

Sermon Title: Pilate: Savvy and Spineless
Scripture Text: Mark 15:1-21

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 1-26-20

As we make our way through the Gospel According to Mark, we come to the next-to-last chapter: Mark 15. I'm going to take on a pretty sizable chunk this morning. You are about to see how Jesus got sent to the Cross—from a human perspective. *God* sent Jesus to the Cross (Acts 2:23). God is the One who sent His Son to take away our sins (Is. 53:6, 10), *but* He used a number of people—wicked people, at that—to get Jesus to the Cross (Ac. 4:27-28).

The text that we are going to be looking at in Mark focuses mainly on a man named Pontius Pilate; he was the Roman governor who actually handed down the sentence of death by crucifixion. Now, again today, to help you with putting all of this together, I've included the chart of all six phases of Jesus's trial (see last page of this transcript); three Jewish phases—we saw that two weeks ago in Mark 14; and then, three Roman phases that we're going to see today. The Roman part of the trial was just as much a mockery of justice as was the Jewish part of it.

Just imagine, for a perspective, if someone in our world is accused of a very serious crime, worthy of capital punishment. Imagine how long it would take to gather all of the information, put together the case, get the indictment, go to trial, present the prosecution, present the defense, have the jury deliberate, and then have a sentence passed down. *They* did all of this in five hours, in six different courtrooms, with a whole array of accusations—all of them false. Humanly speaking, this was absurd.

But let's see how it unfolded, because next week—Lord willing—we're going to look at the Crucifixion, and we want to see what led up to it. So we look, focusing on Pilate. Mark Chapter 15, Verses 1 through 21. The first point we'll call "Pilate To Herod To Pilate"—those are the three portions of the Roman trial. And then, six verses: "Mocking The Master."

Now, this is kind of a different style of sermon; there are going to be many, many verses to read today. If you like working on harmonizing parallel passages, this is a whopper, because we're going to be in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. We are following Mark's narrative, but to get it all fleshed-out for you to be able to see the big picture, we're going to do a lot of flipping back and forth today.

Let's look at "Pilate To Herod To Pilate." We come to Mark 15, Verse 1—and actually, this is the end of the Jewish portion of the trial. Mark 15:1—"Early in the morning the chief priests with the elders and scribes and the whole Council"—that's the Sanhedrin—"immediately held a consultation; and binding Jesus, they led Him away and delivered Him to Pilate" (NASB, and throughout, unless otherwise noted). Now remember, in the Jewish trial, He had already been to Annas, the former high priest; He had been to Caiaphas, the son-in-law of Annas, who was the reigning high priest at that time. They had broken just about every rule of their own legal structure in doing all this by cover of darkness. It was *all* illegal. But at the end of the trial, they wanted to give some sort of at least an *appearance* of legality to what they had done. One of the rules that they had broken was: you couldn't do it at night, so they waited until sunup, and then held this "consultation" where they said, "Yeah, everything-we-said-before-and-send-Him-away!" That was pretty much what this part of the Jewish trial was all about.

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So, we read: "They led Him away and delivered Him to Pilate." Right away, let's go over to John Chapter 18, Verses 28 and 29—"Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas into the Praetorium"—the Praetorium was a judgment hall, sort of a royal palace that *included* a judgment hall, probably located in Fortress Antonia, just north of the temple; it was an ostentatious place, as you would expect from the pomposity of the Romans and how much they loved their own displays of authority and power. So "they led Jesus from Caiaphas into the Praetorium, and it was early"—the sun had just come up—"and they themselves did not enter into the Praetorium so that they would not be defiled, but might eat the Passover. Therefore Pilate went out to them and said, 'What accusation do you bring against this Man?' "

Here we meet Pilate—or, Pontius Pilate—he was appointed the governor of the region of Judea by Emperor Tiberius in A.D. 26; so about four years before this, he had become the governor of that region; he lasted from 26 until 36. His duties were: to be responsible to command the Roman military in that area, to collect taxes—and you know how corrupt *that* system was, where the Romans would have the Jews collect the taxes from their own people, and they had their tax collectors who would collect what Rome needed, plus whatever *they* could rip off; the whole thing was a mess. And Pilate was also responsible to adjudicate certain legal matters.

