

Mark 15:1-20 (PM)

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Preacher: Rev. Aaron Roberts

[0:00] So, these 20 verses here, they're really ugly, aren't they? It's very ugly, and it's very beautiful, I think. It's really ugly because of what they did to Jesus, and it's very beautiful because Jesus allowed all this to happen to Him.

Some recent scholarship has suggested that Jesus was just a really great teacher, like a sort of a dynamic kind of guy, gifted the gab, but he got in over his head, and to quote one scholar, he was crushed by the wheel of history.

Folks, this is not the story of the Bible, though. Jesus let this happen to him. He had a greater purpose. His purpose was to save us.

Now, Pilate is obviously a pretty key player in all this, so let's start with some background on him as an entryway into the story. So, you probably know at this point in history, 2,000 years ago, that this part of the world, a good chunk of the world, was under Roman control, and Pilate was a Roman prefect, so he looked after Judea specifically, and he had this big army to enforce his rule.

And we know from extra-biblical documents that Pilate did not like Jewish people, and the region that he was in charge of actually gave him lots of trouble. So, periodically, there would be these insurgencies, right?

[1:27] These ultra-nationalists like Barabbas would lead a bit of an uprising against Roman rule, and they'd murder a few Romans, but these rebellions were usually squashed pretty quickly.

But these revolts, though, they did reflect badly on Pilate, because there was quite a few of them. Eventually, he actually got fired from his position a few years after what happens today in our text. In our story, we've read that this was the Passover, which was a big feast, so all the Jewish people would gather in this one place for this huge, big festival, and Pilate would have been on edge, because it was during those times that Jewish nationalism was running really, really high.

And Pilate would have been thinking, we just need to get through this feast without any dramas. No dramas. No dramas. But there was a bit of a drama, because the Sanhedrin, which is the Jewish high court, turn up to Pilate's palace with this prisoner, who was Jesus, who was a bit famous at this point.

The previous night, a lot had happened. This high court had tried to pin a charge on Jesus that would get him killed. They hated him. They didn't like him. He was steering the boat.

[2:42] He was rocking the boat. So they had him down for blasphemy, because he admitted that he was the Christ, which is a word that means saviour. But because they were under Roman rule, the whole area was under Roman rule, the Sanhedrin, the high court, they can't just kill people.

Can't just kill people. Only the Romans can kill people. So they bind up Jesus, and they deliver him to Pilate. Now, Pilate, he doesn't care about blasphemy. It's just not a thing he's worried about.

So the high court, they massage, they sort of massage the charge a little bit. And they say that Jesus is claimed to be, claims to be the king of the Jews, which is sort of in the ballpark of treason. Now, that's punishable by death. So Pilate looks at Jesus. Jesus has been roughed up by the Pharisees, the religious leaders.

He's covered in spit and blood. And he looks at him, and he says, so, so, the king of the Jews, eh? You are the king of the Jews. And it's a question that's just, you know, just dripping with sarcasm.

[3:51] The thing is, though, is Pilate obviously did not believe Jesus was any threat to him. He did not believe Jesus was any threat to Rome.

Look at verse 10 there. For he perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up. So Pilate realizes this whole thing is just a complete setup. But he is really intrigued by this Jesus.

So he looks for the easy way out. But he remembers he's got this prisoner release thing he's been doing for a few years. And it's perfect, he's thinking. People love Jesus. He's a good guy. He's done some healings, did some cool things. Do you want me to release you, the king of the Jews? He says in verse 9. But Pilate's plan just backfires. Because the chief priests have gotten the crowd, and they've stirred them up, and they yell for Barabbas, the insurrectionist, the murderer. So Pilate, wanting to satisfy the crowd, not cause any dramas for himself. He just did what they wanted. He had Jesus whipped and then send him off to be crucified.

[4 : 58] Now Pilate knew that Jesus didn't deserve this. But he sent him away anyway. And he freed the murderer Barabbas. Now, Pilate, I mean he's an interesting character I think.

I think he's a very interesting character. But ultimately, he's just a political pragmatist. He's a cowardly political pragmatist. Folks, that's kind of the story.

That's those 20 verses right there. The question is, what do we take from this? Why did the writer of this gospel, Mark's story of Jesus, why did he include all of these details?

And it's a sophisticated document. He had some reason for including all of these details in the story. What are we meant? What are the readers meant to learn from this? I think there's a couple of things.

The first thing is, the big theme, one of the big themes here is substitution. Substitution. The guilty Barabbas is freed.

[6 : 03] And innocent Jesus is killed. Barabbas was supposed to die. He was a murderer. Jesus dies instead. So it's not the case. Jesus goes to the cross as a side note.

Wow, lucky break. Lucky break for Barabbas. No. He's clearly, with all the details, showing us a substitution has taken place. Jesus died so Barabbas the murderer could live.

And the Bible talks about this a lot in Romans 5. But God demonstrates his own love for us. That while we are still sinners, Christ died for us. Christ stood in our place.

This is the beauty and the ugliness of the passage. So that's the first big theme, a substitution. The second major theme is the theme of rejection.

And this is all throughout these 20 verses. You cannot miss it. Rejection is an awful thing. Probably all of us experienced it to some degree.

[7 : 04] But the rejection of Christ here is so profound. And so brutal. And so total.

