

Mark 15:1-15

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[0 : 00] Father in heaven, we come before you this morning about to open your word to a very difficult passage. In fact, the remainder of Mark's account of Jesus' earthly ministry, the rest of it is very difficult.

But Lord, in it, well, number one, you gave it to us so that we could read it. And in it, there are many instructions on how to live like Christ. But more than that, it is an account of Christ himself that we get to behold him.

And Lord, beholding him, we are changed. Help us this morning to behold Christ for who he truly is. And by your Holy Spirit, we ask that we would be changed.

And we pray this in Christ's name. Amen. If you have your Bibles, we'll be going through the portion of Mark's Gospel that I read, Mark 15, 1 to 15.

By the way, if you want to grab a Bible at the back, please feel free to do so. Before we get into the text, just a bit of a story. In 1970, a 17-year-old teen from Winnipeg named David Milgard was sentenced to life in prison for the rape and murder of Gail Miller that took place in Saskatoon.

[1 : 21] Milgard, he was traveling across the prairies, and he denied that he committed the crime. But under duress from police who were themselves pressured to solve the crime, David Milgard's friends changed their testimony, which led to his wrongful conviction.

And he was incarcerated for 22, just over 22 years, until DNA evidence exonerated him, and he was released. David Milgard served 22-plus years for a crime he didn't commit.

And some six years or so later, maybe seven years later, he settled with the Saskatchewan government and the federal government for \$10 million.

\$10 million for 22 years. Now, if you haven't heard of David Milgard before, that's okay. You might have heard of him if you're a fan of the Tragically Hip. The song Wheat Kings references him.

But it's a Canadian story, and it's a terrible blot on our recent history. It's an injustice of the first degree.

[2 : 31] A terrible stain on the justice system. There's something incredibly unsettling about injustice, isn't there? When justice is expected, but injustice is what we get.

Justice, and those tasked with safeguarding it, is very foundational to an orderly, safe, and stable society. Take away justice, things unravel awfully quick.

Society begins to crumble. In our text this morning, Jesus will be subjected to the second unjust trial in 12 hours.

He is before Pilate. He's already had the ridiculous charge levied against him that he was a blasphemer. It was drummed up by the chief priests and the whole council of the Sanhedrin.

And now, he's quite literally dragged in front of Pontius Pilate and accused again. And they are seeking, not life in prison, not 22 years, but the death penalty and crucifixion at that.

[3 : 39] Jesus will be unjustly condemned, ultimately. We'll see in the weeks to come leading up to Easter, as we wrap up our time in Mark's Gospel.

And we will see this morning the conviction of Jesus, which will be the most unjust act in human history. The sinless, perfect Savior, who is condemned to death for something that he 100% did not do.

So, how does this unjust sentence go down? And what does it teach us about human nature? And what injustice does to us and to our society?

So, we'll look at this scene, and we'll go through the whole text, but what we're going to do is we're going to break it up in terms of specific characters and taking a look, doing a bit of a deep dive in three characters that are featured here.

The first one, I'd say character as it's singular, but really the chief priests. We're going to take a look at them. The second group, or the second person rather, so that's the first group. The second person is Pontius Pilate.

[4 : 51] And the third and final one is Jesus himself. So, let's get right into it. We'll take a look at the chief priests. The chief priests, they have been engaged in a plot to destroy Jesus all the way back from Mark chapter 3.

Jesus, he is proclaiming the gospel, he is healing the sick, he is casting out demons, he's doing miracles, and people are being blessed in ways that they've never been blessed before. And by doing that, Jesus is showing the religious establishment to be wanting. And since chapter 3, they have hated him. And it says in chapter 3, verse 6, that they sought a way to destroy Jesus. They have been plotting and scheming since chapter 3. And here, we're going to see three ways they engage in injustice. The first way is their strategy. they're engaged in a very unjust strategy to get Jesus eliminated.