Though he was often brutal and impulsive, Pilate also, at times, exhibited some rather profound weakness and indecision; and you're going to see both sides of him today—the mean part and the wishy-washy part. It's important to know that, on two prior occasions, Pilate had been forced to back down when he threatened Jews, and the people then stood up to him. Josephus and Philo and somebody else—different historians—document that in extra-Biblical history. He was known to be a paper-tiger puppet of Rome with a mean streak, but not much of a spine. He liked to rail, but he could also be forced to back down.

Did you notice the absurd hypocrisy of the chief priests and scribes? All night long, they had been lying: they had arrested an innocent man; they had falsely accused this innocent man; they had twisted words; they had broken virtually every rule of their own judicial system; but then, after sunup—"We can't set foot in the Praetorium because that's Gentile territory, and we don't want to be defiled before we eat the Passover tonight!" That's how legalism works: "We will *steamroll* you in our righteous way!" That's exactly what they were doing. No compunction about lying in order to murder the Son of God, but *Oh*, don't step across *that* line—that's Gentile territory, and then you couldn't eat the Passover (cf. Matt. 23:24).

And if you recall: Jesus and His guys ate the Passover meal the night before; they [the Sanhedrin] were talking about how they were *going* to eat the Passover. Remember that the resolution of that is, that the Galileans, from the norther part of Israel, and the Judeans, in the southern part, had two different traditions about which day of the series of days the Passover meal was to be eaten, and which day the Passover lambs were to be slain. Jesus was going to be slain at exactly the hour of the slaying of the Passover lambs, according to the Judean custom; but they [Jesus and the Apostles] had already eaten it the night before.

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John 18, continuing at Verse 30—"They answered and said to him"—he [Pilate] had just said, "What accusation do you bring against this Man?" and I love this answer—"If this Man were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him to you." Now, that's an interesting thing. Can you see the prosecutor walking into the courtroom and saying, "Order this man's execution!" "Well, what's the charge?" "You don't think I'd bring him here if he wasn't a bad guy, do you?" That's how deep their case ran, and that's exactly what they did. And Pilate is savvy—he's spineless, but he's also savvy. "So Pilate said to them, 'Take Him yourselves, and judge Him according to your law.' The Jews said to him, 'We are not permitted to put anyone to death' "—and that's true, according to the Roman law.

But they did it "to fulfill the word of Jesus which He spoke, signifying by what kind of death He was about to die." Here's the significance of *that*. If the Jews *had* put somebody to death, it would have been by stoning. How do they "stone" somebody? Well you get an elevated place with a little cliff or an overhang, and you push the person off, or you tie them up at the bottom, and then you rain down stones on them until they're dead. Jesus said that He would be "lifted up" (Jn. 12:32). What form of execution lifts someone up? Well, that was a figure of speech for crucifixion. If the Jews *had* succeeded in killing Jesus, it would not have fulfilled that prophecy! So, *who* is in charge of this situation? Jesus—arranging it all according to the eternal plan of God (Is. 46:10; Eph. 1:11). So that's why He had to go to the Romans.

We pick it back up at John 18:33—"Therefore Pilate entered again into the Praetorium, and summoned Jesus and said to Him, 'Are You the King of the Jews?' Jesus answered"—most of the time, He did not answer, but when it was a factual, direct, legitimate question, He would answer. "Jesus answered, 'Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about Me?' " He knew that Pilate didn't care *at all* about His title with the Jews, but he was trying to find a loophole to get *himself* out of the mess, not Jesus Himself. "Pilate answered, 'I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You to me; what have You done?' Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm.' Therefore Pilate said to Him, 'So You are a king?' Jesus answered, 'You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.'" Now, here comes words that you often hear, with no reference to the context: "Pilate said to Him, 'What is truth?' And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews and said to them, 'I find no guilt in Him.'" Now, the Jews didn't want that to happen! They didn't want anything to do with Pilate actually acting as a judge; they wanted a rubber stamp for their death sentence—that's all that they wanted.

