

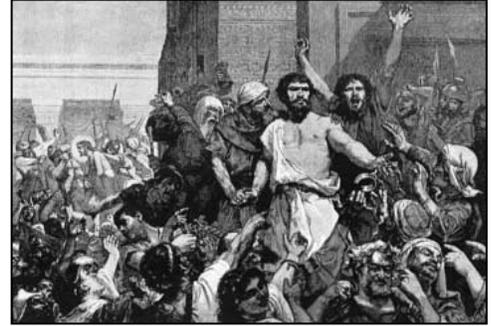
Jesus vs Barabbas

[Mark 15:1-15](#)



We have seen Jesus arrested in the middle of the night while He was praying in [Gethsemane](#) and hustled off to the high priest's palace where He is interrogated. Then at dawn, the Sanhedrin officially meets to condemn him. Now they must convince Pilate of Jesus' guilt in order to have him executed.

When we put all four Gospels together we see that Jesus endured a night of six trials. The first trial was before [Annas](#), the political boss of Jerusalem. The second was before [Caiaphas](#), the High Priest. The third trial was held at daybreak before the [Sanhedrin](#) to make it legal. A trial at night was invalid. The fourth trial was before [Pilate](#) and Pilate found no guilt in this man from Nazareth. The fifth trial was before the Jewish monarch [Herod](#) who demanded a miracle and when Jesus would not perform for him has him beat and sent Jesus back to Pilate. The sixth trial was before Pilate again in which he again found no fault in Him but put him before the people to be released, but the people chose [Barabbas](#).



Mark's account selects only three of these six trials. The second trial; before Caiaphas the high priest which we examined in chapter fourteen, and now, in chapter fifteen, the fourth and sixth trials before Pilate.

All four Gospels mention the trial of our Lord before Pilate. Mark's account is only 15 verses. Matthew covers the trial in 26 verses (with verses 3-10 dealing with the remorse and suicide of Judas), while the text of Luke is 25 verses, and John's account is the most detailed, with 27 verses. We really need to examine all four accounts to get the full picture.

And 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 up to Pilate. (Mark 15:1 NASB)

Once daybreak came the whole Sanhedrin was called together officially, and after discussion and confirmation of what had happened during the night, there followed a guilty verdict. Their charge against Jesus was blasphemy; therefore they believed Jesus was worthy of death. So now they bind Jesus and they're going from southwest Jerusalem through town to northwest Jerusalem, from the palace of Caiaphas the high priest to the palace of Herod, where Pilot would have his headquarters. But they also understand that the charge of blasphemy would be of no interest to Pilot. They had to come up with a political charge that would force Pilot to take action. So the charge is that Jesus is claiming to be King of the Jews. That would make Him guilty of high treason.

The Sanhedrin is taking no chances. They move *en masse* to Pilate's residence in Jerusalem.

A little history on Pilate

Here we are introduced to Pilate, whose name is long remembered in history as the man who gave the order to send Jesus to His death. Pilate, whose name is Latin for “one skilled with a javelin”, was the Roman consul for Judea and Samarian for ten years, from AD 26 to AD 36. He was the fifth Roman counsel in this region and the name Pontius means: “fifth” and may be more of a title than a name. Little is known of him prior to coming to Jerusalem but much of his activities there and his subsequent career is recorded by [Josephus](#), [Philo of Alexandria](#), and later [Eusebius](#).

The region which he controlled for Rome was considered the most difficult of postings, the combination religious and political differences between the Romans and the Jews made this a volatile region of the Roman Empire. When Pilate governed Judea and Samaria he was a comparatively young man. Historians of the time gage him to be in his late twenties or early thirties.

Pilate did not like the Jews, nor did he like making concessions to them as he had proved rather cruelly in the past. But he was wary of them and their sometime influence in Rome and knew he had to tread carefully. The description of him as “inflexible, merciless and obstinate” was a Jewish viewpoint but had some truth in it. He was quite ready to shed blood to have his way. He was a typical Roman procurator, a military man exalted above his rank as a demonstration of favor. But that he had some idea of justice comes out in his dealings with Jesus.

[Lord Acton](#) of England is credited with the statement: *Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely*. That is very true of the power Pilate had. A power that was corrupt.

