



Christ Reformed Community Church

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“What Shall I do with the Man?”

Part 2

Mark 15:1–15

Let’s take our Bibles this morning and turn again to the Gospel of Mark, Mark chapter 15. That’s where we find ourselves, Mark chapter 15. We began looking at verses 1 through 15. I’ve entitled these messages: “What Shall I do with the Man? What Shall I do with the Man?” That title is taken from verse 12, which was a question that Pilate asked regarding Jesus: “*What shall I do with the man you call the King of the Jews?*” I want you to stand in honor of the reading of God’s Word. Beginning in verse 1, I’ll read through verse 15, but the focus of our study this morning will be verses 6 through 15. Now hear God’s Word:

And as soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. And they bound Jesus and led him away and delivered him over to Pilate. And Pilate asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” And he answered him, “You have said so.” And the chief priests accused him of many things. And Pilate again asked him, “Have you no answer to make? See how many charges they bring against you.” But Jesus made no further answer, so that Pilate was amazed.

Now at the feast he used to release for them one prisoner for whom they asked. And among the rebels in prison, who had committed murder in the insurrection, there was a man called Barabbas. And the crowd came up and began to ask Pilate to do as he usually did for them. And he answered them, saying, “Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?” For he perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release for them Barabbas instead. And Pilate again said to them, “Then what shall I do with the man you call the King of the Jews?” And they cried out again, “Crucify him.” And Pilate said to them, “Why? What evil has he done?” But they shouted all the more, “Crucify him.” So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.

Thus ends the reading of God’s Holy Word. Please be seated, and let’s go to the Lord in prayer before we look at our text this morning.

Father, we come by the power of the Holy Spirit this morning to study the sacred Scriptures concerning the glory of You, the glory of Your only begotten Son, His majesty, His purity, His perfection, and the sacrifice He made for sinners. So, as we study this, Lord, help us to think deeply. Help us to meditate truthfully on how glorious a Savior He is, for Your glory, for our good, and for our sanctification. We pray and ask all of this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

The apostle Paul, who in sacred Scripture, loved to speak about the glories of the gospel said on one occasion in Romans chapter 5—you’re familiar with it: *“For while we were still weak [or helpless], at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”* *“For while we were still helpless,”* Paul says, *“at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.”* That is, of course, true if you believe in the sovereignty of God. As we study Jesus being on trial before Pilate, you recognize that behind the evil, behind the injustice, behind the wickedness is the sovereignty of God. The apostle Peter also affirmed this. He said in the book of Acts:

“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—this Jesus, [was] delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.”

Or Acts 4:27: *“For truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.”* This was according to the foreknowledge of God. This was according to the predestination of God that His Son would be a sacrifice for sins. *“For while we were still helpless...For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.”* Jesus did not die one moment before or one moment after the appointed time by the Father—not by the Jewish leaders, not by Pilate, not by the crowds, but this was ordained by God. And they were still responsible and culpable because Peter says that they were *“lawless men,”* beginning with Pilate, who was supposed to be the justice of the peace. He was supposed to be the governor of Judea who looked at all sorts of criminal cases and came to a decision in order to uphold the justice of the Roman state, but instead, we see Pilate’s wickedness. We see Pilate’s cowardice. We see Pilate unwilling even to do what he knew should have been done, which was release Jesus because he recognized the innocence of Jesus, and yet, according to the plan of God, the foreknowledge of God, the predestination of God, before the foundations of the world, Jesus would be delivered up to secure salvation for us. And that is why, as we look at verses 1 through 15, our focus cannot be on Pilate and his wicked actions because behind Pilate stands the good sovereignty of God. And as we look at Christ and focus on Christ, we see the very glory of the gospel itself. In fact, there are three aspects of the glory of the gospel that we see in these verses. Last week, we looked at the first two.

First of all, we looked at what I called His sanctification; that is, Jesus’ sanctification from verse 1: *“And as soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. And they bound Jesus and led him away and delivered him over to Pilate.”* This, of course, took place after they had a trial under the cover of darkness before the Sanhedrin, before Caiaphas the high priest. They couldn’t come up with anything to accuse Him of, and so they said, *“Well, He’s committed blasphemy because He claims to be the Messiah.”* They understand that they have violated Jewish law by having that trial at night. So now, as verse 1 indicates, they come together for *“a consultation,”* as Mark calls it. This is sort of a quick trial put together at daybreak about 5:00 a.m. on Friday, the day that our Lord was crucified, in which they would come up with some sort of accusation that would appeal to the Roman state. For them to go

to Pilate and simply say that Jesus had committed blasphemy would have meant nothing to Pilate. Pilate wasn't a religious man. Pilate wasn't a Jew. And so, these scribes, these expert lawyers had to not only look into Hebrew law to find out how Jesus had violated Jewish law, but they had to come up with some sort of accusation according to Roman law that would be palatable to Pilate so that Pilate could see that Jesus was a threat to society and would crucify Him.

