

Mark: Suffered Under Pontius Pilate

Mark 15:1-15

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Now turn with me once again in the Gospel of Mark, as we come now this evening to the fifteenth chapter and we now move into the final day in the earthly life of Jesus. We're going to be reading Mark 15, and we're going to read together the first fifteen verses.

This is God's holy and inerrant word:

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. And 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. Then Pilate questioned Him again, saying, "Do You not answer? See how many charges they bring against You!" But Jesus made no further answer; so Pilate was amazed.

Now at the feast he 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. 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. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to ask him to release Barabbas for them instead. 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!" Wishing to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas for them, and, after having Jesus scourged, he handed Him over to be crucified.

Our Father in heaven, we thank You now for this Your word. We need Your help, as we always do, to understand it, that we might read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Someone was telling me, I believe on Friday, a story that I had heard before. It's a Ben Shore-type figure asking a group of children a question. He had been describing a creature, furry, who runs across the road, gathers a nut, scampers up a tree and hides it. Long bushy tail.... And he asks the question, "What kind of creature is this?" and the girl puts her hand up and says, "I know the answer is Jesus, but it sounds like a squirrel!"

And there's a sense in which the answer is always "Jesus." There's a sense in which the answer to all of the problems and pain and hurts and confusion and anger and frustration of the last 48 hours is Jesus. And so, in the providence of God, this is a text about Jesus, so it can't be wrong; and what we need more than anything else in all the world is to hear His word and to have His word hidden within our hearts.

It's a story of injustice. It's a story that from an earthly point of view does not make sense. It is foolishness when evil forces conspire to take the life of a young man. Our Father in heaven knows what it is to lose a Son in terrible circumstances.

We've already seen the religious authorities, the Sanhedrin, come together and declare that Jesus is worthy of death. But there's a complex relationship between the Jewish state, and particularly the priestly faction of the Sanhedrin and the Council, and the Roman governing authorities. They had found Him guilty of blasphemy, but in order for Him to be put to death, they would need a better charge than blasphemy. The charge of blasphemy would not hold up in a Roman court. And as Jesus is now brought before the officers of state in the figure of Pontius Pilate, the Roman governing official and prefect of Judea, a charge will now have to be cobbled together: treason. They will make Him out to be a King. And that's why Pilate comes into the picture here.

Don't feel sorry for Pilate. His name of course is now infamous from *The Apostles' Creed*: "He suffered under Pontius Pilate...." Strange, isn't it, that Pontius Pilate's name should be mentioned in a creed of the church? It does, I think, two things. It was of course on one level an assertion of the way in which the state condemned Jesus: that the condemnation of Jesus was total. But it was also, of course, a way of saying that there's a historicity to this man Jesus Christ, this Jesus of Nazareth: that He suffered at a particular point in history, during the reign and rule of this prefect of Judea called Pontius Pilate, dating somewhere between 25 or so and 36 A.D. on the map of history.

There are three things I want us to see tonight, and forgive me if I resort to an alliteration.

I. The Silence of the Lamb.

I want us to see first of all the silence of the Lamb...the silence of the Lamb. You see there in verse 5 how Jesus made no further answer, so that Pilate was amazed; that apart from replying to the question "Are You the King of the Jews?" saying "You have said so," which was a partial answer, Jesus then remains silent. Not a word in His defense. There is of course a Scripture that is being fulfilled here, that

"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."

And I can verify that. I grew up on a farm shearing sheep. I've done it, and they are silent. They seem just to lie there as you hold them until it's over, and you have to almost push them to get them back on their feet again.

There are several layers here that we need to unpack just a little. First of all, He's silent because there is no point in answering these trumped up charges. This is a mob. This is a kangaroo court. There is no justice here. There is no resort to logic or reason here in this court. To speak to these charges might have given them credibility and dignity which they did not possess.