Early in his appointment by the [Emperor Tiberius](#) as the procurator of Judea, Pilate moved his army by night from [Caesarea](#) into Jerusalem bearing ensigns with the emperor's image. Previous procurators had avoided bringing any kind of image into Jerusalem since it offended the Jews who recognized this as emperor worship and as breaking the first and second commandments. But Pilate wanted to make his point, that *he* was the governor of Judea and *he* would give honor to Caesar wherever he desired! Pilate was still at his palace in Caesarea when this happened, so a large delegation of Jews incessantly pleaded outside the palace for five days for these idolatrous images to be removed. Pilate sent in the soldiers on the sixth day, threatening death at their insults of Caesar. But the Jewish demonstrators prostrated themselves, bared their throats for the Roman swords, showing their willingness to die, if need be, to rid Jerusalem of idols. Pilate relented and removed the images.

After that, he "appropriated" funds from the sacred temple treasury (the "[Corban](#)") to build an aqueduct. In response to the Jewish outrage for this blatant act of stealing from the temple treasury, Pilate sent soldiers among them dressed as Jews, yet armed with clubs. They viciously beat and murdered many of the people, delivering Pilate from their complaints but adding to his reputation for savagery. Additionally, he ordered golden shields placed in Herod's Palace in Jerusalem, shields inscribed with Caesar's image. The Jews complained so strongly that word came to the emperor, who ordered Pilate to remove the shields and their offensiveness to the Jews. Even Jesus told of an incident in which Pilate killed a group of Galileans, and then mingled their blood with the sacrifices that they sought to offer.

Pilate's desire and demand for power finally caught up with him when a large number of Samaritans gathered at [Mt. Gerizim](#) to search for the hidden golden objects of the Tabernacle. Some were armed and Pilate saw this as a threat and had his troops massacre many people. A formal complaint of this incident was registered with Rome and Pilate was removed from office in disgrace.

With that as a background let's look at our text:

And Pilate questioned Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" And answering He said to him, "It is as you say." (Mark 15:2 NASB)

Roman law was very specific regarding this type of trial. It was a referral trial from the local, indigenous rulers who were granted limited powers. This type of trial had to take place in the early part of the day so the Roman authorities could attend to matters of state in the afternoons.

The trial would have begun with the verbal or written accusation against the accused. This resulted in an interrogation of the accused by the chief magistrate, in this case the only magistrate, Pilate. Dr. Luke gives us more detail here:

Then the whole body of them arose and brought Him before Pilate.² And they began to accuse Him, saying, "We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, and saying that He Himself is Christ, a King."³ And Pilate asked Him, saying, "Are You the King of the Jews?" And He answered him and said, "It is as you say." (Luke 23:1-3 NASB)

Here we see that three charges were leveled against Christ:

1. **"We have found this man misleading our nation"**—The word translated "misleading" is the Greek verb *diastrepho*, "to cause to depart from an accepted standard of oral or spiritual values, make crooked, pervert." Keep in mind that all of these charges were political (that is, against the state). They were saying that Jesus was stirring up unrest and rebellion against Rome. Did Jesus do this? No. Just the opposite and we'll look at that in a moment.
2. **"And forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar"**—The term "forbidding" is the Greek verb *koluo*, "hinder, prevent, forbid." This is a distortion. Jesus does not oppose paying taxes to Caesar, and they know this:

And they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Him, in order to trap Him in a statement.¹⁴ And they came and said to Him, "Teacher, we know that You are truthful, and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any, but teach the way of God in truth. Is it lawful to pay a poll-tax to Caesar, or not?" (Mark 12:13-14 NASB)

And Jesus said to them, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." And they were amazed at Him. (Mark 12:17 NASB)

I find it interesting that these religious leaders were in violation of the very word of God that they claimed to uphold:

"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. (Exodus 20:16 NASB)

They were a bunch of religious hypocrites.

3. **"Saying that He Himself is Christ, a King"**—This rightly assumes that the Sanhedrin charged Jesus before Pilate with treason, claiming to be a king. But look back to Mark 14:64. What is the charge

there?