The religious leaders had already decided to do this, but now they come together in a consultation to wickedly scheme about how they can come up with another accusation that will appeal to Pilate, and yet in all of this, we see the sanctification of our Lord. We see the purification of our Lord. We see the consecration of our Lord. He never sinned in thought, word, or deed. He lived a perfect life, so perfect that no court could legitimately find a transgression against any law of which Jesus had committed. He was the perfect holy Son of God. He was the spotless Lamb of God, ordained before the foundation of the world to die as a substitute for sinners, and we see that even in these consultations by the religious leaders trying to come up with something to accuse Jesus of. Their mouths are literally silenced so that they have to lie and make a false accusation. In John chapter 17 in Jesus' High Priestly Prayer, Jesus says I have consecrated myself for your people. Jesus sanctified Himself. Jesus set Himself apart from sin. Unlike the first Adam who said, "Yes" to the devil in the garden, Jesus in the wilderness said "No" to the devil time and time and time again, proving He was innocent, pure, undefiled, and spotless, just like all the other animals in the Old Testament that had to be sacrificed. They had to be spotless. They had to be without blemish, and here, before Jesus Christ is crucified, the Lamb of God, we see His purity, His consecration, His sanctification, and His perfection.

And dearly beloved, I want you to understand this morning that Christ did not merely secure your salvation by dying on a cross. Jesus secured your salvation by being perfectly obedient to the law of God. The book of Revelation says even one sin is worthy of the fires of hell. Even one white lie is worthy of eternal condemnation, and yet our Lord, pure as He was, perfect as He was, in our place condemned He stood after living an obedient life. This is part of the gospel—the active obedience of Christ, and you must affirm the active obedience of Christ in order to be a true Christian. You don't get into heaven simply because Jesus died on the cross. What did He die for? He died because you transgressed the law of God, and the only reason that God the Father accepted that sacrifice instead of the death of someone else in your place as your substitute is because Jesus was perfect. He did what you couldn't do, wouldn't do, and didn't do. He obeyed God's law perfectly. So even in Jesus' trial before Pilate, we see the glory of the gospel. We see His sanctification. The malpractice of the religious leaders, the malpractice of the council, their legal malpractice reveals Jesus as our sanctification.

Secondly, we saw in verses 2 through 5 that the armistice of Christ reveals His submission. Verse 2: *“And Pilate asked him, ‘Are you the King of the Jews?’ And he answered him, ‘You have said so.’ And the chief priests accused him of many things. And Pilate again asked him, ‘Have you no answer to make? See how many charges they bring against you.’ But Jesus made no further answer, so that Pilate was amazed.”* This fulfills Isaiah chapter 53, that Jesus was silent before His accusers. Jesus refused to answer any false charge. Jesus' life had spoken for itself. But as we read the gospel of John and John's account of Jesus before Pilate, we read that there was a little bit of a dialog in John chapter 18 in which Jesus says, *“My kingdom is not of this world.”* In other words, Jesus was making a declaration. He was declaring an armistice, a ceasing of hostilities with

the Roman government for the purpose that they could put Him to death. In other words, Jesus said, “I didn’t come to fight Rome. If that was the case, I would have told Peter to swing his sword again. If that was the case back in the garden, I would have told the other disciples to start swinging their swords and to declare war on Rome.” Jesus says, “*My kingdom is not of this world.*” “I must be delivered over by Rome to die for sinners.” Now, of course, in Jesus’ second coming, He is coming to defeat all kingdoms, isn’t He? He is coming to defeat all wicked governments. He is coming to defeat all kings and princes and presidents, but at His first coming, it was a coming of humility. At His first coming, it was a coming in which the state martyred Him, the state crucified Him. And so, Jesus says, “*My kingdom is not of this world.*” He declared an armistice to Pilate and to the Roman government. He quietly and submissively with His mouth essentially shut, obeyed the will of the Father from before the foundation of the world. All Jesus would have had to have done is call for legions of angels. All Jesus would have had to have done was produce testimony after testimony after testimony of those who said He was innocent, of those who said He had never violated the law of God, and yet Jesus’ quiet, humble submission is necessary for our salvation. For Him being silenced, He was led to the cross of Calvary to die for our sins.

This is the glory of the gospel. Not only His sanctification, not only His submission, but finally we come to what we want to talk about this morning, and that is in verses 6 through 15, His substitution, His substitution. It is the prejudice of the crowd that reveals Jesus’ substitution. In fact, the shocking injustice that takes place in Pilate, as we are going to see, releasing Barabbas, a known criminal over Jesus reveals the doctrine of substitution, which is central to the gospel. And in verses 6 through 15, it breaks down to us in three subpoints. First of all, I want you to notice with me what I want to call the seasonal request, the seasonal request. We see it in verses 6 and 7. Notice your Bibles, verse 6: “*Now at the feast he [that is Pilate] used to release for them one prisoner for whom they asked.*” Now, this custom that is outlined here in verse 6 seems to have been a way for Rome to maintain peaceful relations during a feast like Passover where you have thousands of Jews traveling to Judea, to the capital city, Jerusalem. And perhaps Pilate, who was the ideal politician, instituted this. We don’t know exactly when this granting of amnesty began to be a custom, but perhaps Pilate himself did it because there were so many tense moments between Pilate and the Jews. And so, this became an accepted practice, at least by the days that our Lord walked the earth, that this granting of amnesty, this granting of freedom or release of a known criminal would sort of appease the Jewish crowd.

