

Big Life Little Life

The Cross (Part 11)

Mark 15:1-15 (Mt.27:11-26; Lk.23:1-25; Jn.18:28-40) 11/5/2022

What is it about the natural human heart that prefers someone like Barabbas to Jesus? If we don't know the answer to that question, we'll miss one of the most important messages of the whole book of Mark. And when it comes to a choice, we'll make the wrong decision too.

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Mark 15:1 Very early in the morning, the chief priests, with the elders, the teachers of the law and the whole Sanhedrin, reached a decision. They bound Jesus, led him away and handed him over to Pilate.

2 "Are you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate. "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied.

3 The chief priests accused him of many things. **4** So again Pilate asked him, "Aren't you going to answer? See how many things they are accusing you of." **5** But Jesus still made no reply, and Pilate was amazed.

6 Now it was the custom at the Feast to release a prisoner whom the people requested. **7** A man called Barabbas was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the up-

rising. 8 The crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did. 9 "Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate, 10 knowing it was out of envy that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him. 11 But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead.

12 "What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?" Pilate asked them. 13 "Crucify him!" they shouted. 14 "Why? What crime has he committed?" asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, "Crucify him!" 15 Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

Introduction: Always Barabbas

When the Jews were given the choice between Barabbas and Jesus, the unanimous, enthusiastic decision was Barabbas. If that trial would have happened 1000 years later in a different place in a different culture, they still would have picked Barabbas. If it happened in our day, same result. Why? What is it about the natural human heart that prefers someone like Barabbas to Jesus?

If we don't know the answer to that question, we'll miss one of the most important messages of the whole book of Mark. And when it comes to a choice, we'll make the wrong decision too. Today we're going to see why the crowd chose Barabbas and what the implications are for us.

Big Life Little Life

Last time we finished ch.14 which is a side-by-side comparison of the trials of Jesus and Peter. Jesus was confronted by false witnesses and made a true confession. Peter was confronted by true witnesses and made a false confession. Jesus faced the most powerful officials in the nation and stood firm. Peter was questioned by a lowly slave girl and collapsed. Jesus remained silent and refused defend himself. Peter defended himself with curses and swearing. Everything happened exactly the way Jesus had predicted. Everything happened exactly the opposite of the way Peter predicted. And here's the most crucial difference: Everything Peter did was to preserve his life while Jesus was giving up his life.

That's that key principle from chapter 8.

Mark 8:35 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.

When Jesus talks about losing your life to save it and saving your life to lose it, he's talking about two lives, one we should be willing to lose and one we must save. The life we should be willing to lose is this temporal, earthly life. The life we need to make sure we never put at risk is eternal life.

So for shorthand, let's call them big life and little life. Big life is all that God offers us; little life is all the stuff that will all be gone the minute we die. Little life is this world; big life is the kingdom of God. And the whole issue with following Jesus is the question of which life you pursue. You have to forfeit one to secure the other.

Now let's take a look at how that principle plays out in the trial before Pilate (ch.15).

Forfeiting the King

Given to the Gentiles

In verse 1 Mark uses a lot of extra verbiage.

Mark 15:1 Very early¹ in the morning,² the chief priests, with the elders, the teachers of the law and the whole Sanhedrin, reached a decision.

Okay, big confab, reached a decision—what was it?

¹ We know from historical sources that if you were going to bring a case before a Roman official, it had to be around sunrise because Roman officials wanted their leisure time around mid-morning. So they ran the trial through the night and made sure they were done by sunrise.

² WBC argues that this time marker modifies the end of the verse, not the beginning. The point isn't that they reached a decision early in the morning. They reached the decision, and early in the morning they bound Jesus and led him away to Pilate.

1 ... They bound Jesus ... led him away (Literally “carried him away”) ... and handed him over

Made a decision, tied him up, carried him off, handed him over, *to whom?* Spit it out Mark.
... handed him over to ... Pilate.

What? The Jews turned a matter of great importance over to a *Gentile* court? How often does the Supreme Court of an occupied nation say, “You know what... , instead of handling this ourselves, why don’t we go beg our enemies who are oppressing us to make a ruling for us?” Why on earth would they do that? Strange as it was, it was a fulfillment of Jesus’ prophecy.

