

## **A Call for Crucifixion -- Mark 15:1-20**

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Please bow your heads with me for prayer.

*Father, may Jesus now be lifted up as the crucified, risen, and soon-coming Savior. You have promised that when this happens, humanity will be drawn to Him. May what we see of Him today have a supernatural, transforming effect on us. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.*

There is a Roman governor who plays a major role in our story today. His name was Pontius Pilate. As we begin we will take a brief look at who he was and his relationship with the Jews. He was possibly a descendant of Gaius Pontius, who was a commander of the Samnite army in central Italy, southeast of Rome. "Pilate" likely comes from the Latin word, "pileatus", which refers to the cap or badge of a freed slave. So it is possible that Pontius Pilate himself had once been a slave. At the time of our story he was governor of the Roman province of Judea. He held this position from A.D. 26-36. His headquarters were located at Caesarea.

Regarding his relationship with the Jews, he clearly hated them and freely shed their blood. In return, the Jews appealed to Caesar and brought against Pilate accusations of every crime and cruelty imaginable. Pilate visited Jerusalem as little as possible. He had no interest in the Jews' religion or their traditions. Furthermore, the city was like a smoldering volcano ready to erupt in revolt at any moment. At the time of Jesus' trial, Pilate was between a rock and a hard place. He was not only at odds with the Jews, but he was also becoming less popular with Tiberius Caesar in Rome. Every revolt in Jerusalem was seen as a failure on Pilate's part. Only a few years after Jesus' trial, Pilate would be deposed from his position following a massacre of the Samaritans.

Now let's consider a summary of our story today:

*After being condemned to death by the Sanhedrin, Jesus was taken to Pilate, the Roman governor. In spite of the Sanhedrin's many accusations, Jesus remained silent. Pilate believed Jesus to be innocent and tried to convince the crowd to set Him free. The Sanhedrin, however, provoked the crowd to call for Jesus' crucifixion. So Pilate set free a murderer named Barabbas and handed Jesus over to be crucified. The soldiers then took Jesus into a courtyard. There they mocked and abused Jesus before leading Him out to be crucified.*

This story is ultimately about Jesus Christ. So we will now look at what He experienced. First of all, He experienced being condemned. Jesus had already been tried and convicted the night before (Mk. 14:64). This trial in the morning (Mark 15:1) served only to ratify what had already been pronounced by the night Council. It was the Sanhedrin's way of having at least the appearance of a legal trial, which could only be held in the day time. Luke gives the most detailed account of this morning trial. The extent of the trial merely consisted of calling for Jesus to make another confession that He was the Christ, the Son of God (Luke 22:66-71).

Second, Jesus experienced being betrayed. Mark 15:1 says that the Sanhedrin delivered Jesus to Pilate. The word translated, "delivered", is the same word that describes what Judas did ("betrayed"). Jesus experienced a second betrayal. His own people betrayed Him to their enemies, the Romans. Why did the Sanhedrin take Jesus to Pilate? According to John 18:31, Rome reserved the right to execute the death penalty. Since Pilate's headquarters were in Caesarea, why was he in Jerusalem? It was standard protocol for Roman governors to be present during the major festivals of their subjects. Pilate had come up to Jerusalem to preserve order during the Passover. It is believed that when Pilate was in Jerusalem, he stayed in the palace built by Herod the Great, who had ruled Jerusalem from 37 BC to 4 BC.

Third, Jesus experienced confessing the truth. Incidentally, Jesus' two previous confessions before the Sanhedrin had resulted in His death sentence. Rome was known for crushing out any self-proclaimed rulers in their provinces. But Jesus was unafraid. When Pilate asked Him if He was the King of the Jews (according to Luke 23:2, the Sanhedrin had just accused Jesus of saying that He was a King), Jesus said, "You say", which

was an idiom affirming the questioner's statement. Perhaps Jesus was giving Pilate an opportunity to state what he was convicted of concerning His divinity.