In fact, John 18:39 refers to it as a custom at the Passover feast. And it’s been suggested that since they’re celebrating the Passover, which commemorated their deliverance or their freedom from Egyptian bondage, that perhaps this was a small way for Rome to allow Israel to celebrate the Passover, and indeed, rejoice in the fact that they had been delivered from Egypt by delivering from prison and granting freedom to one of their own people who had been incarcerated. Ironically, however, it was an insurrectionist that many wanted released. It was an insurrectionist—listen—a political activist, the same thing Jesus was accused of. They said He was the “*King of the Jews.*” “Oh, He’s going to overthrow Rome. He’s a political activist. He’s a zealot.” Irony of all ironies, the one that would be released was an insurrectionist. Jesus was falsely accused, but Barabbas was truly an insurrectionist. In fact, notice verse 7. Mark says, “*And among the rebels in prison, who had committed murder in the insurrection, there was a man called Barabbas.*” Now, I’m going to say more about Barabbas a little bit later, but suffice it to say here in verse 7—notice your Bibles—he’s called one of “*the rebels in prison.*” That means He’s already been charged, and he’s

incarcerated currently. He is a known criminal. And as verse 7 points out, he had “*committed murder in the insurrection.*”

Now, as to what insurrection verse 7 alludes to, we simply don’t know. It does say, “*the insurrection,*” indicating it was one of the more well-known insurrections, but as you well know, I mentioned last week, there were so many insurrections by the Jews, revolts by the Jews against Pilate because he was such an incompetent leader, and he had hatred against the Jews. But perhaps Mark says it was *the* insurrection in verse 7 because it was the most recent insurrection. I mean, did Barabbas kill one of the Roman soldiers? Did Barabbas carry a dagger? These were called dagger-bearers who walked around secretly trying to assassinate Roman senators. I mean, who was Barabbas? Essentially, he was some sort of patriotic Jewish fanatic, a zealot, an insurrectionist. In fact, Matthew calls him a “*notorious*” robber. It’s not just that he was murderer as is indicated here in verse 7, but Matthew says that he was a “*notorious*” robber. John calls him “*a robber*” in John 18:40. Matthew calls him a “*notorious prisoner*” in Matthew 27:16. Now, this custom of amnesty for a known criminal, a murderer at that, was not supported by God’s law. You need to understand that. Genesis 9:6 says, “*Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.*” In other words, murder is wrong because man has been created in the image of God. And even before Mosaic law, the idea of the death penalty was instituted by God Himself. And so, for the Jews to allow a murderer to be granted amnesty was not upholding God’s law; it was perverting it.

And let me just say on a sidenote, we live in a land where justice no longer prevails, true justice, and you see it all the time, particularly in the fact that the death penalty has almost just ceased to exist. Just over half of the states in these United States still have the death penalty on the books—twenty-seven states. And then you look at our prison system which needs a reform in and of itself. The prison system was started as an attempt to reform an inmate instead of upholding the restitution for the offended victim. It decided to punish the victim by putting them in prison as a sort of reform institution, which is based upon humanistic principles. It is based on a faulty understanding of the depravity of man. Man is totally depraved, but the whole prison system is built off the humanistic concept that man is naturally good at his heart, or that at worst man is morally neutral, and so based on this faulty doctrine of man, the government has provided a solution: “We’re going to rehab these murderers. We’re going to rehab these prisoners so they can be sent back out into society.” And they’re sent back into society, and they commit the same crimes again, only to go back, all the while our tax dollars are paying for it.

By the way, the state assumes that it can fix somebody. The states assumes that it has the power to rehab someone who has committed a crime, and it also assumes that the crime was against the state instead of the crime against another citizen. Criminals should be viewed as sinners with a bent toward evil and the gospel being the only thing that can rehab them, but we live in a humanistic society, don’t we? We live in a secular society where the state acts as a surrogate father, a sugar daddy, playing the part of God and using imprisonment as man’s rehab program, as man’s rehabilitation program in the hope that if he loses his freedom, maybe he’ll be changed and be able to be put back in society. That’s why we call some of these prisons “correctional facilities.” It’s the idea that the state can correct these people because at heart they are morally good. Now, according to God’s law, which is by the way, the only law that matters, there can be a retributive element—that is eye for eye and tooth for tooth—in terms of punishment, but there should always

be a restitution element. That is, if you steal someone’s car, you should return it and pay a fine for the damages. There’s nothing in the Bible that says anything about God endorsing a prison system, but in the prison system, the state has become the Messiah. The state has become the one that’s going to come beside the criminal and save the criminal. In the prison system, vengeance belongs to the state. It doesn’t belong to God. The state is the one that punishes these prisoners. True justice is overturned and redefined by the state to say that we need to put people away and lock them up. And maybe most importantly, the victim of these crimes is not the focus, but the criminal. What about the victim? Where is restitution paid for the victim? There is no restitution. The focus is on the criminal and the goodness of the criminal and throwing them into a prison with no restitution.