Mark 10:33 ... the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles.

Seemed like a crazy prophecy at the time, but it’s exactly what happened.
We’re about to study something absolutely horrific—the murder of Jesus.
But Mark keeps reminding us that every step of the way, the more evil, wicked, vile people did their worst...
, God’s perfect plan was never bumped even one degree off course.
This fits God’s purposes because by having Jesus tried in both Jewish and Gentile courts... —courts with different systems, different laws, and different interests, and neither court finds anything against Jesus...
, God was showing the perfect sinlessness of Christ from every angle.

Ceding the Messiah to the Gentiles

So the Jews hand Jesus over to Pilate. Why is that significant? Look at v.2.
1 ... They bound Jesus, led him away and handed him over to Pilate. 2 "Are you the king of the Jews?"³ asked Pilate.⁴

Does that strike you as a little abrupt?
Mark skips past the whole process, the charges, the whole first half of the trial and skips right to this moment where Pilate asks Jesus this question.
And of all the accusations they made, the only one Mark lets us know about is this king of the Jews one.⁵
And if you question whether that’s important to Mark, just read the next several verses where the phrase “king of the Jews” appears a half dozen times.
Mark’s point is that Israel handed their king over to the Gentiles.

Irony

Now, obviously the priests don’t believe Jesus is a real king, and neither does Pilate—or the soldiers. But remember, all through this whole account Mark has been teaching us through irony.⁶

³ King of the Jews” is a Roman designation (cf. Josephus, J.W. 1.14.4 §282, where Mark Antony makes Herod “king of the Jews [βασιλέα ... Ιουδαίων]”).

⁴ Pilate’s question is exactly the same in all four Gospels (Matt 27:11; Luke 23:3; John 18:33) which is striking because of how different the four accounts are in their descriptions of the trials and crucifixion.

⁵ Mark 15:2 "Are you the king of the Jews?"

⁹ "Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?"

¹² "What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?"

¹⁸ "Hail, king of the Jews!"

²⁶ The written notice of the charge against him read: THE KING OF THE JEWS.

³² Let this Christ, this King of Israel, come down now from the cross

King of the Jews is exactly what Jesus is. When Caiaphas, the high priest accused Jesus of blaspheme, we saw that Caiaphas was the real blasphemer and Jesus was the real high priest.⁷ Now Jesus stands before Pilate bound, in chains, under arrest—guess who's really the sovereign and who's really a prisoner. Jesus does exactly what he planned, and Pilate is forced to do the opposite of what he wants to do. Jesus is the real king.

Forfeiting the Crown

So for thousands of years the Jewish people had been waiting for their king, the Messiah, who would fulfill all the promises of the Old Testament. God finally gives them that king and they look him up and down and say, “No thanks,” and kick him off to the Gentiles.

Back in ch.12, in the parable of the vineyard, Jesus taught that the kingdom of God would be taken from Israel and given to the Gentiles. And now we see why. Reject the King and you lose the kingdom.

And I think one reason why Mark used so much verbiage in v.1 was to highlight how deliberate this was. It wasn't in the heat of the moment. It wasn't that they just got caught up in a frenzy without really thinking it through. This was premeditated, carefully considered, deliberate choice.

He came to his own and his own did not receive him. The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone. This section is the account of when those builders rejected the cornerstone of the whole kingdom of God.

The Good Confession

Of all the questions Pilate asks, this is the only one Jesus responds to.

2 “Are you the king of the Jews?”

Jesus' answer was something the church never forgot. When Paul really wants to get Timothy's attention in making a solemn charge, he invoked this moment with Jesus before Pilate.

1 Timothy 6:13 In the sight of God, who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus, who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you

Jesus making this confession is right up there with God sustaining all life. This answer is not a small moment.

What was the answer? It's a bit difficult to translate.⁸ We know it's an affirmative answer because Matthew and Luke both say Jesus' answer was “yes.”⁹ So it's a yes, but it's kind of a “Yes, but...” “Yes, I am the king of the Jews but not like you're thinking.” Jesus is saying, “Right words; wrong meaning.”

Wrong how? We get more detail in John.

John 18:36 Jesus said (to Pilate), "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place." 37 ... "You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth.

