

Led To The Slaughter

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[0 : 00] As soon as it was morning, the chief priest held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. And they bound Jesus and led him away and delivered him over to Pilate.

This section introduces us to a new character in the plot of Jesus' crucifixion. And his name is Pontius Pilate. Pilate was the Roman prefect responsible for governing this particular area of the empire.

History tells us that he served in this particular role for about 10 years. The question immediately becomes, as we look at the bigger picture here of Mark's gospel, why is Pilate actually necessary? Why is it that he even comes into the picture as far as the narrative of Jesus' crucifixion? Pilate is concerned. And we need to understand that the Roman form of government did indeed allow for quite a bit of flexibility with conquered nations.

They were allowed nations like Israel to live under their own customs and laws to a certain extent. And then, of course, that was underneath the umbrella of the Roman law.

[1 : 18] The Sanhedrin, which consisted of the chief priests and the elders and the scribes or the lawyers, as we're told here in verse number one, were a legitimate governing body for the Jews, even as the Roman perspective was concerned.

They looked at the Sanhedrin as a legitimate governing body. But they were limited in the scope of their government. And one such limitation that they had was the power of execution.

Only Rome, in Roman law, was allowed to actually condemn a person to death. And so the council needed Pilate's permission to actually put Jesus to death.

Now, they could have carried out the execution, but they needed the okay from the Roman authority, which in this case was Pontius Pilate at that particular time. They needed his permission to do it.

Not only that, but in the case of the Jews at this particular time, it being Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, they had laws that said they could not put a person to death during the feast.

[2 : 22] So they not only needed Pilate's permission, they actually needed Pilate to carry out the execution of Jesus. So the purpose in them bringing Jesus to Pilate at dawn early in the morning was so that their plan could actually be finalized and come to fruition.

And what we see happening and unfolding in these verses is that we find the perfect Lamb of God, as Isaiah said in Isaiah 53, being led to the slaughter.

But it's not just the fact of Jesus' death that I want you to understand this morning. This trial with Pilate affirms Jesus' innocence, and then it illustrates an important doctrine for us, and that is the doctrine of substitution.

And not only was Jesus innocent, but Jesus' death was a substitutionary death. And to help us walk through the narrative, I've got three words for us to look at.

The first is interrogation. The second is substitution. The third is condemnation. And I think that will help us as we work through these verses together.

[3 : 36] First off, let's see interrogation. Interrogation. Look with me again at verse 2. Pilate asked him, Are you the king of the Jews? And he answered him, You have said so.

And the chief priest accused him of many things. And Pilate again asked him, Have you no answer to make? See how many charges they bring against you.

But Jesus made no further answer, so that Pilate was amazed. Well, for Pilate to agree to crucify Jesus required a bit of political maneuvering on the part of the chief priest.

Now remember back, if you can remember a couple of weeks, to Jesus' midnight trial, that kangaroo court we called it, before the Sanhedrin. Remember what the charge eventually became.

The charge against Jesus was a charge of blasphemy. That's what the Sanhedrin was seeking to put Jesus to death for. But that was something that the Roman authorities, they wouldn't have really cared anything about.

[4 : 45] There was nothing about the breaking of Jewish religious laws that Rome cared anything about governing over. So when the Sanhedrin brought Jesus before Pilate, they were going to have to come up with something else.

And when they presented their case before Pilate, they accused Jesus not of blasphemy, but instead they accused him of treason and insurrection, crimes of which were intolerable to Rome. Now Luke wrote about this. In fact, if you'll just flip over a few pages to Luke's gospel and turn with me please to Luke chapter 23, Luke actually gives us the specific charges that the Sanhedrin lays out.

And I want you to see these. Luke chapter 23, verse one, then the whole company of them arose and brought him before Pilate. And they began to accuse him.

There's a threefold accusation here. We found this man misleading our nation. That's number one. He's trying to become a leader among the people. Number two, forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar.

[5 : 54] In other words, he's trying to amass a following among Israel. And a part of his teaching is that they shouldn't pay their taxes, which was something Rome cared about.