From another point of view, Jesus is fulfilling the word of God, and we've caught the sense of that in these past two weeks especially, that there seems on the very consciousness of Messiah at this point in His life, especially during the last week as He comes in and out of Jerusalem to the temple, that He is deliberately fulfilling the prophecies of Scripture with regard to Messiah. And so here, I think, perhaps repeating to Himself the very words of the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, that fourth Servant Song, and seeing now in Himself a resolution to fulfill its every precept.

And then again I think it's the silence of surrender — a surrender to an overriding providence that, amidst the injustice, amidst the obscenity of what is happening, amidst the sound of gnarling dogs all around Him there's a calm and sweet repose as He contemplates His Father in heaven, and that with His Father in heaven there are no mistakes, and that all that is happening is occurring and falling out according to a plan and purpose in which He Himself as the covenant Mediator had agreed to before the foundation of the world. True enough, in the Garden of Gethsemane He had wrestled with the will of His Father: "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me. Nevertheless, not My will, but Thy will be done." He knows that He is the King of the Jews in the most profound sense imaginable. He's meditating, I think, on how it is now that, as the Servant of the Lord, He resigns, submits Himself in obedience to all that His Father has asked Him to do on behalf of His children.

Pilate may have wielded enormous power. He came from Spain, found himself in

Rome, married the daughter of the Emperor Augustus — a profligate, vile woman. He asked for this job, the prefect of Judea. He was a tyrant. You remember in Luke 13 how the blood of certain Galileans had been mingled in the sacrifices by Pilate on another occasion. He had marched his troops when he was in Caesarea (where he lived most of the time — not in Jerusalem...he was only in Jerusalem at the time of Passover, which was now)...he'd marched Roman soldiers into the very temple precincts bearing the insignia of Rome — an idolatrous act! And a band of Jews went to Caesarea. There was a stand-off of five days. He agreed to meet them in a stadium, and once they were inside the stadium locked the doors and had soldiers all around threatening to kill them. And they lay down on the floor and bared their necks, ready to die. And Pilate had to stand down.

On another occasion in Jerusalem he had taken money from the temple treasury to build an aqueduct, and in the opposition that followed many Jews were slaughtered by Pilate. Pilate may have a lot of power, but the ultimate power and the ultimate sovereignty and the ultimate rule, the ultimate control lies in the hands of His Father in heaven. So the storms may be raging all around, but there's calm serenity and repose about Jesus now, because He sees, knows, and believes His Father's love for Him. The silence of the Lamb.

II. The suffering of the Lamb.

But then in the second place, there is the suffering of the Lamb. Not just, of course, the suffering of the ignominy of His trial, but the reference in verse 1 and again in verse 15 that He was delivered up (in verse 1), delivered up by the Council. They bound Jesus and led Him away and delivered Him over to Pilate. And then again, as a kind of bookend in verse 15, so Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, he delivered Him to be crucified.

Mark has used this word on many occasions now in the Gospel of Mark. It has become something of a technical term. The choir sang it, in fact, this evening from Romans 8. "He spared not His own Son, but freely delivered Him up for us all." It's the same word. It's the word that's used in the Greek translation of the story of Abraham and Isaac, that Isaac was spared...but God did not spare His own Son. He's being delivered up. But especially in verse 15 it is of course the reference to scourging.

The Roman flagellum, cords on which were tied bits of bone and lead — 39 lashes across Jesus' back, until His back was torn to shreds. Eusebius records martyrs under the flagellum with inner organs and arteries being exposed, some even dying from it. Our Lord, our sweet Savior, bruised and battered and bleeding, and bits of flesh hanging from His back, and they mock Him. Soldiers — a whole battalion of soldiers mocked Him, having lost all sense of dignity.

They put a purple robe on Him, which must have turned bright crimson with the blood that flowed from His back, and a crown of thorns upon His head. Why the crown of thorns? Because in the irony of all, thorns was the symbol of the curse that would come in the very Garden of Eden, and here is the One who is to undo that curse. He will bear those thorns in His own crown.

“He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces, He was despised, and we esteemed Him not. Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions; He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement due to our peace was laid upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we've turned everyone to his own way, but the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and He was afflicted; yet He opened not His mouth.”