"You have heard the blasphemy; how does it seem to you?" And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death. (Mark 14:64 NASB)

They charge Him with blasphemy. But the Romans could not have cared less about blasphemy. So the Sanhedrin came up with a new indictment, treason. If any of these three charges had any substance at all, it was the last. At least this was the real issue with these Jewish religious leaders. And so Pilate passed over the first two charges, asking Jesus only to respond as to whether or not He was "the king of the Jews."

And Pilate questioned Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" And answering He said to him, "It is as you say." (Mark 15:2 NASB)

"King of the Jews" is a loaded title and implied that He was therefore planning rebellion, for many insurrectionists had taken the title "king". There had recently been such an insurrection which had failed, and there were at the time prisoners there who had killed during that insurrection and were awaiting punishment, one of whom was called Barabbas.

Had Jesus given a direct affirmation of the question, and said, "YES", the proceedings would have ended, and Pilate would have had the legal right to sentence Him to die. But Jesus did not really give an affirmative answer, He said—***"It is, as you say"***.

The NIV, ***"Yes, it is as you say,"*** is too positive a translation of Jesus' words. His answer to Pilate's question is, essentially, "The statement is yours." The form of expression is not a direct affirmation; but it is certainly not a denial. Jesus was acknowledging that it was in some way so, but not in the terms in which Pilate understood it. The Fourth Gospel give us more details it tells us that Pilate questioned Him further and discovered something of the nature of His kingship.

Pilate therefore entered again into the Praetorium, and summoned Jesus, and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?"³⁴ Jesus answered, "Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about Me?"³⁵ Pilate answered, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You up to me; what have You done?" (John 18:33-35 NASB)

Now notice carefully what Jesus says about His kingdom:

Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting, that I might not be delivered up to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm." (John 18:36 NASB)

Jesus is saying in very plain words that His kingdom is not a physical, geographic, kingdom. His kingdom is spiritual, it is other worldly, and it is not of this (physical) realm.

Pilate therefore 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 bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."³⁸ 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. (John 18:37-38 NASB)

Pilate obviously understood what Jesus was saying, Jesus said that He was a king but not in a political way. Pilate did not see Jesus as a political enemy to Rome. He found no guilt in Jesus. Back to Mark:

And the chief priests began to accuse Him harshly. (Mark 15:3 NASB)

The Chief Priests were bringing charges against Jesus and Pilate wonders why Jesus doesn't respond to their charges:

And Pilate was questioning Him again, saying, "Do You make no answer? See how many charges they bring against You!"⁵ But Jesus made no further answer; so that Pilate was amazed. (Mark 15:4-5 NASB)

Jesus' silence did more to convince Pilate of His innocence than any protest. He was experienced enough to recognize the special pleading of the accusers and to note that they had no real evidence. And he didn't like them anyway.

By Roman law, a defendant who refused to make a defense had to be assumed guilty; yet Roman officials typically offered a defendant three opportunities to respond before convicting by default, and Pilate offers Jesus at least two here. It is no wonder, then, that Pilate is amazed by Jesus' silence.

At this point Luke tells us that Pilate sent Jesus to Herod:

And Pilate said to the chief priests and the multitudes, "I find no guilt in this man."⁵ But they kept on insisting, saying, "He stirs up the people, teaching all over Judea, starting from Galilee, even as far as this place."⁶ But when Pilate heard it, he asked whether the man was a Galilean.⁷ 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. (Luke 23:4-7 NASB)

Luke also tells us what happened before Herod:

Now 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 was hoping to see some sign performed by Him.⁹ And he questioned Him at some length; but He answered him nothing. (Luke 23:8-9 NASB)

Herod wanted to see Jesus do a miracle, he had obviously heard much about Jesus and the mighty works that He had done. But Jesus does not respond to Herod.

And the chief priests and the scribes were standing there, accusing Him vehemently. (Luke 23:10 NASB)

The Jewish religious leaders follow Jesus to Herod and continue to accuse Him.

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. (Luke 23:11 NASB)

Herod mistreats Jesus and sends Him back to Pilate and here Mark takes up the narrative in:

Now at the feast he used to release for them any one prisoner whom they requested. (Mark 15:6 NASB)

The custom of releasing a prisoner at the Passover seems to have been Pilate's own (he used to release) and is not evidenced outside the Gospels. The ensuing events support the idea of such a custom for it explains the presence of a crowd who had probably come for this very purpose—to see their favorite prisoner freed.