And then the third part, saying that he himself is Christ. Now, they defined Christ the way that they wanted to divine Christ for Pilate's ears.

They said Christ a king. Now when the Jews thought of Christ as a king, they had a very different idea than what Rome had when they considered Christ as a king.

They didn't think of a spiritual leader. They thought of a political rival to the empire. In verse four or verse five, if you'll look down again, Pilate wasn't convinced of what they were saying.

And then they continued on. They were urgent, saying, He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee even to this place. So what they charge him against with Pilate to try to get him to be put to death is not blasphemy.

[7 : 00] It's treason. It's insurrection. He's amassing a following. He's going to come in. He's telling them to stop paying their taxes to Caesar. And he's going to try to create a revolution.

And for that, he must be put to death, Pilate. Now, this explains why Pilate immediately asked Jesus in verse two if he was the king of the Jews.

Because they're attempting to deceive Pilate into thinking that Jesus was trying to set himself up as a king. The irony in all of this is that a powerful political figure overthrowing Rome was precisely what the Jews were hoping for.

They come to Pilate seeking to destroy Jesus for being the thing that they wish he was. If Jesus had actually come with that agenda, with that kind of political, military agenda, all of these men that are accusing Jesus would have actually supported him.

But since his purpose didn't match their expectations, they pretended to be on the side of Rome so that they could get rid of him instead.

[8 : 18] And that's not unlike the way many people view Jesus today. People come to Jesus every week in churches with a particular expectation.

And then when they find that Jesus doesn't line up with their particular expectation, they abandon the truth. When they find out that Jesus's primary interest is not their personal ambition, they decide that Jesus isn't actually the Messiah that I want him to be, and they crucify him in their minds.

That's what's unfolding here with the Sanhedrin. Now, Jesus's answer to Pilate is a bit enigmatic, isn't it? It's just a strange saying.

The way it comes across in English, he says, you have said so. You have said so. Which comes across in English as if Jesus is almost trying to skirt the question.

He's trying to avoid being too transparent. So he answers affirmatively, but it's with a measure of reservation.

[9 : 26] And why do you think he did that? We have to remember and interpret this in the larger context of Jesus's life, where he regularly actually veiled his identity.

And do you remember why he did that? It wasn't because he was dishonest. It wasn't because he was afraid. It was because one cannot rightly understand Jesus's identity as the Messiah apart from his purpose as the Messiah.

And in this moment, even if Pilate thinks he's a messianic figure, Pilate's mind is not a spiritual savior that will redeem them from their sins.

His mind is set on Jesus as a political savior who will overturn the rule of Rome. So there's, in the sense, Jesus is saying with this phrase, I am, but not in the way that you think I am.

So Pilate says, are you the king of the Jews? Well, yeah, but you're not exactly thinking of that the way that you should be thinking of that. And John actually gives us the fuller picture of that.

Actually, why don't you turn there with me to John chapter 18.

[10:43] John chapter 18. John covers more detail than any of the gospel authors when it comes to Jesus's crucifixion.

And I want you to look with me at verse 33. John 18, verse 33.

So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, are you the king of the Jews? And look how Jesus answers. Do you say this of your own accord or did others say it to you about me?

And Pilate answered, am I a Jew? Your old nation and chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done? And Jesus answered, my kingdom is not of this world.

If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from this world.

[11:48] Then Pilate said to him, so you are a king. And Jesus answered, you say that I am a king. And for this purpose, I was born.

And for this purpose, I have come into the world to bear witness to the truth. And everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice. And then notice how Pilate responds.

He says, what is truth? He was looking at truth, embodied, but he didn't see it. And after he had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, I find no guilt in him.

Now, do you see the fuller picture that John gives? You have said so. What's Jesus saying? Yeah, I am a king, but I'm not a king like you think I'm a king. I'm not here to be the emperor of the Roman Empire.

I'm not here to lead a revolution of Jews to throw you out of Palestine. My kingdom is not of this world. And if it was of this world, that's exactly what we'd be doing. But if you will look around, Pilate, you will notice that none of my followers are actually doing that because my kingdom is not of this world.

