

Mark 15

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- [0 : 00] Well, if we could this morning, with the Lord's help, turn back to the portion of Scripture that we read, the second portion in the Gospel according to Mark, in chapter 15, page 1022.
- Gospel according to Mark, in chapter 15, if you just read from the beginning. Very early in the morning, the chief priests were the elders, the teachers of the law, and the whole Sanhedrin reached a decision.
- They bound Jesus, led Him away, and turned Him over to Pilate. When you hear the name Pilate, what do you think of?
- What kind of Persian do you think of? What type of Persian springs to your mind? Do you see him as a man who was in the wrong place at the wrong time?
- Or was he a man who was indifferent to the situation that he faced early on that Friday morning? Or do you think he was a man with no backbone, who failed to stand up for what he knew was right?
- [1 : 15] When you hear the name Pilate, what do you think of? It was the late R.A. Finlayson, who was professor of systematic theology in the Free Church College in Edinburgh.
- He was there from 1940s to the 1960s. And he explained in an address given on the statement, Pilate made at the crucifixion of Jesus, when Pilate said, What I have written, I have written.
- And Professor Finlayson said that Pilate lived among the events that turned the tide of history. And he had a hand in a transaction from which hope has flowed to millions of people.
- Yet Pilate himself retired from that scene and set his back upon its light and its life and left nothing behind him but an inscription.
- An inscription which read, Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews. And for the past few weeks we've been meeting people Jesus encountered in his life and ministry recorded for us in the Gospel of Mark.
- [2 : 21] We've met a leper, a paralytic, a woman with an issue of blood, and Jairus' family. And in each case I hope that we were able to see the portrait that was being painted of the varying types of people whom Jesus met and the way in which he dealt with them all individually.
- He dealt with them in a very different way. But it's safe to say that Jesus changed the lives of these people whom he met. The leper was cleansed from his leprosy.
- The paralytic could walk. The woman who had the issue of blood for twelve years stopped bleeding. And Jairus' daughter was raised to life. And in each situation Jesus shows us his authority over sin, sickness, and death.
- And the lives of these people whom Jesus met, they changed dramatically. They came to Jesus with an illness and they left differently. They came to Jesus seeking help and healing and left totally different to what they had been like before.

These people had life-changing experiences. And Jesus had transformed their lives in remarkable ways. And that's what happens to us when we come to Jesus and ask him to forgive us and to cleanse us and to heal our wounds and to raise us to life.

[3 : 36] That's what happens. Our life changes. But when we come to Jesus, we see that his life didn't change.

He wasn't transformed. He didn't have a life-changing experience. He wasn't converted because to be converted is to turn away from sin and turn back to God.

Yet this man here, the Son of God, right in front of him. And he turned away and would not stand up for what he knew was the truth. Pontius Pilate was a Roman governor.

And during the period of Jewish history, the Roman Empire had taken control of Palestine. And as a result at the time of the Jewish festivals, especially at the time of Passover, the pilgrims would travel from all over the nation and they would come to the city of Jerusalem.

And the presence of the Roman governor was required in order to keep control of the city. Pilate's permanent residence was in the northwest coast of Caesarea.

[4 : 44] But he had been summoned to the city to be on hand if any problems arose because of all the thousands of people crowding into the city of Jerusalem. And all four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, each of them paint this portrait of the governor of Rome.

And in a sense, each of them give the events of the trial of Jesus from different camera angles. Matthew records the dream of Pilate's wife. And Luke tells us that Jesus was passed to Herod by Pilate in an attempt to avoid making a decision about Jesus.

And John, as we read, he gives us this theological discussion which took place in the judgment hall with this description of the dialogue that took place between Jesus and Pilate.

But Mark, we have to remember that Mark wrote his Gospel in order to encourage Christians who were living in Rome, who were themselves victims of persecution. And Mark exhorts them time and time again to look at Jesus' faithful and consistent example.

But when Mark introduces us to Pilate in his Gospel, he does so first thing in the morning. The introduction of Jesus to Pilate happens at a significant time of the day.