I say all that to say that the Jews by agreeing to this custom of amnesty turned justice on its head. They saw amnesty as celebrating the feast because it freed or delivered one of their own from prison. They saw this as an act of worship. This wasn’t an act of worship; this was an abomination to God itself. In fact, Scripture says that whoever justifies a criminal is as guilty before God as the person who punishes the innocent. Proverbs 17:15: *“He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the LORD.”* So, just because God gives the sword to the state does not mean the state has sovereign power to use the sword as they wish. I quote John Calvin. He says, “God’s desire is that the state take fatherly care of the people and that they make sure they do not rise up and cruelly oppress others by misusing their influence and authority. Evil doers are to be punished only according to God’s command,” says Calvin. But the Jews were not honoring and worshiping God, celebrating the feast by offending God’s true justice and going against His Word. And yet at the same time—here is the irony—at the same time, though it was unjust for Barabbas to be released in the place of Jesus, though Barabbas was unjust and Jesus was just, this is part of the gospel scandal, is it not? That Jesus the just, Jesus the righteous, would be punished in the place of the unjust and the unrighteous.

God had ordained the death of Jesus. Jesus died at the right time when there was a criminal at the feast of Passover that everyone wanted released, who was a known murderer. It was at that time the Father says, “My Son will die.” It is at that time, the Father said, “The just will give His life for the unjust.” And the truth about the gospel is that we must be willing to celebrate that. The gospel doctrine of substitution was made possible by the evil intentions of the crowd wanting Barabbas released, but let me quote Joseph, Genesis 50:20: *“As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good.”* Understand this was necessary. It was necessary that injustice take place so that we could receive salvation, and this highlights the substitution of Jesus. But it wasn’t only the seasonal request that makes the glorious doctrine of the substitution a reality for us to worship God this morning, but it’s also the shrewd revenge. We move from the seasonal request in verses 6 and 7 to the shrewd revenge in verses 8 through 10 on Pilate’s part. Notice with me in verse 8: *“And the crowd came up and began to ask Pilate to do as he usually did for them. And he answered them, saying, ‘Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?’ For he perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up.”*

Pilate was looking to find a way to release Jesus, but this wasn’t from good motives. His desire to have Jesus released was not based out of a love for our Savior but out of a hatred for the Sanhedrin. That’s what we read in these verses. He is seeking revenge on the religious establishment, and verse 8 tells us that the crowd itself was the ones that initiated the release of a prisoner in accordance with the custom of amnesty being granted. Notice again, verse 8: *“And the crowd came*

up and began to ask Pilate to do as he usually did for them.” I mean, this was the custom, and so the Jews are approaching Pilate. When it says that they “*came up,*” it probably indicates they ascended the steps leading up to Pilate’s headquarters in Jerusalem. His main headquarters were Caesarea, but in Jerusalem he stayed during the Passover in the Tower of Antonia, and the Tower of Antonia had steps leading up to it from the temple grounds. The Tower of Antonia was essentially a Roman garrison, and attached to that Roman fortress was where Pilate stayed when he was in Jerusalem. It was a huge structure located on the northwest corner of the temple complex, rectangular in shape, 490 feet by 260 feet with four towers on its corners, three of those towers 75 feet high and one tower, the one closest to the temple complex that looked over the temple complex was 100 feet high to make sure the Jews were being good citizens, so that they could watch the Jews.

It was from this tower, no doubt, Roman soldiers saw Jesus do everything He did in the temple, from His teaching to the cleansing of the temple—all of it. And it was also in this fortress that later the apostle Paul, if you remember, was held after Roman soldiers escorted him away from an angry mob of Jews. And Paul waited in this fortress in protective custody until a military escort could take him to Caesarea. It was here that some of the Jews began ascending the steps up toward the Tower of Antonia, and after ascending the stairs going up to the fortress, this delegation of Jews reminded him, as verse 8 says, of the seasonal custom of amnesty. “*And the crowd came up and began to ask Pilate to do as he usually did for them.*” But notice verse 9: “*And [Pilate] answered them, saying, ‘Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?’*” We read here that Pilate’s shrewd revenge was an attempt to avoid giving the religious leaders what they wanted. Really what they wanted was who they wanted—that was Jesus to be crucified. And so he offers the crowd here in verse 9 the option to release Jesus: “*Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?*” indicating the fact that that’s who Pilate wanted to release because that’s who the religious leaders, the Sanhedrin, did not want to be released. They wanted Jesus to be crucified.