[12:56] Do you see the bigger picture here? Now, all kinds of people seem to be on this endless search for the historical Jesus, what they call the historical Jesus. They're intrigued by Jesus as a person, but they refuse to accept that he was anything other than an ordinary man who suffered a tragic death.

But until you come to terms with what the Bible says is true of the purpose of the Messiah, namely to give his life to appease God's wrath against your sin, until you come to terms with that fact, you'll never comprehend the reality of his identity.

And that's the issue with Pilate. That's the reason Jesus answers Pilate in the way that he did. The Sanhedrin continue to press their accusations against him.

You see that in verse 3. The chief priest accused him of many things. But just as Jesus had done in the earlier trial, he refused to answer any of the false allegations.

Now, Mark writes that Pilate was especially taken aback by this. Look with me there at verse 4. Pilate again asked him, Have you no answer to make?

[14:16] See how many charges they bring against you. But Jesus made no further answer so that Pilate was amazed. Pilate is accustomed to people coming into his courts begging for their life, begging in defense against their accusers.

And now he has just this unique experience where this man stands before him, not cowardly, but with a silent resilience, a silent resolve.

And Pilate is blown away by the fact that Jesus stands there with this composure, not attempting to defend himself against what he and Pilate both know to be false charges.

He quietly stands, and he answers only the question of his identity. But Pilate didn't know it. But scripture was being fulfilled before his very eyes.

Remember Isaiah 53, 7. He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth. Like a lamb led to the slaughter, and like a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.

[15:33] So we see interrogation. Secondly, we see substitution. Substitution. Look with me at verse 6. Now at the feast, he used to release for them one prisoner for whom they asked.

And among the rebels in prison who had committed murder in the insurrection, there was a man called Barabbas. And the crowd came up and began to ask Pilate to do as he usually did for them. Now history tells us that Pilate was no friend to the Jews. According to James Edwards, he actually despised them and on at least two other occasions had so offended them, intentionally offended them, that it produced riots among the people.

Now, some, Rome clearly being intolerant of insurrections, didn't appreciate the riots that Pilate has caused.

And Pilate then was walking on thin ice, as it were, in relation to his superiors. So perhaps that's why he had developed this custom to satisfy the Jews.

[16:48] On the feast day when the Passover would roll around, he would offer two options for the Jews before the people and he would release one of their prisoners back to him to show some kind of favor to the Jews and perhaps quell any other offense that he caused throughout the year.

And on this particular day, a crowd of Jews well aware of Pilate's tradition came to his headquarters at the same time as the Sanhedrin had come with Jesus.

But they're there for totally different reasons. I want you to see this. The Jewish leaders are there to have Jesus condemned. That's why they brought him. But the rabble is not there because of Jesus. They're there to have one of their friends released from custody. And unlike is often assumed, so many times we come to these passages and we may, as preachers, unfortunately, we'll refer to the fickle crowd, how that, on one hand, the crowd just one week earlier was crying out, Hosanna, glory to God in the highest as Jesus as Messiah.

And then a week later, they've already turned on him and they're calling for his crucifixion. But this isn't the same group of people. This isn't the same group of people that welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem.

[18:04] Those people that welcomed him in were devastated by what happened to Jesus. They still didn't quite understand exactly what he was doing, but they still expected him to come as the Messiah and deliver them even if they thought it was going to be a physical and political deliverance.

And they're crushed. That's why after Jesus' death on the morning of his resurrection, we see the two unnamed disciples walking back to their homes on the way to Emmaus.

Why? Not because they cried out crucify and then they felt bad about it, but because they were probably a part of the earlier crowd crying Hosanna and they're crushed by what they have now experienced.

Their hopes have now been crushed. This isn't the same group of people. This group of people that have come to Pilate's headquarters on this day seems to be a group of Jewish revolutionaries. We refer to them as zealots. Remember one of Jesus' disciples was at one time a zealot before he was converted and became a follower of Christ. They wanted to take advantage of Pilate's custom to get one of their men back.

[19:12] They weren't there because of Jesus. They wouldn't have even had any way of knowing that Jesus was even there or been aware of what was unfolding in regards to his midnight trial.

