

Pilate Before Jesus

Scripture: Mark 15:1–15

Code: 41-79

Let's open the Word of God to the fifteenth chapter of Mark's gospel...the fifteenth chapter as John said, the end is in sight. Chapter 16 looking right ahead of you, perhaps in your Bible on the same page, although this is somewhat of a long chapter.

We come to the opening fifteen verses of Mark and in this particular portion of Scripture, we meet this fascinating character by the name of Pilate...Pilate. He is a name to add to the rogues gallery that we've been accumulating in the drama of the murder of Jesus. Names like Judas, and Annas, and Caiaphas, and Herod, and now the Roman Governor by the name of Pilate, fascinating lineup of infamous, evil characters in the unparalleled drama that unfolds around the crucifixion of Christ. They are all part of the black backdrop set behind the shining glory of the Lord Jesus. All of them tried to use their position and their power and their influence and their wits to bring Jesus to His end. Humanly speaking, they are the co-conspirators who finally accomplished the execution of Jesus.

However, divinely speaking God is the true power and God is the true influence who brings His own Son to the cross. God in reality is the true executioner. He is the one who was pleased to kill His Son as a substitutionary sacrifice for our sins. The Apostle Peter will give testimony to this in his great sermon on the Day of Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2 verses 22 and 23 where he says, "You crucified Him, but by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God." That will be repeated again in the fourth chapter of Acts in a similar apostolic sermon, verses 27 to 28, where while there is human responsibility, God is the one who is accomplishing in the death of Christ His will and His saving purpose. The irony is that Judas from the viewpoint of man bears an immense amount of responsibility for the betrayal of Jesus. He renders, in a sense, the initial death sentence. Annas follows up with his own death sentence. Caiaphas follows with his. Herod plays a role. And Pilate passes final sentence.

But the truth of the matter is, none of them were the cause of the judgment on Jesus Christ. Rather Jesus judged them. Judas thought he rendered a verdict on Christ, but the reality is, man by himself is priced for 30 pieces, Judas sold himself, not Christ. Annas and Caiaphas thought they sat in judgment on Jesus, as did Herod. But the truth of the matter is, He is their judge. And now we see Pilate and I have titled the sermon purposely not Jesus before Pilate, as if Pilate is the judge, but Pilate before Jesus, because in truth, Jesus is the judge.

In all of their verdicts on Jesus, these men condemned themselves as every Christ rejecter does. And Jesus will be the judge of all such. Here is a story of the final player in this Rogues' Gallery, a man named Pilate, a tragic self-serving coward who was on trial for his own life and his own career and his own eternal destiny, as he stood before Jesus. Let's read the account.

"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. 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 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."

In verse 12 is the ultimate question that every human has to answer, what shall I do with Him whom you call the King of the Jews? Everyone has their eternal destiny based on how they answer that question, Pilate and everyone since.

Now as we approach this passage, we start with a brief review so that we can get some momentum coming in to this. The Jewish leaders who made up the Sanhedrin, this Supreme Court of Israel with 70 men plus the High Priest making a total of 71 made up of chief priests and scribes, and elders wanted Jesus dead. It is Passover week in Jerusalem and they want Him dead but they don't want to arrest Him in daylight because they think the mob will react, the people will react because they hailed Him as their Messiah when He came into the city on Monday, so they're afraid to arrest him in full view of the massive populace that has swelled Jerusalem at the Passover.

They don't know how to capture Him at night in the dark because they're not sure where He will be and they're fairly sure that He will be well protected by His followers. However, Judas solves their dilemma. Since he arrived with the twelve on Saturday, he's been looking for an opportunity to betray Jesus. He's negotiated a price of 30 pieces of silver, the price of a slave, and he's looking for the opportunity to betray Him.

In the plan of God, he can't pull it off until after the Passover meal and the institution of the Lord's Supper on Thursday night. It is there on that occasion in the upper room that Jesus exposes him, Satan enters him, and Jesus tells him to go and do what he wills to do and do it quickly.

After midnight then, on that Thursday night into the wee hours of the morning between midnight or around midnight and a little after between then and one o'clock, Jesus and the eleven are in the Garden of Gethsemane, a private garden owned by perhaps a follower of Jesus who gave that to them to use at night. They're there to pray, at least our Lord was praying.

Judas knows the garden, they've gone there many times and he knows that's where they will be and so he leads this massive crowd of up to a thousand people in the darkness of the middle of the night while the rest of the city sleeps to come and capture Jesus. Why so many? Why a Roman cohort that would have a maximum of 600 soldiers? Why all the temple police? Why all the swords and clubs? Because they were afraid that perhaps if the crowds found out, they would rise out of their beds and come and they would have a riot on their hands and a rebellion that would need to be dealt with.