You see, not only did Pilate view Jesus as innocent, having already questioned Him, but he also quite shrewdly figured that Jesus’ popularity among the crowds would result in them selecting Jesus to be released, and that was true. Remember Sunday, the very Sunday before this Friday, they hailed Him as the King of the Jews as He rode on a colt into Jerusalem. This is the same crowd that is outside of the Tower of Antonia. But the primary reason that Pilate wanted Jesus released was not out of reverence for Jesus, but revenge toward the religious leaders. Notice your Bibles in verse 10: “*For he [that is Pilate] perceived that it was out of envy [that is jealousy] that the chief priests had delivered him [that is Jesus] up.*” In other words, Pilate could see through the religious leaders’ motives, and he perceived quite rightly that they were motivated by envy. They were motivated by jealousy. This was true for the whole span of three years of Jesus’ ministry. They were envious of His fame, they were envious of His preaching, they were envious of His ability to perform miracles, they were envious of the fact that people exalted Him, even though the religious leaders claimed that he violated the Sabbath. They were jealous of all the opinions of seemingly all of the people, all of the throngs, that heard Him preach, all of the throngs that witnessed His miracles.

Matthew says in Matthew 7:28: “*The crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.*” Well, how do you think that made the scribes feel? Envious and jealous. Or Luke 4:22. It says, “*And all spoke well of [Jesus] and*

marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth.” How do you think that made the Sanhedrin feel? They ended up losing credibility with the crowds because of Jesus, and Pilate is smart enough to know that. He knows Jesus is innocent. He knows that the religious leaders are just out to get Jesus. Moreover, not only was Pilate motivated by revenge in asking the crowd rather shrewdly if they wanted to release Jesus, but he was also motivated—listen to this—by fear. He wanted to get the religious leaders back. So, on the one hand, he seeks to use this yearly custom of granting amnesty to be opportunistic in seeking revenge on the religious leaders, but on the other hand, he’s also seizing this custom opportunistically to look good politically. He figured he could win over the crowd and avoid tension, sort of rebuild the relations if he released to them their hero, Jesus, and he would politically risk good relations with the Sanhedrin, but he already had a rocky relationship with them.

And by the way, it would have been far easier to control a seventy-one-member board known as the Sanhedrin than thousands of Jews leading an insurrection and a revolt, which would cost Pilate his job. In fact, Rome had already warned Pilate that any sort of reckless behavior causing another insurrection could spell removal from office. And the Sanhedrin would lose standing with Rome if Pilate was fired because though Pilate hated the Sanhedrin and the Sanhedrin hated Pilate, they had to work together or at least take turns manipulating one another in order for both to maintain their power and position. And so, Pilate knows this. He knows that an insurrection could also cause Rome to come down hard on the Sanhedrin for not controlling their people, and so he thinks he has the religious leaders in a corner. They want Jesus crucified, but he’s going to try to release Jesus to the crowds. The crowds will love him. The Sanhedrin might hate him for a while, but the crowds will love him. He’ll avoid an insurrection, and he’ll have leverage over the religious leaders. This is shrewd, shrewd revenge, but he calculated wrongly because additionally there was something else that occurred, and Mark doesn’t record it, but if you turn over with me to Matthew chapter 27, something really interesting takes place. Matthew 27, and notice with me in verse 18. Matthew says, *“For he [that is Pilate] knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered [Jesus] up.”* Verse 19: *“Besides, while he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, ‘Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much because of him today in a dream.’”* What? Apparently, he didn’t wear the pants in his family. *“Have nothing to do with that righteous man”*? Even his own wife knew Jesus was innocent. *“That righteous man, for I have suffered much because of him today in a dream.”*

I mean, she is fearful of Jesus. Pilate is fearful of the crowd. The religious leaders are fearful of Jesus. Pilate’s wife is fearful of Jesus, and so, turn back to Mark chapter 15 and look with me at verse 11. It says, *“But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release for them Barabbas instead.”* Now, here’s what you need to understand. During the liberation while sitting on the judgment seat, as Pilate thought through the option of releasing Jesus with all its attendant consequences of securing revenge on the religious leaders while at the same time maintaining peace with the Jewish crowd, he was interrupted by his wife who said she had a dream about Jesus and that Pilate wasn’t to mess with *“that righteous man.”* Jesus’ innocence is seen throughout, even by wicked Pilate, even by Pilate’s wife because this is a way for Scripture to highlight the certainty of the purity of Jesus. There was no whiff of scandal in His ministry. There was no hint of immorality. There was only purity and perfection—pristine, clean whiteness. Luke in his account—and it’s important that we speak about all of these accounts—Luke seems to point out the innocence of Jesus and the fact that Pilate recognized the innocence of Jesus more than all the

other gospel writers. Luke records: *“Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, ‘I find no guilt in this man,’”* Luke 23:4. Luke 23:14: *“[Pilate] said to them, ‘You brought me this man as one who was misleading the people. And after examining him before you, behold, I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him.’”* Luke 23:15: *“Neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Look, nothing deserving death has been done by him.”* Luke 23:22: *“A third time he said to them, ‘Why? What evil has he done? I have found in him no guilt deserving death.’”* Throughout the whole course of the trial, it was clear that Jesus was innocent. But as we move along to conclude this passage, we see that the shrewdness of Pilate was not matched compared to that of the religious leaders because verse 11 says—I already read it: *“But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release for them Barabbas instead.”* So, while Pilate was inside talking to his wife, as she sort of superstitiously yet prophetically so said, *“Have nothing to do with that righteous man,”* the religious leaders, verse 11 says, the chief priests were one step ahead of Pilate. It says in verse 11 they *“stirred up the crowd.”*