Alright, jump back to Mark Chapter 15, verses 2 through 5, overlapping what we just read: "Pilate questioned Him, 'Are You the King of the Jews?' And He answered him, 'It is as you say.' The chief priests began to accuse Him harshly." They weren't hearing what they wanted, so they raised the decibel level. "Then Pilate questioned Him again, saying, 'Do You not answer?' " In other words, they're screeching all of these accusations, and Jesus just isn't dealing with them. Pilate said, " 'See how many charges they bring against You!' But Jesus made no further answer; so Pilate was amazed."

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Pilate is seeing through this whole thing. He knows he's caught in the middle. Jesus answered only the legitimate, factual questions; He didn't defend Himself against the ridiculous charges; He did not dignify any of the absurd accusations that came from the Sanhedrin. They're over there blustering and shouting their accusations—and they were probably changing, because they had been changing all night long. While they're shouting, Jesus is silent, and Pilate is "amazed." They just didn't want a judge; they wanted a rubber stamp.

Well, now that brings up another change of venue. Mark doesn't mention it, but now He's going to go to Herod Antipas. Herod Antipas was a son of the Herod that you hear of in the Christmas story—Herod the Great (see genealogical chart at the end of this transcript). When Herod the Great died, very shortly after Jesus was born, Herod Antipas received one of the four slices of the territory that had been under Herod the Great. He ruled over Galilee and Perea—Galilee, around the Sea of Galilee; Perea, to the east of the Jordan River from there. He was their leader under the jurisdiction of Rome, while Pontius Pilate was their [Rome's] guy down in Judea.

This Herod Antipas is the Herod that you've already heard about in Mark. Remember his backstory? He's the one who had a wife; he had married her for one of those political-alliance situations. He dumped her. He wooed and committed fornication with and then stole and married the wife of his half-brother. When John the Baptist called him on his very open treachery against his first wife and the incestuous marriage to his next wife, Herod Antipas had John the Baptist killed. And remember how *that* played out—even getting his head on a platter? That whole situation involved immorality and drunkenness and manipulation; it shows you how these people functioned.

When Herod Antipas, having killed John the Baptist, heard about Jesus and all that He was doing and saying, he—with his bad theology—feared that Jesus might actually be John the Baptist coming back from the dead to seek revenge against him (Matt. 14:1-2)! That's why he wanted to meet Jesus; he wanted to kill *Him*, just in case his superstitious wacko theory was true. But all along, Jesus deliberately evaded Herod's clutches. So this was the first time that Herod saw Jesus face-to-face. And when he saw Jesus face-to-face, remember: Jesus had already been beaten and pummeled and spat upon; He wasn't very impressive.

So Herod Antipas is the one who oversees the second part of the Roman trial. It's not in Mark, so let's jump to Luke this time: Luke 23:6 through 12—"When Pilate heard it"—heard the accusations against Jesus—"he asked whether the man was a Galilean." He had probably heard "Jesus of Nazareth"—Nazareth is in Galilee. "And when he learned that He belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod, who himself also was in Jerusalem at that time." When you're the governor over the Jews, you want to make nice; you want to at least have a pretense of caring, so Herod was there for the Passover. "Now Herod was very glad when he saw Jesus"—because he had wanted to see Him for a long time, after the John-the-Baptist incident. Read on: "for he had wanted to see Him for a long time, because he had been hearing about Him and"—here's what he wanted—"was hoping to see some sign performed by Him." "Oh, I hope I can get that guy to my palace, and He'll do a trick!" That was the depth of what he was really thinking about Him.

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"And he questioned Him"—Herod questioning Jesus—"at some length; but He answered him nothing. And the chief priests and the scribes were standing there, accusing Him vehemently." These guys never shut up! Just accuse and accuse and accuse and accuse and accuse—change people—accuse and accuse and accuse some more. They're not listening? Raise the volume! It was awful.

"And Herod with his soldiers, after treating Him with contempt and mocking Him"—he was no longer threatened by Him, so immediately he turned it into a joke—"dressed Him in a gorgeous robe and sent Him back to Pilate. Now Herod and Pilate became friends with one another that very day; for before they had been enemies with each other." Do you see what a uniter Jesus was? Pharisees and Sadducees hated each other; the only thing they ever agreed upon was: "Kill Jesus!" Pilate and Herod could never get along, except—well, they both liked to make fun of the Son of God, so they became friends. So here He is now, forced into this dazzling royal robe; bleeding, already bruised, maybe close to unrecognizable by them. We see, of Herod's character, just what we already knew of him: No problem with treating the Son of God as a mock King. Once he found out that Jesus was not an immediate threat to him, he just turned Him into a joke for his own depraved amusement, at the expense and pain of Jesus.