Fourth, Jesus experienced being falsely accused. Jesus had already endured similar accusations in His previous trials before the Jews. Mark 15:3 states that the Sanhedrin accused Jesus of "many things" before Pilate. Luke 23:2 specifies three charges they brought against Jesus: (1) perverting the nation; (2) forbidding the paying of taxes; and (3) saying He was a King. The Jews thought that any one of these would be sufficient reason for Pilate to condemn Jesus. Instead of being convinced by the Sanhedrin, Pilate was astonished by Jesus. He was amazed that Jesus made no attempt to defend Himself. How many times Jesus chose not to retaliate in His repeated trials, we may never know.

Fifth, Jesus experienced being rejected. Mark 15:6 states that at the Passover feast Pilate traditionally had given the Jews the option of releasing one of their own prisoners. Such a gesture was based on common Roman diplomacy towards its subjects and was certainly needed by Pilate who was lacking in diplomacy. The prisoner brought forth on this occasion was a man named, Barabbas. His name means, "son of Abba". "Abba" was a Hebrew word meaning, "Father" or "Dad". Jesus Himself had addressed God in Gethsemane earlier that night as, "Abba, Father". Furthermore, Matthew 27:16 has an alternate reading of his name as Jesus Barabbas. How ironic that the two men bound as prisoners could have had such similar identifiers and yet such vastly different identities. Notably, Barabbas embodied everything that the Sanhedrin had accused Jesus of being and more. He was the leader of rebels. He was a murderer. He had led a rebellion against Rome.

Mark 15:8 describes the crowd getting involved once more. They wanted Pilate to do what he had always done for them. This could be a reference to Pilate's history of injustice. Perhaps he had previously condemned men that they knew were not guilty. Pilate took this opportunity to speak to the crowd instead of the Sanhedrin. Perhaps they would be more objective in this case. He had picked up on the fact that the Sanhedrin were simply jealous of Jesus' popularity. And he was not ready to condemn Jesus. So, he asked the crowd if they wanted him to release Jesus. But according to Mark 15:11, the Sanhedrin incited the crowd against Jesus. They started chanting for Barabbas' release.

The actions of the Sanhedrin here have a striking parallel to Hitler's manipulation of Germany. According to an article on Wikipedia, many historians believe that Adolf Hitler used herd behavior and crowd psychology to his advantage. His officers disguised themselves as civilians in the crowd attending one of his speeches. These officers then cheered and clapped loudly for Hitler and the rest of the crowd followed their example, making it look like the entire crowd completely agreed with Hitler and his views. These speeches were then broadcasted, increasing the effect.

Sixth, Jesus experienced being betrayed. Mark 15:12-14 pictures Pilate still trying to save Jesus while at the same time preserving his position as governor. After the crowd had shouted for Barabbas' release, Pilate asked them what they wanted him to do with Jesus (verse 12). In verse 14 he asked the crowd to explain why they want Jesus crucified, inferring that he didn't believe Jesus had done anything wrong. Verses 13 and 14 of Mark 15 reveals a shift in the cries of the crowd and the Sanhedrin. They had cried for Barabbas' release. And next their cries were directed at Jesus. "Crucify Him!" was repeated as a chant. They had no convincing charge to bring against Jesus. They abandoned the legal process and rely on the use of their sheer numbers. Pilate knows what would happen should the Jews accuse him again before Caesar. It would likely cost him his position. So in Mark 15:15 Pilate agreed to deliver Jesus to them to be crucified. Once again, the word translated, "delivered", here in verse 15 is the same word used earlier to describe what Judas did. This time Pilate, in a position to deliver justice on behalf of Jesus, "betrayed" Him. He handed Jesus over to the Jews who thirsted for His life.

Last of all, Jesus experienced being mocked and abused. Mark 15:15 states that Pilate had Jesus scourged. A "scourge" was a whip used by the Romans for torture. According to John 19:1-3 Pilate had inflicted a scourging on Jesus once already in an attempt to appease the crowd. Afterwards the soldiers led Jesus into the "Praetorium". This is a Latin word used to describe the building used by Roman governors. It was likely a part of or adjacent to Herod the Great's palace. Mark records that "the whole garrison" was called in. This was

a group of 600 soldiers. Just why this was done, we are not told. Perhaps they were simply following protocol for the treatment of common criminals sentenced to crucifixion.