And the man named Barabbas had been imprisoned with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the insurrection.⁸ And the multitude went up and began asking him to do as he had been accustomed to do for them. (Mark 15:7-8 NASB)

Notice that the man the crowd wants released is guilty of the very thing they falsely charge Jesus with—insurrection. The word "insurrection" is from the Greek noun *stasis*, which here means: "*movement toward a (new) state of affairs, uprising, riot, revolt, rebellion against the civil authority.*"

Barabbas was most likely a leader of a group of Jewish revolutionaries called Zealots. They were zealous in their resolve to eliminate, exterminate, and extricate the Romans. Hence, the name Zealots. The Zealots fought against the Roman occupation of Israel.

The Zealots used the Biblical prophecies of the Messiah crushing the enemies of Israel, as a biblical basis for their rebellion. The Zealots were sincere, were enthusiastic, were dedicated, and yet, were very wrong in what they were doing.

Barabbas was what the people wanted. He fulfilled the expectations of the people, whereas Jesus did not. Barabbas was more of a Messiah, in the eyes of the people, than was Jesus. Israel viewed Messiah as a warrior-prince who would expel the hated Romans from Israel and bring in a kingdom in which the Jews would be promoted to world dominion. Jesus didn't fit this but Barabbas did. Barabbas was more of a savior to the people, in their estimation, than was the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now I want you to see something very interesting here in Matthews account:

And they were holding at that time a notorious prisoner, called Barabbas.¹⁷ When therefore they were gathered together, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?" (Matthew 27:16-17 NASB)

Some ancient manuscripts bear the name "Jesus Barabbas" at this point rather than, simply, "Barabbas". It has to be remembered that the name "Jesus" was not a reverential title as it is today in the Church but was a regular name to give a child— "Jesus" being the Greek version of the Hebrew "Joshua".

Origen refers to very early manuscripts which contained "Jesus Barabbas". It is very hard to imagine Christian scribes adding the name Jesus to Barabbas if this was not already in the text, but very easy to understand their suppressing it, particularly as none of the other Gospels mentions his first name. It may well be that originally this read "Jesus who is called Barabbas".

The New English Bible is confident enough to put that name “Jesus Barabbas” in the text:

At that time they had in custody a notorious prisoner named Jesus Barabbas.¹⁷ So after they had assembled, Pilate said to them, “Whom do you want me to release for you, Jesus Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Christ?” (Matthew 27:16-17 NET)

This makes sense when you notice how Pilate address the crowds by describing Jesus as the One “*Who is called Christ*” he was contrasting the name with someone who bore the same name.

The name Barabbas in Hebrew would have been the name “Ben-abbas” which means: “*son of the father*”, a title very obviously applicable to Jesus Himself.

"All things have been handed over to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him." (Luke 10:22 NASB)

So in our text we have two men both called “Jesus son of the Father”. If Barabbas was called Jesus Barabbas, and Pilate overheard the name Jesus being called out, he may well have mistaken it for a popular demand for the release of Jesus who is called the Christ and seen this as a way out of his dilemma. This might explain why the choice was finally between Jesus and Barabbas and why Barabbas was favored.

And Pilate answered them, saying, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" (Mark 15:9 NASB)

Who is the “them” that Pilate answered? If we look back at verse 8 we see that it is the “crowd”. The crowd began to ask him to fulfill his custom and make the customary release.

In his desire to release Jesus Whom he recognized as innocent, and possibly overhearing the name “Jesus” being mentioned by the crowds as a contender for release, Pilate made the effort to have Him set free.

For he was aware that the chief priests had delivered Him up because of envy. (Mark 15:10 NASB)

Envy is a powerful emotion. To envy is to desire to have what someone else has. It is similar to the word "covet," but "envy" carries with it the sense of being resentful at the advantage another has. Envy is an evil and resentful desire to have what someone else enjoys. This is the desire the religious officials felt towards Jesus.