[6 : 01] Mark has just told us in the previous chapter that Peter had denied Jesus again and again with cursing and with swearing, and then the cock was to crow for the second time. And then Peter would call to mind that Jesus had said to him, that before the cock shall crow twice, you shall deny me three times.

And then immediately, he says, immediately, says Mark with his trademark word as he opens chapter 15, although it's not in the NIV, it says immediately in the morning as the cock crew for the second time, Jesus knew that Peter had denied him three times.

But what was to take place in the next couple of hours leading towards this cross, Jesus was not only going to see Peter deny that he ever knew him, but he was also going to see Pilate deny that he knows he is innocent.

And Pilate was the only one in all the world who could have changed the outcome of the events of history. But the path of the Lord was set. The road to Calvary was already paved with the fingerprint of God.

And these things happened, as John tells us again and again, these things happened so that the Scriptures could be fulfilled. And it was by that point in the morning that the chief priests, they were already holding this council to get rid of Jesus, and they had waited three long years to get to this precious point, and they weren't going to let this opportunity slip from their fingers.

- [7 : 31] This was the moment. This was their great opportunity to have Jesus tried according to Roman law. And they couldn't get rid of Jesus themselves, because it wasn't lawful for them to put anyone to death.
- But they wanted to get rid of Jesus once and for all. And Jesus is brought to the judgment seat of Pilate to give an account of his life and ministry in this world.
- But if we were to paint this final portrait, as it were, I don't think it would be a portrait that we could hang in the lives of people the Lord has changed.
- Because this portrait is of a man that is so darkened and so blurred, so much so that there are streaks, in a sense, on this painting that view this image.
- It's so hazy and unrecognizable. Pilate was a man who knew the truth, but he refused to stand up for it. And this morning I'd like us to consider this meeting that Jesus had with Pilate on that early Friday morning.
- [8 : 35] And I want you to notice from this section that Pilate asked many questions. And with each question that he asked, he received an answer that he didn't expect. So the first thing I want to draw your attention to is Pilate's prosecution.
- Pilate's prosecution, where he asked the question in verse 2, Are you the king of the Jews? Are you the king of the Jews?
- History tells us that the Jews didn't like Pilate. They had many run-ins with him. It's said that Pilate had spent some of the money that was in the temple. And he had spent it for his own gain.
- And he had erected statues of Roman soldiers throughout Jerusalem, much to the displeasure of all the Jews. Yet in spite of their opposition to him, the Jews needed Pilate to do them a favor.
- And the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council, they had bound Jesus after taking him from the Garden of Gethsemane and conspired that they would say to Pilate and that their testimony would all have this same accusation.
- [9 : 38] And as they brought Jesus to Pilate, they presented their three charges against him. The first charge was, This man is perverting the nation. He's misleading them completely.
- Then they say he's refusing to pay his taxes and he doesn't want to show honor to Caesar. And then the third and most important one, he's claiming to be king.
- But not any old king. He claims to be the Messiah king. And the way in which the chief priests and the scribes present their case to Pilate, they describe Jesus as this revolutionary, a politically dangerous man.
- And in their eyes, he was a terrorist. And as they delivered Jesus to Pilate, Jesus was brought into the judgment hall, which was presumably part of Herod's palace.
- And it seems that as Jesus was brought in on his own, he was questioned by Pilate one to one because the Sanhedrin, they wouldn't come in themselves. The absurdity of their request was that they brought Jesus to the door of the judgment hall, but would not go in and see through to all their accusations in order that they would not be defiled.
- [10 : 47] They had perfection in their midst, and yet they were worried about being made unclean. They wanted to be able to eat the Passover, and yet they only gritted their teeth towards the one who was the fulfillment of the Passover.
- But Jesus is brought to Pilate, and Pilate is intrigued by the accusations that have been made against this man. And he asks, Are you the king of the Jews?
- But the way it's worded in the original makes me think this question could have been more direct. You are the king of the Jews, aren't you?

And Jesus answers in this ambiguous way and says, You say so. And then the camera angle, it moves from Mark's perspective onto John's angle and starts explaining the conversation that went on between the accused and his judge.

And Jesus in turn, Pilate, he's probing with all these questions, and then Jesus in turn, he questions Pilate whether or not he had thought up all these questions himself, or had he been told by the Jews.