That doesn't happen. They take Jesus prisoner. They take Him immediately to the High Priests quarters and first to Annas, and then to Caiaphas. There is a mock trial before Annas, a mock indictment for looking for some kind of crime against the state, against Rome. Can't find one. Annas gives up on that. Passes Him off to his son-in-law Caiaphas, and you know the story there. False witnesses who are bribed, lie. Their testimony is incoherent. Their testimony is inconsistent. They can't come up with anything that makes sense. They finally are left to accuse Jesus of blasphemy because He said He's the Messiah, the Son of God, thus claiming to be deity.

All of this before Annas and Caiaphas goes on between one and three Friday morning. At three, the trial ends, and Peter's denials end. From three to five now, Jesus is held. He is held prisoner. He is mocked by the Jews who really have custody of Him at this time. He is spit on. He is beaten. He is slapped. And He is blasphemed for several hours.

Sunrise is about 5 A.M. The Sanhedrin, wanting to maintain a veneer of legality, know that Jewish law requires a trial has to be held in the daylight, and so once the sun is up, they hold a mock trial. This is recorded in Luke 22, verses 66 to 71. That's the third phase. The first part of His Jewish trial before Annas, the second before Caiaphas, the third, this brief mock trial early in the morning so that there's some appearance of legality.

Mark says that they made their judgment in the middle of the night. Matthew says the same thing. Luke tells us they had that morning trial to make it look legal. Now the Jewish part is done. But they must bring the Romans into this and that is why we see them binding Jesus here in verse 1 and leading Him away to Pilate.

You might ask, "Why is that?" The answer is in John's gospel, as John's record gives us a very specific answer, John 18:31, "They said, 'We are not permitted to put anyone to death.'" The *exousia gladii*, which is Latin for the power of the sword, was taken from Israel. The power of the sword, the power of execution belonged only to Rome in all its occupied countries.

You say, "Wait a minute. Didn't the Jews stone Stephen to death?" Yes in Acts chapter 7. "And didn't the Jews try to kill Paul as we read in the book of Acts today?" The answer is yes. In fact, they tried on several occasions to kill Paul. But those were mob acts. Those were not the result of legal process. The Jews had no legal right to execution. They had no right to kill. Only the Romans had the right to kill. And apart from mob violence, which they would not do because they were trying to give the veneer, as I said, of legality, the appearance of legality because, after all, they were THE Supreme Court of Israel. They deferred to the Romans. And so, they must get permission from the Romans. In fact, the Romans must do the execution.

This fits Scripture because when the Jews executed in the case of Stephen, they threw him off the edge of some precipice and then stoned him to death. That's what they tried to do with Jesus in the synagogue, according to Luke 4, early in His ministry in Galilee. Their method of mob violence was stoning. But Jesus was to be lifted up. He said that in John 12, didn't He? "If I be lifted up, I will draw all men to Me."

The Talmud confirms this. The Talmud says, "Forty years before the destruction of the temple," this is a quote, that would put it right here in this very time, "Forty years before the destruction of the temple," says the Talmud, "judgment in matters of life and death was taken away from Israel."

The first governor of Palestine or Israel was Coponius of whom Josephus wrote, quote: "He had the power of death put into his hands by Caesar." So we have historical evidence that they did not have the power of death and that's what they said, as the gospel of John records. So their case must come to Pilate. Now we pick it up in verse 1.

"Early in the morning the chief priests with the elders, after the mock trial in the day, come," that's essentially the whole Council. "Immediately held a consultation." The whole Council is unanimous on this. They are all committed to the death of Jesus. It is a unanimous decision. So they hold their consultation as to this legal issue of having the Romans by necessity do the execution. So they bind Jesus. John gives us more details in John 18. He is bound and taken off to Pilate.

By the way, just one little note here. The Jewish law required a 24-hour period before an execution after a sentence had been rendered in order that new evidence could be brought forth if there was any such new evidence. They're not interested in this new evidence and so they rush through their judgment and they rush to execution briefly after they have had their last trial. If their final public trial was somewhere after five o'clock, Jesus will be on the cross by nine o'clock. In the intervening time will allow for this interaction with Pilate and in a little bit we'll see also with Herod.

Meanwhile, we can go back to another interesting thing going on. It is around this time that Judas begins to feel remorse, according to Matthew 27:1 to 10, and he goes back into the presence of the Sanhedrin and he throws the money down and says, "I have betrayed innocent blood," and then rushes from there to try to hang himself. He succeeds in committing suicide and the rope breaks or the branch breaks and his bowels are gushed out on the rocks below.

But let's go to the phase one of the trial, the Gentile trial before Pilate. "Binding Jesus," the end of verse 1, "they led Him away and delivered Him to Pilate." Pilate, by the way, has a very elevated opinion of his power. He says to Jesus, "Don't you know that I...I have authority over you, I can do anything I want to you," John 19:10. "Jesus says, 'You have no authority over Me at all if it was not given you from on high.'"

But Pilate, from his own vantage point, at least, thinks that he has power over Jesus. He's another one like Judas who thought he could exercise power, like Annas, like Caiaphas, like the corporate Sanhedrin. And now Pilate. He thinks he has the destiny of Jesus in his hands. The truth is, Jesus has his destiny in His hands. No earthly power can determine the destiny of Jesus, but every soul's destiny is determined by what he does with Jesus.

