own consciences. But even this second sitting violates the rules since the first was done at night and it was not a different day. Clearly they are not interested in the laws of jurisprudence. They have to act quickly on their sentence. The Romans would begin their business at day break and would not be available later in the morning. So the Sanhedrin have a rush session and bind Jesus and have him on Pilate's steps shortly after dawn.

Pilate was the prefect of Palestine during the years A.D. 26-37. There were 14 governors in all and Pontius Pilate held the office the longest. He was a rather harsh ruler and was no friend of the Jews. His normal residence was in Caesarea Maritima, but during the feast days, especially large feasts like the Passover, he would take up residence closer to the action in case things got out of hand. The most probable place of residence is in Herod's palace to the northeast of Jerusalem. It was located up on a mountain. It sort of cascaded down to the mountain in several tiers. It provided a rather amazing view.

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The charge has changed slightly. The Sanhedrin know that Rome cares nothing for their theological quibbles and will not execute on the basis of heresy or blasphemy. They translate their case about Jesus claiming to be the messiah to one of being a king. The force of the accusation now is not theological but political. In fairness, these were very closely related in Jewish thought. A messianic claim was a political claim. So they present this as the charge and Pilate asks Jesus, "Are you the King of the Jews?"

There is no interrogative in the original, so it reads more as an inquiring statement, "You are the King of the Jews?" This form allows Jesus a somewhat elusive answer, "You have said so." The truth, of course, is both yes and no. Is Jesus a king as you conceive of him? No. He is not an insurrectionist, he is not a political ruler. But in another sense, Jesus is the the King of kings. He is the high king who holds Pilate's life and breath by his sheer will. "You are the king of the Jews?" "You have said so." Other gospel writers fill out this exchange a bit more, but Mark leaves us with just a skeleton sketch.

As at the midnight trial, so now before Pilate, there are multiple charges that are brought. The charge of an insurrectionist was just one of many that they hoped to pin on him. And just as the high priest asked Jesus for a defense, so Pilate asks, "Have you no answer to make?" Their questions are the same, but their motives are quite different. The high priest had hoped that Jesus would incriminate himself, whereas it seems that Pilate is just trying to get down to the bottom of this fiasco and is amazed that Jesus has no reply to make. And so the prophecy is fulfilled:

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,  
yet he opened not his mouth;  
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,  
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,  
so he opened not his mouth.

This is a sovereign silence. He has come for this purpose and he will not try to fight or argue his way out. That is the meaning of the passage. He is silent. The storms are raging around him. The people are in a frenzy and Pilate is looking for an escape and Jesus is in sovereign control of the storm and keeps his silence as he once slept in the helm of a boat in the midst of another storm. His silence is a sovereign resolve to surrender himself.

## Barabbas Offered

*6 Now at the feast he used to release for them one prisoner for whom they asked. 7 And among the rebels in prison, who had committed murder in the insurrection, there was a man called Barabbas. 8 And the crowd came up and began to ask Pilate to do as he usually did for them. 9 And he answered them, saying, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" 10 For he perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up. 11 But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release for them Barabbas instead.*

In the initial questioning Pilate discovers that Jesus is a Galilean and sends him to Herod. Herod has his fun and sends him back. Pilate appeals to the people saying that neither he nor Herod found any guilt in Jesus. But the chief priests will not settle for that.

It appears that Pilate had a custom of releasing a prisoner to the people on the Passover - a sort of presidential pardon. He knows that the chief priests have handed Jesus over because of jealousy and not because of any genuine crime. Their cry all along has been that Jesus claims to be the messiah and therefore is a threat to Rome. Jesus, although he has never acted on it, is a potential insurrectionist. That is the argument anyway. So when Pilate presents the people with a choice, it is hard to see how this is not a challenge to their case.