The second is they will engage in deception. And the third, we'll see their motivation in all of this, which is envy. So if you have your Bible, we're going to look at verses 1 to 5 of chapter 15.

[6 : 09] It says this, And as soon as it was morning, the chief priests 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.

I'll pause really quickly there. The chief priests, I mean, they're incredibly calculated with their strategy and their plan to destroy Jesus. Like I mentioned, it's a culmination of some three years of planning Jesus' downfall.

They have found a willing accomplice in Judas, Jesus' own disciple who betrays him and they take him away. And notice with me the strategy in verse 1.

They held a consultation first thing in the morning. This is, by the way, on top of what happens at the end of chapter 14 where Jesus is, he is before the whole council, a bit of a rump court.

We looked at that last week. And he has the charges levied at him. They don't stick. And finally, he's asked a question about his identity and he answers in the affirmative.

[7 : 16] The chief priest rips his garment and he cries out blasphemy. Death penalty it is. But in the morning, it continues. Because you have to understand, at this point, the sovereign power is not the Sanhedrin.

It's not the religious elites. It's Rome. Judea is a colony of Rome and they do not have the ability to sentence Jesus to death, but specifically a crucifixion.

Sure, maybe they could just have a hired hand to take Jesus out. I mean, they've had three years to do that. But they want it to be crucifixion. Because crucifixion is public and it's embarrassing.

And we'll see for the rest of chapter 15 that the emphasis of the crucifixion and the death of Jesus is not in the brutality of it. And I mean, the other gospel writers, they'll talk about the brutality of their crucifixion.

But Mark emphasizes its humiliation. How do you rehab somebody's reputation after they have hung on the cross as a naked, beaten criminal to die so that the body, this is the way it works in crucifixions, the body rots off and falls down.

[8 : 35] It is the most shameful thing that could happen in a shame-based society. The Sanhedrin can't do that. Rome can. So they meet in the early morning to figure out a way to meet with Pontius Pilate so that Jesus gets the stamp of death by crucifixion.

It is remarkable their strategy in place in all this. It's completely unjust and they're going in the early morning. Why? I mean, quite the gig.

If you're a Roman official, you wake up super early, you deal with the business of the day, 9, 10 o'clock, it's leisure time for the day. Not too bad.

So it has to be early morning because there's going to be a lineup of people to try to get their issues or their cases or their disagreements dealt with by Pontius Pilate.

So there is incredible planning that is happening here, incredible strategy, but it needs deception and this is the other part of it. And if you continue on with me in verse 2 and following, Pilate asked Jesus, are you the king of the Jews?

[9 : 44] And he answered him, you have said so. And the chief priests accused him of many things. We'll pause really quickly there. If you remember, in chapter 14, Jesus is condemned by the religious establishment for being king of the Jews, for being the Messiah.

King of the Jews is like another term for the Messiah. No, but for blasphemy. For Jesus saying that he will be at the right hand of the Father. Essentially equating that he and the Father are one. Now, there's a lot of overlap of what Jesus said and him claiming to be the Messiah, but they're very different things. But here, the chief priests and the religious establishment, they know that blasphemy is not a charge that sticks in Rome.

Especially among the Jewish people. I mean, people had to worship the Roman gods and especially Caesar himself, but the Jewish people had a bit of an agreement with Rome. They could worship their gods, their God, as long as it didn't interfere with the Roman god. But if somebody blasphemes their god, who cares? If it's Rome, who cares?

[10:53] Who gives a rip? I mean, it's a backwater Judeans who believe in God, but it's a false god. Let them have their thing. Who cares if it's blasphemy? So what do they do?

The religious establishment, the chief priest, what do they do? They say, this man is claiming to be the king of the Jews. Who's the king of the Jews right now? It's Caesar.

It's not Jesus. And if they're, all of a sudden shows up a rival king, now that's a problem. Now that's something to crucify somebody for.

