

“It Is as You Say”
The Gospel According to Mark 15:1-15
January 27th, 2019

A pastor was having an awful time with his congregation and eventually decided to pack it in.

At the close of the next Sunday morning’s service of worship, he announced, "Some years ago Jesus brought me to this congregation. He is now taking me away from it."

With those remarks he sat down abruptly and it was left to one of the elders to announce the closing hymn. "How appropriate," he commented, "that we sing hymn number 629 - 'What a Friend We Have in Jesus.'"

In his book, *The Pleasures of God*, John Piper gives a parable. A country was taken over by a wicked prince. The prince enslaved the people of the nation and has them working in a coal mine.

But, to get to the coal mine, those slaves had to travel across a deep gorge. The wicked prince had a trestle built across the gorge. Every morning the people went across that trestle to work in the mine, and they returned over the trestle each night. There were only two free men in the entire nation, a father and his son. They lived in an inaccessible cave high above the trestle. They hated that trestle because of the slavery to which the people were subjected.

The father and son determine to destroy the trestle. As they planned, it became apparent that, because of the way the trestle is guarded, one of them would have to go out on the trestle carrying explosives. There will not be enough time between planting the explosives and the guards returning to that area for an escape. So, one of them would die with the explosion; he would sacrifice his life.

“The night came when the deed would be done. Their hearts were pounding with joy. It was a hard plan. It would require the sacrifice of the son. To make sure the trestle blew up the two men agreed that the young man would detonate it by hand on the trestle. He would die with the explosion.”

“They believed in heaven, and they loved the people of the land. And so the honor of this sacrifice made their hearts leap with joy. The hour came. The two men folded up the map of their strategy, stood from the table, and embraced each other. When the son got to the door, he turned back with the explosives strapped to his back, looked at the old man, and said, ‘I love you, Father.’ And the old man took a deep breath – with joy – and said, ‘I love you, too, Son.’”

This parable speaks to the events recorded in the passage before us this morning. We come to the 15th chapter of Mark’s account of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The late Bishop of Liverpool, JC Ryle, says of this passage, “It is a part of the Gospel history which should always be read with peculiar reverence.” (Ryle, 335) Another commentator observes, “Jesus before Pilate is an encounter which has captured the imagination of people in every century since then.” (English, 227) Pastor Jay Adams notes of this text, “We tread on holy ground.” (Adams, *The Christian Counselor’s Commentary/Matthew & Mark*, 323)

Indeed, from the third chapter of Genesis through the Old Testament and to the gospel accounts, all of history was headed to this point. God's long promised Messiah was about to be sacrificed for the elect souls He came to earth to save.

Mark 15:1-15:

"Immediately, in the morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council; and they bound Jesus, led *Him* away, and delivered *Him* to Pilate. ² Then Pilate asked Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?"

He answered and said to him, "*It is as you say.*"

³ And the chief priests accused Him of many things, but He answered nothing. ⁴ Then Pilate asked Him again, saying, "Do You answer nothing? See how many things they testify against You!" ⁵ But Jesus still answered nothing, so that Pilate marveled.

⁶ Now at the feast he was accustomed to releasing one prisoner to them, whomever they requested. ⁷ And there was one named Barabbas, *who was* chained with his fellow rebels; they had committed murder in the rebellion. ⁸ Then the multitude, crying aloud, began to ask *him to do* just as he had always done for them. ⁹ But Pilate answered them, saying, "Do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?" ¹⁰ For he knew that the chief priests had handed Him over because of envy.

¹¹ But the chief priests stirred up the crowd, so that he should rather release Barabbas to them.

¹² Pilate answered and said to them again, "What then do you want me to do *with Him* whom you call the King of the Jews?"

¹³ So they cried out again, "Crucify Him!"

¹⁴ Then Pilate said to them, "Why, what evil has He done?"

But they cried out all the more, "Crucify Him!"

¹⁵ So Pilate, wanting to gratify the crowd, released Barabbas to them; and he delivered Jesus, after he had scourged *Him*, to be crucified."

Part of **Mark Chapter 14** was concerned with the Jewish trial Jesus faced. With the opening of Chapter 15, that transitions to the Roman trial He also faced. To explore these verses in more depth, I've segmented the text according to the three people mentioned by name - Pilate, Barabbas, and Jesus.

We begin with Pontius Pilate. Even those loosely affiliated with God's Church have heard of Pilate. His name is memorialized in the words of two creeds we often recite during worship. One is the *Apostles' Creed* - "He (Jesus) suffered under Pontius Pilate..." The other is the *Nicene Creed* - "(Jesus) was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate..." Pilate's name means, "Armed with a spear." He was the Roman Governor of Judea who presided at the trial of Jesus. As governor, Pilate possessed the power of life and death.

Jesus is then brought before Pilate. The initial question Pilate posed to Jesus is word for word identical in each of the four gospel accounts - that question is in verse 2 - "Are You the King of the Jews?" (**Also found in Matthew 27:11; Luke 23:3; John 18:33**) Jesus' response is verbatim in Matthew, Mark, and Luke - "It is as you say," (which I've taken for the title of this sermon).