This takes us to verses 11 through 15, the shameful release. We move from the seasonal request, verses 6 and 7; the shrewd attempt by Pilate at revenge, verses 8 through 10; now the shameful release. And the release isn’t of Jesus; it’s of Barabbas, and the way that it happens is that while Pilate is deliberating the chief priests, who by the way were the former high priests, went among the crowd and stirred them up. That’s an interesting word. *Anaseiō* is the Greek word “stirred up,” made up of two Greek words *ana*, which means “up” and *seiō*, which means “to stir, to shake, to agitate.” A *seismós* for example is an “earthquake.” So, these chief priests are going through the crowd and creating an earthquake, creating a rumbling, creating the will of the people to intimidate Pilate. And if you remember, this was the same crowd that hailed Jesus the King of the Jews, *“Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”* on Palm Sunday just a few days earlier. The chief priests effectively were able to formulate among the crowd a prejudice against Jesus so that they turned against Jesus. This is the age-old tactic of blackmail, and that’s the method that they used. The threatened Pilate. In fact, this is an implied threat, but turn over with me to John chapter 19 and his version of these events.

They say something very interesting to Pilate. In John 19:12: *“From then on Pilate sought to release him [that is Jesus], but the Jews cried out,”* notice this, *“If you release this man, you are not Caesar’s friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar.”* By implication, “You do this, you release Jesus, and we’re going to go to Caesar. We’ve already sent delegations before. We’ll go to Caesar, and we’ll say you’re doing what you’re accusing Jesus of doing—being a king. We’ll say that you are the one who’s trying to stand up against Caesar.” In Matthew’s version, Matthew indicates that Pilate began to cave. He asked the crowds, “Who do you want me to release to you?” That wasn’t his job to ask. He was supposed to be a person of justice, but Luke reveals that—this is actually really interesting. Turn with me to Luke chapter 23 because Luke reveals that Pilate tried at least three times to persuade the crowds. He really did want to release Jesus. Verse 15 he says, He’s done *“nothing deserving of death.”* Verse 16:

“I will therefore punish and release him.” But they all cried out together, “Away with this man, and release to us Barabbas”—a man who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection started in the city and for murder. Pilate addressed them once more [the second time], desiring to release Jesus, but they kept shouting, “Crucify, crucify him!” A third time he said to them, “Why? What

evil has he done? I have found in him no guilt deserving death. I will therefore punish and release him.”

Over and over and over again, Pilate tries to release Jesus instead of Barabbas. But finally, Pilate gave in to the crowd. Notice back in Mark 15:12, as we move along in the text. It says, “*And Pilate again said to them, ‘Then what shall I do with the man you call the King of the Jews?’*” I mean, what is this? This is a shirking of responsibility is it not? This is Pilate feeling the stress from his wife, feeling the stress from the crowds, feeling the stress from the religious leaders. He’s nervous. He doesn’t want to lose his job, so he just lays it out there for the people: “*What shall I do with the man you call the King of the Jews?’*” Matthew 27:24 says, “*So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing,*” and a riot was beginning, that’s when he gave in to the crowd. The chief priests had so stirred up the crowd against Jesus using intimidation tactics, that the crowd swells in anger and turns on Jesus, and now Jesus and Pilate have their backs against the wall from a human perspective. A riot is beginning to break out on the steps that lead up to the palace of where the governor presided. This is exactly what Pilate was trying to avoid. “Not another insurrection, not another protestor, or I lose my job.” So, notice your Bibles in verse 13: “*And they [that is the crowd] cried out again, ‘Crucify him.’*” Verse 14: “*And Pilate said to them, ‘Why? What evil has he done?’ But they shouted all the more, ‘Crucify him.’*”

So now, he’s got to preserve his political career out of fear for the crowd, and so what does Pilate do? Well, he does something that was common, for example, in the book of Deuteronomy and chapter 21. He’s known as the judge of the land, right? Well, Matthew reveals to us what Jesus did. Matthew 27:24: “*So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, ‘I am innocent of this man’s blood; see to it yourselves.’ And all the people answered, ‘His blood be on us and on our children!’ Then he released for them Barabbas.*” It’s really shocking that Pilate would have given in, but in one sense both Pilate and the people helped fulfill Scripture, right, as wicked and evil as their actions were. And that’s why the focus can’t be on them. Notice how that the text ends, verse 15 back in Mark, Mark 15:15, Mark concludes it: “*So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd,*” that’s never a good idea, “*released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.*” This is what Isaiah prophesied. “*The LORD laid on Him [that is Jesus] the iniquity of us all*” at the cross. Galatians 3:13: “*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.’*”