Jesus then is in Pilate's judgment hall, at somewhere around six A.M., between five and six A.M. All of this happens very rapidly. These places are very, very close together. John gives us a little more detail, and it's good to get this detail, although we won't spend a lot of time digging down into it, go to John 18 for a moment, a little more detail is necessary.

"They led Jesus from Caiaphas into the praetorium and it was early. And they themselves did not enter into the praetorium so that they would not be defiled, but might eat the Passover." These hypocrites are something, aren't they? They don't want to be defiled while they're trying to murder the Son of God, because they don't want to step on Gentile land, they don't want to get into Gentile space, Gentile building, a Gentile room, a Gentile praetorium because they would ceremonially

defiled by contact with the Gentile. But they bring Jesus to the praetorium. Pilate went out to them, because they wouldn't go in, and said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?" This is a legal question. Pilate is acting now as a judge. He is a judge. He is Rome's primary judge. He is the final court of appeal in Israel for Rome and for any cases that need to be adjudicated by Rome.

But they don't want Pilate as a judge. They want Pilate merely as an executioner. They don't want another trial. They don't want a retrial. They don't want any questions like this to be asked. So they simply answer, in verse 30, "If this man were not an evil doer, we would not have delivered Him to you." They don't want to answer the question, they want to impugn Pilate for asking the question. As if to say, who are you to distrust us? We wouldn't be bringing Him to you to execute because you alone have the power to execute unless there was reason. He is an evil doer, that's why we're here and that's why we brought Him.

Now you have to know that Pilate was fully aware of Jesus. He had been fully aware of Jesus who knows how long, who knows how many weeks or months or years he had known about Jesus. But certainly he was very well acquainted with Jesus that week. His responsibility was security in the city of Jerusalem and when Jesus entered the city there would have been a massive reaction by the Roman power to make sure they secured the security of that city because people were rising up and hailing Jesus as the Messiah, a new leader, a new King, a new anointed one. His troops were in on that from the very beginning.

And, of course, the cohort were the ones that went into the Garden of Gethsemane to arrest Jesus. And as I said at the time when we looked at that, permission had to be granted for them to do that by Pilate himself. He was well aware of the issues concerning Jesus and he is also well aware that this is a blatant miscarriage of justice. He knows that. He knows that.

So Pilate said to them in verse 31, "Take Him yourselves and judge Him according to your law." Kill Him yourself. He gives them permission to execute Jesus. He gives them permission to execute Jesus. And the Jews said to him, "We're not permitted to put anyone to death." They're going to be so noble that they would never think of over-stepping the parameters of Roman law. We're not going to do that. We really are not allowed to do that.

All of a sudden they're becoming so legal, so righteous. They don't want the responsibility of executing Jesus. They don't want to deal with the implications and repercussions. They've got to give Pilate some reason for executing Jesus and Luke 23:2 comes in at this point, they make three accusations. This is what they said. He is perverting our nation. He is forbidding to pay taxes. And He's claiming to be King.

All false, all lies, He did not pervert the nation, they did. He did not forbid to pay taxes. He told people to pay their taxes and He paid His own. And while He claimed to be a King, His Kingdom was never of this world. They lied.

But that was nothing new for them. You'll notice verse 31 ends, "We're not permitted to put anyone to death." Verse 32 says, "To fulfill the Word of Jesus which He spoke, signifying by what kind of death He was about to die." And what was the Word of Jesus which He spoke that signified what kind of death He would die? John 12:32 and 33, "If I be lifted up," which was a prophecy of the elevated posture of a victim of crucifixion.

Now we go back to the fifteenth chapter of Mark. This is what happened between verses 1 and 2. "Pilate then questioned Him, 'Are You the King of the Jews?'" He ignored the first one that He had perverted the nation. He ignored the second one that He was telling the people not to pay their taxes. And He went right to the third one because this one fascinated Him the most apparently. "Are You the King of the Jews?" And, of course, there is scorn in that because there's nothing about Jesus that makes Him look royal or regal. Remember His condition at this time. He has still a garment on that has been profusely stained by sweat and blood. He has a face that is battered and bruised from punches and slaps, spit all over His face. He has not been washed. "Are You the King of the Jews?" There's irony and perhaps sarcasm in that.

"And He answered him, 'It is as you say. It is as you say.'" That is a legitimate question and our Lord gives a legitimate answer. Pick up on John's version of this. "Pilate entered into the praetorium, summoned Jesus in, got Him inside, said to Him, 'Are You the King of the Jews?' Jesus answered, 'Are you saying this on your own initiative or did others tell you about Me?' Pilate answered, 'I'm 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.' Pilate said to Him, 'What is truth?'"

Wow! An agnostic, a cynic. "And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews and said to them, 'I find no guilt in this man.'"

Well let's go back again to Mark's gospel. "Are You the King of the Jews?" "It is as you say." "When Pilate says, 'I find no guilt in this man,' the chief priests, verse 3, began to accuse Him harshly...harshly."