So Herod returns Jesus to Pilate, and he didn't add any charges. As a matter of fact, Pilate sent Him to him, saying, "I have found no guilt in this man." So you wind up with two now-independent witnesses saying that, despite the loud and incessant accusations from the chief priests and the scribes, He's innocent (Lk. 23:14-15). But both Pilate and Herod added to His title "man of sorrows" from Isaiah Chapter 53 (vs. 3), which describes the physical torture that Jesus endured before the Cross.

That brings us to the third part of the Roman trial, again back in front of Pilate. This time, we jump back to our main text in Mark: Mark 15:6—"Now at the feast he"—Pilate—"used to release for them any one prisoner whom they requested. The man named Barabbas had been imprisoned with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the insurrection. The crowd went up and began asking him to do as he had been accustomed to do for them." We don't know the background of that, in detail. What insurrection this is, is not specified; it was probably a *popular* thing among the Jews—I mean, they had the whole party called the Zealots, that *lived* to throw off Rome's authority over them. Some insurrection had happened; a bunch of people had been arrested; they had been accused of murder; Barabbas was one of them. Barabbas was probably a popular figure among the Jews. And so, going into this day, Pilate had probably figured that his token act of kindness—he would do this once a year, give a little semblance that he had some compassion and that he actually cared about the people that he governed; he would release one prisoner. He had probably teed up Barabbas to be the one that would be set free, and that would help him gain favor with the Jews.

But now, he's in a tough spot. He knew Jesus was innocent. Barabbas—might have been popular, but he was not innocent. And it appears that part of Pilate wanted to do the right thing. In once sense, you could say you can understand why he was happy to figure out that Jesus was from Galilee: because Herod is in town; Herod is the governor of Galilee—"I can hand off my problem, and I won't have to deal with Him!" I think he thought that, as well.

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But now, he sends Him off to Herod, and he gets Him back in short order; and it's just as bad as it was, only now the chief priests and scribes are even *more* hot in their screaming accusations.

Pilate had a long history of doing rash things that alienated him from the Jews, *and* things that, when he alienated the Jews, would get him in trouble with Rome, because his and Herod's job was: Keep the Jews happy, keep them paying taxes, no rebellions, and you'll be fine. Well, his problems had begun when Pilate got carried away with himself, and he allowed his soldiers to enter Jerusalem carrying banners and standards that had on them the image of Caesar. Remember: Caesar-worship was an issue in those days. The Jews regarded that as idolatry, so they were incensed with Pilate when Pilate did that.

So, a delegation of the Jews went down to Caesarea by the seashore—that was where Pilate usually hung out; that's where his main palace was. They went there to complain, and they protested for five days. Finally, Pilate agreed to meet them in the amphitheater. You that have been to Israel, you that were there with me a couple of years ago, we went to that amphitheater by the seashore in Caesarea—quite a spectacular place, even the ruins of it.

He gathered all the Jews there, but instead of listening to their complaint, he surrounded them with his soldiers and he threatened that he would have them all killed on the spot, unless they would stop demonstrating against what he had done in Jerusalem. Well, he figured they would buckle—and they *didn't!* Instead of backing down, they defiantly bared their necks; you know, a symbol you'd give like, "Okay! You want me, come get me! Cut my head off if you want to!" It's like when your dog is attacked by the big dog, and your dog rolls over on its back to say, "Okay, I submit!"—hoping the big dog won't carry through. That's what they did. Well, Pilate realized: he wasn't going to get away with carrying out his bluff, so he reluctantly acquiesced and removed the images. And it didn't help his approval rating to have done that. Now they know: he's not only mean and vindictive and idolatrous, he's also a wuss—and he's going to back down!