⁶ Irony is when the words the character speaks carry way more meaning to the reader than the speaker intends. Or in this case, the opposite meaning. They're mocking Jesus, but the words that come out of their mouths are right on.

⁷ Jesus applied Ps.110 to himself (Mk.14:62; Ps.110:1), which is also the psalm that speaks of the Messiah as the eternal priest in the order of Melchizedek (Ps.110:4).

⁸ In Mark's account it's just two words: “You say.” Evidently that was a colloquialism. To understand the meaning, we have to look to the parallel passages.

⁹ And back at the Jewish trial when the high priest asked Jesus if he was the Christ, Matthew says Jesus' answer was “you say.” And Mark says the answer was “I am.”

Yes, I'm a king, but in the kingdom of God, not in this world. That was the good confession—pointing to the kingdom of God instead of trying to save his life. The Good Silence That was the good confession, but it's not what amazed Pilate the most. What really amazed him is what Jesus didn't say. That answer is the last we'll hear from Jesus.

3 The chief priests accused him of many things.¹⁰ 4 So again Pilate asked him, "Aren't you going to answer? See how many things they are accusing you of." 5 But Jesus still made no reply, and Pilate was amazed.¹¹

He was amazed because Jesus wouldn't defend himself. In Roman law, if you refused to defend yourself, you were presumed guilty.¹²

There's plenty of chatter in the room. The chief priests are going on making their best case, Pilate is asking questions, the witnesses are testifying, but the none of it impressed Pilate. The only amazing element in the whole scene was the silence of Jesus. Only Jesus can captivate everyone and astonish kings by saying nothing. Part of what made the good confession so good was the good silence. His confession of the truth wasn't diluted by a bunch of self-defense and arguing over lesser issues.

Jesus Chooses Big Life

This is Jesus once again choosing to drink the cup. By refusing to defend himself, Jesus was letting go of his earthly life to testify to the truth about the kingdom of God. He let go of little life in favor of big life.

And that's an example for us. Don't think of courtrooms as places of justice. Think of them as opportunities to proclaim the gospel to the authorities.

The Priests on Trial

Now, starting in v.6 we have a rare moment in the gospel where someone besides Jesus takes center stage. We won't see Jesus do or say anything again until he cries out from the cross all the way down in v.34. Normally, the camera is always trained on Jesus. But it's important to Mark that we get a really clear view of the people who killed Jesus and why they did it.

Everybody that tries Jesus ends up being the one who's really on trial. Last time it was the Sanhedrin. They tried Jesus and came up guilty. And they're indicted again in this passage.

9 "Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate, 10 knowing it was out of envy that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him.

It had nothing to do with justice or blasphemy or any of that—they just hated Jesus because they envied him. Envied what? His relationship with God? No. Was it his perfect moral purity? No. His wisdom? No. The thing Jesus had that they so envied was the one thing about Jesus that really wasn't all that valuable. His popularity. They coveted that so much it drove them to murderous rage.

¹⁰ Luke tells us some of them.

Luke 23:2 And they began to accuse him, saying, "We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Christ, a king. ... 5 He stirs up the people all over Judea by his teaching."

No doubt they also brought up the one about destroying the temple, as that's the one the people bring up when Jesus is on the cross. Any threat on a religious temple was a very serious charge in the Roman empire.

All these revolve around the same basic charge, that he's a seditious who stirs up unrest.

¹¹ Pilate is shown as one who recognizes that something quite remarkable is taking place. The verb may be a deliberate echo of the LXX rendering of Isa. 52:15—"so shall many nations be amazed at him, and kings will shut their mouths because of him."

¹² Sherwin-White, Roman Law, 25–26, cited in WBC.

The Crowd on Trial So the priests are guilty. Next up on trial is the crowd. You're judged by your judgment of Jesus, so what was their verdict?

Barabbas

6 Now it was the custom at the Feast to release a prisoner whom the people requested. 7 A man called Barabbas was in prison.

Mark is famous for not naming names, but he wants us to know this guy's name. I'll show you why in a minute, but first, let's look at his rap sheet.

7 A man called Barabbas was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising.

This guy was involved¹³ with a violent insurrection against Rome.¹⁴

8 The crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did.

"Hey Pilate—you know that prisoner amnesty thing?
Will you do that again this year?"