And since about 30-ish, 40 years before Jesus comes on the scene, this idea of the Messiah started to take a political, um, era, like it started to transform into like a political position, a political office so that the Messiah would be understood as the one that would liberate us from our oppressors.

So, how do they make the charges stick? They cook. They cook the charges. They're going to come up with something crappy, something that's really going to get Rome's attention.

[12:03] And they do. King of the Jews, that's a big problem. Their strategy is, uh, is, is by any means necessary. And that's exactly what they're doing.

But what's, what's so interesting here is that we see a great irony. The chief priests in trying to condemn Jesus to death, they will affirm who he truly is.

The king of the Jews. The Messiah was always supposed to be the king of the Jews. Not the king that, um, would come to just defeat Rome and install, um, a new throne of David that would be passed down kind of from generation to generation.

But that David's throne would be reestablished. King David's throne would be reestablished in Israel forever. That, that, that the Messiah would come and he truly would reign over his people.

Not just the Jewish people. The Bible talks about all people. And in trying to get charges to stick to Jesus, they affirm who he truly is. He is. It's incredible.

[13:09] They don't believe it, but the words come out of their mouths. We'll see that when Jesus is hung on the cross, it will say king of the Jews above him. Mark doesn't record this, but in another gospel, um, another gospel account, the Jewish leaders will say, take that down, that sign.

He is no king of ours. Pilate says, I've done what I've done. It is so interesting that, that, that, the irony, that it's just, it's all over the page here.

Wicked men often fulfill God's prophecy at their own ruin. And we're seeing this happen. So not only do they participate in this injustice with their scheming and their deception, but we see that their motivation is rooted in envy.

Where do we see this? Look with me, verses 9 to 11. And Pilate answered them, saying, do you want me to release for you the king of the Jews?

For he perceived, verse 10, 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.

[14:25] Verse 10, for he, Pilate, perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up. They're envious of Jesus.

Pilate put words to what we have been witnessing throughout the Gospels and especially in chapters 11 and 12 where Jesus has the triumphal entry and he condemns the temple, but really the religious establishment of the day that did not seek to serve the people of God but instead to be served by the people of God.

He exposed them and he has had a following and he has fruit in his ministry where they have none and they're envious. What's the result of their self-exaltation?

they become blind to God himself who came not to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many. That's chapter 10 verse 45.

To not be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many. The religious establishment minus the one guy in who comes up to Jesus, the one scribe who Jesus commends for his faith, but the entirety of the religious establishment is looking to be served and to give their lives as a ransom for ours.

[15 : 53] It's the complete opposite. Not only have they become spiritually blind but their envy has led to a dehumanization of Jesus and their people.

They desire something that somebody else has and by doing so they dehumanize them. Envy always reduces a person to what they possess or what they can do for you or what they have their life the image that they project it reduces somebody to that and elevates desire to an eternal end. An unquenchable thirst for more. And what's the result? Jesus is going to his death. No longer do people have intrinsic value as reflective of God's image but are merely a sum of their stuff. It's a problem. It's what envy reduces people to. And it's hard because we want to be better and we want more things.

And we want good things but we elevate them to ultimate things. And we look past the fact that in front of us is an image bearer of God himself. We dehumanize people.

[17 : 22] That's what envy does. But it goes further. Their envy doesn't just send Jesus to the cross but they foment the crowd. Remember it's hard to really hammer this home enough.

These people are there to serve those people to open their eyes to the scriptures to the way of God that the people of Israel God's people are supposed to be light to the nations.

And because of their envy they stir up the crowd so that the crowd really is only a means to achieve their end. They lead the crowd astray.

The same crowd that chanted Hosanna Hosanna Hosanna in the highest blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord in the triumphal entry. The same crowd. And now they're stirred up to say crucify him.

There's power in leadership. And when leadership goes awry people suffer. And it's not to somehow to take the blame away but it's to show the power of leadership both good and bad.

