

The Journey to the Cross, Part 18

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[0:00] So Mark chapter 15, we're going to read from verse 1 to verse 20. Last week we looked at Jesus' trial before the Jewish religious leaders. This time here is Jesus before the Roman governor Pilate.

Let's hear the word of God together. Very early in the morning, the chief priests with 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. Are you the king of the Jews? asked Pilate. Yes, it is as you say, Jesus replied.

The chief priests accused him of many things. So again Pilate asked him, aren't you going to answer? See how many things they are accusing you of. But Jesus still made no reply, and Pilate was amazed.

Now it was the custom at the feast to release a prisoner whom the people requested. A man called Barabbas was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising.

[1:06] The crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did. Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews? asked Pilate, knowing it was out of envy that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him.

But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead. What shall I do then with the one you call the king of the Jews?

Pilate asked them. Crucify him, they shouted. Why? What crime has he committed? asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, crucify him.

Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged and handed him over to be crucified.

The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace, that is the praetorium, and called together the whole company of soldiers. They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him.

[2:09] And they began to call out to him, Hail, king of the Jews. Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spat on him.

Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him. And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

Amen. Let's think about the first 20 verses there. As we look again at this, now the second trial that Jesus undergoes.

As we see Jesus being rejected as king in this section. There is a saying that goes along the lines that we need to learn from history, or we will simply repeat its mistakes.

And I think it's important for us as we focus on this second trial scene, as we look at Jesus now on trial as king of the Jews.

- [3 : 21] So the Jewish religious leaders had tried him in the religious court in order to find him guilty of blasphemy. But they knew that a Roman court would never convict a person to die for blasphemy.
- So they're charging Jesus with claiming to be king of the Jews. They want Pilate to find him guilty of treason against Caesar. It's important for us to recognize that while in some ways Pilate and the soldiers are very different from us, they are also guilty of mistakes that we ourselves can make.
- As we find Jesus being subjected to more injustice, as we see him face dishonor, it's important for us to see that these figures, these stories, can and should in a way serve as mirrors, exposing our own hearts and lives, causing us to reflect on how we respond to Jesus.
- So we're going to think about Pilate. We're going to think about the Roman soldiers. We're going to think about Barabbas. We're going to think about how did Jesus impact their lives? How do they react to Jesus?
- And in what ways, if any, am I like them? How should I pray for myself? How should I pray for others in light of these character traits? What difference will it make to see our own hearts being revealed in this story?
- [4 : 50] So let's look at these characters and let's see what we can learn, beginning with Pilate, who is the Roman governor. Now, I think Mark wants us to understand that Pilate doesn't believe Jesus is worthy of death.
- He believes Jesus is innocent of this charge that's brought against him. Well, let's see how this plays out. So in verse 1, the religious leaders of the Jews bring Jesus to Pilate.
- And they've obviously told Pilate that he is claiming to be the king of the Jews. And so Pilate asks Jesus the question, are you the king of the Jews?
- Yes, it is as you say. One of the interesting things about this trial, same as with the religious trial, is the silence of Jesus. And see there in verse 4, Pilate is struck by the fact that Jesus remains silent despite the many accusations being brought by the Jewish religious leaders.
- Pilate is not used in his courtroom to see someone with this level of composure and dignity when they're on trial for their lives.
- [6 : 05] But this is Jesus fulfilling his role as the suffering servant. In Isaiah 53, we're told that Jesus would suffer silently. And we see this here.
- So here is Jesus before Pilate. Pilate, we're told in verse 5, is amazed by Jesus. And it seems that from the beginning, Pilate wants to find a way to not have to try or sentence Jesus.
- And so we're introduced to this custom in verse 6. It was the custom at the feast, that's the Passover feast, to release a prisoner whom the people requested.
- So the Romans are now in charge over Israel. But they have set this law where once a year at the Passover, time of great national celebration, a prisoner can be set free.
- So Pilate, naturally, when the crowd in verse 8 come and ask Pilate for a release, says to them, Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?
- [7 : 18] Because at this stage, he's already figured out that the real motive behind the charge against Jesus is envy, is self-interest.
- That they are issuing trumped up charges in order to get rid of an opponent who's taking popularity from the religious leaders.
- When it gets to the end, when Pilate nails his colors to the mast, when the crowd begin crying out that Jesus should be crucified, look at verse 14.

Pilate asks the question, Why? What crime has he committed? So there is Pilate's personal verdict. Pilate, Jesus has done nothing deserving of death.