There were two other occasions we know that Pilate either killed some Jews or threatened to kill Jews who opposed him. So, no wonder the resentment was so high. There was another conflict when Pilate insisted on, not those standards and the pictures of Caesar he brought in, but he brought in gold-covered shields honoring Tiberius Caesar in Herod's palace in Jerusalem. Well, Herod's palace in Jerusalem—that's probably the same as the Praetorium—that's right next to the Temple Mount.

Again, that was regarded as idolatrous, so *this time*, the Jewish delegation didn't want to press their luck and go to Caesarea and fight with Pilate there. They sent a delegation to *Rome* to appeal directly to Caesar! Well, Caesar didn't like hearing that Pilate wasn't able to handle things there, so he was angered by Pilate's insensitivity in provoking the Jews over and over. So he ordered him to take the shields down. So Pilate also hated the people who hated him. This guy is in a mess! If one more bad report about him gets to the ears of Caesar, he knows he's *done*. So watch him try to wriggle out of this situation.

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We have to jump to Luke again, to keep weaving the story together. Luke 23:13-16: "Pilate summoned the chief priests and the rulers and the people, and said to them, 'You brought this man to me as one who incites the people to rebellion'—remember, that was the false charge they brought to the first part of the Roman trial, even though that wasn't what they accused Him of in *their* part of the trial—"and behold, having examined Him before you"—you were here when I was questioning Him—"I have found no guilt in this man regarding the charges which you make against Him.' " Jesus had said plainly, "Yeah, I'm a king, but I'm not after your kingdom!" Pilate was not worried about that. He continued: "No, nor has Herod, for he sent Him back to us; and behold, nothing deserving death has been done by Him." Now, that sounds pretty good, so far. Let's reword that: "You accused Him, but the charges don't add up. I found Him innocent. I sent him to Herod. Herod found Him innocent. He's done nothing worthy of death. He sent Him back to me. I say to you again, He's done nothing worthy of death." So far, so good. Jesus is innocent and doesn't deserve to die.

But then, there's that last sentence: "Therefore I will punish Him and release Him." What do you do when you're the judge, and the guy before you is *clearly* not guilty? You release him! But, if you are a cowardly, self-serving mini-tyrant who cares more about your own self and maintaining your own position and your own power than you care about truth and justice, *and* you're afraid of the people in front of you, *and* you're afraid of your boss in Rome—you say something *totally* ridiculous, like: "Well, since He's innocent, therefore, I'll punish Him and let Him go."

What? Did you *hear* what you just *said*? Here's what he's thinking—it's pretty obvious: He figured, "If I'll just commit *a little bit of violence* against Jesus, maybe *that* will satisfy the bloodlust of these chief priests and rulers." He didn't care *at all* that Jesus was innocent, and His accusers were guilty. Jesus did not matter *at all* to Pilate in this situation. Jesus, in the eyes of Pilate, was merely a problem that needed to be handled in whatever way necessary to wiggle out of the pickle that he was in.

Now we have to jump to John. Pilate is speaking. I think the first time he tried to get out of it, he was thinking: "I'll send Him off to Herod. *Whew!* Thank goodness—the governor from Galilee is here! Oops! I got Him back!" Here's his second thought. In John 18:39, he says: "But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover; do you wish then that I release for you the King of the Jews?" He had seen those crowds in the temple; he knew Jesus was *incredibly* popular! He had heard about Him all of this time, and he had this custom: Throw a bone the way of the Jews once a year at the Passover, to act like you have a little compassion or a little mercy. So he's figuring: "Okay, I'll release *Him*." But Pilate was as savvy as he was spineless and foolish. Understand that he saw through this whole situation—except for how stupid *he* looked.

Back to Mark 15:9 and 10. We just read John's version of this; now Mark adds this comment: "Pilate answered them, saying, 'Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?' For he was aware that the chief priests had handed Him over because of envy." He saw that they weren't after justice! They came with the death penalty first, and then tried to find an accusation. He knew that the motive for killing Jesus had *nothing* to do with their feigned

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loyalty to Rome... "Well, this man doesn't want people to pay taxes to Rome!"—which is exactly contrary to what Jesus said (see Mk. 12:14-17; cf. Matt. 17:24-27). Pilate could sniff out envy. He could recognize desperate hunger to hang on to position and power, because *that's how he lived!* It takes one to know one! And he saw right through these guys.