[11 : 55] Even as we read in John 18, he says, Is that your own idea, Jesus asked, or did others talk to you about me? And Pilate says, Am I a Jew? It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me.

What is it you have done? And Jesus clearly accepts the title as king, but he hints that it's not what Pilate understands to be a king. And he goes on to say, My kingdom is not of this world.

If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews, but now my kingdom is from another place. You're a king then, said Pilate. Jesus answered, You're right in saying I'm a king.

In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this reason I came into the world to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me. Then almost in this frustration with the Jews' accusation and Jesus' answer, battering back and forth in his head, Pilate asks the question that Jesus is just waiting for.

What is truth? And is that not the same question that the world is asking today? What is truth? What is it all about? And there's so many thoughts and theories that are proposed by all the scientists and the evolutionists and the atheists and the secularists of the day.

[13 : 17] And they all have an accusation to make against Jesus as king. They all have this desire to rid them from their mind and from their thinking and make any possibility to make you think that Jesus Christ is Lord and king.

But what they seem to forget is that this Jesus who has made us is the one who has put eternity into our hearts. And every man, woman, boy, and girl, they are asking the same question as Pilate.

What is truth? What is truth? And every time someone asks us that question, we need to be ready to answer. The world is clutching at the thoughts and all the feelings of the things around them, but what they need so much is for you to tell them the truth.

The truth of their condition. The truth of their need. The truth about Christ who is truth. The truth about the fact that they need this Jesus. And He thinks so highly of the life that He has given to us that He will ask us what we did with it.

We're not to shy away from the truth because far too often we want to soften the truth and water down the gospel, put it to one side and not tell them the extent of their sin and their need for Jesus Christ.

[14 : 36] Because when we're doing that, we're only frustrating the grace of God and not telling them the whole truth. And yet, my Christian friend, although you may find it hard to do, and the evil one is there, Christ has already prayed for you and pleaded in that high priestly prayer that you would not be taken out of this world, but kept from all evil because you are not of this world.

And He has asked that you will be sanctified, made more holy through the truth, for Thy Word is truth. So when someone asks you, what is the truth?

Be ready to give an answer for the reason for the hope that is within you. Take them to the truth. Show them that the law came by Moses, but grace and truth comes by Jesus Christ.

And this conversation between Jesus and Pilate, it's just like the world. It will always try to accuse the Christian falsely. They will try to trip you up on any possible occasion, but we're to have the same testimony as Jesus did before the onlooking world, that they couldn't point the finger at Him.

They couldn't see anything about Him. And they can't question the way we live our Christian lives and live in this world that is hostile to the gospel. And if there is anything in our lives that others may question in light of Scripture, get rid of it.

[16:08] Get rid of it. Get rid of it. The witness of the church of Christ is far more important than any of our earthly desires because our witness is to be like Christ, where Pilate came out and said before the whole Sanhedrin, I find no fault in Him.

And Paul even picked up on this thought in his letter to Timothy as he stressed to this young man who was coming up as a preacher.

He said, Follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. He said, Fight the good fight of faith. Lay hold on eternal life to which you were called when you professed your good profession before many witnesses and before Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession.

And when you combine all of the gospel records together, you find that Pilate, he repeatedly stated that he found no fault in Jesus because no one ever will.

But Pilate's problem was that he lacked the courage to stand for what he knew what was right. Pilate's prosecution concluded that he found no fault in him.

[17:30] But secondly, we see Pilate's proposal. It's another question Pilate asks, this time in verse 9. Do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?

It was a sarcastic question because Pilate knew that the Jews had delivered Jesus to him because of envy. Their accusations could not stand, and Pilate thought that there would be an easy way to solve this problem that had arisen first thing in the morning.

He thought that he could propose to this hostile crowd that there was an opportunity to release a prisoner and set him free. And Pilate knew that the custom of all these particular feasts, such as the Passover, that they were allowed to release prisoners from time to time.

And here Pilate, he possessed the authority to pardon a sentence of any criminal that he chose. So in order to allow the one he thought was innocent to go without any fuss, Pilate brings before them this known revolutionary, a known murderer.