The silence of the Lamb, and the suffering of Jesus.

III. The substitution of the Messiah.

And thirdly, the substitution of the Messiah. The substitution...especially in verse 11 in the story of Barabbas, this custom that at Passover they would come and they would ask Pilate to release someone in prison as a token of Pilate's clemency. And there's a man, Barabbas...he's an insurrectionist, he's a murderer, a violent man who has, in the cause perhaps of zealotry, killed...justly condemned. And the crowd asks for Barabbas to be released. “And what will you have me do with He who is King of the Jews?” Pilate said. “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” they said.

And you see it, my friends. It's as clear as day, isn't it, what behind the scenes is being taught us here in symbolism: that the guilty one is being let free, and the innocent One, of whom Pilate himself said “I find no fault in Him”, is condemned to death. Is that not substitution? He died, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God; that in order for you and me to hear those sweet notes of covenant blessing, “The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace.” In order for those words of covenant blessing to come to us, He would say to His Son, His only Son, “The Lord curse You. The Lord make His face to turn away from You”; in order for us to know peace and blessing, forgiveness and reconciliation, and fellowship with God and the hope of glory, and the assurance of sins forgiven, His only Son is condemned, and He will be taken from His place and lifted onto a cross and crucified until He is dead.

According to Origin (who is not always to be trusted), but according to Origin, Barabbas' full name was — and it's not unlikely — his full name was Jesus

Barabbas. There's a choice for you. Who will you have, Jesus Barabbas or Jesus of Nazareth? And here is Jesus of Nazareth, and He is going to Calvary as our substitute because

“There is no other good enough to pay the price of sin; He only can unlock the gates of heaven and let us in.”

You remember that story from Ernest Gordon's *Bridge over the River Kwai*, and those prisoners in that terrible, terrible prison being taken out by day to do their work and toil; and as they're leaving in the evening, counting up the shovels...and there's one missing...and a guard shouting hysterically, threatening that unless the soldier, the imprisoned soldier, confesses to having taken the shovel and hidden it, that all are going to die. All die! And eventually one steps forward, and guards come, and with the end of their rifles club him to death. And then they recount the shovels, you remember, and there wasn't one missing. He died to spare the others. He died in their place. He died as their substitute.

And that's our most basic confession tonight, that Jesus died for me, that He bore this suffering that my sins deserve, that my guilt deserves.

“God made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be reckoned the righteousness of God in Him.”

Jesus Barabbas or Jesus of Nazareth...who will you have tonight? Who will you have? Who will you have this weekend, in all of its sorrow? Who will you have to wash away your sins? Who will you have as you lay your head down on the pillow tonight and ask God to give you quiet sleep and rest? Who will you have, Jesus Barabbas or Jesus of Nazareth? Who will you have when the storms are raging all around and life makes no sense, and sorrows abound and your heart is breaking? Who will you have? Jesus Barabbas or Jesus of Nazareth? What's your soul saying tonight? I will have Jesus of Nazareth, because my only hope in life and in death, in the grave, is in Jesus of Nazareth, that He died for me, that He bore the unmitigated wrath of God against Him for me, that He died to win for me the rights and privileges of adoption, so that tonight I may say I am the child of King. “With Jesus, my Savior, I'm the child of a King.”

Are you saying tonight in the midst of all the sorrow and all the pain and all the hurt, “Crown Him!”? Is He the King of the Jews? Yes, He's my King! He's my Lord! He's sitting on a throne in heaven as much now as He was on Friday morning, and He always will be King...King of Kings and Lord of Lords, who one day

“...will come again on the clouds of heaven with a voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will arise. And those who are still alive will be caught up to meet Him in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord.”

This Jesus of Nazareth.

Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for the bedrock of Your word. We thank You that it never, ever changes. We thank You for its sweet comforts and consolations. We thank You that in the midst of a storm it brings us safely into harbor. We pray now for each and every one in this building this evening. Oh, that each one might rest in Jesus Christ, and find in Him their all in all! Hear us, O Lord, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Please stand and receive the Lord's benediction.

Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

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