It's throughout the passage. Let me show you. The whole council, it says. Emphasizes that. The whole council delivered Jesus over to Pilate in verse 1.

Verse 3 says, He was accused of many things. This is the most wonderful, most beautiful person who's ever lived. He's accused of many, many things.

Another example of rejection. The crowd chose a murderer over Jesus. The guy who heals people. When Pilate asked the crowd, in another sort of tactical blunder here, he says, What should I do with this man?

Pilate's thinking they'll probably go easy on him. And what do they yell? Crucify him. And then again in verse 14, they shouted all the more, Crucify him. And in the last paragraph, verses 16 to 20, it's really hard stuff to read.

[8 : 06] Jesus is handed over to this elite group of Roman soldiers. And they take him out back somewhere. And they just brutalize him. And there is, these soldiers had no reason to enter so fully into the degradation of Jesus.

But that's what they did. Like a mouse, like a cat playing with like a half dead mouse, just tortured him, mocked him. So much violence.

The rejection of Jesus is so wide and so deep. It came from Jewish people. It came from Gentiles. It was verbal. It was emotional. It was physical. Politicians were involved.

The army was involved. Their religious elite were involved. And the crowd, like just the everyday person, they all participated in rejecting Christ and sending him to the cross.

And obviously, what makes all this brutality and rejection so, so awful is that Jesus was innocent. He was innocent.

[9 : 13] And even Pilate sees this. The first time the crowd yells, crucify him, Pilate in verse 14 says, why? Why? You can imagine him trying to shout over the crowd.

Why? What evil has he done? And there's no answer. Just another round of crucify him. Folks, here's a bit of a summary here.

God came to be with us in Christ. God came to be with us. And we humiliated him. We tortured him. We mocked him. And we killed him.

This was humanity's reflexive response to God. Now, I know there's a lot of people here who are Christians, but when that urge to yell, crucify him, still lingers in dark corners of our heart. Now, we have been changed by the Holy Spirit. This is why it grieves us to read this stuff. But little bubbles of kind of rebellion that's just still there, popping up every now and then.

[10:23] You see, Mark puts in all these details. He elevates the theme of rejection here because he wants to remind us that every day, every day, we need to repent. We need to say sorry to God for the ways that we choose ourselves over Jesus.

Repent of the ways that we push Christ away, that we push the creator away. God made us to be with us, which is wonderful, but there is a strong urge in us to keep him at a distance.

Keep him at a distance. I'll give you some examples. Lots of examples in the passage. Pilate handed Jesus over. Why? He knew it was wrong, but it just would have been a headache. If he had sided with Jesus, it would have been a headache.

Would have caused the drama for him. Could have cost him his job. Would have cost him status. And he wasn't going to do that. The chief priests, they rejected Jesus because they wanted to hang on to power. And Jesus was a threat to their power.

The crowd, it just seems like a group mentality. You know, like group think. I know a lot of people in the world today do not engage with God, with Jesus, with faith, because it's just not, not many other people do.

[11:26] So why would I? The soldiers, I don't know what's behind their particular savagery, but perhaps their work dehumanized them and they were just sort of tripping out over the power they had perhaps.

Or perhaps in the terms of the flow of the story, this was rejection at its peak. This was peak rejection. You can think of examples, I'm sure. I know I can very quickly in my life.

How we reject God. How that bubbles up every now and then lots of different ways. Don't get me wrong, we do great things. We do wonderful things. Humans are capable of extraordinary things. Extraordinary things. Those little bubbles, they come up and they have many faces.

So the passage, I know this isn't fun to hear, right? But I'm just preaching the passage. This is just what the Bible says here. The passage confronts us with the rejection of Christ. And our response is like, should be, yeah, yeah, yes.

We need to say sorry to God. We need to come to God in humility and go, yeah, I acknowledge that. Help me. And God is always eager to forgive. Now before I finish here, I want to remind you of the beauty of this story again.

[12:38] The beauty within the ugliness. All that Jesus went through, it was not arbitrary suffering. It wasn't just random suffering.

Behind it was the plan of God. You could summarize it like this. When humanity was doing its worst, God was doing his wonderful best.

When humanity was doing its worst, God was doing his best. He was allowing the innocent to be made guilty so the guilty could be made innocent. Jesus was suffering all this from us and for us. He did it for you. He could have called angels. He could have healed himself. He could have done all of those things, but he allowed it because he loves us. Bore the judgment of God.

God is angry at the way the world treats each other, the way we treat the planet. God is rightfully angry about that, but instead of pouring his anger on us individually, he poured it all out on his own son, Jesus.

[13:49] That's the beauty and the ugliness of this passage. Now, if you don't think about Jesus a whole lot in your life, but you find this whole thing quite intriguing, quite interesting, and you want to talk to somebody about it, you can come and chat to me afterwards.

I would also recommend what I said during the announcement time. My friend Chris here, this discussion group. Go and chat to Chris or just go sign up and turn up to it.

It's specifically people who are genuine skeptics, who have curious minds. All questions are welcome. I mean, if this is true, what I said about Jesus, like if this is actually true, then this is the best thing you can give your mind to, isn't it?

And it's worth walking into a room full of strangers and saying, I'm just a bit curious. Can you help me with some questions I have?

Thank you.