

The Memoirs of Peter
Jesus Before Pilate (Part 1)
Mark 15:1-5
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I am excited about the fact that tonight and next Sunday night, Lord willing, we get to look further into the Gospel of Mark, and especially at Jesus' trial, the final trial before the Jewish leaders and His trial before Pilate. What was going on in those trials from a human perspective, not the divine one which I hope to consider before the night is done, but from a human perspective?

Maybe it's best captured in a story that Kent Hughes tells of an African chief who visited a mission station. And while at the mission station, this African chief saw a little mirror hanging on the tree just outside the missionary's hut. The chief happened to see, in this case, her reflection in the mirror; and her response was "Who is that horrible looking person inside that tree?" The missionary tried to explain to her that the glass was simply reflecting her own face, but she wouldn't believe it until she actually held the mirror in her hand. And then she offered to buy the mirror. Although the missionary had obviously no desire to sell it, the woman begged to such an extent that finally the missionary thought it would be best to do so for his future ministry there among the tribe. So, he named a price, and she accepted. To his shock, this tribal chief took that mirror that she had just purchased, threw it to the ground, and crushed it to pieces. And she said, "I'll never have it making faces at me again!"

That is exactly what the Jewish leaders of the first century did to Jesus. They simply could not tolerate the clear reflection of their own wicked souls in the pure and spotless life and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth. Kent Hughes writes, "There is nothing like the hatred of theologians. The mirror must not only be broken, but ground to powder." Tonight, we continue our journey through the last hours of our Lord's life before His crucifixion. And in the series of trials that takes place, that is exactly what the religious leaders of Israel attempt to do: to grind out the reflection of their own wickedness seen in the perfect, spotless life of the Lamb of God. But to no avail, because God had other plans.

As we begin tonight, let me remind you of the events that occurred on that night. We've already

looked at most of these, but just to give you a picture of them. You'll see that first of all there was, of course, the Last Supper. It began in the evening, the Scripture says, which was probably around-around the-the dark, the twilight of sunset. And it lasted sometime till late in the evening, probably around 11. We can't be exactly sure. And it was in the upper room on the upper western side of the city of Jerusalem, and it's recorded for us in Mark's Gospel in the text that I've listed there.

Then you have Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, sometime starting around 11 when the Last Supper was over and lasting about an hour or so, sometime in that framework. He refers to *Can you not pray with Me for an hour?* at one point, so something in that time frame; happened at the base of the Mount of Olives in the Garden of Gethsemane.

That's followed by an initial hearing before Annas at Annas' house sometime between midnight and 1 A.M. recorded in John's Gospel only. That is immediately followed by a second Jewish trial between two and three or so in the upper room of Caiaphas' house. The time frame is given to us by the cock crowing which generally would've occurred (cock crowing was a watch of the night) usually from midnight to 3, and so sometime in that time frame. This happened probably just across the courtyard from Annas' house at the home of Caiaphas. (Caiaphas was the son-in-law of Annas.)

Immediately following that was the physical abuse of Jesus by the temple guard, and perhaps some of the Sanhedrin as well, around 3 A.M. We're really not told of what happened from that time until early morning, but it appears, and most believe, that Jesus was probably temporarily imprisoned somewhere in Caiaphas' house from about the time a -second trial Jewish ended until it got close to daybreak.

Now those events bring us to Mark 15. Let me give you Mark's own outline of the time frame of the rest of the events surrounding the trial and crucifixion of Jesus. Here is Mark's time frame. Now we're on to Friday. Notice verse 1, "Early in the morning the chief priests... held a consultation... and delivered Him up [to] Pilate." The other Gospel writers put it this way. Matthew, in Matthew 27:1, says, "When morning [had come.]" And Luke, in 22:66, says,

“When it was day,” or, when day had just broken.

If the year was 30 A.D. as I believe it probably was, then the day was April seventh. An actual sunrise that morning would’ve been around 5:30 for that time of year in Palestine. But the day, as the Jews reckoned it, officially began before sunrise. It started with the first appearance of light in the eastern sky.

