

Mark 15:1-15 – Jesus' Trial Before Pilate

Last week, we saw how Jesus was arrested, and tried by the leaders of Israel. We saw that they could find nothing he was guilty of. At last, they asked him if he was the Son of God, and then they found him guilty of blasphemy. However, they could not then put him to death. The Jews at that time were ruled by the Gentile Romans. Only the Romans were allowed to give the death sentence. So they now took Jesus to Pilate, the Roman governor in the area of Judea (where Jerusalem was).

1. The trial before Pilate (v1-5)

This trial fulfilled Jesus' words in 10:33-34. He had told his disciples that he would be handed over by the Jews to the Gentiles to be killed. It seemed like Jesus' enemies were in control. Though they did the evil they desired, nothing happened except what God had planned. Nothing can defeat God's plans (Romans 8:28-31)!

The Jews had condemned Jesus for blasphemy. But blasphemy was not a crime that the Romans would put him to death for. So instead they accused him of being a rebel – claiming to be a king, and so being an enemy of the Roman ruler, Caesar (see John 19:12). Jesus was a king, and he said so. However, when they accused him of many other things, he said nothing. It was clear to Pilate that Jesus was no threat to his rule or to peace. As we read in John 18:36-37, Jesus' kingdom is not from this world. It is not one more political party. Its beginnings and its power come from heaven. We do not need to and must not fight, manipulate or politic to advance the gospel. We must use only holy ways – teaching the word of God, obeying it, loving and praying.

2. The release of Barabbas (v6-15)

Pilate wanted to release Jesus, but he could see that the leaders of Israel were very angry. Pilate wanted to keep them happy, as he wanted there to be peace in his kingdom – otherwise his own masters in Rome would be displeased with him. Each year at the Passover (v6), a Jewish prisoner used to be released to please the people. The crowd asked for this again. Pilate thought to himself, “Perhaps I can release Jesus this way.” He knew that the leaders of Israel were jealous of Jesus. He thought that the crowds might ask for Jesus to be released. After all, Jesus was very respected with many people throughout Israel. Jealousy is a terrible sin which brings great confusion and disorder (James 3:16). Is there someone you are jealous of? Jealousy is a form of hatred. If we were loving, we will rejoice when someone is blessed. However, the priests persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas to be released (v11). Barabbas was a murderer (v7) – a real enemy of Rome! The priests were hypocritical. Pilate thought (v12), “perhaps I can release them both.” But when he asked if he should release Jesus, the crowds were persuaded to cry out for him to be crucified. The Bible says that we must not follow crowds in doing evil (Exodus 23:2). Where there is a lot of noise and excitement, there is often little wisdom or godliness. Even now, Pilate knew Jesus was innocent (v14). However, Pilate's real desire was to keep the people happy and quiet (v15). Pilate did not hate Jesus like the priests did, but he still had him crucified. Weak men can do as much evil as bad men! Jesus was beaten, and handed over. Jesus suffered so many wrongs and humiliations – all for us. Barabbas went free and Jesus died in his place. Christians are like Barabbas; we deserve to die, but innocent Jesus did it in our place and we go free!