9 "Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate, knowing it was out of envy that the chief priests handed Jesus over to him.

He knows Jesus isn't guilty of anything and this is all just a personal vendetta on the part of the priests. But if Pilate kills Jesus to make the priests happy, is there going to be an uprising? Pilate had to know that Jesus had been incredibly popular. So before putting him to death, Pilate wants to feel out the crowd.

And at this point the reader of Mark would say, "Oh, of course the crowd will pick Jesus. They've been Jesus' fans all through the book."¹⁵ So you expect them to shout, "Yes, release Jesus!" But they don't—why not?

Release Barabbas

11 But the chief priests stirred up¹⁶ the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead.

They were never able to win the crowds over before, but now, with Jesus standing up there in chains, all beaten up, weak, seemingly defeated, now they're able to do it. And they do it not by bad mouthing Jesus, but by pointing them to a better alternative—Barabbas. Barabbas was a popular¹⁷ figure because he was a perfect fit for the kind of deliverer the people wanted. A strong, violent, mil-

¹³ Mark doesn't say that he was in prison for murder, but that he was with those charged with that crime.

¹⁴ Nothing is known about that particular uprising even though Mark, writing decades after the fact, speaks of 'the insurrection' as though it had been well known.

¹⁵ That's not to say this crowd is made up of the same individuals as previous crowds. The word "crowd" is used in a literary sense to represent the population of Israel, but these may have been different individuals than comprised the crowds in ch.13.

Sometimes you'll hear preachers talk about how fickle this crowd is because days earlier they were shouting "hosannah" and waving palm branches at the triumphal entry. But this is not that same crowd. The people praising Jesus at the Triumphal Entry were his followers from Galilee. The people of Jerusalem never did that.

¹⁶ They stirred up the crowd. That's one of their accusations against Jesus—that he stirred up the crowds (Lk.23:5). It's the only other use of the word "stirred up" in the Bible. They said Jesus deserved to die for stirring up the people, but they ended up being the ones who did that.

¹⁷ Matthew 27:16 says Barabbas was "notorious," but that word can also mean "famous." It probably carries the more positive meaning here. The whole point of releasing a prisoner was to win favor from the people. That wouldn't be accomplished unless the prisoner were someone the people wanted.

itary leader who could raise a resistance, beat the odds, and return Israel to their glory days of independence.

So it was the priests behind this. But the crowd is culpable too. They shouldn't have been so easily stirred up.

And it takes courage to resist the pressure of strong, insistent leaders. It takes some backbone—especially when everyone else is going along with them. But hard or not, God holds us responsible to follow his way regardless of the pressure.

And the crowd isn't just a little bit culpable. They turn absolutely bloodthirsty.

12 "What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?" Pilate asked them. 13 "Crucify him!" they shouted.

The crowd could have said, "We don't care, as long as you give us Barabbas." Or they could have said, "Give him a whipping and let him go." But instead they call for the most savage, dehumanizing, tortuous, humiliating death possible. They sound like a bunch of crazed, demonized monsters.

Sometimes people think of the "common people" as being generally good. That's the assumption behind Marxism—the regular, working class common folk, poor people, the oppressed—their the good guys. Not true. They're just as bent and broken as the people in power. And if you get them into a mob where they finally have some power, you'll see it.

And the Jews kind of give themselves away here. They brought Jesus under the pretense that they were concerned for Rome. "Oh, Pilate, we're so loyal to Rome that we just have to turn Jesus in, because he's disloyal to Rome." Then the first chance they get they say, "Yeah, release the guy who has already led a rebellion against Rome!"

The truth is, the reason they're accusing Jesus of rebelling against Rome is that they were mad at him for not rebelling against Rome. The Jews wanted Jesus to be a political, military messiah, and Jesus refused to be that so they handed him over to Pilate on the charges of being a political, military messiah.

Pick Your Messiah

So the people of Israel get a clear choice. And that's where the name Barabbas comes in. Bar (son of) Abba (father). Bar-Abbas means son of abba father. This is immediately after Jesus had just testified that he was the Son of God before the Sanhedrin. And he called God Abba, Father in Gethsemane.