Two things happened as the light began to creep onto the eastern horizon on that Friday morning: first, the Sanhedrin held a brief but formal third Jewish trial in which they formally and officially found Jesus guilty of the crime of blasphemy.

Secondly, as dawn began, when that formality was done (And that would’ve been a very brief trial.) then they would’ve quickly taken Jesus to the Roman prefect, Pontius Pilate. With that, the three Jewish trials were done, and then three Roman trials quickly took place: the first Roman trial before Pilate (We’ll look at that tonight.), the second Roman trial before Herod, the third Roman trial before Pilate again.

And all of those events, (Here’s the remarkable thing.) All of those events occurred between the break of dawn, sometime shortly after 5 A.M., and 9 A.M. In fact, John tells us that all of the trials were essentially over (John 19:14) “about the sixth hour.” Now, there were—people weren’t walking around with watches on their wrists in the first century, so about the sixth hour is a time frame, a margin of time, that could have been as late as 7 or 7:30 A.M. So, in other words, four of the legal proceedings against Jesus (the third Jewish trial and all three Roman trials) were over in no more than two hours’ time. Talk about a rush to judgment!

Now, the next reference that Mark gives us is down in verse 25 of chapter 15. He says, “It was the third hour when they crucified Him.” This would’ve been 9 A.M. Jesus crucified at 9 A.M. The next reference comes down in verse 33: “When the sixth hour came, darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour.” Jesus was on the cross from nine A.M., the third hour, until the ninth hour, 3 in the afternoon. And at noon, in the sixth hour by Mark’s reckoning, by Roman reckoning, darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour.

The next time reference comes down in verse 34 and verse 37: “At the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice” and with “a loud cry ... [He] breathed His last.” Verse 42 gives the final time reference, “When evening had already come, because it was the preparation day, that is, the day before the Sabbath, [Friday] Joseph of Arimathea came ... and asked for the body of Jesus.” So, when evening had come, probably in our reckoning early evening, late afternoon, he came and asked for the body of Jesus. Jesus dies at 3, and before it’s completely dark and the Sabbath day would begin, He was temporarily buried in Joseph of Arimathea’s tomb.

So, with that framework, let’s return to where we left off last time. The preliminary hearing before Annas and the trial before the quorum of the Sanhedrin, Jewish trial number 1 and Jewish trial number 2, have both finished. Jesus was probably temporarily detained somewhere in the high priest’s basement in some kind of holding cell for an hour or two. But before the first break of dawn’s light, Jesus is taken from the house of Caiaphas up on the upper west side of the city of Jerusalem to the official chambers of the Sanhedrin on the Temple Mount.

Here is what the Temple Mount looked like in the first century. I’m sorry that’s not clear, on my screen it’s very clear. But you get the idea. The large box there is the entire Temple Mount complex, and where I’ve circled in the center is the temple proper. You have the courts of the women, the courts of Israel, the courts of the priests. And then that large building standing there, that’s the facade of the temple proper where the holy place and Holy of Holies would have been. Now that gives you the overall scope of the Temple Mount. I’m going to zoom in to the temple proper. The temple, (you see it there in the foreground), is the temple proper with its huge gate and its gold facade, but around that was this other complex. And you see what I’ve circled, that is where historians believe the Sanhedrin typically met, at least until the year thirty A.D. It’s the chamber of hewn stone.

And this is where they would have taken Jesus, probably, because we’re told -by Luke, I believe it is, that they were-they took Him specifically to the council chambers, to an official meeting place of the Sanhedrin. So, this is where things begin to unwind and work their way out in the Jewish trials. So, through the dark and winding streets of the ancient city, the entire Sanhedrin

makes its way to this meeting chamber early in the morning, probably before the first break of light, so that at the first break of light they could convene their meeting and quickly be done and get Jesus to the governor.

Mark tells us what happens next. Let's read it together. Mark 15:1,

Early in morning the chief priests with the elders and scribes and the whole Council, immediately held a consultation; and binding Jesus, they led Him away and delivered Him to Pilate. Pilate questioned Him, "Are You the King of Jews?" And He answered him, "*It is as* you say." The chief priests *began* to accuse Him harshly. Then Pilate questioned Him again, saying, "Do You not answer? See how many charges they bring against You!" But Jesus made no further answer; so, Pilate was amazed."