In fact, according to Luke 23:5 they were saying things like He stirs up the whole nation. He stirs up the people all through Judea and even as far away as the Galilee. But we also read, Matthew 27:12 to 14, that while He was being accused at this point, He never said a word to the Jews and He never said a word to Pilate defending Himself, He answered Pilate's legitimate question, and gave him the correct and extensive answer about the nature of His Kingdom, the fact that He was a King. But when the crowd began to scream and accuse Him, He never answered at all. Verse 4, "Pilate questioned Him again saying, 'Do You not answer? See how many charges they bring against You?'" They were just throwing charges at Him. These are the Sanhedrin members. These are the judges of Israel. This is the Supreme Court. And there's a rare silence in court. Jesus gives no defense against these lies, against this illegal barrage. Verse 5, "Jesus made no further answer, so Pilate was amazed," from the verb *thaumazo*, to marvel, to be in wonder.

Here was somebody being accused of all kinds of things that He didn't do, that weren't true. And He makes no defense...makes no defense. What's Pilate going to do? Pilate's in a tough spot. Between verse 5 and 6, something happens. What happens?

He sends Jesus to Herod. For the record of this, go to Luke 23. I've tried to put the chronology together for you and this is an accurate reflection of that chronology. If you go back to Luke 23, you

will see the same scene, the people kept on insisting, the people are saying He stirs up the people, He teaches all over Judea, starting from Galilee even as far as this place. Verse 7 then says, "When he learned that He belonged to Herod's jurisdiction..." Wow! He's a Galilean. They said as far as Galilee. Now, maybe that's a way out.

So now we come to the second phase of the trial. He decides that if He's from Galilee, that's Herod's jurisdiction. So he sent Him to Herod who himself also was in Jerusalem at that time.

Now let me introduce you to Herod, just very briefly, this Herod. There was a Herod called Herod the Great. Those kinds of names are usually self-granted. Herod called himself Herod the Great. He was not a Jew, he was an Idumaeen. He ruled Israel, he was an amazing builder. He built the temple and a whole lot of other things. But Herod the Great died in 4 B.C. and he divided the Kingdom among his four sons, the Kingdom of Israel among four sons. The area of Galilee and Perea, east of the sea of Galilee went to his son named Herod Antipas...Herod Antipas and he ruled for a long time 4 B.C. to 39 A.D., ruled forty-plus years.

Now he ruled, like all the Herods ruled, all the four sons, as a vassal of Rome. He had to be pleasing to Rome or they would obliterate him. He was educated in Rome. He went to Rome. He was educated in Rome. He was empowered by Rome and he served at the pleasure of Rome. So he was just a vassal, a petty king who served the purposes of Rome. Like his father, he was a builder. Like his brothers, he was a builder. In fact, collectively they built at least twelve cities including the city of Sepphoris which was then the largest city in Galilee, completed in 8 to 10 A.D. It doesn't appear in the New Testament because it was a city where Jews didn't go and didn't live.

Later he built the city of Tiberius and Tiberius was even a worse place for Jews to contemplate living because it was built over a cemetery and they thought it was a desecration of the cemetery and it was built on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee in honor of Tiberius Caesar who replaced Augustus in 14 A.D. And Herod Antipas had built that city. So he was a great builder. It was an unclean city. Jews wouldn't go there. In fact, they refused to go there and so in order to get them to go there, they gave them free land, free houses and tax exemptions if they would just go live there. It became Herod Antipas' capital city and home. It was colonized, but it was colonized by foreigners and misfits and migrants and destitute people and freed slaves and all kinds of riff-raff. There's no indication in the four gospels Jesus ever went to Tiberius.

Now you know the story of Herod Antipas. You know the ugly story. He married the daughter of Aretas, the king of Nabatea. It was an alliance marriage. And then he decided to divorce her and steal the wife of his half-brother and so there was an incestuous adulterous relationship there. John the Baptist confronted that relationship and John the Baptist lost his head over that. It was served on a platter.

This was not a nice man, Herod Antipas. He was a very wicked man. He was an incestuous man, he was a murderous man. He was an immoral man. And we've said a lot about him in our study of Scripture. He engaged in adultery and divorce and even in execution of the prophet of God.

Now did Herod Antipas have any personal knowledge of Jesus? Answer: yes, he did. He heard about Jesus, according to Mark 6:14 to 16. And he feared that this Jesus was John the Baptist back from the dead. You remember that? Because he had murdered John the Baptist, he had all kinds of

guilt. And when he heard about this miracle-working preacher named Jesus, he was afraid that this was John the Baptist back from the dead and he wanted to see Jesus, but never did...never did.

There was a second connection between Herod Antipas and Jesus. Jesus' final trip to Jerusalem, some Pharisees came to Jesus, and they warned Him to flee the region because Herod Antipas wanted to kill Him. That's in Luke 13:31 to 33. Jesus said to those Pharisees, "Sorry, God has other plans. Herod Antipas is not going to kill me." And here's the third time that they interact. The first two, they never saw each other. This time they do, Jesus is sent by Pilate finally to Herod Antipas who wanted to see Him and apparently on another occasion wanted to kill Him and now has his opportunity.