Now there's one more juicy little unexpected piece of this drama. We haven't been to Matthew yet; let's go over to Matthew 27, Verse 19—"While he [Pilate] was sitting on the judgment seat"—that's the place in the Praetorium where he would make legal pronouncements—"his wife sent him a message, saying, 'Have nothing to do with that righteous Man; for last night I suffered greatly in a dream because of Him.' "

Wow! As if Pilate isn't miserable *enough!* He's got the Jewish leaders screaming over here; he's got the problem of what to do if this gets back to Rome; *now* he's going to have his wife on his case! Trust me: Mrs. Pilate didn't usually interrupt him when he was at the judgment seat, but she obviously knew what was going on; they had likely spoken of Jesus during the week—I mean, you couldn't have *been there* for the five days before this, and not talked about Jesus and the crowds in the temple, and clearing the temple, and all that stuff (see Lk. 24:18). Probably, his wife knew of Pilate's original verdict; maybe he had come back home after he sent Him off to Herod and said, "Wow, honey! Boy, I just dodged a bullet! Herod's in town—I'm off the hook! Oh, wait a minute—they want me back at the Praetorium; Jesus is back!" She probably knew all that was going on.

Well, she had had a terrible dream—remember, this is happening first thing in the morning—she had had a terrible dream about what might happen, presumably to her husband, if he sent Jesus to His death. Now, I promise: she did *not* have a legitimate dream about what would happen to her husband, unless she dreamed about "the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:10; cf. Matt. 25:41)—*that's* where her husband ended up, for all that we know. Now, I've heard people say that this was a prophecy, that God gave this prophecy about Jesus, and said, "Lay off the righteous Man." There's no indication that this was a revelatory dream from God, and there's no reason whatsoever to take it as such. Far more likely, she was convinced of Jesus's innocence; she knew her husband had trouble with his boss in Rome; she knew he was in a mess; and she was frightened for her husband.

So, why is this mentioned here? We don't need Mrs. Pilate to convince us that Jesus is innocent. We don't need Mrs. Pilate to further illustrate that Pilate was a weasel. But by taking this very unusual act of interrupting the governor on the judgment seat. Pilate's wife is recorded forever in Scripture as *yet another voice* attesting to Jesus's innocence. Now, there are a lot of things I would *hope* are true: I would like to think she was a believer, somehow, through all of that—maybe she had been in the crowds; maybe she had heard; maybe she had come to faith—or, maybe *after* Jesus went to the Cross, maybe she became a believer. I've heard some wonderful points of sermons to that effect—and those are great sermons, if you're willing to add to the Word of God, but it doesn't say that. She had a bad dream, and she was scared for husband, *to the point* that she did something very unusual.

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Well, poor Pilate...the jaws of the vice, with every word spoken, get tighter and tighter and tighter on Pilate—pressure to release Jesus, even from his wife; pressure to send Him to the Cross. I imagine his discomfort was pretty easy to see. I can see the messenger coming up and handing him a note, and he's looking at it, and it would only get worse. Well, the chief priests sniffed *that* out, and they pounced on his discomfort.

We go back to Mark 15, Verses 11 to 15—"But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to ask him to release Barabbas for them instead." I think he came there planning to release Jesus that day; he was thinking, "Wait a minute! Barabbas is guilty; Jesus is innocent...Why don't I give them an innocent man who has been very popular among them!" But, the chief priests and those guys—they led spiritually the same way that Herod and Pilate led politically: by intimidation and manipulation. They whipped the crowds up to demand the release of Barabbas.

"Answering again, Pilate said to them, 'Then what shall I do with Him whom you call the King of the Jews?' They shouted back, 'Crucify Him!' But Pilate said to them, 'Why, what evil has He done?' But they shouted all the more, "Crucify Him!" Now, here comes everything you ever need to know about the character of Pilate in one verse—look at it carefully: "Wishing to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas for them, and after having Jesus scourged, he handed Him over to be crucified."

