

Jesus Before Pilate Mark 15:1-15

We come to the final step before Jesus' crucifixion, and to the heart of why it was necessary: a substitute to suffer in our place for our sins. Jesus has been condemned for blasphemy by his own testimony before the Sanhedrin (14:64). Now he stands trial before Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea who has the power to save or execute him. In Mark's account this is not where Jesus becomes a helpless victim, but ironically where he shows himself as the true King, willing sacrificing himself for his people.

The Question

The entire Sanhedrin meets in the early morning to plot and deliver Jesus to Pilate (v1). They can condemn him all they want about the Torah, but convincing Rome that he is worthy of death is another issue. Pilate sits in the judgment seat and this trial resembles the one with the Jews (cf. 14:60-62; 15:4-5, 2). Both trials end with a verdict, mocking and torture, but this one will soon bring death. The mention of Pontius Pilate is enormously important which is why he is included in the Apostle's Creed, the only non-divine person besides Mary. Why is a third-rate Roman politician, stuck in Palestine (AD 26-37), doing in one of our foundational creeds? Demonstrating the historical nature of the faith. Christianity is not philosophy or psychology or a better way of living. It's an historical faith founded on the person and work of Jesus which you could have photographed had you been there. This is why Paul says if Jesus didn't physically rise, Christians are the most pitiful, and why the writers of the NT constantly appeal to eyewitness testimony (1 Cor. 15:6). The Bible tells us to investigate and be set free by the truth (Jn. 8:32). Pilate's question is not about subjective feelings. It's falsifiable: "Are you the King of the Jews?" (v2).

The Answer

There are lots of charges, but Pilate gets the gist in his question. Jesus answers so briefly that Pilate is amazed at his lack of defense. It would be a huge mistake to think that Jesus is going limp at this point. He has confounded his enemies over and over in the Gospel, and the Word of God always had words. His face was set on the cross, and the lion was now choosing to lay himself down like a lamb, fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy from 700 years before: "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" (Is. 53:7). His answer is brief because he's on his way to accomplish his mission (10:33-34). But it's also unequivocal: "You have said so" (v2). His first word is that the kingdom is here (1:15) and he doesn't take it back now. His kingdom is here, but it's not *from* this world, or else his servants would fight (cf. Jn. 18:36). Saying that he is not a king from this world is not to say he isn't King over this world. He is King of kings, and Lord of lords (1 Tim. 6:15). Jesus isn't political; he's transpolitical. So Christians seek political justice.

The Substitution

It's tradition for Pilate to grant amnesty to someone at Passover, and Jesus Barabbas is one popular imprisoned murderer from *the* insurrection. We don't know exactly when he murdered, but he was someone who really did try to violently overthrow the authorities, a rich irony. The one who committed no crime, violence or treason will be condemned and executed, the one who did all these things will go free. Pilate perceives they delivered him because of envy (v10). This is not just wanting what someone else has, but wanting it *instead* of them (Acts 7:9, 13:45; Jms. 4:1-2, 5). Envy desires the desolation of the other. "Why, what evil has he done?" "Because crucify him!" (v14). They'd rather have a murderer walk who actually threatens their lives, than a man who is willing to would give his own life to save them. *Jesus was innocent of the charges against him, and condemned anyway.* It's easy to see these high crimes and imagine yourself above them, but there's no hiding. Mark, Peter, the Sanhedrin, the crowd, and Barabbas: "we have turned – everyone – to his own way" (Is. 53:6). Jesus is finally crowned in Mark's Gospel—with thorns. He died *for* you.

NOTES FOR LITTLE SAINTS

Today's Passage: Mark 15:1-15

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.

1. Why did the priest deliver Jesus to Pilate to be crucified (verse 10)?
2. Envy is when someone doesn't want another person to have something. For example, you can see it when a child isn't playing with a toy but then sees another child playing with and runs up to take it away. This is one of our strongest temptations. How can you resist envy? How should you feel instead when you see someone playing with a toy you like?
3. Was Jesus guilty or innocent of blasphemy and evil (verse 13)? Was Barabbas guilty, and if so what did he do (verse 7)? Why did Jesus gladly die in your place?
4. Draw a picture of Pilate amazed that Jesus isn't defending himself, with the angry crowd accusing him in the background.

Memory Verse to Recite Next Week:

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