Now in these verses the series of Jewish and Roman trials continue against Jesus. The Jewish leaders, because of their envy of Jesus, are trying desperately to establish His guilt; but instead, as part of God's eternal plan, all they are doing are proving His complete and utter innocence.

Now, Mark's account of the trials of our Lord is the briefest and the most concise of any of the Gospel writers. He essentially telescopes a number of events and conversations into a few brief lines. What he records is entirely accurate, but it reflects only a little of what transpired in these series of trials. And what I want to do is to give you a little fuller glimpse, and so we may not get very far in this text tonight. But I want you to see the overall picture of what was going on, and Lord willing, we'll finish it up next Sunday night.

What Mark records here, and the other Gospel writers as well, reflects the due process of law in the provinces of Rome. It synchronizes beautifully with the other more complete records of the three Jewish trials and the three Roman trials. Only John recorded the preliminary hearing and indictment before Annas.

Mark records what happened in the second phase of the Jewish trial before a quorum of the

Sanhedrin in the home of Caiaphas early that morning at probably 2 or 3 A.M. And now here in chapter 15, Mark continues his account with, first of all, a brief mention of the third Jewish trial. Look at verse 1, “[And] early in the morning the chief priests with the elders and the scribes and the whole Council immediately held a consultation....”

At the second Jewish trial held in the upper room of Caiaphas about 2 A.M. that morning, probably only a quorum of the Sanhedrin had been present, and so now they meet as an entire council to officially ratify the decision that had been made earlier that night. As I pointed out before, the time references for this trial in Matthew and Mark and Luke all place it very early in the morning; in fact, the language implies it was the first hint of light. And the whole Council has this meeting. Mark summarizes that brief formal meeting with these very few words.

Fortunately for us, in God’s providence through his careful research and investigation, Luke was able to gain a first-hand account of what happened in that third Jewish trial. Perhaps he learned the details from Nicodemus or Joseph of Arimathea, both of whom were members of the Sanhedrin, but both of whom had become true followers of Jesus. In fact, we are explicitly told that Joseph of Arimathea “had not consented to their plan and action” (Luke 23). Perhaps it was from him Luke got this information, but let’s look at it together.

Turn over with me to Luke 22. Let’s see what happened that Mark describes in that one verse. Luke 22:66: “When it was day, the Council of elders of the people assembled, both chief priests and scribes, and they led Him away to their council chamber.”

As I showed you before, that was near the temple proper on the Temple Mount, and that’s where they take Jesus at the first break of light. And here was the summation of what happened there, and I doubt it was much more lengthy than this. When they assembled, they said, “‘If you are the Christ.’ That’s “Christos”; that’s the Greek form of “Messiah, Hamashea”. “If you are the [Messiah] tell us.’ But He said to them, ‘If I tell you, you will not believe; and if I ask a question, you will not answer. But from now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God.’”

Jesus here puts Himself in the place of the Old Testament prophecy in Daniel and in Psalm 110. “And [all of them] said, ‘Are You the Son of God, then?’” Is that what You’re claiming by quoting that text? Are you claiming to be God’s unique son? “And He said to them, ‘Yes, I am.’” Just as in the second Jewish trial when asked by Caiaphas if He was “the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One” He said, “I am.” Here now in the third Jewish trial early in the morning on that Friday morning, He’s asked the same question. Are You “the Christ”? (verse 67) Are you the Messiah? And He says, “I am” the Son of God and the Messiah. “Then they said, (verse 71) ‘What further need do we have of testimony? For we have heard it ourselves from His own mouth.’” He has confessed that He believes that He is the Messiah and the Son of God, and that’s blasphemy—unless it was true.

But they couldn’t allow for that. Their system didn’t allow for that. Their prejudice didn’t allow for that. Their desire and envy to keep their own position didn’t allow for that possibility, so the only option was that He was blaspheming the true God which called for the death penalty. So, this is what happened that Mark describes in just one part of one 1; a brief interchange in which Jesus says officially on the record with all the council president-present what He had said earlier that night before a least a quorum of the Sanhedrin in Caiaphas’ upper room.

Now clearly at this third trial, the Jewish leaders accomplished two purposes. First of all, they formalized the accusation, the verdict, and the sentence against Jesus: the accusation, blasphemy; the verdict, guilty (By His own mouth He claims to be the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One.); the sentence, He is worthy of death. It’s now formalized. That was all decided before, but now it’s formalized as a package, a neat little tidy package with their own wicked bow tied around it.

The other thing they probably accomplished at this morning session, if they had not previously decided it during the nighttime trial, is they determined on what basis they would accuse Jesus before the Roman governor. Because Pilate’s not going to be interested in a charge of blasphemy. There was no law in Rome against blasphemy, and so they have to turn that charge in some way that Pilate will consent to put Him to death. And they do it in a devious and wicked way as we’ll see, Lord willing, next Sunday night.

Now, Matthew tells us one other fascinating event that occurred at this point. Sometime around this brief, morning trial on the temple mount at their official chambers, something else happened that's absolutely astounding. Go back to Matthew, Matthew 27. Matthew 27:1,

Now when morning came, [There's that expression again: when the break of dawn came.] all the chief priests and the elders of the people conferred together against Jesus to put Him to death.... [We're talking here about the same third Jewish trial that we're looking at in Mark 15:1.] "... and [then] they bound Him and led Him away and delivered Him to Pilate the governor." [But in the mix of that, something else happens in verse 3.] "Then when Judas, who had betrayed ... [Jesus], saw that He had been condemned....

Stop there. Somehow Judas learns very quickly that Jesus was found officially guilty of the crime of blasphemy and had been sentenced to death. We don't know exactly how he found that out. There are a couple of reasonable possibilities: one, not likely, is that he was somehow able to be in the council chamber during the deliberations. More likely, he was there on the Temple Mount with all the other pilgrims who had already begun to gather for the day's festivities. Remember, it's Passover, and he knows what's going on. He knows this hearing is being heard, this trial is being had; and he hangs around the door, if you will, waiting for the first indication of what the verdict is, what is going to happen to Jesus. And he learns that He's been condemned. Verse 3 says ... he felt remorse....

It's an interesting word. It's a word that is like the word for "repentance", but it's a totally different form. And it doesn't mean repentance in the New Testament sense. It's "regret." It's "sadness." But it's not repentance. He felt remorse for what he had done. The crushing weight of the decision that he has made to betray the Spotless One just absolutely grounds his conscience to powder, and he is wracked with remorse. And so,

he ... returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests [the] elders, saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." But they said, "What is that to us?

See to *that* yourself!”

We know by what follows that what Judas felt here was not true repentance, it was instead the sting of guilt that comes from the relentless work of conscience. We know that by what follows, because it's not full confession. Notice what Judas doesn't do. He doesn't go find Jesus and fall at His feet. He doesn't go to the cross along with John and the women and say, “Lord, please forgive me,” and beg for forgiveness.

Instead, what follows his remorse is the further, selfish act of suicide. Once Judas heard the verdict of the Sanhedrin that had been passed on Jesus, he apparently (And we can't be sure.) but he apparently burst into their presence, either in the meeting hall where they were gathered, or as they left their chamber and came out onto the Temple Mount (Remember, they're going to leave that facility and head to-to the royal residence of Pontius Pilate.), or as they walk across that Temple Mount to exit it, or at some point on the way from their meeting place to the home of Pontius Pilate.

Somewhere in that brief journey Judas finds a group of them, at least, together, and perhaps all of them; and having found them Judas begins to profess Jesus' innocence and to try to return the money. They refused to take it back. They essentially said, and this is really a good paraphrase of what they say in Greek: That's your problem. Verse 5, And he threw the pieces of silver into the temple sanctuary and departed; and he went away and hanged himself.” This is fascinating, because when they refused to take the money back, Judas is not going to keep it. “[But] he threw the pieces of silver into the ... sanctuary and [left.]”

Now again, just to remind you, that is that-the temple proper standing there with the gold facade: fifty yards high by fifty yards wide, massive structure, entering the front door is the holy place, behind that is a small cube fifteen by fifteen that was the Holy of Holies. There's a closer-up picture of that area. You can see even by the little dots, those represent people. This was a massive, massive structure. In the foreground, in the red circle is where the official chambers of the Sanhedrin were. And you can see it was a pretty close distance to pass the altar on which the animals were sacrificed, and to take those silver coins up the steps of the temple proper, and to

fling them into the holy place. I say that, because the Greek word that Matthew uses for “sanctuary” is used by him only of the temple proper; that building in the center of the Temple Mount which consisted of the holy place and the Holy of Holies, the place that only the priests could enter.

So, Judas left their meeting chambers or just outside their meeting chambers; he walked across the short distance on the Temple Mount. He either entered the court of the Israelites there by the altar, or perhaps he even broke through the barriers, ran up onto the steps of the temple itself and hurled that bag of coins into the holy place. And then he went out, and he hanged himself from a tree on a cliff overlooking one of Jerusalem’s valleys. And according to Acts 1, either the tree limb or the rope broke, and he fell. And when he fell, he fell from such a distance or fell upon a rock so that his internal body burst open, and all of his organs gushed out. (Acts 1:18) The brutal end to the betrayer of Jesus Christ. That happens in conjunction with this third trial.

Now Mark picks up the story in the middle of verse 1. We’ve seen the third Jewish trial. He picks it up now with the first Roman trial. Go back to Mark 15:1. “Early in the morning the chief priests with the elders and [the] scribes and the whole Council, immediately held a consultation; and binding Jesus, they led Him away and delivered Him [up] to Pilate.” Jesus, you remember, we saw that when He was arrested in the garden He was initially bound. At some point, apparently, His hands had been freed, but now as they prepare to transport Him to the governor’s residence, they bind Him again. And “... they led Him” (the whole group of them) to the governor’s residence. “They ... delivered Him” up, or they transferred Him as a prisoner to Pilate’s authority. That term is a legal term.

And here we come to the first of the three Roman trials. This would have been very early in the day. Historians tell us that the typical Roman official rose very early with goal of completing all his work by noon. Now just in case you think that’s because they were persons of such industry, the real reason was to allow plenty of time for “the elaborately organized leisure of the Roman gentlemen.” That’s from an expert on Roman culture and society. It was that leisure that would take most of Pilate’s day.

The legal trials that were held in Rome at the Roman forum usually began shortly after sunrise. In fact, Seneca, the Roman writer, says, (quote, I love this ((chuckle)) quote) talking about the trials that would start shortly after sunrise at the Roman forum, he said, “All these thousands hurrying to the forum at the break of day, how base their cases, and how much baser are their advocates.” (chuckle) Some things never change. (Sorry Tom.)

Notice first of all, the accusers, the accusers.

Under Roman law there was no state prosecutor; instead, any interested party could bring an accusation. Who were Jesus’ accusers? Notice verse 1 says, “... binding Jesus, they led Him away....” Clearly, the antecedent of that pronoun “they” occurs earlier in verse 1. Notice, “The chief priests with the elders and scribes and the whole Council.” We’ve seen those terms before.

“The chief priests.” That’s a term that describes the dominant political families in Jerusalem, the ones who controlled the high priesthood. And then you had the rest of the entire Sanhedrin: the seventy ruling members of their executive and legislative body plus the high priest—seventy-one. And in addition, we’re told “the elders and scribes.” Those tended to be the lay leaders from across the nation sent as representatives of the people and to serve on the Sanhedrin for some period of time.

You remember for most of Jesus’ ministry it was Pharisees, the elders and scribes, who were His main enemies. We’ve seen that throughout Mark’s Gospel. But the chief priests, for the most part, had demonstrated little interest in Jesus until about six weeks before this. You remember what happened? Six weeks before this, back in about February of that year, Jesus had gone to the village of Bethany just over the hill about three miles from Jerusalem. And there He had purposely done one of His most flamboyant miracles, and He had done it in a flamboyant way. Often, He would heal and raise from the dead privately and secretly: send everyone out and raise a little girl from the dead.

But in this case, six weeks before, He had gone to Bethany. And with an influential family, the family of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, He had raised His friend Lazarus, who had been dead for

four days. And you remember the dramatic way He did it. He stood at a distance, ordered the stone to be rolled away. And all of the friends and family are gathered around, and He says, “Lazarus, come forth.” And Lazarus shows up at the entrance of that tomb still wrapped in his grave clothes but very much alive.

Well, guess what the theological position of the chief priests was? They were antisupernaturalists, and they didn’t believe in the resurrection. Suddenly, Jesus shows up on their radar. And now they are the instigators. Notice, they’re the ones leading the parade. And the elders and scribes, the Pharisees and the rest of the Council are just along for the ride in full agreement but following the lead of the chief priests.

Now Mark deliberately says, “the whole Council.” Apart from Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, the vote of the seventy-plus-the-high-priest was unanimous. Although all of them would not have spoken as the accusers of Jesus, instead they all showed up. They would all be there as His official accusers, but two or three of them would have been chosen to speak on their behalf. Matthew puts it this way, Matthew 27:1,

“Now when morning ... [had come], all the chief priests and the elders of the people ... [took council] against Jesus to put Him to death.” Luke 23:1, says, “Then the whole body of them ... [arose] and brought Him before Pilate.” So, you get the picture. A quorum meets in the early morning hours, but the whole Council meets at that just post daybreak meeting. And then all of them (according to Luke), the whole body of them, arose from those meeting chambers on the Temple Mount and bring Him to Pilate. They want Pilate to know they are serious about this man and the problem He poses. Those are the accusers.

What about the judge?

Notice verse 1 says they brought Him “to Pilate.” This is first time in Mark’s Gospel that we have met this man. There are several sources of information that give us a little insight to what Pilate was like: obviously, the four Gospels; some from the writings of Flavius Josephus. Philo of Alexandria, the Jewish writer, gives us a little more insight into Pilate. Tacitus, the Roman historian, just mentions Pilate in passing. He refers in his annals to “The execution of Christos,

author of that sect [that is, the sect of Christians] by the procurator Pontius Pilate, in the reign of Tiberius.”

You know what’s interesting about that. In 1961, a stone tablet with an inscription was found at Caesarea. Prior to that there was no archaeological evidence that a man named Pontius Pilate ruled over the land of Israel. Of course, we believe it because the Bible said it, and Christians always have. They knew that eventually, if God desired, there would be some archaeological evidence because he existed. Scripture makes that very clear. But it’s fascinating, because that’s exactly what happened. I’ve seen—this is in Caesarea Maritima on the coast of the Mediterranean. And this is a copy that the Antiquities Ministry there in Israel made. The original is not out there in the weather. It’s been taken and carefully placed in a museum. But here is Pilate’s name. You can’t read it very well. But you can see, if you look at it carefully, written in the Latin kind of letters, you see “Pileatus”. And on that plaque it mentions that he was the prefect of Judea during the reign of Tiberius. Which is exactly the same timeframe that the Scriptures describe.

Now we know very little about Pontius Pilate before he took this position. We know that he was a Roman citizen probably born in Italy, but the date and places of his birth are really not known to us. He was married. We know that. Matthew mentions his wife. And it’s almost certain that he served in other military and administrative posts (either as a military tribune or a staff officer in a Roman legion) to get this kind of position. Philo hints that he may have gotten his position through friends and connections. He had a political connection with the commander of the Praetorian Guard, and some say that he got some of his opportunities through the woman that he married and her family. But apparently, regardless, Pilate had served well enough to catch the eye of Rome, because this decision had to be made in Rome. And it would advance his career, and he would eventually gain this post which would be his last.

Pilate’s specific responsibility was to serve as the governor, or prefect, over the Roman province of Judea and Samaria. He served under the larger Roman province of Syria. He was the fifth such governor. He served for a decade, from the year 26 A.D. to the year 36 A.D. It was his responsibility to keep the peace and to ensure that Roman authority and law were respected.

Under his command he had approximately five thousand soldiers: five infantry cohorts and a cavalry regiment. They were probably not for the most part Italians, they were probably auxiliary troops; but typically, the commanders and the centurions would have been Romans. Pilate's authority over all the people in his province except for the Roman citizens would have been absolute. At his whim he could put them to death or save them alive.

What was this man like? Philo of Alexandria, quoting a letter from Agrippa the First to Caligula, described Pilate as "inflexible, merciless, and obstinate." He was a harsh and brutal man. He was known for inflicting punishment without the benefit of a trial. He committed a number of atrocities. In fact, look at Luke 13:1. Jesus refers to one of them, "Now on that same occasion there were some present who reported to [Jesus] about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had [mingled] with their sacrifices." We don't know exactly what that was about, but clearly it was a capricious, brutal act where Pilate had Galileans killed at the temple while they were offering their sacrifices. And Jesus said they were no worse, "Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." But Pilate hated the Jews, and he really didn't understand them. In fact, again, Philo of Alexandria, quoting Agrippa the First, says that the Jews

"Exasperated Pilate to the greatest possible degree, as he feared lest they might go to an embassy to the emperor and might impeach him with respect to other particulars of his government." What issues did they have? Here again Philo, "His corruptions, his acts of insolence, his rapine, his habit of insulting people, his cruelty, his continual murders of people untried and uncondemned, and his never ending gratuitous and most grievous inhumanity." [Not the kind of guy you want to invite on your next vacation.]

Together, those qualities had made clashes between Pilate and the Jews. And there'd been a number of them. Historians tell us that on one occasion, Pilate, just to get at the Jews, had brought Roman standards, shields, or banners into Jerusalem and into the temple area that bore the name and the image of the emperor, who was worshiped as a god. That violated all that they stood for about not having any other gods. And so, a huge number of the Jews marched seventy miles to Caesarea over on the coast where Pilate stayed, and they protested at his residence for

five days. Initially, Pilate ordered his soldiers to kill the protestors in the stadium where they had gathered, but he later relented and eventually withdrew the images of the emperor from Jerusalem.

On another occasion he took money that had been given exclusively for the temple. It had been declared “Corban”. You remember that word from the Scripture? He took that money from the temple treasury and used it to finance a twenty-five-mile aqueduct into the city of Jerusalem. Again, there was a huge riot, and this time his soldiers actually did kill many of the protestors.

On yet another occasion, there was a mob of Samaritan fanatics following a false prophet who were at the base of Mount Gerizim. They had this false idea that Moses had hidden some of the sacred vessels from the tabernacle up on Mount Gerizim, and they were about to ascend to get those. But they had weapons, and Pilate, as a Roman, saw those weapons as a threat. And so, he ordered them marched upon. He ordered his cavalry to attack, and they were slaughtered. The Samaritans that survived complained, and it was because of that incident that Pilate was eventually removed from office and called back to Rome.

It’s unconfirmed, but the church historian, Eusebius, reports that Pilate, after he was tried and convicted for that Samaritan affair, eventually took his own life. What a tragic, tragic man. It’s clear from the Gospel record that Pilate was proud, cruel, superstitious, and utterly self-seeking and self-promoting. All that mattered to Pilate was Pilate: his reputation, his career, his advancement. And because of that he was the ultimate pragmatist. That’s the man to whom the Jewish leaders brought Jesus: the self-promoting and ambitious Pontius Pilate. He thinks that Jesus is standing trial before him.

I almost named this message, instead of “Jesus before Pilate,” “Pilate before Jesus.” Because he thinks Jesus is standing trial, but in reality, it’s Pilate who’s on trial. In a very real sense (as I considered that), it occurred to me that is true for every person who ever hears of or is confronted by the story of Jesus of Nazareth.

Let me just say, if you’re here tonight, and you’re not a Christian, you have never confessed

Jesus as Lord, then right now, right now, tonight as you hear this message, two things are taking place. Jesus is on trial before you. You must evaluate His claims, and you must decide what you are going to do with Jesus. You can't ignore Him. You can't decide just to forget that He exists. You will make a decision before you leave here tonight. You are making a decision about what to do with Jesus.

Look down in 15:12. We'll look at this verse next week. But Pilate says to them, "Then what shall I do with Him whom you call King of the Jews?" That's the question you are confronted with right now. What are you going to do with this historical person who made such radical claims to be the Messiah and the Son of God?

But at the same time that Jesus is on trial before you, you, right now, are on trial before Jesus, just like Pilate was. And to be condemned before Jesus, like Pilate, you don't have to decide that Jesus was some kind of evil seditionist and deceiver. Pilate never decided that. All Pilate did was simply not to confess Jesus and to look out for Pilate.

And that's all you have to do to receive a guilty verdict from Jesus Himself, is just ignore Jesus and look out for yourself, do what you want to do. But when you fail to acknowledge Jesus' lordship and kingship over you personally, understand, you have made a decision. Tonight, right now, you made a decision.

Let me show you that. Look at John 3. We love John 3:16, a beautiful verse of the grace and love of God.

"For God so loved the world, [He loved the world to such an extent] that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. [There's the Gospel; that's the invitation.] For God did not send the Son into the world to [] ... judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him." Jesus didn't come the first time to bring judgment, but salvation, rescue. Verse 18: "He who believes in Him is not judged [right now]; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name

of the only begotten Son of God. This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.”

You understand that’s the issue? People talk about having an intellectual problem with the Christian faith and with Jesus. They don’t have an intellectual problem; they have a moral problem. They will not have this man to rule over them. That’s the issue. And by choosing not to have Him rule, by not believing, they’ve already had the judgment passed on to them.

Let me plead with you tonight if you’re not a Christian. Understand what’s really happening as you look at the Gospel record, as you see Jesus moving toward the cross to die for sins, as you see Him in His beautiful, noble dignity facing the indignities of injustice. Realize what’s happening. He is offering Himself for every sinner who will believe. He is offering Himself to you. And you, right now, are making a decision. Will He be Lord, or will He not? Will you acknowledge His claims, or will you deny Him? But there’s no middle ground. You will leave here tonight, once again, if you’re not in Christ, having made a decision to refuse Jesus. And you will be under, already, as John says, the judgment of God. I plead with you, don’t let that happen again. Tonight’s the night for you to bow your knee to Him.

For those of us who are in Christ, I want you to see what’s going on here, because as Jesus stands before Pilate, He’s still in control. Look back at chapter 10 of Mark. Mark 10:33. He said this would happen. He’s not the victim of circumstances. Mark 10:33. This is what He told His disciples when they were walking to Jerusalem that previous Friday.

[He said], ... “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and will hand Him over to the Gentiles. [And] They will mock Him and spit on Him, and scourge Him and kill *Him*, and three days later He will rise again.”

A week before, Jesus had said exactly what was going to happen. How did He know that? Turn

over to Acts 2. Because not only was Jesus in control, but God the Father was in control. What I want you see is this wasn't about these wicked Jewish leaders and this wicked Roman governor. That isn't what this is about. Acts 2:23, in his sermon there on the Day of Pentecost, Peter says,

“Men of Israel, listen to these words [verse 22]: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know [They were all witnesses of it.]—... this *Man*, delivered over [What do you expect next? by the chief priests?] delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God....”

What's happening in those trials has really nothing to do with those wicked men. It has to do with the loving Father handing over His only begotten Son because of His love for sinners by His predetermined plan. God is on a rescue mission. That's what's happening.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, our hearts are moved beyond words by these accounts. Lord, as we read these stories, as our minds enter into the events of that dark night and that darker morning, Father, we are overwhelmed. We're overwhelmed with our own guilt before You, that it would require, that our sins would require such a sacrifice. And Father, we are equally overwhelmed by Your grace and by Your love, that You would love us to such an extent that You would go to these ends, that You would deliver over to these wicked men Your own Son.

Thank you for the reminder, Father, that Jesus was not the hapless victim of wicked, ambitious men; but instead, He was the knowing and willing victim of Your eternal, sovereign, gracious plan to rescue sinners. We love You, and we thank You with all of our hearts for what You've done for us in Christ. Help us to think about these things, to meditate on these things, and may we never be the same.

We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.