And Barabbas was this guy's last name. Some reliable manuscripts tell us his first name was Jesus.¹⁸

So Mark is setting this up as a clear choice between two possible Messiahs. Take your pick: Jesus, son of an earthly abba, or Jesus who calls God Abba. Mark wants us to understand that Barabbas was an alternative messiah.

We're about to vote for who we want as our Governor. These people got to cast their vote on which candidate would be their savior. The hate your enemy, macho Jesus who will take it to Rome right now? Definitely the best candidate if you're focused on this little life. Or the love your enemy, meek Jesus who talks about a spiritual kingdom? Big life.

The choice is unanimous, by acclamation, "Give us Barabbas." That was their choice, and they followed the violent, insurrectionist..., Barabbas type deliverers for the next few decades until finally came in 70 AD and decimated the Jewish population in a bloodbath.

¹⁸ Matthew 27:16. Most translations don't include the name Jesus in this verse because it only appears in a small number of manuscripts. However, most commentators are convinced the word Jesus was in the original. Origin commented on it and rejected it because "the name Jesus does not belong to anyone sinful." The fact that he rejected it for that reason is actually strong evidence that it was in the original and was omitted by copyists because of their discomfort with it.

Choosing Little Life

That's what happens when you choose little life over big life. You get death. He who wants to save his little life will lose it. But whoever loses his little life for me and the gospel will get big life.

Pilate on Trial

The Sanhedrin, guilty. The Jewish population, guilty. Next up—Pilate.

What to Do with the King of the Jews?

9 "Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate, 10 knowing it was out of envy that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him.

That should have been the end of it. He should have said, "I'm not going to kill an innocent man because you're envious. Get lost."

Some say, "But at least Pilate was trying to release Jesus." No he wasn't. Pilate had full authority to release Jesus any time he wanted.

But he wants to please the crowd, so he tries the amnesty thing and they choose Barabbas. But Pilate's attention is still fixed on Jesus. He doesn't even seem to care about Barabbas.

12 "What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?" Pilate asked them.

That is a stupid question to ask a rabble mob. Just do your job, Pilate. Don't ask the crowd. If you're just going to turn the decision over to the mob, why even have lawcourts?

Crucify!

But he puts it to the crowd, and their response is shocking.

13 "Crucify him!" they shouted.

Why Crucifixion?

And Pilate's response is, "Why?" Why would the Jews want one of their own crucified by the Romans? The normal method for execution in Rome was beheading. Not even all insurrectionists were crucified. They might be banished to an island or thrown to the lions.

Crucifixion was only used in extreme cases when they wanted to send a message and terrify the population. So they would strip him naked, torture him in the most brutal, bloody ways, and hang him on a pole along a major road. And they would leave the body up there for vultures and other animals to pick at. And it would be such a gruesome, horrific, traumatizing thing to see that the general population would be terrified to ever do what that guy did.

So why did the Jews want Jesus crucified? To send a message? That was probably the chief priests' motive. Jesus had embarrassed them, defied their authority, showed them up, and, worst of all, took from them the thing they prized most—popularity.

Another possibility is they wanted Jesus to be cursed by God.

Deuteronomy 21:23 ... anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse.

They didn't just want Jesus rejected by the people; they wanted him repudiated by God. And it proved to be an effective strategy for preventing Jews from following Jesus going forward.

1 Corinthians 1:23 We preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews.

What Crime?

So they want Jesus crucified. And Pilate is baffled.

13 "Crucify him!" they shouted. 14 "Why? What crime has he committed?" asked Pilate.

Clearly Pilate is not convinced by any of their accusations, including the king of the Jews one.¹⁹ The Jews are going to have to come up with a more persuasive argument. So here it comes:

14 "Why? What crime has he committed?" asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, "Crucify him!"

You can always tell when someone doesn't have a good argument—they just get louder.

Okay, here's the big test for Pilate. God gave him his position so he would carry out justice—punish the guilty and protect the innocent. That's his God-given role and that's what the Roman government was paying him for as well. But he was afraid of an uprising because that could threaten his job, so he decided to appease the crowd.

Condemning and Acquitting

15 Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

Proverbs 17:15 Acquitting the guilty and condemning the innocent-- the LORD detests them both.

The LORD hates them both and Pilate did them both in one trial.