[18 : 39] Their envy has shipwrecked the people of Israel. And what's interesting in all of this is that that same mentality that same fomenting aggression towards Rome will ultimately get Israel raised to the ground and Jerusalem destroyed.

The temple completely toppled over. Friends we need to be violent in our fight against envy in our lives and especially in a day when image is truly everything.

It truly is. It is everything. And in a day where image is everything envy it is like fertilizer and the envy just continues to grow and grow and grow.

We need to be violent in how we attack it. It's very hard and we can't do it alone. We ask the good Lord for help. We cry out to him maybe literally.

you know in a time of Lent we strip away some of the image some of the things that we hold on to as dear to us and we realize that we're actually more frail than we think and that we need God a lot more than we'd like to admit.

[19 : 56] We also worship together in a church and I've said this in the past I'll say it again confess your sins to one another and pray so that you may be healed.

We come to the faith one by one but we walk it out side by side and I'm not sure you can walk out the faith any other way. How do you fight against envy?

By God's strength and by the help of your brothers and sisters. God's word as well washing over us. So that's a chief priest. How about Pontius Pilate?

Pontius Pilate was a prefect a Roman prefect in Judea. He was the ultimate sovereign in the land. Ultimate power to wield the sword.

And he wielded the sword. Pilate did. He was bloody. He would kill hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people and yet at the same time there's historical proof that he would placate the crowds to avoid rebellion.

[21 : 00] Apart from what we see here in chapter 15. So he used brutality and political expediency to keep the peace and to keep order. And here is an example of that in verse 6 and to the end of our section verse 15.

Now at the feast that is the Passover Pilate 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 and he answered them 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 priest had delivered him up.

But the chief priest stirred up the crowd to have him release for them Barabbas instead. And Pilate again said to them then what shall I do with the man you call the king of the Jews?

They cried out again crucify him and Pilate said to them why what evil has he done? But they shouted all the more crucify him so Pilate verse 15 wishing to satisfy the crowd released for them Barabbas and having scourged Jesus he delivered him to be crucified.

[22 : 19] What a sham of a trial. Pilate uses Jesus to secure political favor for the crowd.

There is at the Passover year by year there was a heightened kind of political fervor in the land.

There was rebellion always kind of in the air during the feast the Passover feast.

And he sees here an innocent man but a very useful man. Somebody that he could use to get through one more year. To deal with this crazy crowd in front of me.

I mean it's almost nine o'clock I have things to do. Who knows? It's very easy to kind of speculate what Pontius Pilate was thinking. The scripture doesn't say that at all.

But we know it seems that Pilate thinks Jesus is innocent at the very least. He thinks he's innocent. Now whether or not Pilate has a conscience in all of this or whether it's been seared from years of being a Roman governor we're not sure.

[23 : 33] He knows that Jesus is innocent but does he think it's wrong? Not sure. Maybe maybe not. The scripture doesn't say Mark doesn't record any of Pilate's kind of inner thinking.

But nevertheless it's instructive for us to see how the desire to appease rather than do what is just results in not peace now and peace later a little bit of peace now and calamity for everybody.

In this case an innocent man is sent to his death and a crowd is merely appeased but nothing more.

The Bible is crystal clear on the evil of political corruption and injustice and this is where the scriptures help us in a sense to understand I guess I'll say it this way the scriptures has formed western civilization it has formed Canada it has formed the US it has formed the West and we take it for granted that governments should not be corrupt and governments should be just and politics should be there should be a general desire to bless the people and not use the office for gain checks and balances we take that for granted but that's not the case in ancient Rome and it's scripture verses like this that help us to see our eyes to the deep impact and the lasting impact of the scriptures on our society it's remarkable something like this we see and we say yeah

Pilate he's corrupt in the first century that wasn't the case we've had the scriptures wash over us for centuries and centuries and centuries and we take it for granted but our standard for political life is in a big way formed by the scriptures we revolt rightly at political cover ups and political decisions that only benefit the elite few because we have an innate sense that injustice is unfair and dangerous and so it is because God has created the world with order he's created the world to reflect his goodness injustice is neither orderly or good is it I mean the story of David Milgard it testifies to that we recoil at that story it's a tragedy earlier in Mark we saw something very similar didn't we with Herod John the