He's not the dangerous revolutionary guilty of treason that the religious establishment have set him up to be. So Pilate believes he has done no crime, but in verse 15, nevertheless, he condemns Jesus as guilty.

[8:34] Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged and handed him over to be crucified. Here is another injustice against Jesus.

Here is a judge willingly and knowingly condemning an innocent man and doing it blatantly in order to please the crowd, in order to secure his political position.

Now when we see this going on in world politics today, we are rightly horrified. But here we see it in Jesus, that Pilate condemns him as guilty for his own self-interest.

That begs an important question from us. Are you and I, are we, like Pilate, people pleasers?

Do we live with the fear of man so that that's what determines how we live and how we act?

[9:46] What does that look like for us compared to Pilate? Well, perhaps it might look like hiding our beliefs, hiding our values and behavior under pressure from family, from friends, from colleagues.

Or maybe it's just a perception that if I stand and be counted as a Christian, that life will get difficult for me. Maybe you know that Japanese proverb, the nail that sticks out will be hammered in.

We instinctively do not want to be hammered. So it's a challenge for us to count the cost to stand up and be a Christian. And so perhaps you know what it is to hide your belief and behavior.

I was talking to our young people, our edge group, and that was my experience as a teen, as an early 20, trying desperately to fit in, to blend in, to not have anybody ask those questions.

You know, God calls us to be holy. Jesus said we should be a different kind of people, living a different kind of culture. That's hard. Perhaps for us, we have an inner tug of war between our convictions that we would love to live out, but then we get weak and we get fearful.

[11:08] And so we're constantly feeling guilty because there's things we should do and say that we don't. Or maybe you feel really drawn to Jesus, but you've never committed because you're aware of the cost.

Perhaps what it will mean within your family or friends. I had a Chinese friend called Larry in Glasgow, and we spent years reading the Bible together.

And he was really drawn to Jesus. You could see it. He went home to visit his family, and he came back and he sat down with me and he said, I would love to follow Jesus, but I can't because my parents would not approve.

Perhaps that's our experience. Perhaps living with the fear of man means we seek approval in the wrong places. Ed Welch has written a book with a great title, When People Are Big and God Is Small.

We can find ourselves doing that all the time, not living for God's approval, but being concerned, what will other people around me think if I stand up for Jesus in this way or in that way?

[12:18] And when we are like that, if we're Christians and we're struggling with the fear of man, one inevitable consequence is that we will always struggle with sharing our faith, that our evangelism and mission will suffer.

I read an incredibly convicting sentence from a man by the name of Tahir. Tahir is somebody who works in some of the Stan states in the former Soviet Republic.

He plants churches among Muslim people groups. And he said this, he said, the world is more ready to receive the gospel than the church is to share the gospel.

Because so often we're afraid. So often we're concerned to please people rather than to please our God. When that's you, when that's me, what do we do about that?

Where does change come from? Can I suggest that the change will come when we focus on identity?

[13:28] First of all, focusing on the identity of Jesus. To see who Jesus is and what Jesus has done for us. To recognize here is the son of God who has left the glory of heaven.

That he has become fully human. He's been tried and tested and tempted as we are yet without sin. That he's lived in perfect obedience on our behalf. That he's going through all this suffering, ultimately taking him to the cross in order to pay the price for our sin to bring us to God.

If we understand the cost that Jesus was willing to pay in order to make us children of God, as we continue to live in that reality, as that dominates our thinking, that's the only way to overcome being a people pleaser.

To be overwhelmed by the love of God as it's shown to us in Jesus. So we need to see the identity of Christ, but we also need to be so clear on our identity as Christians in Christ.

To see that when our faith is in Jesus, we are children of God. That we have this eternal inheritance laid up for us. We have absolute security.

[14:54] We have a love that will never let us go. We have an acceptance that is guaranteed from the one who matters more than anybody else. If you get the chance over the summer to read one book, I've recommended it before, Tim Keller's The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness.

The Gospel of Self-Forgetfulness. I can't remember which one it is. Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness, I think it is. An incredible book on helping us to think less of ourselves, to think more of Jesus as the way into joy and as the way into mission as the people of God.

So there's some lessons from Pilate. What lessons can we draw from the Roman soldiers? What do we see of them? We see men who are professional in cruelty and humiliation, don't we?

Verse 16, These Roman soldiers, they're experts in torture.

They're experts in killing. They're experts in degrading and humiliating their prisoners. Remember a few years ago, some of those horrible images that came out of the Abu Ghraib Detention Center.