It's amazing how all the parties involved twist themselves up in trying to deal with Jesus. The governor asks to be governed by the Jews. "Tell me what to do." And the Jews say, "Oh no. Please. You go ahead and crucify one of our own." Everyone is so intent on perpetrating this evil, they're all doing the opposite of what they normally did.

Pilate is driven by his subjects. The crowd is driven by the chief priests. And the priests are driven by envy. Only Jesus stands unharried, unpressured, in full command of everything he says and does in carrying out the Father's will.

Dangerous Weakness

In the movies, the villains are always super-powerful. But in real life, the most dangerous villains are weak men in positions of power. They have big smiles and zero spine. They get elected because they're good at pleasing everybody. But once they're in power, they're incredibly dangerous because they'll go wherever the mob pushes them.

This happens a lot in churches. If the crowd doesn't get what they want, they start leaving, which puts the pastor's job at risk. If they want less about repentance and more funny stories, that's what they get. I think some congregations are going to answer on Judgment Day for the fact that those pastors had jobs and the faithful pastors didn't because of the lack of demand for faithful preaching. But the church leaders with no backbone will also be held responsible on Judgment Day because they're just like Pilate.

¹⁹ It's even more explicit in Luke.

Luke 23:4 Then Pilate announced to the chief priests and the crowd, "I find no basis for a charge against this man."

Absolution

Why does Pilate try so hard to give Jesus amnesty? It's because he's not trying to give Jesus amnesty; he's trying to give himself amnesty.

Matthew 27:24 ... Pilate took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. "I am innocent of this man's blood," he said. "It is your responsibility!"

But when you're guilty, protests of innocence only make you more guilty. The only path to getting that stain out of your soul begins with confessing your guilt, not pretending your hands are clean.

Universal Guilt

Who deserve the blame for killing Jesus? Everyone. It's fashionable for scholars to accuse the gospel writers of anti-semitism. They say the gospels go out of their way to make the Jews the ones guilty of killing Jesus, and they paint Pilate in a favorable light.

That is bizarre to me. If it's antisemitic to point out the rebellion of the Jews against God, then the entire Old Testament is antisemitic.

Everyone Guilty

It's ridiculous to say they're antisemitic, and it's equally ridiculous to say they portrayed Pilate in a favorable light. Look again at what he does to a man he knows is innocent.

15 Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

I'll refrain from the gruesome detail of flogging and crucifixion, but I will say the Roman flogging was a lot more savage than the Jewish 39 lashes. The Romans had no limit, and the scourging lacerated and stripped the flesh, often exposing bones and leaving entrails hanging out. A lot of men died during the flogging.

To do that to an innocent man is unforgiveable. And not just the flogging, but after that, crucifixion, which was designed not only to be even worse torture, but with the most degrading humiliation. It was designed to dehumanize the person and create not only the most extreme physical pain but also emotional anguish and completely crush the person's spirit.

Pilate was a monster and the gospels portray him as monster. "But doesn't verse 5 paint him in a favorable light, when he was amazed at Jesus?" No. All through the book of Mark, amazement at Jesus is always portrayed as an inadequate response. His amazement should have led him further. But instead he had Jesus crucified and went on his merry way. He walked right past the glimmers of light that could have saved him from eternal ruin.

And next time we'll see that the Roman soldiers are monsters too. Every single character in this story is to blame for Jesus' death—the Jewish leadership, the crowd, Pilate, the soldiers, Judas, Peter, the disciples. Who's guilty of killing Jesus? Mankind. Does the Bible give special emphasis on the Jews' role? Of course it does—not because they were the only ones guilty, but because their guilt was the most theologically significant. But no one escapes blame.

Little Life Big Life

And it's worth noting that the sins that led to the murder of Jesus were mostly what we would consider small sins. For Judas it was the simple love of money. Peter—fear of embarrassment. The chief priests—envy. Pilate—desire for job security. For the crowd it was the desire to make Israel great again.

None of those sound like big, scandalous sins. But they all have one thing in common: preferring little life over big life.

There's nothing wrong with wanting job security, but when you put that above justice, you've chosen little life over big life.

There's nothing wrong with patriotism and wanting Israel to be independent. But when they choose the tough, macho messiah who could put the nation of Israel on top here and now rather than wait for Jesus to bring about eternal glory for Israel, that's little life over big life.