This man, Barabbas, was also in many respects a terrorist. He was a dangerous man worthy of death by Roman law, considered to be a fanatic patriot, who would be ready at any time to fight against Roman oppression.

[18:50] And in Pilate's eyes, Barabbas was a threat to everyone. But then the camera angle, it shifts again and it pans the whole view of the judgment hall. As Matthew explains to us that Pilate's wife has sent this letter in.

She's had a nightmare. It is still early in the morning and most people, they weren't awake, but she has someone send this note in because she hasn't slept well. She's had this really bad dream and this note is brought in.

It's given to Pilate in the judgment hall and it reads, have nothing to do with that man who is innocent. And you might think, what place does that have in the gospel narrative?

But do you not find it interesting that the man who had all authority of what was to happen in the next few minutes, he had just been told again that Jesus was innocent. Pilate could find no fault in him.

His wife, who had never met Jesus, knew that he was not guilty and she was saying, have nothing, have nothing to do with this man. Pilate's wife knew that this was no ordinary criminal.

[19 : 56] This was no ordinary trial. This man of Galilee was more than just the carpenter's son. Surely this was the son of God. Have nothing, have nothing to do with him. But regardless of his wife's plea, Pilate knew that the Jews were serious.

And he didn't want an uprising against the Romans. He wanted promotion. He wanted admonition from Herod and he wanted praise from Caesar. And to keep the Jews sweet whilst this bitter taste was to remain in the back of his mouth, Pilate, he presents these two criminals to the Jews to choose who is to be set free and the other to be condemned.

And Pilate had made the contest so unbalanced that you would have thought that Jesus would go free so easily. The choice was a simple one. Jesus the Nazarene or Barabbas the murderer.

Jesus the healer or Barabbas the assassin. Jesus the one who preserves life and helps people and shows compassion. Or Barabbas who takes life and hurts people and wants revenge.

Whom, whom shall I release unto you? And Pilate receives the answer that he never expected. Give us Barabbas. Give us Barabbas.

[21 : 16] Give us Barabbas. And he can't believe what he's hearing and the shouts for the guilty to go free and the innocent to be condemned. For one group of murderers lets another murderer go.

Now my friend, there is nothing that shows the absurdity of sin quite like the trial of Jesus. And who do you want today? Who do you want to have?

What name will you call out for? Who do you want? Do you want to release the king of the Jews or do you want Barabbas? Who do you want?

An innocent Barabbas or a condemned Christ? I tell you, I want a condemned Christ. I want a condemned Christ.

Because when I come to the central moments of the Bible, I see a man upon a cross. Now, I know that human hands have put him there. But I know that if these people who put him there knew what they were doing, they would have never crucified the Prince of Glory.

[22 : 21] And I know that their act of putting there was this act of supreme defiance and supreme rebellion against the God of the Bible. And with all these religious people scuttling about and hurrying about to crucify him so that they wouldn't break the Sabbath day and thinking that this act of putting the Son of God to death, that they were going to please the God whom they professed.

But I'll tell you why I want to condemn Christ. Who killed Jesus? Who killed him? It wasn't the Jews for envy or Pilate for fear or the Romans for the hardness of their heart.

No, it was God for love, to make a people his own and to redeem the lost sons of Adam and to bring them into the blessings of his great covenant. And when Peter is to stand on the day of Pentecost, he will say to all that are present before him, he will say that Jesus was delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.

Who killed him? God did it. Because he so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son. Give them Barabbas.

I want a condemned Christ because it was my sin that held him there until it was accomplished. His dying breath has brought me life and I know today that it is finished.

[23 : 48] I want a condemned Christ. Condemned for me. Who do you want? Who do you want?

We've seen Pilate's prosecution in Pilate's proposal and then the third and final question Pilate asks reveals Pilate's Passover.

Pilate's Passover with a question in verse 12. What shall I do with the one you call the king of the Jews? What shall I do with the one you call the king of the Jews?

And when thinking about the situation that Pilate was in, I couldn't help but see the contrasts which can be made between this event and the Passover which was instituted at the time of the exodus from bondage in Egypt.