Pilate was no fool he knew why they wanted Jesus killed. He knew that Jesus was an innocent man but he also had some disturbing news from his wife:

And while he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent to him, saying, "Have nothing to do with that righteous Man; for last night I suffered greatly in a dream because of Him." (Matthew 27:19 NASB)

So his wife tells him to have nothing to do with Jesus because He is a righteous man and he knows that

Jesus is innocent so he wants to release him. As a side note here many historical records indicate that Pilate's wife became a Christian following the crucifixion.

***But the chief priests stirred up the multitude to ask him to release Barabbas for them instead.
(Mark 15:11 NASB)***

The Chief Priests and their supporters allied themselves with those in the crowd who wanted the release of Barabbas. They were probably both delighted and surprised to get such powerful support and pressed them to demand Barabbas. It was pure political manipulation.

And answering again, Pilate was saying to them, "Then what shall I do with Him whom you call the King of the Jews?"¹³ And they shouted back, "Crucify Him!"¹⁴ But Pilate was saying to them, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify Him!" (Mark 15:12-14 NASB)

This scene used to always bother me. Think of all that we have learned about Jesus so far in Mark, this is the One who made the lame to walk, who made the blind to see, who made the deaf to hear, who raised the dead to life, who set the captives free. This is the One who touched the untouchables; the One who loved the unlovable. Why did this crowd want Him dead?

The answer to that comes in understanding who this crowd is. This crowd did not come from among the pilgrims who had kept the Passover, and having eaten their meal would be resting and preparing for the day ahead, not knowing of the drama that was being carried out. Rather it would come from those in Jerusalem who had a particular purpose in being there because of the custom and because of the men who were being held. They had probably come specifically seeking the freedom of one of the insurrectionists.

This cry to "crucify him" could only first have arisen from the enemies of Jesus: The religious leaders of Israel. But the others probably joined in, not because they hated Jesus, but because they wanted their man Barabbas set free. Barabbas was in support of violent action against Rome, Jesus was not.

It was clear to Pilate that they were not to be trifled with. Passions were running high. Pilate would have recognized the signs of a crowd approaching the point of getting out of control.

I think it would be fair to read between the lines of the text and say that the cross Jesus hung on was the cross that was intended for Barabbas. And rather than hang that day on the cross, he is released. It isn't hard to realize that Barabbas is a picture of you and me.

Mark's details pertaining to Barabbas paint a vivid picture of what Jesus did for you and me. Barabbas had been judged and legally condemned. Barabbas was guilty. Barabbas deserved death. Barabbas could do nothing to free himself. Jesus took the place of Barabbas and died on Barabbas' cross. Barabbas was released. I am Barabbas. In this story we see the [doctrine of substitution](#). Christ died for sinners.

This idea of substitution; of Christ being condemned, and suffering and dying in our place, is fundamental to the Christian faith. Because, in contrast to every other form of religion, we hold to a gospel of grace; a gospel of God's unearned, undeserved, unmerited favor. We are forgiven, but not because our so-called "good" deeds outweigh our bad ones. We have eternal life, but not because we do our best to live up to a moral code. On the contrary, we know that our good works are insufficient; that we constantly fail to meet

God's perfect standard of holiness; and that we deserve, not acceptance and approval from God, but rather rejection and condemnation. No, our hope is not based on anything we have done, or could do, but entirely on the fact that Jesus Christ, the sinless Lamb of God, gave His life in exchange for ours; that by His blood, He paid the penalty for sin on our behalf.

and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. (1 Peter 2:24 NASB)

The reality is we are guilty and we are deserving of that cross. We are deserving of that eternal punishment. Yet, for all who trust in Him, God offers eternal life.

Matthew adds one other important point to this story:

And when Pilate saw that he was accomplishing nothing, but rather that a riot was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the multitude, saying, "I am innocent of this Man's blood; see to that yourselves." ²⁵ And all the people answered and said, "His blood be on us and on our children!" (Matthew 27:24-25 NASB)

Notice what the crowd said, ***"His blood be on us and on our children"***. Jesus had already said that Israel's leaders would be guilty of His blood:

"You serpents, you brood of vipers, how shall you escape the sentence of hell? ³⁴ "Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city, ³⁵ that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. (Matthew 23:33-35 NASB)