Mark 15:17-19 pictures a disgusting combination of mockery and abuse inflicted on Jesus by the Roman soldiers. Notice the sequence: (1) clothing Jesus in purple; (2) twisting a crown of thorns on His head; (3) greeting Him as the King of the Jews; (4) hitting Him on the head with a rod; (5) spitting on Him; and (6) bowing before Him in worship.

After all of this, they put Jesus' own clothes on and led Him away to be crucified. This scene of abuse was the last of many. He had been abused before Annas, before the Sanhedrin, earlier in Pilate's hall (John 19), before Herod Antipas (Luke 23) and now again in Pilate's hall. It's a miracle Jesus even made it to Calvary.

Now that we have considered what Jesus experienced, let's see what His experience reveals about ours. As Christians, Jesus is our example in all things. How He acted in this story is how we should act. One way in which Jesus is revealed as our example is that He maintained a kingly bearing. Three times Jesus was mocked as the King of the Jews by the Roman soldiers (Luke 23:11; John 19:1-3; Mark 15:17-20). He was accused and condemned by the Jews for saying that He was a King. But it seems intriguing that Pilate, a pagan ruler, repeatedly referred to Him, not as a prisoner, but as the King of the Jews. He was brought under conviction that Jesus was more than human. Notice what Ellen White says about this:

*The Roman governor, though familiar with cruel scenes, was moved with sympathy for the suffering prisoner, who, condemned and scourged, with bleeding brow and lacerated back, still had the bearing of a king upon his throne. (Desire of Ages page 736)*

Beatings could not take away His kingship. Mockery could not steal His dignity. It didn't matter how much they accused Him of treachery and blasphemy, He was still a King. You could tell by looking at Him. He carried Himself as a King on His throne.

And in this He is revealed as our example. He shows us that a healthy Christian is someone who lives like a child of the King. In 1 John 3:1 John writes how amazing it is that God calls us His children. And if God, the King of the universe, calls us His children, that is what we are! It doesn't matter if you're poor. It has nothing to do with what your position is at work or in the church. Your net worth cannot be calculated in dollars. You are a child of the King! It's not based on what you look like. It's based on who your Daddy is. Barabbas had the right name. His name said he was the son of Abba. But he lived like a son of the devil. Which brings up a valid question: How does a King's child act? Here's how Jesus exhibited His kingship: (1) with dignity and confidence – a child of God stands tall and erect; she looks people in the eye; (2) with self control – Jesus' was supernatural. And His strength of character is ours; (3) with honesty and integrity – Jesus was never afraid to tell the truth; a child of the king will not sell her integrity for any price; (4) with bravery – Jesus could not be intimidated; He did not turn away from the darkness of the valley of the shadow of death; children of the King do not live from fear; and (5) with benevolence – Jesus was not a Man of earthly wealth; but He was rich in virtue and mercy; a respected royal family abounds with kindness and generosity.

How about you? Do you act like a child of the King? Can people tell by how you live that you are a member of the heavenly royal family? God has already made you one in Christ. He calls you His son or daughter. Hold your head up. God's royal blood flows in your veins.

I will close with the lyrics to the song, "Child Of The King", by Cindy Walker:

*Once I was clothed in the rags of my sin,  
Wretched and poor, lost and lonely within;  
But with wondrous compassion the King of all kings,  
In pity and love took me under His wing.*

*Oh yes, oh yes, I'm a child of the King;  
His royal blood now flows in my veins;  
And I who was wretched and poor now can sing,  
"Praise God! Praise God, I'm a child of the King."*

*Now I'm a child with a heavenly home,  
My holy Father has made me His own,  
And I am cleansed by His blood, and I'm clothed in his love;  
And someday I'll sing with the angels above.*

*Oh yes, oh yes, I'm a child of the King;  
His royal blood now flows in my veins;  
And I who was wretched and poor now can sing,  
"Praise God! Praise God, I'm a child of the King."*