Baptist is a problem for Herod but Herod is intrigued by him but his brother's wife whom he shouldn't have married and John the Baptist calls it out wants John the Baptist's head and Herod gets himself into a pickle and off comes John's head again another example of weak leadership doing something that's wrong to placate the crowd injustice may take different forms but it never ever results in human flourishing or blessing never does again peace now but it will be problems later injustice never never results in human flourishing or human blessing but back to Pontius Pilate here again we see an irony in the text because Pontius Pilate is the sovereign over everything and yet he is manipulated by the crowd and in a sense he bends a knee to the crowd and he sacrifices

[27 : 13] Jesus like an animal on the altar of political success and expediency and yet the Lord uses it to fulfill the prophecy that Jesus will be he will he will be crucified like a lamb led silently to the slaughter and it's unmistakable that this is an image from Isaiah 53 the suffering servant who is sacrificed for the sins of many Pontius Pilate what does he do he attempts to satisfy the injustice of the chief priests and the mob they've worked up they've stirred up but Jesus will satisfy the justice of God all because Pontius Pilate is trying to do what is politically expedient for him again just like with the chief priests we see that wicked men fall into doing the will of God but why does this injustice have to happen why couldn't there be another way why why does

Jesus have to go through this injustice why would God deliver Jesus over to unjust men we see that both the chief priest delivered Jesus over to Pontius Pilate and Pontius Pilate delivers Jesus over to be crucified why would God in a sense deliver Jesus over to unjust men and let's look at the third and final character of this completely farcical unjust trial look at Jesus go back with me verses one to five and as soon as it was morning the chief priest held a council with the elders and scribes and the whole council we'll go down to verse two and Pilate asked Jesus are you the king of the Jews Jesus answered him you have said so and the chief priest accused him of many things and Pilate 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 more than the accusations of the chief priests the roars of the the crowd and the sliminess of Pilate in all of this the silence of Jesus dominates this portion of scripture

I mean what he says what you have said so that's in a sense Jesus simply saying you would do well to consider what you're saying but other than that he is silent and it and it is deafening his silence I mean who doesn't defend themselves when they're facing the chair in a sense except that it's not the chair it is the most gruesome way to die how is he silent in all of this but he is silent he says nothing absolutely nothing the end of verse five what does it say so that Pilate was amazed Pilate has seen criminals in his day and it I'm sure it would have taken a lot to amaze Pilate but here he is amazed Jesus doesn't plead his case he doesn't oppose the false charges he says nothing and Pilate is amazed to be clear this isn't weakness it is not a sign of defeat but rather it's the outworking of

Jesus who is God the son of God come down in the flesh fully man and fully God who in a sense left all of his divine prerogatives all of his authority in a sense when he came to earth it is him submitting to the father's will it's the outworking of what we see in the garden of Gethsemane not my will be done but yours and Jesus is resolute he knows what's happening he is silent and it is a silence of strength not of weakness he is completing the father's will and what is the will of God that both justice that both his justice will be satisfied both his justice will be satisfied because of the sin and evil that we have committed and also at the same time that the human race may be redeemed from the sin and evil that we have committed the justice of God or the will of

God is that justice and mercy meets in the person of Jesus Christ and it can only be done through the death and resurrection of Jesus who is the suffering servant the lamb who goes silently to the slaughter but why does it have to be an unjust trial why does God have to deliver Jesus over to unjust men but here's the thing the only way the justice of God and the mercy of God could ever be satisfied is with a perfect substitute in our place we're not perfect you think you have a good day excellent the next day or the next week the wheels fall off it's kind of the way things go for us we're not perfect so in a sense if we are punished we are justly punished by God but that's not God showing us mercy but if God shows us mercy where's the justice and God has to have his justice satisfied so only in Jesus who is God himself God the son of God but also fully human he is perfect and he suffers an unjust trial because what other trial could the perfect