This even fulfilled what Jesus predicted earlier in Mark: “*We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him.*” Jesus had predicted this. The Old Testament in Isaiah had predicted this. This was the will of God. It pleased the Father to crush the Son, Isaiah chapter 53. Peter says in 1 Peter 3: “*For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.*” And so, you say to yourself, “If Jesus was so clearly innocent as the gospel record indicates over and over and over again, as the rest of Scripture is so clear, as Pilate was so honest to say, as Pilate’s wife knew, and even the religious leaders knew, then why did God allow Jesus to be crucified? “*For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.*” That’s why. He’s our substitute. John MacArthur says, and I quote, “Incredibly, at the very time when the nation

was preparing to remember God’s mercy and goodness through the Passover, the people were violently screaming for the death of His Son and wanting to be held fully responsible for the crime.” That’s exactly what happened.

And as verse 15 says, before Jesus was delivered up to be crucified, it says, He was first scourged. This was known as the Roman flogging. A flagellum was used. That was a little stick, a little wooden handle that had strips of leather attached to it, and on the ends of those strips of leather were pieces of lead and sharply pointed bone. The victim was beaten on his bare back, stripes being applied. His shirt would have been off. His hands would have been tied up over His head and His feet elevated off the ground on a pole so He couldn’t go anywhere while two men, one on each side, alternated lashes upon Jesus. The Roman scourging, the Roman flogging, so bad, so violent, that history tells us that the victims were so badly lacerated that veins and arteries and sometimes even organs would protrude and be exposed because, inevitably, the leather straps would whip around to where the abdomen is. Sometimes death itself preceded crucifixion because the flogging process produced so much blood and the victim would pass out and eventually die. Why do we speak about this? Why do we believe in a bloody gospel? Why do we believe and affirm the violence of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross? Well, because we believe in Jesus’ vicarious substitutionary atonement. We believe that He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree to bring us salvation. In fact, turn back with me to Isaiah 53. This was the whole point of the prophet Isaiah. He predicts in uncanny detail what Jesus would face in His suffering. Verse 4:

*Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.
But he was pierced for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
and with his wounds we are healed.
All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned—every one—to his own way;
and the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.*

*He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he opened not his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,
so he opened not his mouth.
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,
stricken for the transgression of my people?
And they made his grave with the wicked
and with a rich man in his death,
although he had done no violence,*

and there was no deceit in his mouth.

*Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him;
he has put him to grief;
when his soul makes an offering for [sin].*

That’s the substitutionary vicarious atonement of Jesus Christ: Jesus, the just, punished for the unjust. Quoting Peter again, *“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.”* That’s the language of Isaiah. Verse 25 of 1 Peter 2: *“For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”* The entire Old Testament pointed forward to Jesus’ substitution. The entire sacrificial system pointed to Jesus’ substitution. All the types, all the shadows of the Old Testament, have the concept of substitution. For example, there is the type of the serpent in the wilderness during Moses’ day.

Turn with me over to John chapter 3. Jesus alludes to the serpents that bit Israel in Moses’ day found in Numbers 21. But here in John chapter 3, remember these are Jesus’ words to Nicodemus. He says in verse 14: *“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness,”* that was a type, *“so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.”* What is Jesus doing? He’s teaching typology. He’s saying that that bronze serpent that Moses held up typified or pointed forward to Jesus who would be lifted up on the cross. And just as the Israelites looked at that bronze serpent and were healed from the fiery bites of the serpents beneath their feet, so too, when we look up in faith to Jesus on the bloody cross, our sins are forgiven. The bronze serpent is a type of Christ pointing to the fact that that bronze serpent being lifted up over all those other serpents, this points to Christ, the one lifted up, the one who was raised from the dead, the one who ascended to the right hand of God, who defeated the kingdom of the serpent, who defeated the kingdom of Satan, the one high and lifted up, the one promised to crush the head of the serpent in Genesis 3. This is the doctrine of substitution in John 3, Numbers 21, with the bronze serpent being lifted up as a substitute to heal the people. And we can be healed from our sins, Jesus says, if we look in faith to Jesus high and lifted on the cross, raised after three days, ascended to the right hand of God.

But there’s also the type not only of the serpent, there’s also the type of the scapegoat of Israel’s camp. We read about this earlier, didn’t we, in Leviticus chapter 16, that the sins of the people symbolically were placed on the scapegoat who was driven outside of the camp into the wilderness? This was a type of Christ. The scapegoat was a substitute driven into the wilderness. As Isaiah says, Jesus was cut off out of the land of the living. Jesus was the scapegoat. He went into the wilderness of sin in outer darkness, even though He had no sin. He died outside of Jerusalem, outside of the camp, on Golgotha, on Mount Calvary, surrounded by darkness, surrounded by enemies. And so that scapegoat in the Old Testament is a picture of Christ, isn’t it, our substitution, our sins laid upon the head of the spotless Lamb of God?