And in Exodus chapter 12 where the Passover is first mentioned, we're told of how the Israelites were to kill this Passover lamb and smear its blood upon the doorposts and upon the lintel of their house.

[24 : 55] And it was so that when the angel of death would pass over that the eldest child in their family would not die. And the Passover was used to protect the innocent and to condemn the guilty.

And our Jesus, who is our Passover lamb, he is used to protect the guilty where the innocent is condemned.

The lamb of God becomes guilty to let the guilty go free, where Jesus is condemned and Barabbas is said to be innocent. And it's a great picture of what we term as penal substitution, where the penalty of the guilty is replaced, it is substituted with the purity of the innocent.

The deserved penalty of the guilty is placed upon the one who has done nothing amiss. And the one who is guilty is able to go free. And here Jesus is condemned as guilty and Barabbas is set free, the innocent is passed over, but the guilty Jesus is to receive the wrath of God.

And Pilate asks, what will I do with him? What will I do with him? What a question. What a question to ask, what will I do with the Son of God?

[26 : 18] What will I do with this innocent man whom you claim is guilty? What will I do with the one whom you call the King of the Jews? And they cried out, crucify him. Why, what evil has he done?

But they have no answer, they have no accusations, all have failed, and by all accounts, this man, this innocent, yet the shouts get louder and louder, crucify him, crucify him, away with him, crucify him.

Pilate had tried everything to persuade the crowd that Jesus was an innocent man. He had offered the compromise that he would scourge Jesus and just let him go, and it failed, and then he repeated himself again and again that Jesus was a righteous person, not worthy of death.

And then to justify his actions even further, Pilate, he washed his hands in water to show that washing his hands from the blood, he was washing his hands from all the blood of Jesus.

And although he washed his hands from the whole event, he was as guilty as sin itself. He said, I am innocent of the blood of this righteous person.

[27 : 26] See to it yourselves. He thought that he was innocent. innocent. But when is an accomplice to murder ever innocent? And regardless of how much Pilate washed his hands in the face of the crowd, he only washed his hands in the filth of this corrupt trial that he was part of.

You see, my friend, you can never wash your hands from Jesus. You can never ignore what he has done for sinners. Either his blood has cleansed you, or his blood will condemn you.

Either his blood has cleansed you, or his blood will condemn you. And his blood is there for cleansing. But those who reject him, those who ignore him, those who fail to stand up for the truth, only leave their blood upon their own hands, and the blood of Jesus only a reminder that they did nothing with it.

But all efforts, they were of no use. Pilate's plan had failed, and they called all the more for Jesus to be crucified, and he brings forth his prisoner before the nation, and he says, behold, your king.

But what does Israel say through its leadership? We will not have this man to rule over us. But they cried louder and louder away with him, crucify him, crucify him.

[28 : 48] And Pilate says, shall I crucify your king? And they answered, we have no king but Caesar. It's frightening. It's frightening what they did.

They rejected their God. And yet the forces of hell, they were pressing upon Pilate's soul to make this decision, and Pilate knew what was right, but he refused to do anything about it.

Verse 15 tells us, wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged and handed him over to be crucified.

It was a sad ending for this Roman governor. He had followed the crowd. The dangerous thing to follow the crowd when you know the truth. It's frightening to ignore your conscience when it tells you what is right and good.

And yet so often we go along with the crowd and choose what is false and no benefit to our soul and ignore our conscience that is screaming, screaming out for us to listen to it.

[29 : 51] Pilate delivered Jesus to be crucified. He gazed into the face of divine majesty and turned away forever. And you know Pilate's problem was that he lacked courage to stand for what he believed and what he knew what was right.

And yet it's the same problem the church has today in the day that we live in. We lack courage to stand up for the truth, to stand up for what is right, to stand up and be counted as one of the Lord's people.

All too often we want to wash our hands and walk away from the hard task of being a Christian and witnessing a good confession and telling others about Jesus and how things are so different now.

For in the days of the early church they used to put many, many Christians to death in the great arenas of Rome, one after another after another. And to be a Christian then meant that you signed your death warrant and your life was forfeit.