On the one hand you have Jesus, who supposedly poses a potential threat as an insurrectionist, and on the other hand you have Barabbas who actually is an insurrectionist. In fact he was part of an actual uprising and was found guilty of murder. "So, my dear subjects, do you want to drop your insurrectionist charges against Jesus and I will release him, or shall I release a real insurrectionist?" The chief priests show that they are not really concerned with insurrection, they just want to kill Jesus.

*12 And Pilate again said to them, "Then what shall I do with the man you call the King of the Jews?" 13 And they cried out again, "Crucify him." 14 And Pilate said to them, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify him." 15 So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.*

The crowds, whipped up by the chief priests, will not settle for Jesus being released. They shout for Barabbas. Frustrating as it is, that matter has been settled, Barabbas is free, but what now is to be done for Jesus? "Crucify him!" Is the cry. If you read the parallel accounts side by side you can see how many times Pilate tries to free Jesus and how many times he insists that Jesus has done no wrong. And yet the people, impervious to logic and justice keep crying, "Crucify him!" It comes to a point where, as Matthew records, a riot was beginning. So Pilate relents and gives

Jesus to be crucified.

They lead Jesus away to scourge him. This was the practice I described in an earlier sermon where the person is tied to a stump or something similar so that their back is exposed and they are bent over. They are then whipped with a whip that has bone, shells, and metal woven into it. This was a horrible procedure. There was no limit on how many strikes a person received. There are reports of people being scourged and having their bones or organs exposed as a result of the process. As you may expect, many people would die simply from the scourging itself.

But he was wounded for our transgressions;  
he was crushed for our iniquities;  
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,  
and with his stripes we are healed.

## Application

What kind of sin requires this sort of punishment? What had he done to deserve this treatment? What manner of crimes warrant such abuse? Answer: Yours. Think about Jesus and the scourging he endured, then imagine yourself being mercilessly whipped. That punishment should be yours. Imagine that you are led to the stump and your arms are fastened around it. Imagine your shirt being torn open to reveal your back. Imagine the fearful anticipation of that first whip. As the lictors position themselves on either side of your body your heart begins to race. Dear friend, that is where you should have been by all rights.

What cause have you to complain? Your car won't start, your job is stressful, your finances are tight, your spouse is difficult, your children drive you crazy, so what!? This is where you should be: fastened to the stump and whipped times without number.

Stinging strike after stinging strike belongs to you. Welt after welt belongs to you. That swelled flesh can take only so many strikes before they begin to slit open. The bruising of the metal and the tearing of the bone speeds the process along. All of this should have been yours.

It is on account of your pride that this punishment comes. It is on account of your lust. It is on account of your lies and hatred and selfishness and gossip and slander and un-thankfulness and rebellion and dishonor and idolatry and unfaithfulness and stealing and whoring and conniving that this punishment is due.

But he was wounded for **our** transgressions;  
he was crushed for **our** iniquities;  
upon him was the chastisement that brought **us** peace,  
and with his stripes **we** are healed.

Do not separate yourself from this passion. You need to see yourself in this story for you are an integral part of it. I am not saying that you should identify with it as perhaps you can identify with some other moving story. I am saying that you are actually part of this story. You are a character in it. Your name is not mentioned, but your sins were the reasons for this suffering. Do not distance yourself from it. Were men to come in these doors now and grab you and drag you out of this building tie you to a fence post and beat you until you were unconscious, would you not have a greater sense of urgency and desperation than what now resides in your heart? Were they to take you to Norris park at the center of town and strip you naked to hang you on a tree for all to see and pity, would you not have a greater sense of thankfulness in your heart if someone

stopped that process?

Ladies and gentlemen, that is what has happened. All of this suffering that we read about is rightfully ours. Yet God in his mercy sent his Son to put a stop to the process. He did this, not in some heroic way by defeating all the bad guys who were trying to do this to you. No, there are no bad guys in this story except you. There is no injustice being done when the men come for you. Jesus did not come to stop bad people from being mean to you. He came to bear in his body the punishment that was due our sins.