Peter couldn't stand the thought of a stranger looking down on him (especially a member of the opposite sex). Looking good in the moment meant more than honoring the King of kings. Little, tiny life over big life.

The chief priests—they wanted the fame and influence Jesus had more than they wanted favor in the eyes of God. Little life over big life.

The desires in themselves aren't sinful. It's fine to desire the components of this little life. But when that rises above the desire for big life, it becomes as evil and wicked and dark as the human heart can get.

Conclusion: The Reason Jesus Had to Die

You can see why most of the time Mark focuses on Jesus instead of people, because focusing on sinful humanity can get really depressing. So let's close by turning our attention back to Jesus.

All through this message I've been using "big life" and "little life" as shorthand for what Jesus taught in Mark 8.

Mark 8:35 Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.

While everyone around him was grasping after little life, Jesus was laying his little life down. Peter had promised Jesus, "Even if I have to die with you I will never disown you," and all the others said the same. But Jesus knew they would all fail because they hadn't yet learned what it meant to let go of little life. And that was the very reason why Jesus had to lay down his life.

Peter said, "I'll die for you Jesus!" And Jesus might have responded, "That's true, you will end up dying for me. But not until after I die for you." All this evil we've looked at tonight—that was the reason Jesus chose to die.

How many of you have been hurt deeply by people in the church? Me too. No one in the world has ever hurt me as deeply as people in the church hurt me and my family.

How should we respond to that? By retreated and trying to protect what's left of our little life? Or by following Jesus' example.

If you've been hurt by the church, Jesus can relate. In this whole crucifixion account, who slanders Jesus the worst? The most vicious, vile repudiation of Christ in the whole ordeal came from the mouth ... of Peter. It wouldn't surprise me if the most excruciating moment of the entire crucifixion was when Jesus had to listen to his chief disciple and close friend curse and swear that he didn't even know who Jesus was.

You've been hurt by the church—that's nothing new. If you think it's a sign that the modern church has gone off the rails and is nothing like the early church, remember, it doesn't get any earlier than Peter. Jesus went through what you went through—treated horribly by the church, by the leadership of the church.

And what did he do? Turn his back? No, he died for them.

What do you do when people in the church stab you in the back? Just overlook it? No, you can't overlook it. It's a serious matter.

The way to handle it is like Jesus did. You say, "This is a serious problem, so serious that I'm willing to lay down my life and die if necessary to improve the situation."

Peter had to learn that not only was it necessary for Jesus to die, but he, Peter, was the *reason* Jesus had to die. Jesus had to die for sins because even the very best of mankind is hopelessly wicked and in need of a substitute sacrifice to avoid being punished in hell. And now, when we receive eternal life through him—big life, we can afford to lay down our little life for the sake of those who hurt us.

Harmony

<p>Matthew 27:1 Early in the morning, all the chief priests and the elders of the people came to the decision to put Jesus to death.² They bound him, led him away and handed him over to Pilate, the governor.</p>	<p>Mark 15:1 Very early in the morning, the chief priests, with the elders, the teachers of the law and the whole Sanhedrin, reached a decision. They bound Jesus, led him away and handed him over to Pilate.</p>	<p>Luke 22:66 At daybreak the council of the elders of the people, both the chief priests and teachers of the law, met together, and Jesus was led before them.</p>
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Matthew 27:3-10 3 When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders. 4 "I have sinned," he said, "for I have betrayed innocent blood." "What is that to us?" they replied. "That's your responsibility." 5 So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself. 6 The chief priests picked up the coins and said, "It is against the law to put this into the treasury, since it is blood money." 7 So they decided to use the money to buy the potter's field as a burial place for foreigners. 8 That is why it has been called the Field of Blood to this day. 9 Then what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: "They took the thirty silver coins, the price set on him by the people of Israel, 10 and they used them to buy the potter's field, as the Lord commanded me."