Jesus' charge is that the history of Israel is the history of the murder of the men of God—including Himself. He says that the righteous men, from Abel to Zacharias, were murdered. The story of Zacharias is found in [2 Chronicles 24:20-22](#). Zacharias rebuked the nation for their sin, and Joash stirred up the people to stone him to death in the very Temple court; and Zacharias died saying, ***"May the Lord see and avenge!"***

In the Hebrew Bible, Genesis is the first book, as it is in ours; but, unlike our order of the books, 2 Chronicles is the last in the Hebrew Bible. We could say that the murder of Abel is the first in the Bible story, and the murder of Zacharias the last. From beginning to end, the history of Israel is the rejection, and often the slaughter, of the men of God—including Jesus Christ.

Notice, who their blood is come upon; ***"upon you"*** — the scribes and Pharisees of the first century; the ones Jesus was then speaking to. This is confirmed in the next verse.

"Truly I say to you, all these things shall come upon this generation. (Matthew 23:36 NASB)

Now, all commentators are agreed that ***"this generation"*** means the generation then living. Jesus says that the Jewish people would be punished for their rejection of God's servants, and the kingdom of God would be taken from them, and it would all happen in that generation.

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. ³⁸ "Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! (Matthew 23:37-38 NASB)

By “house,” he was referring Jerusalem, and certainly the temple, was included. The word “desolate” is the Greek word [eremos](#), (er'-ay-mos); it means: “waste, desert, desolate, solitary, or wilderness.” The city and the temple were both destroyed in A.D. 70. The crowd cried out, “His blood be on us and on our children” and it was. Judgment fell on that very generation. Back to Mark:

And wishing to satisfy the multitude, Pilate released Barabbas for them, and after having Jesus scourged, he delivered Him to be crucified. (Mark 15:15 NASB)

“Wishing to satisfy the multitude” – The Romans had a saying about their law: “Let justice be done though the heavens fall.” Nothing was to come before justice in the Roman mind, but Pilate was thinking for himself, trying to secure the power he had, and giving in to the pressure of the people.

It’s very important to understand at this point in the story; Pilate is on very thin ice politically. Pilate was a representative of the Roman government, but it had numerous clashes with the Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem. The religious leaders had filed formal charges against Pilate on several occasions, and Rome was tired of it. Pilate was convinced if it happened again he would probably lose his post. So he’s in a very delicate position politically. By now Pilate had given up on any idea of justice. His only desire was to pacify this crowd that had suddenly become so fired up, and if it meant the life of an innocent man it was out of his hands. So he released Barabbas and handed Jesus over to be crucified, but only once he had had Him scourged.

This scourging would not be just a beating. The Roman scourge was a dreadful thing. It consisted of a short wooden handle to which a number of leather thongs were attached whose ends were equipped with pieces of lead, brass and sharp bone depending on choice. The victim’s back was bared and the scourge lay on more or less heavily. It could cause severe damage penetrating well below the outer flesh. This is an allusion to:

I gave My back to those who strike Me, And My cheeks to those who pluck out the beard; I did not cover My face from humiliation and spitting. (Isaiah 50:6 NASB)

Jesus’ friends, the disciples, have fled. One who was very close to him even denied knowing Him. The religious leaders who were the custodians of faith and spiritual life for God’s people turned against Him and wanted Him out of the way. The Romans who normally had such a love for justice allowed that justice to go forth perverted and bent to the will of the religious leaders. The crowd chose a criminal to be released and cried out, demanding that Jesus was to be crucified.

Here stands a beaten, bloody Christ about to be crucified on a Roman cross. But he is not a helpless victim being brutalized by the will of the people. We can talk about Pilate, the religious leaders, and the multitude joining in the most criminal act in history, but behind it all we see the *unseen providence* of God. God’s providence is not His wish for things but His wise, righteous governance of the affairs of men in order to bring about His eternal purposes. The early church understood this as we see in their prayer:

"For truly in this city there were gathered together against Thy holy servant Jesus, whom Thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, ²⁸ to do whatever Thy hand and Thy purpose predestined to occur. (Acts 4:27-28 NASB)

Why did God plan the brutal death of His Son? He did it for us! That's how much He loves us:

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8 NASB)

This is substitution—the innocent died for the guilty—and this is the message of Christianity!



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