Verse 8, "Herod was very glad when he saw Jesus for he had wanted to see Him for a long time because he had been hearing about Him and hoping to see some signs performed by Him." Wanted to see miracles. "He questioned Him at some length but He answered him nothing. And the chief priests and the scribes were standing there, accusing Him vehemently." They followed Jesus to Herod. And they're there with the same screaming, screeching accusations. "And Herod with his soldiers, after treating Him with contempt, and mocking Him, 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 they had been before enemies with each other."

When Herod finally meets Jesus, he's not impressed. He thinks it's a joke. He looks at this beleaguered man and he concludes that this is no threat to anybody. By the way, he's in Jerusalem because it is the Passover. He's there. He's in the Hasmonaean palace which is right in the similar vicinity. And he questions Jesus, verse 9 says, at some length. He fires a lot of questions, this is his time, he thinks, to judge Jesus. And Jesus doesn't answer any question, not any question. The only time He answered questions was when they were legitimate questions, when the Sanhedrin asked Him a legitimate question and He answered, "Yes, I am the Messiah, Yes I am the Son of God." And when Pilate asked Him a legitimate question about His identity, and He said, "Yes I am a King but not in the way that you think." He says nothing to defend Himself and the chief priests and the scribes keep firing the accusations. They put a gorgeous robe on Him, the word is *lampros*, it means brilliant, shining, bright, very possibly a white robe because Jewish monarchs were prone to wear white robes. Agrippa is said to have had a white robe with silver woven through it, some kind of a dazzling robe on Him. And this is part of the comedy that's now beginning to crank up. This is a joke, that this man is a King, that this man is a threat is ridiculous, absolutely ridiculous.

Herod wants nothing to do with Him. He just sent Him back, verse 11, to Pilate. And then the strange comment in verse 12, that they had been enemies and they became friends. We know why they were enemies. Philo, the historian, records that Pilate put shields in Herod Antipas' palace. Romans shields with names of people that the Romans wanted to honor, that Pilate wanted to honor, he puts these shields in the house of Herod Antipas. The Jews believe these are idols. The Jews are upset. They send a message to Tiberius Caesar that Pilate is setting up idols in the city of Jerusalem. Tiberius Caesar thinks it's ridiculous to provoke these people. He tells Pilate to take them down and to haul them off to Caesarea, the Roman city on the coast, and put them in a pagan temple. Pilate does that, but he's not real happy about having done that. The fact that Pilate did that and usurped that authority over Herod Antipas made them enemies. Herod Antipas wouldn't have put those idols in his palace, Pilate did it and they were hostile and from that time on until they agreed on what a joke Jesus was.

Why does Pilate send Jesus to Herod? I think from Pilate's point, to confirm Jesus' innocence. That's what I think. I think...I think he wanted Herod to say, "I agree with you, this man hadn't done anything." And de facto, that's essentially what Herod did when he sent Him back without any kind of sentence, without any kind of adjudication. From God's viewpoint, this is just another testimony in the mouth, if you will, de facto of a second witness, Deuteronomy 19:15, of the innocence of Jesus. It was only the Jews who want the Son of God murdered, only the Jews. So Jesus is now sent back to Pilate. So let's go back in Mark 15 and we'll wrap it up. Back He goes to Pilate.

Now as we come back to Pilate at verse 6, I want to stop here and talk a little bit about Pilate, okay? Let me just give you a sort of a sketch of this man. We know he actually lived. He's a historical figure. Philo, the historian, Tacitus, the historian, and Josephus all write about him. He was the governor of Israel for a long period time, relatively long period of time, from 26 to 36 A.D., for at least ten years. We know that he lived from archaeological finds.

Near Caesarea a stone has been found. That stone, archaeologists dug up, is inscribed to Tiberius Caesar and it makes reference to a man named Pilate as the prefect of Judea. So we have the testimony of historians, and the testimony of archaeology. He is a prefect, or a governor, or a procurator, any of those words will do. And what his responsibility was is multiple. One, he commanded the Roman military. Two, he collected taxes. And three, he judged matters related to Rome. So he was a combination military leader, administrative leader and judge. In fact, it was the Roman governor who approved the High Priests in Israel.

Now Pilate was hated by the Jews. He was hated by them because of things like putting up idols, from their perspective, in their buildings. But what is interesting about Pilate here to me is that he repeatedly declares that Jesus is not guilty. "I find no fault in Him," three times, three times he pronounces Him not guilty. And the man didn't get to the position he had by not having a sense of justice. He did have a sense of justice. He wanted to stand on justice. He wanted to maintain his legal ground. He wanted to do what was fit for a man of that dignified position. He wanted to do what would prove to the people who were above him that he was an honorable man. He wanted to treat Jesus in a just fashion.