[16:28] Whenever prisoners are treated as less than, it's not a nice thing to see. Here is Jesus being treated as less than, dishonored shamefully, mocking Jesus' claim to be king.

There's this cruel theater show. Let's dress Jesus up as a king in order to tear him down, is the soldiers thinking.

They would agree with the Jewish crowd at the cross that cried, We have no king but Caesar. They don't see Jesus as a king. They respond to power, to the power and glory of Rome.

That's the emperor. He's the true king. They look at Jesus. They see nothing worth value. And so they mock him and they continue to go about their business of execution.

Here's one lesson that we can take for ourselves from the Roman soldiers. Are you and I too busy for Jesus? Are you and I too busy to build a relationship with Jesus?

[17:40] Or too busy to even get to know who he truly is in the first place? It seems such a tragedy in the case of these Roman soldiers. They have this unique opportunity to examine Jesus' claim.

You know, he's come from the courthouse. He's been tried as the son of God, as the savior of the world, as the king of the Jews, but they have no interest in discovering, is any of this true?

And if that's true, what difference does it make? They're too busy doing their job to take the opportunity that's presented to them. Like them, for us, life can get crazy, crazy busy.

Even in summer, when it should be, in a sense, a time for many of us to rest, it seems like things are just relentless. There are things that we must do to do with work.

There are commitments in the home. There are family and friends to take care of. There's stuff that we sometimes just waste time on. There's good hobbies to pursue. But all of that taken together means often we leave very little time for Jesus.

[18:53] We don't make blocks in our calendar for reading, for prayer, making time to be with other Christians. Sometimes we find that that time can very easily be squeezed out, if we're honest.

There was some leadership advice I was reminded of this week, which I think is really appropriate when it comes to this. And it's simply, don't let the good swallow the great. We have many good things that we have to do in our lives.

Many noble things to pursue. But don't let those block out the time that we need to build a relationship with Jesus, our Lord and our Savior.

to grow in our faith or to come to faith. To make this relationship with Jesus a priority.

To really understand who he is and what he has done. To not let him simply pass us by like the soldiers did. Maybe we can think of the story of when Jesus went to visit Mary and Martha.

[20:00] Boys and girls, I'm sure you remember the story of when Jesus went to visit Mary and Martha. Two sisters. Jesus came. He was their friend. And he sat down and he began teaching in one room.

There's one sister, Martha, and she's like super busy. She's cooking. She's cleaning. She's preparing a meal for Jesus. And she's really annoyed with Mary because Mary is sitting simply listening to Jesus.

Boys and girls, do you remember what Jesus said? He said, Mary's chosen the better thing because Mary's listening to Jesus. It's good to be busy. It's good to work.

But it's most important for each one of us to spend time with Jesus. So again, if we find ourselves, you know, coming into the summer season thinking, man, my calendar is absolutely crammed.

How is change going to come? We're going to have to be really deliberate about slowing down. We're going to need to be really deliberate in our time management, in our calendar management, if we want to invest in our relationship with the Lord Jesus.

[21:09] If we want to be serious about knowing him and knowing him better, perhaps there are changes, really practical changes that need to happen to how our weeks, our days look.

It would be a wonderful thing if we could look ahead to this summer and say, this is a summer where I'm really going to dig deep into the Bible, where I'm going to examine who Jesus is. I'm going to think about what the cross is all about and to see how that would change us to prioritize church, whether that's Sunday morning, Sunday evening, whether it's Wednesday evenings and outside of term times, prioritizing Bible reading and prayer.

Your man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. We need God's word for our spiritual life. The change will come as we slow down, as we reevaluate, as we set new priorities to build, to grow a relationship that will last so we won't be too busy for Jesus.

And what about Barabbas? What lessons can we draw from Barabbas? We don't learn too much about him, but we know that he was a political freedom fighter.

Verse 7, a man called Barabbas was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising.

[22:37] He was a man who wanted revolution. There was lots of people called zealots who were keen to see a free Israel. He wanted to get rid of the Romans. And Barabbas is one of those guys who's willing to kill for the cause.

What do you live for, Barabbas? I live for the freedom of Israel. But he's obviously been found captured, been found guilty of murder, and here he stands condemned and guilty with just a few hours left to live.

But then that remarkable thing happens at the feast. This condemned and guilty man walks free. Verse 9, again, do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?

Ask Pilate, verse 11, but the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead. So the religious leaders, along with the masses, they choose this murderer, this political freedom fighter, rather than Jesus.