[32 : 40] Jesus suffer under there's no justice just way to punish Jesus he's deserving of no punishment and yet he is punished in our place where God's justice is satisfied and his mercy extended and we see this we see this exchange even in our in our text this this morning Pilate releases Barabbas for Jesus the guilty for the guiltless and it's just a small kind of picture into what will happen on a cosmic level of Jesus on the cross friends this is the gospel in a very real way this is the good news of Christ the great and glorious love of God on full display the love of God that the love of God is far deeper than you or ever like to admit God knows us and he loves us Christ dies in our place unjustly condemned so that we can experience the mercy and love of

God but there's still more because it's not that Jesus suffers on our behalf and it was the only way he could suffer unjustly but Jesus now brings meaning to suffering and this life is full of it it is full of suffering and a lot of that suffering is unjust that you'll experience if you turn to 1 Peter chapter 2 I'll just read it from my text 1 Peter chapter 2 verses 18 to 25 and I'll read it this is the same Peter who will talk about suffering well the same Peter that did not suffer well that bent immediately under pressure who caved under pressure this is a redeemed man writing this letter he says this 2 Peter 1 Peter chapter 2 verses 18 servants be subject to your masters with all respect not only to the good and gentle but also the unjust for this is a gracious thing when mindful of God one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly for what credit is it if when you sin and are beaten for it you endure for if when you do good and suffer for it you endure this for this is a gracious thing in the sight of God for

to this you have been called because

Christ also suffered for you leaving you an example so that you might follow his steps he committed no sin neither was deceit found in his mouth when he was reviled he did not revile in return when he suffered he did not threaten but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly he himself bore our sins in his body on the tree that we might die to sin and live to righteousness by his wounds you have been healed for you were straying like sheep but have now returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls when we suffer well for Christ's sake unjustly looking to him for both strength and a desire to do his will God delights in it he delights in it think in your head of a time when when somebody delighted in something you did or for who you are a parent if it's a distant memory it might be hard maybe a part of the sting is that you can't remember but surely it's good if somebody delights in you imagine if God in heaven who created everything delights in you does that not bring great meaning to suffering all of a sudden is it something that we can endure by his strength knowing that he delights in us that it brings him great glory and like

Christ it will ultimately lead to blessing and it might not be our physical blessing it might be somebody else but we will be ultimately blessed because we know the delight of God in our lives what other ideology or philosophy or religion or whatever it may be can turn suffering into ultimate blessing what can when we suffer unjustly let us not be angry forever there's a time I guess initially maybe we react we're human beings but let us suffer with the mind of Christ remembering what he has done he asks you to know God's eternal blessing it is worth everything think about David Milgard he got 10 million dollars for 22 years in prison just under what I mean

I'm not going to do the math between 400 and 500 thousand dollars a year in prison is that does that bring meaning to his suffering is that worth it no he passed away last year I'm sure he would if he was here today say did not bring meaning to my suffering but imagine the delight of God in our lives only the unjust suffering of Jesus can give meaning to injustice for through the silent suffering of the servant of God our eternal salvation was won and that is the ultimate meaning through Christ and his suffering we are a part of the family of God let's pray Lord God thank you for for your son who who didn't cower who didn't back away but was brave and resolute and looked to you and drank the cup that he was to drink and he drank it all the way empty for us and now we through faith in him can know what it's like to be children of

[38 : 56] God but also it helps us to suffer to suffer well when unjust suffering comes our way so Lord help us to be people that are just really about your business really looking to have you delight in us Lord we have no idea what the future will bring whether they be small sufferings or large ones but Lord we pray that you'll prepare us so that when that time comes we'll be ready and that we will know your delight we pray this in Christ's name Amen