Justice is no threat to him. Jesus is certainly no threat to him, or to Rome. But I'll tell you who is a threat to him, the Jews are. They make his knees knock. They make him shake. Here's why. On his first visit to Jerusalem, he came into town wanting to make a big show and he came with this massive entourage of soldiers and they were carrying banners and standards and on the banners and standards were the busts of Caesar with an eagle. Caesar was considered a deity and the Jews saw this as an idol. By the way, all previous governors from the historical records, all previous governors avoided such offenses, but Pilate was this brash, bold, proud man, adamant in refusing to remove the displays. He returned from Jerusalem with his banners, back to Caesarea and the people followed him. And what happened was, when they got to Caesarea, the records says they harassed him for five days to remove the idols.

Finally in frustration, he told the people to meet in the amphitheater in Caesarea. And they came and he surrounded the people who had followed him with his soldiers and he informed them that if they didn't stop the harassment on the spot, they would all be massacred in that amphitheater by the Roman soldiers. The Jews pulled their collars down and bared their necks and said, "Go ahead and massacre us." They called his bluff and he removed all the images and they had won.

A second thing got him in trouble with the Jews, the Jerusalem water supply was inadequate, so Pilate determined to build an aqueduct and he took the money out of the temple treasury. That's supposed to be money that's corban, devoted to God. So the people rioted and Pilate sent men into the rioting Jewish crowd at a given signal and they clubbed and stabbed these Jewish people to death and a massacre took place. This just added to their hatred of this man.

And when he was in Jerusalem, he lived in that Hasmonaean, Herodian palace and that's where he put up the shields in honor of Tiberius Caesar and other persons that were honored by having their names on the shield and refused to remove them until they went to Rome and protested and Caesar forced him to do it. He hated the Jews.

In the thirteenth chapter of Luke, in the opening five verses, it says he sent some of his men into the temple where some Jewish people were making sacrifice and they took their knives and slaughtered all the people who were making sacrifices in the temple. This is Pilate. He was called back to Rome in 36 A.D., he was exiled to Gaul and he killed himself, according to Josephus.

Pilate now is in a very precarious place in our scene because he knows that he has failed so many times in dealing with the Jews, and he's afraid if they report him to Caesar again, he is really done. And they remind him of that. We will tell Caesar if you don't do what we want. You're no friend of Caesar.

Trying to hang on to justice, he makes an appeal which is recorded in the twenty-third chapter of Luke. He said to them, "You brought this man to me as one who incites the people to rebellion, and behold, having examined Him before you, I found no guilt in this man regarding the charges which you make against Him, nor has Herod for he sent Him back to us. And behold, nothing deserving death has been done by Him. Therefore...how's this for a conclusion?...therefore I will punish Him and release Him."

Punish Him for what? You just said He didn't do anything. "I will punish Him unjustly, illegally, cowardly and then release Him. Wouldn't you be satisfied with that? If I just lash Him?"

Now we pick up the story in Mark 15 again. "At the feast, he used to release for them," this is phase three; Pilate, phase 1; Herod, phase 2; back to Pilate, phase 3. "He used to release for them any one prisoner whom they requested." This was a kind of a way to conciliate with an occupied people, amnesty. Amnesty for one prisoner of the people's choice. By the way, ancient sources say this was a provision of good will that the Roman governors did in a lot of places to try to maintain some sense of mercy. And he was sure, I think, that the people would want Jesus. After all, Jesus was the miracle worker. So he's done with the Sanhedrin. He's not going to deal with them anymore. They're incorrigible. But now he's going to turn to the population and he feels he's on pretty safe ground finally here because of what happened on Monday when Jesus came in and they hailed Him as their King. So he's going to move away from the vicious, unjust leaders and he's going to address the people who have been given the privilege on occasions like this, at the Passover, to choose a prisoner to be released and to receive amnesty. "The man named Barabbas...verse 7...was his choice as an option. He had been imprisoned with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the insurrection." By the way, Barabbas means "son of the father," bar-abbas...*abba* is papa, *bar* is son of. This is the son of the father offered in the place of the divine Son of the divine Father.

This man, is a robber. Here he is a murderer. He is a revolutionary. He is called by Luke a notable prisoner, well known, surely headed for crucifixion and they didn't wait. The Romans didn't wait, crucifixion came fast. The insurrection must have been very, very, very near, just happened in a matter of days before, perhaps. Insurrections, by the way, like this and revolts were not unusual. There was one of these in 66 that led to the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70 A.D. Barabbas probably...well let's just say maybe, was the one who should have been on the middle cross with the other two who may well have been partners in this insurrection.

Pilate thinks maybe this is going to be the way out. Turn to the people. "The crowd went up, verse 8, and began asking him to do as he had been accustomed to do for them." Hey, it's the Passover, release a prisoner. Gathering in the early morning, attracted by the public proceedings regarding Jesus, this thing begins to gather a crowd in the early hours. They come before Pilate. They want what they're entitled to by precedent. So Pilate answers them in verse 9 and says, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" There's so much scorn in that.