But in the providence of God, the Sanhedrin shows up at the same time that this rabble of revolutionaries show up and what begins to unfold in the ensuing chaos is this picture of substitution.

The target of the crowd was a man named Barabbas. All four Gospels make it clear that Barabbas was an insurrectionist, he was a murderer, and he had been arrested in a recent altercation with Rome.

The fact that the crowd had specifically come for Barabbas indicates that he wasn't just one of their group, but he was probably a main leader in their group, in this zealot movement.

Matthew even refers to him as a, quote, notorious prisoner, informing us that Barabbas was well known among all the people for his actions against Rome.

[20:26] And my point is that everybody knew Barabbas was actually guilty of crimes punishable by death, not only by Roman law, but also by Jewish law.

Whether you were Jew or Gentile, you could look at Barabbas and say, yeah, he's guilty according to our law. He deserves to die.

And while the chief priests were there to condemn Jesus, the crowd had actually come to demand the release of their guilty comrade. Now I want you to look at verse 9. Pilate answered them saying, do you want me to release for you the king of the Jews?

For he perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release for them Barabbas instead.

That last word is important here. Instead. Meaning, Barabbas was the one who was on the road to the cross.

[21 : 28] Barabbas. But instead of Barabbas, it becomes Jesus. An exchange has taken place. A substitution has taken place here with Barabbas.

So Pilate offers to release Jesus. You can see as you read through those gospels, you can see a great reluctance on Pilate's part to actually condemn him. That's not because Pilate was a believer or because Pilate was a righteous man.

He was neither. But the Lord was working on his heart in such a way that he knew there was something significant to this man. He could clearly see through the facade of the chief priest, recognizing that Jesus was a victim of establishment envy.

But he was also reluctant to release Barabbas, who was a known enemy of the state. So Pilate's in quiet. The conundrum here, he has a dilemma. On one hand, he has a man he believes to be innocent and he's reluctant because his wife has told him, I had a dream about this guy, you better not mess with him.

And now he's a little bit nervous about that being a superstitious man. And he's a little bit nervous about condemning Jesus. And then on the other hand, he has a criminal that he really wants to see dead because this criminal's main objective is to kill him instead.

[22 : 51] dead. So he doesn't want to condemn Jesus, but he doesn't want to release Barabbas either. And that creates a problem. What's certain in all of this is that Pilate publicly affirmed Jesus' innocence and Barabbas' guilt.

That's the point. Being unwilling to be just, perhaps trying to avoid another riot among the people, he left the decision in the hands of the crowd.

We aren't told exactly how the chief priest stirred up the crowd here. That's what we're told in verse 10 happens, or in verse 11, that the chief priest stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas instead.

But it probably wasn't very difficult. After all, the crowd had come for Barabbas, not Jesus. There's a good chance that they knew of Jesus, especially if they were from sort of the headquarters of the Zealot movement in Galilee.

That's where Jesus did most of his work and his ministry and his teaching. They probably knew of him. Perhaps they had been impacted on some level by him. They might have enjoyed the miracles that he did.

[24 : 05] They might have listened to the teaching that he gave, but in the end, Jesus wasn't the kind of Messiah that the crowd wanted. Barabbas was.

Do you see that? Jesus comes as the true Messiah. The crowd doesn't want him. He doesn't meet their expectations. On the other hand, is Barabbas, the sinful man.

Well, now, Barabbas, that's the kind of guy we want leading us at this point. That's the kind of guy we want calling the shots. though the stories of the Lord entertained them perhaps.

They weren't interested in someone whose agenda didn't match their own. And again, things haven't changed very much for people today. They're happy to hear about the incredible things that Jesus did.

They're happy to listen to some of the stories that he told, but they're not interested in a Messiah who calls them to abandon their ambitions, to repent of their sin, and to follow him instead.

[25 : 11] That's where the crowd is. Not very far off from where the Sanhedrin is. Maybe it's not very far off from where you are. But do you see the reality of substitution here in these verses?