He knew Jesus was innocent. He knew that His *accusers* were absolutely *filthy* in this situation! They had manipulated truth, they had manipulated people, they had broken countless of their own laws! He even knew that his own wife was going to be mad at him! But what mattered most to this man? "Wishing to satisfy the crowd..." So he lets a murderer loose. He decided to go ahead and inflict an *unspeakably* horrible physical punishment on a totally innocent man, in order to try to please the crowd of murderers led by hypocrites. He was just fine with doing that, as long as it solved *his* problem. And in the end, he handed over the only innocent man in all of history to be crucified. He "who knew no sin" became "sin for us" (2 Cor. 5:21, NKJV; cf. Heb. 7:26; 1 Pet. 2:22; 3:18). We're going to see the "became-sin-for-us" part of it next time.

Well, that's Pilate to Herod, and back to Pilate. One more step before we are ready to look at the Cross next time. Before the actual crucifixion comes another absolutely abhorrent scene. I'm not going to describe scourging—or, flogging—to you; it's utterly terrible. Only the most despicable of human beings could ever order something like this, or do something like this. That's what was done to Jesus. Go back to Mark Chapter 15, Verses 16 through 20. This is Mocking The Master: "The soldiers took Him away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium), and they called together the whole Roman cohort." What's *that* about? Remember, the Roman cohort—that's the soldiers. A cohort would be up to 600 of them. Now, they did not need 600 soldiers to contain Jesus. And remember, when they *did* come after Him, He said two words and knocked them all off their feet! It wasn't like He was their victim at any point (Jn. 10:17-18). But they called all of them together. Do you know *why* they called them together? "Hey, guys, come look at this! We're going to have some fun!" It was *that* wicked!

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Date: 1-26-20

"They dressed Him up in purple"—a symbol of royalty, mocking Him—"and after twisting a crown of thorns, they put it on Him"—a crown of thorns would have been digging into the skull; more pain, more blood—"and they began to acclaim Him, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' They kept beating His head with a reed"—He's got a thorny crown on His head, and they keep beating Him with a stick of bamboo—"and spitting on Him, and kneeling and bowing before Him." Total mockery! Utter blasphemy! "After they had mocked Him, they took the purple robe off Him and put His own garments on Him. And they led Him out to crucify Him." He's about to lose His life—it's a death sentence. There is no compassion. There is no sense of solemnity, no sadness *at all* for what they had just done to this guy, let alone what He was about to face. There was no human decency. They ridicule and they mock the Son of God. They inflict the unspeakable torture of flogging upon Him. And by the way: many victims of flogging died at *that* stage, from the trauma and the blood loss.

Well, we have one more really interesting little detail. It's a fascinating thing, when you try to think about why Mark included this. The last verse of our pericope is Mark 15:21. They're on the way to the Cross. "They"—"they" refers to the soldiers—"They pressed into service a passer-by coming from the country, Simon of Cyrene (the father of Alexander and Rufus), to bear His cross."

Now, probably, what's going on is: the soldiers want to get this done. They have to get to Golgotha, the place of the crucifixion; there was Jesus and the two others who were crucified there. I'm sure you have had it explained to you: They would typically take the person being crucified and tie his arms to this big piece of timber, which would be the crosspiece of the cross, and they had to carry that across their shoulders there [to the place of crucifixion]. Well, it wasn't easy to carry that on a *good* day, but if you had been flogged, it was even worse. They were probably in a hurry to get the men to their crosses, and Jesus wasn't going fast enough to carry that piece of the cross, so they randomly conscripted, from the crowd, a man named "Simon of Cyrene."

Cyrene was a vibrant port city on the North African Coast; it's in what would now be modern-day Libya—I'm not sure if it's still called Cyrene or not. Cyrene was also the home to a significant Jewish population. So Simon was one of those thousands of Jewish Pilgrims who traveled to Jerusalem to observe the Passover. He happened to be coming by, and he was the random choice of the executioner. But there's more to the story! God's invisible, sovereign hand is at work here, providentially using the witless actions of the Roman soldiers to draw this poor bystander—he probably looked like a strong young guy—and make him carry the cross. So they wound up bringing him to Jesus, and they played a role in bringing him to *faith!*