He is a man full of bitterness, guilt, hate. Let history record that this pagan knew Jesus was innocent of all charges. And he gives the people of Israel the choice to stop the corrupt efforts of the Sanhedrin and to have Jesus released. He turns to the people, expecting the response "Yes, we want Jesus, the great teacher, the greatest teacher ever, the miracle worker. We want Jesus."

And the reason thought he was on safe ground is in verse 10, a very interesting verse. "He was aware the chief priests had handed Him over because of envy." That's correct. That's...if you're looking for a motive here, there it is. They were jealous. I told you that a few weeks ago, they were jealous of His power, they were jealous of His popularity. They were jealous of His teaching. They hated Him because of envy and he knew that. And he was sure it was the envy of the leaders that made them the way they were and if he went to the people, it would be different because the people had hailed Him as their King and their Messiah.

There's a little incident that occurs at this time, also recorded by Matthew. In Matthew 27 and verse 19, "While he was sitting on the judgment seat, 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.'"

You know, people in pagan worlds believe in dreams and the seriousness of dreams. Well was this a divine revelation? No. This was just absolute fear on the part of his wife, transferred into a dream. "Don't have anything to do with this righteous man, for last night I suffered greatly in a dream because of Him." Listen to this, "But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to put Jesus to death."

In the middle of all of this he gets a note from his wife. And while he's considering this concern of his wife, the Sanhedrin is moving in the crowd and they're stirring up the crowd and they effectively persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to put Jesus to death. So when the governor said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" they said, Barabbas.

Her fears showed up in her dreams as fears do. She is another witness to the innocence of Jesus. Have nothing to do with this righteous man. While Pilate is conversing with his wife, the Sanhedrin is turning the mob. And we pick it up again in verse 11 of Mark 15, "The chief priests stirred up the crowd to ask him to release Barabbas for them instead." It's unthinkable. What did Barabbas ever do

for anybody? What good was Barabbas? And yet Luke says they all together declared they wanted Barabbas. In fact, in Luke 23:18 it's recorded that they said, "Away with this man and release Barabbas...release Barabbas." Let the guilty live, kill the sinless one. Treat the guilty as innocent, and treat the innocent as guilty.

So now they render their verdict on Jesus and then the reality of it, that Jesus renders His verdict on them. And Luke says, "Pilate wanting to release Jesus still, addresses the crowd again," verse 12, "Pilate said them, 'Then what shall I do with Him whom you call the King of the Jews?' What do I do with Him? Verse 13, "The shouted back, 'Crucify Him,'" that's the crowd. They have been led into this hysteria by the Sanhedrin. It's really had to understand, isn't it? From Monday a Friday. They join the rest of the corrupt blasphemers. They take their place with Judas, and Annas, and Caiaphas, and Herod, and Pilate, and the Sanhedrin. And Pilate still incredulous, verse 14 said to them, "Why? What evil has He done?" Another declaration of innocence...another one.

But the crowd is relentless. They shouted all the more, "Crucify Him." It's an amazing Passover day, isn't it? They were there that day to honor God with a Passover meal. This was the high point of worship for them. They were there to bring their sacrifices before God to show their obedience to God. They were there to eat the commemorative meal that remembered the deliverance of God, the goodness of God, the mercy of God that brought them out of slavery in Egypt. They were remembering God and His goodness. While at the same time screaming for the death of the Son of God.

Pilate's finished. Done in. And he collapses under the threat. He has to bow to their will. And the first line in verse 15 is an amazing statement. "Wishing to satisfy the crowd," how's that for an epitaph? Pilate who wished to satisfy the crowd. Write that in stone over his life.

It's a despicable thing. Over and over and over he declares the innocence of Jesus. "But he released Barabbas for them and after having Jesus scourged, he handed Him over to be crucified."

Some legends grew up about the end of his life. Really interesting ones. A little research reveals them. We know he committed suicide, that's history. But legend says that after he committed suicide, his body was taken and thrown into the Tiber River, the main river that runs through Rome. At which moment when the body hit the water, the water became so disturbed by evil spirits, that the body was removed, taken to Vienna and thrown into the Rhone River where there is a monument there today titled "Pilate's Tomb." It's a legend, but it's not the end of the legend. The Rhone apparently, according to another legend, rejected Pilate's corpse so it was again removed and it was thrown in the Lake in Luzon Switzerland. It was taken out of that place because they didn't want it and it was removed to a mountain near Lucerne Switzerland. Some say it is in another lake called Lagodepilato in the Sibylline mountains in Italy. You could guess from the name of the lake, Lagodepilato that somebody believes it was put there in that little lake, and legend says that every Good Friday, Pilate's body emerges from the waters and he washes his hands.

In contrast, there is a bizarre eastern Ethiopian orthodox cult called Tebaletto in the sixth century, they sainted Pilate...St. Pilate. Truth? Killed himself and his body dissolved and his soul is forever in hell.