Perhaps for many of the people, they thought this is the kind of savior that we want. Of course, it's not the savior that they needed, but perhaps Barabbas represented the hopes of many for political freedom.

[23:56] We see that in Jesus' ministry. The expectations of God's king were in many ways far too low, only thinking in terms of political and national freedom, rather than recognizing that Jesus, the true king, God's king, he brings spiritual freedom, he brings an eternal global kingdom.

A question related to Barabbas' life, a lesson for ourselves. What difference does the substitution of Jesus make to our lives?

So at this trial, Pilate willingly and knowingly switches the guilty Barabbas for the innocent Jesus. Barabbas, who should have been condemned to die, walks free, expecting death and judgment, but he tastes freedom.

Now we're not told whether Barabbas watched as Jesus took his place on that cross. We're not told whether he cared, whether that made any difference to his life.

We have no idea. It doesn't really matter for us. What matters profoundly for us though is what difference does that substitution make for us?

[25:16] Because this swap that's happening prepares us for the good news of the Bible. Barabbas stands for all of us. As sinners who disobey God, who dishonor God, we stand with Barabbas deserving the judgment of God.

But then there is the cross. There's this wonderful exchange that takes place. Paul puts it this way, God made him, that's Jesus, who knew no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Jesus takes my sin suffers the judgment of God in my place, gives me his righteousness as a free gift of his grace so I can be welcomed, so I can be reconciled.

The Bible says to us, I am Barabbas and you are Barabbas. I wonder, do we see that? Do we appreciate the difference that makes for how we think about life?

Here is the grace of God being indicated to us that Jesus becomes our legal representative. He stands in our place in the court of law.

[26 : 39] He faces judgment and death so that you and I, we don't need to because he has gone there for us if our faith is in him.

Jesus rises from the dead and returns to the glory of heaven and as our legal representative, we too receive new life in him with a promise of resurrection life that will never end after death.

That he returns to the glory of heaven and he is our legal representative. What belongs to him belongs to us too. So that is our glorious future, the glory of heaven.

seeing Jesus face to face and being made like him. Jesus calls God Father. Jesus enjoys the eternal love of the Father and in him, that's our privilege too.

As the church, we can pray our Father in heaven. He belongs to us. Mark writes this so that we wouldn't miss out.

[27 : 49] That we wouldn't walk by Jesus out of fear of what people might say. That we wouldn't put Jesus to one side because of the fear of our loss of reputation perhaps.

Say don't miss out because of our busyness or other priorities that come ahead of the Lord Jesus. Recognize Jesus takes your place, is willing to take your place and gifts you his place.

As a loved child of God. And he's on this journey towards the cross. He's going to this trial to show us just how great God's love is.

Let me just finish by putting Jesus' trial here in the big picture of salvation. What can we see? One thing that we see very clearly is that the world in its sin chooses to reject God's Savior.

We saw last week the Jewish religious leaders reject Jesus. Now we see the Romans rejecting Jesus. The world is conspiring to get rid of Jesus because it reveals our hearts that every one of us by nature rebels, turns our back on our Creator and our Savior.

[29 : 04] Every one of us in different ways every day dishonors our God. This trial reminds us of that. But putting this trial in the big picture also reminds us that God can bring good from evil.

This trial is part of the world's greatest injustice that has ever been seen. Jesus, the one who deserves all the glory we could afford, is treated so shamefully, so badly, yet this is part of God's eternal plan.

And in God's eternal plan, this becomes the greatest act of love and grace and justice and mercy the world has ever known. And again, as we put this trial in the big picture, we see Jesus is the great, the greater, the greatest king the world has ever seen.

The soldiers couldn't see it. They mocked Jesus. What kind of king is this? They thought Caesar was the ultimate king, but of course the Roman Empire would collapse, collapsed in 476.

All its power, all its glory was gone, but Jesus' kingdom is global. It spans history. It spans continents and languages and people groups and religious backgrounds.

[30 : 21] There is no Hadrian's wall that is strong enough to stop the spread of the gospel. Jesus is showing that he is building his church and nothing and no one can stop it.

There's good news all around the world of what God is doing. I wonder, are we part of that kingdom today? Would we like to be part of that kingdom? Do we recognize Jesus is the king who loved us and gave himself for us?

Live so, put your faith in Jesus. Trust that when he went to the cross, he went there for you in order to forgive you your sin and to give you eternal life.

Turn from your sin, turn towards God and live for your king. Let's live for our king. Let's speak for him. Let's pray that his kingdom would come here in Edinburgh and Scotland and around our world.