And so, you have the type of the serpent; you have the type of the scapegoat, but you also have the type of the sinner, and who is the type of the sinner? It’s Barabbas. Barabbas typifies all sinners. In fact, Barabbas typifies all of God’s elect people for which Jesus Himself was substituted in the place of. That’s why Scripture speaks about Barabbas. Bar-abbas, Bar-hyphen-abbas. Abbas, we

get our word *abba* from, “*abba Father.*” Barabbas—that was his surname, son of the father. But you know what his first name was? Jesus. His name was Jesus, son of the father, and so when Pilate gave the choice to the people between Jesus Barabbas, Jesus the son of the father, he was giving a choice between Jesus Barabbas, son of the father, and Jesus the true Son of the true Father. Here is the reality. That cross that Jesus hanged on in the middle of those two thieves was likely originally constructed for Barabbas, Jesus Barabbas. And so, Jesus Bar Joseph, son of Joseph, Jesus Son of the true Father, was a substitute for Jesus Barabbas, son of the father. Barabbas could only offer at best political freedom as an insurrectionist, but Jesus spiritual freedom. He died upon the cross at Calvary to be a substitute for our sins, and yet many today seek a Jesus of their own liking just like the crowds. They want superficial deliverance from their financial problems. They want superficial deliverance to make their marriage better. They want superficial deliverance to have meaning in life, all the while rejecting the true Jesus, the true Savior, who gives the eternal gift of salvation.

Here, the lawbreaking son of a human father was being offered to the people in the place of the sinless Son of the divine Father. God reversed this. He substituted Barabbas, He put Jesus in Barabbas’ place. Barabbas a murderer; Jesus the giver of life. Barabbas a political activist; Jesus a spiritual Savior. Barabbas a rebel; Jesus pure and spotless, dying for rebels, dying for us who had gone astray. This is the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ necessary for a true understanding of the gospel. That’s why we believe in a bloody gospel. There is no other gospel. Sin deserves death. You can think about it this way. When you do something that you shouldn’t do, and we all do, you might say we try to make personal atonement. That is, we try to repay someone what they deserve based on the offense we committed. For example, if I borrow something from you, and I destroy that thing or I break it in using it, I have a responsibility of personal atonement to pay you back, buy you that object as brand new, give it back because you let me borrow it. But that’s not the gospel. The gospel is not about personal atonement. The gospel does not teach personal atonement provided by the offending party.

We could never repay God for the sin that has broken the world we live in. The gospel does not teach personal atonement by the offending party, it teaches vicarious atonement—that is atonement by the offended party. In other words, God made a way where we could not. The offended party made atonement. God made atonement through His Son for you and for me. That’s the gospel. How can we not celebrate that? How can we not celebrate the injustice of Pilate? How can we not celebrate the fact that Jesus was imputed our sin, though He was innocent, in order to impute to us His righteousness, though we are guilty? But that’s the gospel. The malpractice of the council reveals His sanctification, His consecration from sin. The armistice of Christ reveals His submission, His perfection in obeying the will of the Father, not even opening His mouth to complain or to answer a charge, and the prejudice of the crowd in selecting Barabbas over Jesus reveals Jesus’ substitution and the satisfaction of the Father’s wrath upon His only begotten Son to receive us into heaven.

But who really was on trial? Was it Pilate or was it Jesus? Go back to verse 12: “*And Pilate again said to them, ‘Then what shall I do with the man you call the King of the Jews?’*” That is a question that he asked the crowds, but it should have been a question that he asked himself. That question faces all of us. So let me turn it around to you. What will you do with the man? What will you do with Jesus? There’s only two possibilities. You reject Him, and that leads to eternal condemnation;

or you believe in Him, which leads to eternal salvation. What will we do with the man? We must affirm a bloody gospel. We sing about it all the time, don't we?

Bearing shame and scoffing rude,
In my place condemned He stood;
Sealed my pardon with His blood.
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Guilty, vile, and helpless we;
Spotless Lamb of God was He;
“Full atonement!” can it be?
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Lifted up was He to die;
“It is finished!” was His cry;
Now in Heav'n exalted high.
Hallelujah! What a [glorious] Savior!

We sing that, we believe that because that is our only hope. And so, as we continue to work through the end of Mark's Gospel, we will see Jesus being mocked. We will see Jesus being spit upon. We will see Jesus not being able to bear His own cross. We will see people scoffing at Jesus, and in all of that, we must find and see the glory of the gospel: His perfection, His obedience, His substitution in our place. Folks, that's the only hope of salvation, and praise God it did it fully. What did He say on the cross? “*It is finished.*” I hope you found forgiveness in Christ today. Let us pray.

Father, thank You for the truth of Mark chapter 15. Lord, there's so much to uncover in this passage, too much for us really even to discuss. But Lord, we thank You for the gospel. We thank You for the clarity of the gospel that's so clearly revealed in the pages of Scripture. Lord, we pray now as Brother John plays for us this hymn of meditation before we partake of the Lord's Supper. Lord, we ask that You would help us, Lord, to reflect upon what a Savior Jesus is, His death, burial, and His resurrection. Bless us we pray, for Your glory. In Jesus' name. Amen.