And the great empire at that time it was growing and growing and growing and seeming to stamp out the cause of Christ underfoot and with every death of every Christian it seemed that the cause of the gospel was hopeless.

[31 : 09] And one of the emperors at that time was called, this man called Julian the Apostate, who had everything in his power. He did everything to eradicate Christianity.

He had brought in paganism. He had abolished the Sabbath. He would do anything and he tried everything just to stand in the face of Christianity in order to get rid of it. And this emperor, Julian the Apostate, he hated Christianity so much that he wore this medallion around his neck so everybody could see it and it had written upon it the cause of Christ being extinguished.

He was proud of what he did. But then you hear this man on his deathbed. After killing all of these Christians and watching them die, you hear this man's dying words saying, Thou hast triumphed.

Oh, Galilean. You see, my friend, the man of Galilee will always triumph. It doesn't matter whether kings and princes of this world will combine against him.

It doesn't matter if the forces of hell itself are unleashed upon him. The man of Galilee will win the day. And far better for you to join that man of Galilee, though his followers be few and his name be despised and his cause trampled under foot, far better for you to align yourself with the man of Galilee than all the false prophets of this world.

[32 : 41] Never think that because the church is in a minority that her day is done. Never think that because the number of the people who follow the Lord is small that there is no hope for the church.

Never think that there is no way back for the people of God as the tide of secularism and atheism turns. But far better for you to join that minority because God is with her and God is in the midst of her and nothing shall her remove.

The Lord of hosts is on her side and doth constantly remain. So here we see Pilate's prosecution and Pilate's proposal and Pilate's Passover.

But the key word for Pilate was king and it's this expression king of the Jews which runs throughout the whole crucifixion narrative as Pilate interrogates Jesus with it.

Then he taunts the Jews with it. Then he has it written upon the cross for all people to see. And if you've noticed Pilate's three questions in this chapter refer to Jesus time and time again as the king of the Jews.

[33 : 53] And Pilate's is not only known in history for his questions regarding the outcome of the trial of Jesus but he's also recognized by that inscription which he smeared so hastily upon the cross.

And the cross itself is known to all the ages by that bold inscription Jesus of Nazareth the king of the Jews. It was an inscription which was penned perhaps to wound Jewish pride penned in three languages Hebrew so that the world's religion could read it.

Greek so that the world's culture could read it. And Latin so that the world's government could read it. This inscription bore a message that was to be read and to be seen by all people.

And in his writing of that inscription Pilate himself shows us the finality of his own spiritual decision. And although there was a conflict that had waged war in his heart and between the right he knew and the wrong he was about to commit, this inscription was to be the finding of this man's heart and mind.

Majesty had radiated from every word and every movement of Jesus who stood at the bar of Pilate's judgment. And he had spent these last hours of Jesus' life in the presence of a king and yet he turned his back, turned his back forever upon the cross and the hope of salvation.

[35 : 22] And the title of this section, it suggests to us that Jesus was before Pilate, that this day was appointed for Jesus from all of eternity. But the reality of this day in Pilate's life was that one day soon the roles would be reversed because the day was already appointed for Pilate to stand at the bar of God's judgment and give an account of his actions.

He may have stood before Jesus and passed judgment upon him, but his actions were to have eternal consequences. And the Bible, it solemnly, solemnly reminds us that on the day of judgment all must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that everyone may receive the things done in his body according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.

all must give an account of the life that God has given to them and to whom much has been given. Much will be required of them.

Pilate is a solemn reminder that that day is coming for each and every one of us. But the glory of the gospel says to us today that now is the accepted time, and today is the day of salvation.

When you hear the name Pilate, what do you think of? What type of person springs to your mind? It's a man who knew the truth but refused to stand up for it.

[37 : 06] A man who condemned Christ but only in doing so he was condemning himself. He was a man who had the greatest opportunity, but he walked away.

Just walked away. Pilate missed his opportunity. And if we could hear his cry from hell today, we would know that it was a wasted opportunity.

And yet you have the same opportunity as him. Jesus Christ offered to you freely in the gospel. But what will you do with the one whom they call the King of the Jews?

Amen. May the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.