Barabbas was guilty. Jesus was condemned. He quite literally became the substitute for Barabbas. And what we find happening here in Mark chapter 15 is Jesus being the fulfillment of the Leviticus 16 scapegoat.

Barabbas is the guilty one. But in this moment, the sins of Barabbas by Pilate and the Jews and the crowd are being transferred over to the innocent one, the guiltless one, Jesus.

And Jesus is the one who's going to be condemned. Jesus is the one who's going to be put to death. Jesus is the one who's going to suffer the alienation and the shame and the mockery that Barabbas was actually deserving of.

And he becomes the scapegoat in that moment. He becomes the substitute. And the significance of this picture here, listen, is that we, you and me, each one of us, we are Barabbas.

[26 : 32] We're the guilty ones. And because of our sin, we deserve death. We deserve alienation from God. But Jesus, the righteous one, the sinless one, the guiltless one, has become our scapegoat.

He is our substitute. And again, in Isaiah 53, 6, we see it. All we, like sheep, have gone astray. We have turned everyone to his own way.

And the Lord, Yahweh, has laid on him, laid on Jesus, the iniquity of us all. We're the ones who sin. We're the ones who are guilty. But God has laid our guilt on Jesus. He has taken our place. And we see it unfolding in the narrative here with Pilate and Barabbas.

So we see interrogation. We see substitution. And finally, we see condemnation. condemnation. Look at verse 12. Pilate again said to them, then what shall I do with the man you call king of the Jews?

[27 : 43] And they cried out again, crucify him. Now that escalated quickly. They're not calling for Jesus to be imprisoned or just punished.

the chief priests have actually stirred up the crowd to call for his death now. And Pilate said to them again, affirming his innocence, why?

What evil has he done? But they shouted all the more, crucify him, crucify him. So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.

The condemnation of Jesus didn't originate with Pilate. It originated with the Jews. Pilate's reluctance here, it doesn't absolve him of guilt. He's still guilty for what he did.

But the text indicates that had it been left to Pilate alone, Jesus probably wouldn't have been sentenced to death. It was Jesus' own people who pushed so hard for his execution.

[29 : 03] Reminds us of John chapter 1. He was in the world, the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, but his own did not receive him.

In Acts chapter 2, on the day of Pentecost, Peter preaches and he says this, men of Israel, hear these words, Jesus of Nazareth, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God.

You crucified, you crucified, and killed by the hands of lawless men, that being the Romans. God's. Now, was it out of hatred for Jesus, or was it love for Barabbas that the people cried for Jesus to be condemned?

It was both. The chief priest condemned him hatefully. The crowd condemned him ignorantly. But in the end, it doesn't really matter, because they all ultimately rejected the Messiah, the Son of God. And such is the case with those who reject Jesus still. Some despise the very message of the gospel. They despise Jesus himself.

[30 : 21] Their rejection of him is because of their hate for him. But then there's others who reject him ignorantly. Ignorantly just because they love other things more. They want other things more than what they want Jesus.

But whether you reject Jesus out of hate, or whether you reject him out of ignorance, you will face the same eternal judgment for your sin. Whether your position is outright hate or general indifference, the result is the same.

And it was the same for the chief priest and the ignorant crowd. It was also the same for Pilate. Pilate insists he could find no fault in the Lord.

The people didn't even try to justify a charge. He says, what has he done? They didn't say, well, he did this and this and this. No, they just said, crucify him.

We don't care what he's done or if he's done anything. Just crucify him and give us Barabbas instead. Cried for his crucifixion, punishment reserved for the most dangerous and notorious criminals.

[31 : 37] So that Jesus, the sinless one, was condemned to suffer as if he was the worst kind of human that they could find. Which again reminds us of Isaiah 53, 9.

They made his grave with the wicked and with the rich man in his death. Although he had done no violence and there was no deceit in his mouth.

Peter writes about this in 1 Peter 2. He committed no sin. Neither was deceit found in his mouth. 2 Corinthians 5, 21.

Paul addresses this. For our sake, he made him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Again, there's a transaction, a substitution. With Jesus' condemnation, we are made free. With his death, we receive life.