Now, notice: Mark identified Simon as "the father of Alexander and Rufus." Now, here's where it's wonderful, how this comes together. That tells us that Mark—who wrote for Gentiles in Rome—he knew that his original readers were acquainted with sons of Simon; and the dots all connect within the pages of Scripture. "Alexander and Rufus" were almost certainly active in the church at Rome, and when Paul would, many years later, write his letter to the church at Rome and send greetings there, he said, in Romans 16:13—"Greet Rufus, a choice man in the Lord, also his mother and mine." Put that together—what's he saying? "Greet Rufus"—he's a

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member of the church in Rome; he's "a choice man in the Lord"—and "also his mother"—who would be the wife of "Simon of Cyrene"—"and mine"—implying that Simon's wife had treated Paul as if he were her own son. So, this family had played a role in ministering to Paul, and he's sending greetings to them. So wondrously, the man who carried Jesus's cross came to embrace Him in saving faith, as did his wife and sons.

Now, that's an avalanche of Scripture. I don't know if I have ever read any more verses than that in one sermon. As we close: take a step back, and think about what we've taken in. And understand: this is here for our edification, "for our instruction" (Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11), for our "reproof," for our "correction," for our "training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). Pilate, a weasel of a political tyrant—he tried to find ways to release Jesus, but he was intimidated into giving in; he actually came to believe that he might somehow be worse off if he risked his standing with Caesar than he would be if he ordered the execution of the Son of God. And remember how he is ultimately described in Mark 15, Verse 15—"Wishing to satisfy the crowd...he handed Him over to be crucified." Pilate did what many had done before, and what countless ones have done since: he put his career, his personal peace and affluence, his comfort—he put all of that above his convictions, and he let them all outweigh the truth. He caved in to the demands of the mob that was stirred up by hypocritical murderers in the Sanhedrin. And in this case, he made himself an accomplice to murder. And unless something happened that we are certainly not told about and was never recorded anywhere outside the Bible, he is headed for "the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:10, 14-15).

Don't get mired in all the details of what happened that night and early in the morning. Obviously, it's *very* important—you can tell by the amount of ink allotted to it in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—but the *most* important response that you can have to all this would be a fresh appreciation for the humiliation and the indignity that Jesus suffered on your behalf (Gal. 2:20; Phil. 2:8; cf. Is. 53:3-4). How humble was He! He "endured the cross, despising the shame," it says in Hebrews 12:2. He was willing to go through all this. And by the way: *none* of these *horrible* things that happened to Him between 1:00 and 9:00 AM, when He was nailed to the Cross—*none of that* saves you! His *physical* suffering is not what saved you—it was Him taking your sin upon Himself on the Cross (Is. 53:5-6, 8, 10-12). That's why—we'll see next time—He screamed out: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Mk. 15:34)—He was bearing the wrath of God for *our* sin! (see Rom. 5:9) He didn't deserve *any* of it! You don't deserve anything that *mild*! "Hallelujah," we might say, "What a Savior!" Come back, Lord Willing, next Lord's Day, and we'll look at the Crucifixion. In the meantime, let's pray:

Our Father, thank You for all the details of this that You have given to us. It does, indeed, show us: this is very important, and You want us to understand it. And oh, how we thank You for the Savior who endured all of this in order to get to the Cross to bear our sins, that we might stand complete in Christ today. Whatever needs to be done in any heart here today, that we might walk with this Savior, that we might not compromise as Pilate and so many others did—Peter, even. Thank You, Father, for Your grace in which we stand; but we pray You'll strengthen us in our faith as we go from this place today. And put the words of the gospel freshly upon our tongues as we go. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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THE SIX PHASES OF THE TRIAL OF JESUS
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Religious Trials

First Jewish Phase, before Annas	John 18:12-24
Second Jewish Phase, before Caiaphas	Matthew 26:57-68 Mark 14:53-65 Luke 22:54
Third Jewish Phase, before the Sanhedrin	Matthew 27:1-2 Mark 15:1 Luke 22:66-71

Civil Trials

First Roman Phase, before Pilate	Matthew 27:11-14 Mark 15:1-5 Luke 23:1-5 John 18:28-38
Second Roman Phase, before Herod	Luke 23:6-12
Third Roman Phase, before Pilate	Matthew 27:15-26 Mark 15:6-15 Luke 23:13-25 John 18:39 - 19:16

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