Why is it important that the Roman governor was seeking to uncover Jesus' identity as a king?
A charged of sedition would compel the Romans to sentence Jesus to death as a dissident

against the Roman government. Anyone who professed to be a king was a rebel against the emperor. As such, he would be found guilty of treason. Verses 3 and 4 of today's passage portray the Jewish religious officials accusing Jesus of many things. Those accusations are listed in **Luke 23:2**, where we read of the priests saying, "We found this *fellow* perverting the nation, and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, saying that He Himself is Christ, a King."

Despite prompting from Pilate to defend Himself against such charges, Jesus said nothing (also in verses 3 & 4). As such, He was fulfilling Old Testament prophesy. For instance, we read in **Isaiah 53:7**, "He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth."

As we ponder Jesus' fortitude in the face of hatred and opposition, **let us make an application to ourselves**. Think back to a time when you may have unjustly been treated by others. *Perhaps you were the victim of false statements or outright lies? Maybe you were attacked by someone on social media? How did you respond?* Personally, I find it difficult to take such a hit without also offering justification to prove the others wrong. I find the counsel of JC Ryle to be helpful, yet challenging when he writes, "Let us learn to suffer patiently, and not to complain, whatever God may think fit to lay upon us. Let us beware of giving way to irritation and ill temper, however provoking and undeserved our trials may seem to be. Nothing in the Christian character glorifies God so much as patient suffering." (Ryle, 337)

Peter puts it this way in **1 Peter 2:20-21**, "For what credit *is it* if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this *is* commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:"

Pilate was no friend of Jesus – He hated all Jews (and, incidentally, the Jews hated the Romans) - but Pilate also realized that Jesus was innocent of the charges brought against Him. Even so, Pilate couldn't afford, in his thinking, to lose face before those who had gathered in Jerusalem for the Passover celebration. Verse 8 teaches that the multitude of the Jews began to demand of Pilate that he would do as he had done in previous Passover celebrations – release a prisoner they requested to be freed.

Pilate sees a possible way out of having to render a difficult decision on a Man he thought was innocent – this Jesus, the King that the Jews wanted dead. So, Pilate asks the mob (in verse 9), "Do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?" Pilate was shrewd; he knew the chief priests and Jewish elders envied Jesus.

At this point, our third person identified by name comes on the scene – Barabbas. The crowd wanted Barabbas, who along with other rebels, was guilty of murder. Interestingly, Barabbas' name means, "Son of the father." Pilate was giving the Jews a choice between two men who were very different from each other. But who also were both "sons of the father," Jesus being God the eternal Son of God the eternal Father.

The Apostle John includes a statement we don't find in Mark's gospel account. The Jews challenged Pilate whom they believed was waffling, and they make this statement found in **John 19:12**, "If you let this Man go (referring to Jesus), you are not Caesar's friend."

That hit close to home. Pilate didn't want to lose favor in the emperor's sight; as the one who appointed Pilate to the governorship, the emperor could also take it away from Pilate. So, Pilate asks the Jewish crowd (verse 12 of **Mark Chapter 15**), "What then do you want me to do *with Him* whom you call the King of the Jews?"

The Jews next show the extent of their disgust of God's Holy One in verse 13, "...they cried out again, "Crucify Him!" As if to further intentionally stir up the frenzy among the unbelieving Jews – or to show the extent of his inability to make a decision - Pilate asks for more information in verse 14, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they cried out all the more, "Crucify Him!"

Let's drive this point home to ourselves today. The crowd in Jerusalem chose lawlessness (Barabbas) instead of righteousness (Jesus). They chose violence instead of love. They chose war instead of peace. We, friends, must take great care that we do not choose Barabbas and reject Jesus. Thousands, if not millions of people, have rejected Christ in order to protect their position or gain a promotion or achieve scholarly respect.

When it gets right down to it, **we** are Barabbas. **We** are the sinners imprisoned by our sin. You may remember a couple of Sundays ago, we sang that great hymn, "Hallelujah, What a Savior." Verse 3 gives this description of us, and of Jesus: "Guilty, vile, and helpless, we; spotless Lamb of God was He;" Like Barabbas, fellow Christian, we are the guilty ones who are set free while the innocent One – Jesus – is put to death. "The great sinner is delivered, and the sinless One remains bound. Barabbas is spared, and Christ is crucified." (Ryle, 339)

Verse 15 reads, "So Pilate, wanting to gratify the crowd, released Barabbas to them; and he delivered Jesus, after he had scourged *Him*, to be crucified." It was customary to flog (whip) criminals before crucifying them. Such Roman floggings were done with leather straps set with pieces of bone, glass, and lead weights. *Can you imagine the damage such a weapon does to a bare back?*

Just look at what God the Son, Jesus Christ, endured for the sake of the souls God the Father had given to Him. He left the bliss of glory to come to earth as a human being; subjecting Himself to all the miseries of this life – being born in a stable, though He was Maker of heaven and earth. Jesus lived a life of perfection – never once did He sin – in deed, word, or thought! Yet, He was found guilty by a Church tribunal as well as the secular Roman government. He was sentenced to die an undeserved death...because our sin is that great – God the Son **HAD** to die in order to pay the enormous debt of our sin.

In light of all of this, let us consider something else. *What if you were on trial for being a Christian? Would there be sufficient evidence to convict you of being a believer in Jesus Christ? Is it as you say?* **Romans 1:16** reads, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek."