

Jesus Before Pilate (Part 2)
Mark 15: 1-5
The Memoirs of Peter
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E.W. Westhafer wrote this about the trial of Christ. He said,

That entire drama of tragedy, from the arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane to the last spear thrust in His side on Golgotha, was so utterly illegal, that had He but spoken one sentence of the assertion of His rights, under either Jewish or Roman law, the crucifixion would never have occurred. But He did not speak. He chose His suffering.

J. Oswald Sanders puts it this way:

Never were legal proceedings more irregular or a verdict more unjust than in the trial of Jesus. From arrest to crucifixion, every principle of justice was violated and provisions of both criminal and ecclesiastical law flouted.

It's that travesty of justice that occurred in the series of first Sanhedrin Jewish trials and then in Roman trials that we are studying together in Mark's Gospel, where I invite you to turn with me again tonight. Let me read for you the first five verses of Mark 15, and it will reestablish the context that we began last week. Mark 15:1,

Early in the 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 the 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.

Mark continues here his record of the series of Jewish and Roman trials against Jesus. The

Jewish leaders, because of their envy of Jesus and their desire to protect their own power, are desperately trying to establish His guilt; but instead, as part of God's eternal plan they are proving Jesus' utter innocence. Mark's record of the trials of our Lord is the briefest and the most concise of the Gospel writers. He telescopes a number of events in conversations into just a few brief lines. For example, he doesn't record the first Jewish trial, the hearing before Annas immediately after Jesus was arrested, at all. In fact, only John records that. But Mark does record the second Jewish trial, and we studied that back in chapter fourteen, verses 53 through the end of the chapter. That was the second of the Jewish trials. Here at the beginning of chapter 15, Mark also records. And we examined last time the third Jewish trial.

Let me remind you that verse 1 says about this trial, "Early in the morning the chief priests with the elders and scribes and the whole Council, immediately held a consultation." There was a hearing before Annas after Jesus was arrested. There was the second trial in the upper room of Caiaphas, in his home where, apparently, just a quorum of the Sanhedrin assembled probably around 2 A.M. that morning. And so, at the first hint of light (chapter 15 says), the first hint of light on the eastern horizon, they meet as an entire council in their official chambers on the Temple Mount to officially ratify the decision that the quorum of the Sanhedrin had made earlier that night.

And in that third Jewish trial (And we saw it last time from Luke's Gospel.) they ask Him directly, are You the Messiah? are you the Son of the Blessed One? And Jesus affirms that that is exactly who He is. And so, they quickly find Jesus guilty of the crime of blasphemy and, except for Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, they unanimously condemn Him to death. Immediately then, following that very brief, second trial, just after the break of light on the eastern horizon, (It would've been a very brief proceeding.) after that, they proceed immediately enmasse, they leave the temple area, and they headed to the Praetorium. And once they arrived there, came the first Roman trial. And Mark alludes to that in the second half of verse 1. "And binding Jesus, they led Him away and delivered Him [up] to Pilate."

Now notice first of all, (And this is covering ground that we covered last time, just sort of reviewing it.) first of all, the accusers. "And binding Jesus, they led Him away." The antecedent

of that pronoun occurs earlier in verse 1. It was “the chief priests with the elders and [the] scribes and the whole Council.” Luke describes it this way, Luke 23:1, “Then the whole body of them [arose] and brought [Jesus] before Pilate.” So, the entire Sanhedrin (again, minus Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea), the seventy-one men who were the leaders of the nation, brought Jesus to the Roman governor.

And that brings us to the judge. We looked at him last time as well. We’re told at the end of verse 1 they brought Him “to Pilate.” Pilate was the prefect over the minor Roman province of Judea and Samaria. He was the fifth such prefect or governor, serving for a decade’s time from 26 A.D. to 36 A.D. So, this trial came about in the middle of his tenure. Pilate was known as an obstinate, inflexible, merciless man. He was harsh. He was brutal. He was known for inflicting punishment without the benefit of a trial. That’s the sort of man who will hear the case of Jesus of Nazareth. Now that’s where we left off last time.

Tonight I want us to continue to see this first Roman trial before Pilate unfold. We’ve seen the accusers. We’ve seen the judge.

Thirdly, let’s consider the court room. Where did the Roman trial of Jesus take place? John tells us this in John 18:28, “They led Jesus therefore from Caiaphas into the Praetorium, and it was early; and they themselves did not enter into the Praetorium [in order] that they [might] not be defiled, but might eat the Passover.”

What was the Praetorium? Well historically there has been a great debate about whether this is a reference to the Fortress Antonia, that massive fortress that set on the edge of the Temple Mount where the Roman garrison was stationed, or whether this was instead the governor’s private residence. This is a map of Jerusalem at the time of Jesus, and you see that here on the Temple Mount, on the corner of it, was the Fortress Antonia. That is one possible location the other, on the upper city, up on the hill near the-toward the Mediterranean, the palace of Herod. It’s likely to have been the palace of Herod. The word for “praetorium”, rather, simply refers to the governor’s official residence in Jerusalem.

Normally, when Pilate was up in Caesarea Maritima, he stayed in the palace that Herod the Great had built there up on coast of the Mediterranean. But on special occasions, including the great Jewish feasts and especially at Passover, Pilate came up to Jerusalem. And on those occasions we know that he stayed in the amazing palace that Herod the Great had built on the upper west side of the city. Based on the descriptions of Flavius Josephus it has been reconstructed. This is a model of the city of Jerusalem looking from the south. You can see in the middle there is the fortress Antonia off the Temple Mount. In this area there's a huge fortress on the corner of the Temple Mount, and up here on the upper west side is where Herod's palace was. And that's likely where Jesus was taken, to Herod's palace.

This model has reconstructed from the writings of Flavius Josephus what that might have looked like. You can see in the foreground those two massive structures in a large palastrade. That is a reconstruction of Herod's palace. Here's a further closeup of what it was like, and yet another closeup to give you some idea. To give you the scale of this massive structure, it was approximately three hundred yards from one end to the other. Two main wings, as you see them represented there, two magnificent wings. Each had its own banquet halls, its own baths, its own accommodations for hundreds of guests, each wing. It was surrounded (And you can't get the full picture of its glory in this model reconstruction.) but it was surrounded, according to those who saw it, by groves of trees and canals and ponds. It was studded with bronze fountains. In the middle of this palace were gardens with porticoes. This was where Pilate likely stayed, in one wing of this massive structure that Herod the Great had built there in Jerusalem.

Notice John says (in the text I read you a moment ago) that the Jewish leaders did not themselves go into the Praetorium or the governor's official residence; instead, he later tells us they stayed just outside. Listen to John 19:13, "[When Pilate therefore] heard these words, he brought Jesus out, [that is, out from the Praetorium] and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Pavement, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha." Literally, the Greek word for "The Pavement" means a "stone pavement or mosaic." Josephus describes that "Just outside of Herod's palace was a massive agora, a massive open marketplace or square." It's in that open square that the Jewish leaders apparently stayed. Just outside of the governor's residence on that open market was also, apparently, a raised platform on which the Bema Seat or the judgment seat was located.

So, understand, then, that the events as they unfold before us in-the Jesus' trial before Pilate alternated back and forth between probably just inside of the governor's royal residence, and just outside where the Bema Seat sat and where this open marketplace was located: back and forth between the two as the sides go at Jesus. That's the court room. Let's look then at the—there's one other snapshot of it just so you get an idea of what that looked like from the reconstruction and the descriptions of eyewitnesses.

That brings us, then, to the initial charges that were brought against Jesus. We know where it's happening, we know the judge, we know the accusers. What were the charges? Turn with me to John 18, because John gives us a little fuller account, John 18:28. We read this a moment ago, set the context.

Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas into the Praetorium, and it was early; and they themselves did not enter into the Praetorium so that they would not be defiled, but might eat the Passover. [Hypocrisy is an awfully ugly thing, isn't it? They are railroading this innocent man to death, and they're concerned about ceremonially defiling themselves so they can't eat the Passover.] Therefore Pilate went out to them.... [He goes out to them there in the open market area,] and said, "What accusation do you bring against this Man?" They answered and said to him, 'If this man were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him to you.'

Now, understand what's going on here. They at first refuse to bring any specific charges, because their hope is that Pilate, to please them, will simply take their word that He has committed a crime worthy of death. He will not hear the case himself, and Jesus will simply be railroaded. And they then can blame Pilate, and Pilate can blame them, and it's all tied up in a neat, tidy, little bow.

But Pilate doesn't play along. And he says to them in response to their if-He-weren't-deserving-of-death-we-wouldn't-be-bringing-Him-here, he says, "Take Him yourselves, and judge Him according to your law." He immediately understood that what's really going on here is they want

him to do their dirty work, and he's not willing to go along with it. So, he says fine, if it's an issue that I shouldn't hear, that's just between you and the Jewish people, then you take Him and "judge Him according to your law." But the Jews said, "'We are not permitted to put anyone to death,' [this was] to fulfill the word of Jesus which He spoke, signifying by what kind of death He was about to die."

So, they wanted Jesus dead, but they didn't have the authority to carry out the death penalty. Only Pilate did. And so, once the Jewish leaders saw that Pilate wasn't going to just play along with their-*their* accusation that He was worthy of death, he wasn't going to just take their word for it, they-*but* instead Pilate wanted to hold a separate trial himself, they finally presented their accusation.

What was their accusation? Luke records it for us. Again, piecing a harmony of the Gospels together, (I've recommended this to you before.) Let me just say again, there's a wonderful harmony of the Gospels that puts the four accounts together and lets you see them side by side. It's published by Zondervan, and I would encourage you to get it. Gundry and Thomas are the two authors who put it together. And I have benefited greatly from it, and I know you will as well.

But when you put the accounts together, here was how they responded. When Pilate said, fine, you take Him and judge Him, they say, way-way-wait a minute, we do have accusations, this what they said. Luke 23:2, "And they began to accuse Him, saying, 'We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, and saying that He Himself is Christ, [or Messiah] a King.'" Now notice, there are three specific accusations in that.

First of all: He was misleading the nation. The Greek word for "mislead" means "to cause to be uncertain about a belief" or "to believe something different than is normally taught." He is misleading them about the faith of Israel.

The second accusation is: He was forbidding the Jews to pay taxes to Caesar. Now that is just an outright lie, because two days before on Tuesday of the passion week, in answer to their

question about taxes, Jesus had said what? Back in chapter 12 we saw it: “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” So, this was an absolute lie.

The third specific accusation is that He claimed to be the Messiah, a King. Now this is, I think, the most devious of all, because of course this was true. But the way they were presenting it to Pilate was false, because they made it sound like Jesus was intentionally pitting Himself against Rome and its authority. So, those were the three accusations the leaders leveled against Jesus before Pilate.

Did you notice what was missing? What was missing was there’s no mention of the crime of blasphemy, the only crime on which the Sanhedrin has convicted Jesus. Why is that? It’s because they knew that Pilate would have no interest in their religious affairs, so they took Jesus’ claims, His spiritual claims, and they deviously twisted them into an accusation of sedition or treason against Rome. They knew it was untrue, but it was the only way. In essence they were saying, He is a dangerous revolutionary, He is pitting His authority against that of Rome and Caesar. They stated it in three different ways, but they really only made, ultimately, one accusation.

And oh, by the way, Pilate got it, because this is what he said in Luke 23:14. Pilate said to the chief priests and rulers, “... You brought this man to me as one who incites the people to rebellion....” That was the issue: they accused Jesus of sedition and treason against Rome. So that was the charge. Those were the initial charges and ultimately one charge, sedition.

So, in light of those charges then, comes in verse 2 the interrogation. In light of the serious charge of sedition, Pilate takes Jesus inside the Praetorium to question Him. Look back at Mark 15:2, “Pilate questioned Him, ‘Are You the King of the Jews?’ And He answered ... ‘It is as you say.’” Pilate directly asked Jesus if He was guilty of the charge brought against Him.

Essentially, this is what Pilate was asking: are you claiming to be the rightful king and authority over the Jewish people? In other words, are You deliberately setting Yourself against the authority of Caesar and the authority of Rome? That’s the essence of the question. That’s all that Pilate’s concerned about: is this man guilty of sedition against Rome?

Verse 2, Jesus answers the question about “Are You King of the Jews?” but He does so in a very interesting way. Notice, answering him He said, “*It is as you say.*” Now notice in our English text, the italicized words are the words that are added by the translators for clarity. Literally, Jesus answered Pilate “... you are saying.” Now what does that mean? In other places He answers in an unequivocal yes. What did He mean? Well clearly, Jesus was saying yes, that He was King of the Jews. That’s certainly how Pilate understood it, because throughout the rest of this trial and his whole encounter with Jesus, he continually refers to Him as the King of the Jews.

And in fact, ultimately, remember Pilate’s the one who has posted over Jesus’ head on the cross: this is “Jesus [of Nazareth], the King of the Jews.” So, he understood Jesus to be claiming to be the King of Jews, and so that is clearly part of what Jesus means. But at the same time that Jesus was answering yes, I am the King of the Jews, He answered the question in such a way as to be a qualified yes, because our Lord was saying it in a certain way. He was essentially saying, yes, but not in the way you think. And in fact, according to John, after Jesus answered yes, He went on to explain to Pilate that in fact He was not a king in the way Pilate understood. He was not claiming to supplant or undermine the authority of Caesar.

Turn over to John 18. Jesus says, yes, I am the King of the Jews, but not exactly as you understand it. John 18 and look at verse 33.

Therefore Pilate entered again into the Praetorium, and summoned Jesus and said to Him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus answered, “Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you [this] about Me?” Pilate answered, “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You to me; what have You done?” [And notice how Jesus clarifies the nature of His being a king.] [He says] ... “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm.” Literally, “My kingdom is not from here.” [Pilate got it.] ... [He says but], “... You are a king?”

[And] Jesus ... [says yes], “You ... *correctly* [said] that I am a king. For this I have been born, ... for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth.”

My kingdom is a kingdom of the truth; it’s a spiritual kingdom. So, Jesus says, yes, I am the King of the Jews, but Pilate, not in the way you think; I am not challenging the authority of Caesar. So that was the initial interrogation of Jesus.

Now after this brief interrogation, both Luke and John tell us that Pilate issued the verdict. The verdict. Here’s John 18:38. John says, “Pilate said to Him, ‘What is truth?’ And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews and said to them, ‘I find no guilt in Him.’” “I find no guilt in Him.” Pilate steps outside the Praetorium, just inside the gate there of the royal residence; he ascends the Bema, or that elevated tribunal seat; and in his position as the rightful human authority over Jesus, he declares Jesus to be completely innocent. The expression that Pilate uses means, “I find no basis for a charge against Him.”

Luke puts it this way, “[And] ... Pilate said [in Luke 23:4] Pilate said to the chief priests and the ... [multitudes], ‘I find no guilt in this Man.’” The Roman governor (You need to understand this and underscore this.), the Roman governor, acting as a duly constituted authority over Jesus, found Him completely innocent of the charge of sedition that had been brought against Him.

So how are the chief priests going to respond to that? Well, that brings the Jewish leaders to plan B. Look at verse 3 back in Mark 15. “[And] the chief priests *began* to accuse Him harshly.” You’ll notice in our English text, if you look at the footnote over in the *New American Standard* for the word “harshly”, it can also be rendered, and probably should better be rendered in light of verse 4, of “many things.” “The chief priests *began* to accuse Him ... [of many things].”

Now, we aren’t told what all of those additional accusations might have been, but Luke does give us a little bit of insight in Luke 23:5. “... they kept on insisting, saying, ‘He stirs up the people, teaching all over Judea, starting from Galilee even as far as this place.’” You see what’s going on here. At this point the Jewish leaders are desperate, and so they just start hurling accusations against Jesus hoping that one of them will stick.

Now since new charges have been brought against Jesus, Pilate needs once again to hear Jesus' defense. And so, we have a second interrogation in verses 4 and 5. Look at verse 4: And Pilate was questioning "Him again, saying, 'Do You [make no] answer? See how many charges they bring against You.'" Here, for the second time Pilate interrogated Jesus, probably again stepped down off the Bema Seat in that large, open, stone pavement marketplace back inside the gate of the governor's private residence and there interrogated Jesus. But verse 5 says, "Jesus made no further answer; so [that] Pilate was amazed." Matthew describes it this way in Matthew 27:14, And He did not answer him with regard to even a *single* charge, so the governor was quite amazed."

Jesus had already answered the charge of sedition that was brought against Him. He'd had a lengthy discussion with Pilate to assure him that He was not a king in the sense of challenging Caesar's authority. Now both He and Pilate knew that these fresh charges are spurious. Look down in verse 10 of chapter 15: "[Pilate] ... was aware that the chief priests had handed Him over because of envy." Pilate knew there was no basis to these charges. Jesus knew -there was no basis to these charges. These new charges were simply the desperate attempt of the Jewish leaders to get rid of Jesus at any cost, and so Jesus refused to respond.

I think He also refused to respond for another reason. He could have legitimately answered these false charges and potentially have been cleared and released, but that was not why He came. He came into His world to offer Himself as a sacrifice—not to the Jews, and not to the Romans. They are-they are penny-bit-players in this great drama. He came to offer Himself to the Father.

Pilate has served in his role as governor, at this point, for at least four years, and he'd presided over many such trials. This was part of his duty. But he was amazed. He was amazed by Jesus' silence. The word "amazed" literally means "to be extraordinarily impressed." Pilate was impressed with Jesus and His silence for several reasons. I think first of all, he was impressed because of the contrast between Jesus' silent refusal to answer the accusations brought against Him, compared to the loud and long defenses that Pilate was used to hearing from the accused. I think the contrast between the way Jesus' accusers had described Him, as a ruthless

insurrectionist and rebel, compared with the calm and noble and respectful way that Jesus responded to Pilate. It's clear that what Pilate saw made him admire Jesus even more, and made him desire to see the charges against Him dismissed.

But I think there's another reason that Pilate was amazed that Jesus didn't answer. And that's because according to an expert on Rome and Roman law, under Roman law, if the accused to refuse to speak in his own defense, he had to eventually be found guilty. Sherwin-White, who wrote a definitive book on the issue of society in Roman law in the Roman era, says this, "Those who did not defend themselves were given three opportunities of changing their minds before sentence was finally given against them." Pilate's amazed. He knows Jesus is innocent of the charges. He knows they're spurious. And all Jesus needs to do is speak up in His defense, and the trial is over. But He doesn't.

It's interesting by the way, the same thing is reiterated by Festus in Acts 25:16, where Festus says, "... it is not [a] ... custom of the Romans to hand over any man [That is, to hand him over for crucifixion, for death.] before the accused meets his accusers face to face and has an opportunity to make his defense against the charges." Pilate was amazed. Here is this man, who is clearly innocent, and yet refuses to speak in His defense and therefore is marching toward certain execution. That was Jesus' first Roman trial. It took me longer to explain the trial than probably the trial itself lasted. And that's a travesty of justice. A man's life is on the line.

Now that first trial flowed into a second Roman trial. We looked at the third Jewish trial in the first part of verse 1, the first Roman trial in the second half of verse 1 down through verse 5. The second Roman trial is not in Mark's Gospel, but it occurs in Luke's Gospel. I invite you to turn there with me. Look at Luke 23, Luke 23:5. I read this a moment ago. This was their plan B, their back-up charge, one of the many charges they kept hurling at Jesus as they tried to get Him convicted. Verse 5,

They kept on insisting, saying, "He stirs up the people, teaching all over Judea, starting from Galilee even as far as this place." When Pilate heard it, he asked whether the man was a Galilean." [You see what's about to happen here. It's

called passing the buck.] And when he learned that He belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, [Herod oversaw Galilee.] he sent Him to Herod, who himself also was in Jerusalem at that time.

It's almost certain that Herod was staying (You ready for this?). On the other main wing of that huge palace that Herod the Great had built: three hundred yards apart, Pilate probably staying on one end as the Roman governor, and Herod, who was over Galilee, on the other. And so, Pilate's soldiers escort Jesus to the other end of that massive complex, and that's where this second Roman trial probably occurred.

Look at verse 8. "Now Herod was very glad when he saw Jesus; for he had wanted to see Him for a long time, because he had been hearing about Him and was hoping to see some sign performed by Him." I hope at some time to preach on this trial, because it is filled with irony. Here is a man, who loved hearing John the Baptist, but was convicted by John's sermons against his marriage, who ultimately gave into his wife and had John the Baptist beheaded. And he's just playing with the things of religion. He heard about Jesus. When he first heard about Jesus, he was terrified because he thought John the Baptist had been raised from the dead. But apparently, he's gotten over his terror, and now he's just curious. He wanted to see Jesus, and he wanted Jesus (Notice the end of verse 8.) he wanted Jesus to do some trick, some miracle.

And he questioned ... [Jesus] at some length; but He answered him nothing. And the chief priests and the scribes were standing there, accusing Him vehemently. And Herod with his soldiers, after treating Him with contempt and mocking Him, dressed Him in a gorgeous robe and sent Him back to Pilate. Now Herod and Pilate became friends with one another that very day, for before they had been enemies with each other.

Now, what was Herod's verdict regarding Jesus and the charge of sedition that'd been brought against him? Well, we have the verdict from Pilate's own mouth. Look at verse 13,

Pilate summoned the chief priests and the rulers [of] the people, and said to them,

“You brought this Man to me as one who incites the people to rebellion, and behold, having examined Him before you, I have found no guilt in this man regarding the charges which you ... [made] against Him. No, nor has Herod, for he sent Him back to us; and behold, nothing deserving [of] death has been done by Him.” [That was the verdict of Herod as well as Pilate.]

Now Mark picks up (after Herod transfers Jesus back to Pilate’s jurisdiction), Mark picks up with the third Roman trial beginning in Mark 15:6 and following. Lord willing, the next time we come to the Gospel of Mark we’ll study that together, that third Roman trial. But I want to ask the question, as we contemplate what we’ve studied tonight, why? Why do all 4 of the Gospels record some of those 6 trials, 6 separate trials, that Jesus endured? Why are they there? What are we supposed to learn? What lessons are there? Let me give you several things to consider.

First of all, these trials show us our need of a Savior. Think about this. Nowhere is human sin darker or uglier than when both the Jews and the Gentiles declare the Innocent, Spotless One guilty and condemn Him to death. Think about that. They found God Himself guilty, and they sentenced Him to death. And before we’re too hard on the Gentiles or the Jews, understand that the basic tenor of the New Testament is that they acted in our place. They were our representatives. We, without the grace of Christ, would’ve responded the same way, because just like they, we would not have this Man to rule over us, apart from grace. It shows us our desperate need of a Savior. Krummacher, in his book *The Suffering Savior*, writes this,

They bring the Lord Jesus to Pilate, the Roman governor. The Almighty presents circumstances so to connect themselves together, that the whole world in its representatives must participate in the condemnation of the Just One. Hence, His death becomes the common crime of our race, and every mouth is stopped before the judgment seat of God.

They stood in our place. They made the verdict that in our sin and our desire to live our own way, we hate the light and would stamp it out just like they did. It shows us our desperate need of a Savior.

Secondly, the trials also show us that Jesus was convicted only of one crime, and that's the crime of blasphemy. As we've seen, that was the issue in both the second and third Jewish trials. Now why is that important? Because it shows the nature of His claims. Think about this. God arranged it so that no person on the planet could say Jesus didn't claim these things. Jesus claimed in front of seventy-one witnesses (the official leadership of the nation of Israel), under oath, to be both Israel's Messiah and the Son of the Blessed One, God's unique and only Son. Robertson Nicoll writes,

The importance of Jesus' trial lies in the fact that the issue raised was Christ's claim to be the Son of God, the Messiah of Israel, and the King. He was tried unjustly and judged unjustly, but the true issue was raised. He died then, because before the Jews He claimed to be the Son of God and the Messiah, and before Pilate to be the King. All generations since have felt that the judged was the judge. These men were really standing before the bar of Christ, and all appear in a terrible distinctness revealed by the Light of the Word.

It shows what He claimed to be. The trials make it crystal clear who Jesus said He was under oath. Either He was, or He wasn't, but that He said it, cannot be questioned.

Thirdly, the trial showed the fabricated charge that the leaders brought against Him to get the Roman leaders to put Him to death. And what was that charge? It was sedition. It was treason, and we saw that in several of the verses we read. Eventually, the real charge against Jesus comes out even in the third Roman trial, and we'll notice that next time. Eventually, the truth spills out of them in the heat of the crucible of trying to get Jesus crucified, but that's not what they came to accuse Him of. It was a fabricated charge, and Jesus was found innocent.

A fourth reason for these trials is to call his readers, as the Gospel writers include them, it calls the readers of the Gospels to their own decision or verdict about Jesus. You see, you have seen the evidence for who Jesus claimed to be throughout this Gospel. You have seen the evidence as we have watched these trials unfold. The Jewish leaders came to their own verdict: guilty, guilty

of blasphemy and deserving of death. The Roman authorities came to their verdict: innocent of sedition, but for expediency He still has to die. The multitude, as we'll see, condemns Jesus, because they decide that He doesn't fit with their priorities which is a free Israel, free from Rome. Ironically, in all three cases the real reason they rejected Jesus and that Jesus had to die was because of their own desires: their lusts, their personal agendas, their right to rule themselves. Their autonomy was at stake.

Now *you* must come to a verdict about Jesus. And don't even think that you can dodge making a decision: no decision is a decision. There're only three possibilities. His claims? They're on record. They're on record before the Roman governor. They're on record before the Jewish Sanhedrin. He claimed to be the Messiah, the unique Son of the Living God. There're only three possibilities, folks. You've got to make a verdict.

Either He was a liar (He absolutely knew that He wasn't those things, and for His own reasons and His own agenda He was lying through His teeth), or He was a lunatic, He really did believe that He was the Messiah, and He really did believe that He was the unique Son of God, but He was out of His mind; or He was in fact everything He claimed to be. You have to reach a verdict. Which is it? Is He a liar? Does that really reflect the character you've seen in this Gospel? Is He a lunatic? Is that what He looks like? Or is He everything that He claimed under oath to be? What's your verdict? And again, no decision is a decision.

There's one final reason to record these trials, and that is to show Jesus' complete innocence of all charges: completely innocent. God made it clear that He was not guilty of the charge of blasphemy. God had already given His testimony. He had said, (Remember at the transfiguration just not that long before this trial was held, Matthew 17:5.) "This is My beloved Son [in] whom I am well-pleased...." God said, He is My unique Son, He is the Messiah whom I've sent.

But not only did God say it, Pilate said it as well. In fact, five times, Pilate, serving in his official capacity as the Roman prefect, affirms Jesus' innocence. And he does so publicly. Five separate times. One time, Herod affirms Jesus' innocence of the charges of sedition. Pilate does so at the

end of the first Roman trial when he says, I find nothing of a charge that can be brought against Him.

Herod affirms Jesus' innocence one time at the end of the second Roman trial when Herod heard Him and sent Him away.

And then Pilate, three times in the third Roman trial affirms Jesus' innocence: at the beginning of the trial (And we'll look at this next time.), the middle of the trial, and at the end of the trial.

Three separate times in that third trial he affirms that Jesus is completely innocent of all charges. You say, what is going on here? The answer is found in the Prophet Isaiah. Go back to Isaiah 53, Isaiah 53:7.

He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth. [verse 8] By oppression and judgment He was taken away; and as for His generation, who considered That He was cut off out of the land of the living [and it was] For the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke *was due*?" [Here's the real reason.] Verse 10, "But the Lord [but Yahweh] was pleased To crush Him, putting *Him* to grief; [so that] ... He [could] render [notice Himself] He would render Himself *as* a guilt offering.

That's what's going on here. This isn't about the Jewish leadership. This isn't about Pilate and Herod. They are two-bit players in a drama that's way beyond them. Jesus is silent and allows Himself to be carried away in oppression and injustice because ultimately His death isn't about them. His death is about God. It's about Yahweh crushing Him, and He Himself rendering Himself a guilt offering. Notice again the end of verse 8. "He was cut off out of the land of the living for the transgression of My people, to whom the stroke was due." That's our Lord and Savior.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, we are amazed at the picture we see of the injustice, the oppression that occurred in

the trials of Jesus. But Father, while we are struck with that injustice at a human level, we are even more amazed that the real interaction was not between Jesus and Pilate or Jesus and the High Priest. But the real interchange was between You and Your Son; and that it pleased You, O God, for our sakes to crush Him; that He was silent before His shearers, that He was absolutely quiet before those who unjustly accused Him because He was marching forward intentionally to take the stroke for the transgression that was due to us.

Father, help us to read the trials that way. Help us to see that it was all for us that He endured the oppression.

Thank You for the Savior. Thank You for His love and grace. Thank You, that it pleased You to crush Him, that it pleased Him to render His soul as a guilt offering for us.

We thank You, O God, in His wonderful name, Amen.