[32 : 44] Barabbas was released. Jesus was led to the slaughter. We sing about this, don't we? Bearing shame and scoffing rude, in my place condemned he stood.

Sealed my pardon with his blood. Hallelujah. What a savior. Sinclair Ferguson said without knowing him, the religious leaders and Pilate and Barabbas were all part of a tapestry of grace which God was weaving for sinners.

That's a great way to put it. I don't know if I have done an adequate job explaining why all of this matters or why it should matter to you and to me.

I did have the privilege this past Thursday to teach the lesson for the kids adventure club. I don't get to do that very often. Usually it's Allah and Ashley and Kyle that do that. This week I got to do it and the lesson that we were covering was titled Sin Brings Death.

And we walked through this gospel message together with the kids as we close this morning.

Maybe these bullet points would be helpful to show you why this text matters.

[34 : 08] first thing we told the kids Thursday is that God created you to live. God created you to live. Do you know why we dread death so much?

You know why we dread the mystery of it so much? Why we're so afraid? Even those of us who are believers afraid of at least the process of it taking place. Because we weren't created to die.

We're created to live. Genesis 2 says that God formed man out of the dust of the ground and then he breathed the breath of life into Adam's nostrils and man became a living creature.

God didn't create us to die. He didn't give Adam an expiration. He created us to live. So death is not meant to be natural. And we shouldn't treat it as such.

Death is destruction. It's an aberration from God's intention. God created us to live. Sin of which we are all guilty is what brings death.

[35 : 15] Breaking God's law, going against the purpose that the creator has given us causes us to lose the benefit that he gives in creating us.

And we're all guilty. We're not only guilty in Adam, we're guilty like Adam. Romans 3 tells us that we've all sinned.

Romans 6 tells us that the wages of that sin is death. So God creates us to live, but our sin is what brings death. But then here's the awesome thing.

The story of the Bible, the overarching story of the whole thing, is about God's determination to restore and reconcile us to himself in order that he might give us life again.

That's the whole story of the Bible. And as you go through the Old Testament, you see it in regards to covenant promises that God made to his people. You see it in the fulfillment of those promises despite their rejection of him over and over and over.

[36 : 20] And finally, you see it in the person of Jesus Christ, God's own son, who is himself life. John 1 says, in him was life, and the life was the light of men.

John 14, Jesus himself said, you know the verse, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes back to the father, which was the place Adam had before his sin.

No one comes back to the father unless it's through me. I'm the one that has life. So God creates us to live. Sin brings our death. And then God relentlessly pursues us in his perfection and in his will to restore us back to life.

And he does that through the person of his son, Jesus Christ, who when Jesus stands before Pilate here is condemned in the place of Barabbas in the same way that he is condemned in your place and in my place as well.

And then Jesus says, after paying our cost for sin on the cross, after raising from the dead, proving that he actually has power of life over death, Jesus says that whoever repents and trusts and follows me for eternal life will receive it.

[37 : 38] That the restoration to life that sin has destroyed is brought only through Jesus Christ. Jesus himself says it. I am the resurrection and the life.

Whoever believes in me, Jesus said, though he die, yet shall he live. And everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.

That's John 11. What's he talking about? Spiritual life. Of course, we'll all find our physical expiration. But what happens beyond that? For those who follow Christ alone, they receive eternal life, reconciliation with God, forgiveness of sin, eternal peace, comfort, joy.

And no one who doesn't will receive that same thing. That's why this text matters. It proves to us Jesus's innocence as well as his substitution.

This is at the heart of that tapestry of grace that Sinclair wrote about. Jesus willingly laid down his life to be condemned in our place.

[38 : 57] We are Barabbas. But whoever will believe, follow him, will be saved. There's an old hymn that I love.

I came across it again last Sunday. Maybe we'll sing it one day. It's called, My Faith Has Found a Resting Place. One of the verses says this, enough for me that Jesus saves.

This ends my fear and doubt. A sinful soul, I come to him. He'll never cast me out.

I need no other argument. I need no other plea. It is enough that Jesus died and that he died for me.