<p>Matthew 27:</p> <p>11 Meanwhile Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. 12 When he was accused by the chief priests and the elders, he gave no answer. 13 Then Pilate asked him, "Don't you hear the testimony they are bringing against you?" 14 But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge--to the great amazement of the governor.</p>	<p>Mark 15:</p> <p>2 "Are you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate. "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. 3 The chief priests accused him of many things. 4 So again Pilate asked him, "Aren't you going to answer? See how many things they are accusing you of." 5 But Jesus still made no reply, and Pilate was amazed.</p>	<p>Luke 23:1 Then the whole assembly rose and led him off to Pilate. 2 And they began to accuse him, saying, "We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Christ, a king."</p> <p>3 So Pilate asked Jesus, "Are you the king of the Jews?" "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. 4 Then Pilate announced to the chief priests and the crowd, "I find no basis for a charge against this man." 5 But they insisted, "He stirs up the people all over Judea by his teaching. He started in Galilee and has come all the way here."</p> <p>John 18:28 Then the Jews led Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor. By now it was early morning, to avoid ceremonial uncleanness the Jews did not enter the palace; they wanted to be able to eat the Passover.²⁹ So Pilate came out to them and asked, "What charges are you bringing against this man?"³⁰ "If he were not a criminal," they replied, "we would not have handed him over to you."³¹ Pilate said, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law." "But we have no right to execute anyone," the Jews objected.³² This happened so that the words Jesus had spoken indicating the kind of death he was going to die would be fulfilled.³³ Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?"³⁴ "Is that your own idea," Jesus asked, "or did others tell you about me?"³⁵ "Am I a Jew?" Pilate replied. "It was you people and your chief priests who handed you over to me. What is it you have done?"³⁶ Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place."³⁷ "You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this reason I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."³⁸ "What is truth?" Pilate asked. With that he went out again to the Jews and said, "I find no basis for a charge against him."³⁹ But it is your custom for me to release one prisoner at the time of the Passover. Do you want me to release 'the king of the Jews'?"⁴⁰ They shouted back, "No, not him! Give us Barabbas!" Now Barabbas had taken part in a rebellion.</p>
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Luke 23:6 On hearing this, Pilate asked if the man was a Galilean. 7 When he learned that Jesus was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time. 8 When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had been wanting to see him. From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform some miracle. 9 He plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer. 10 The chief priests and the teachers of the law were standing there, vehemently accusing him. 11 Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. Dressing him in an elegant robe, they sent him back to Pilate. 12 That day Herod and Pilate became friends.

15 Now it was the governor's custom at the Feast to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd. 16 At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Barabbas. 17 So when the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them, "Which one do you want me to release to you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?" 18 For he knew it was out of envy that they had handed Jesus over to him. 19 While Pilate was sitting on the judge's seat, his wife sent him this message: "Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him."

20 But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed. 21 "Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" asked the governor. "Barabbas," they answered. 22 "What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?" Pilate asked. They all answered, "Crucify him!" 23 "Why? What crime has he committed?" asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, "Crucify him!" 24 When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. "I am innocent of this man's blood," he said. "It is your responsibility!" 25 All the people answered, "Let his blood be on us and on our children!" 26 Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

Mark 15:6 Now it was the custom at the Feast to release a prisoner whom the people requested. 7 A man called Barabbas was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising. 8 The crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did. 9 "Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate, 10 knowing it was out of envy that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him. 11 But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead. 12 "What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?" Pilate asked them. 13 "Crucify him!" they shouted. 14 "Why? What crime has he committed?" asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, "Crucify him!" 15 Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

Luke 23:13 Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers and the people, 14 and said to them, "You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him. 15 Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death." 16 Therefore, I will punish him and then release him. 17 " 18 With one voice they cried out, "Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us!" 19 (Barabbas had been thrown into prison for insurrection in the city, and for murder.) 20 Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate appealed to them again. 21 But they kept shouting, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" 22 For the third time he spoke to them: "Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore I will have him punished and then release him." 23 But with loud shouts they insistently demanded that he be crucified, and their shouts prevailed. 24 So Pilate decided to grant their demand. 25 He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, the one they had asked for, and surrendered Jesus to their will.

Summary

The Jews forfeited their King to the Gentiles. Jesus made the good confession before Pilate (testifying to the truth of his kingship while refusing to save his own life). The crowd condemned themselves by preferring a violent, earthly messiah over Jesus. Pilate condemned himself by admitting Jesus was innocent and then murdering him. The chief priests were driven by envy. All of humanity is implicated in the death of Jesus.