So he adjudicates his final decision, "After having Jesus scourged, he handed Him over to be

crucified.” Matthew says the screams for Jesus to be crucified were so strong and so relentless, Matthew 27:24, that Pilate feared a riot was starting...a riot. And Matthew writes this, Matthew 27 verse 25, “And all the people said his blood be on us and our children.” They took full responsibility for the murder of Jesus.

Little wonder that the Lord destroyed that city and that nation in 70 A.D., is it? Little wonder that that nation remains under judgment to this very day, until they repent and come to Christ, which many Jews do individually and one day in the future will do nationally. Scourged, what does it mean to be scourged? It means to be whipped, flogged is another term that could express that, whips, a wooden handle, long thongs embedded in the ends of the thongs would be pieces of bone, sharp pieces of bone and stone and iron, massive blood loss. Many people died, there would be two lictors alternating blows. He was handed over to be scourged.

This is such an ugly experience. It was done not only as a form of punishment, but to speed up death on the cross, otherwise people could linger for a long time and the blood loss sped up the reality of death.

In John 19 we get a more detailed account of this. “The soldiers twisted,” John 19:2, “together a crown of thorns, put it on His head, put a purple robe on Him, began to come up to Him and say, ‘Hail, King of the Jews,’ as the comedy continues, the irony, the sarcasm, the mockery, the scorn and they gave Him slaps in the face like they had seen the Sanhedrin do. Pilate came out again and said to them, ‘Behold, I’m bringing Him out to you so that you may know that I find no guilt in Him.’” This is after the scourging. He brings Him back. “Jesus came out this time wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe the soldiers had put on Him in mockery. And Pilate said, ‘Behold the man, take a look at Him.’” Is that not enough? “So when the chief priests and the officers saw Him, they cried out saying, ‘Crucify, Crucify.’ Pilate said to them, ‘Take Him yourselves and crucify Him, for I find no guilt in Him.’ And the Jews answered, ‘We have a law and by that law He ought to die because He made Himself out to be the Son of God.’” Now they forget the tax issue and they forget the King issue, and they forget the perverting of the nation and they come to the blasphemy. He has to die because He said He’s the Son of God.

“Therefore, when Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid and he entered into the praetorium again and said to Jesus, ‘Where are You from?’ Jesus gave him no answer. Pilate said to him, ‘You don’t speak to me? Do You not know that I have authority to release you and I have authority to crucify you?’ Jesus answered, ‘You would have no authority over Me unless it had been given from above, for this reason he who delivered Me to you has the greater sin.’ As a result of this, Pilate made efforts to release Him. But the Jews cried out saying, ‘If you release this man, you are no friend of Caesar. Everyone who makes himself out to be a king opposes Caesar.’ Now he knew if they went to Caesar again on his behalf, he was history. When he heard these words, he brought Jesus out, sat down on the judgment seat at a place called the Pavement, in Hebrew *Gabbatha*. It was the day of preparation for the Passover, the sixth hour.”

Six A.M. in the morning when this ends, likely. And he says to the Jews, “Behold your King.”

“And they cried out, ‘Away with Him, away with Him, Crucify Him.’ Pilate said to them, ‘Shall I crucify your King?’ The chief priests answered, ‘We have no King but Caesar.’ So he handed Him over to be crucified.”

How can this happen? Well one answer is because man is so totally wretched. But the other answer is because God is so totally merciful. Here we see the worst of men and the best of God. He is bruised for our iniquities, isn't He, as Isaiah 53 says.

Rabbi Ben Ezra, contemplating what happened that day in history, wrote this, and I quote from him, he's addressing Jesus. "You, if you were Messiah who at midnight watch came by starlight naming a dubious name, and if too heavy with spiritual sleep, too rash with fear, O You, Messiah, if that martyr gash fell on You, coming to take Your people, and we gave You the cross when we owed You the throne, You be the judge." Humph...He is the judge and they have been judged and so will all be who reject Christ.

Father, as we have looked into this text, there is so much here, so much drama, so much that captures our mind and our fascination, more than we can even absorb in an hour like this. We're so deeply grateful that You have given us such complete record, such marvelous interwoven eyewitnesses and records by the writers of the gospels so that we know exactly what happened. We understand the reason for all of this was not so that the wickedness of man could be on display, that's on display all the time. But so that the love of You, our great God for sinners could be on display. He died for us, pleased You to crush Him, to bruise Him for us, He took our place, bore all of this for us. How wonderful, how incomprehensible, we can't understand how men could do this, but even more, we can't understand how You, a holy God, could do this to Your Son. O how much You love Your Son that You would do this to Him in order that You might provide for Him an everlasting and eternal bride, a redeemed humanity to praise and serve Him forever and ever. We glory in this reality in the cross with all its horrors, we embrace the cross and we find there love demonstrated at its highest level. We thank You that we've experienced that through the work of the Holy Spirit, bringing us to regeneration, repentance and saving faith and we give You praise and glory in Your Son's name. Amen.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2018 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<https://www.gty.org/about#copyright>).