

## Mark 15:1-5

<sup>1</sup> Immediately, in the morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council; and they bound Jesus, led *Him* away, and delivered *Him* to Pilate. <sup>2</sup> Then Pilate asked Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" He answered and said to him, "*It is as you say.*" <sup>3</sup> And the chief priests accused Him of many things, but He answered nothing. <sup>4</sup> Then Pilate asked Him again, saying, "Do You answer nothing? See how many things they testify against You!" <sup>5</sup> But Jesus still answered nothing, so that Pilate marveled.

What do you think of when you hear the name Pontius Pilate? I think it is safe to say that most of the people who hear his name associate it with the person who sent Christ to His death. This morning we will look at the defining moment of his life. This will be the decision for which the world will remember his name. And we will find that his life decisions prior to this event prepared him for this decision. He was going down the greased tracks in the direction he wanted to go.

Our story, this morning has 2 major characters. We see Jesus and Pilate. Pilate has had an interesting story up to this point. We don't know much about Pilate before he shows up in Judea. We do know he was a Roman citizen. He was married. He was appointed to his position by Tiberias in AD 26, at which time he replaced Valerius Gratus.

Remember that a Procurator was a position of direct rule by Rome, as opposed to Herod Antipas who was a tetrarch. A tetrarch was kind of a "home rule" person. He answered to Rome, and as long as there was order and Rome got their taxes, **all was well**. Judea had been under a tetrarch but they were so unruly they required a heavier hand from Rome, so the tetrarch was replaced with a direct plant from Rome- a procurator or a governor.

Pilate answered to the procurator of Syria- Vitellius. I am not sure who Vitellius answered to. He may have answered directly to Tiberius.

Now, the procurators had a lot of power. They were given the power of life and death at their discretion. One can imagine what kind of corruption that led to. And Rome really didn't care, as long as they didn't hear about it. They were like parents who didn't want to know what their kids were doing. But if it was brought to their attention **they would be forced to do something about it**.

Rome cared about order and taxes. And they actually held high standards of justice to which their governors could be held accountable. But as long as there was order and taxes, justice would not be the primary concern.

Now, prior to Pilate, all the procurators before him entered Jerusalem with all of the emblems removed from the military shields and standards. The Jews regarded these emblems as idols and they would not accept them in their city.

Pilate surely knew this, but he chose to push the issue. So he had all his soldiers come into Jerusalem at night with the emblems in place.

When the Jews found out about it they showed up in great number to protest. Pilate surrounded them and threatened them with death. But the Jews pulled a card that Pilate wasn't prepared for. They were all willing to die rather than compromise. I would guess, Pilate being Pilate, that this was something new to him. He may have never known anyone with real principles. He probably assumed everyone was like he was. Anyway, he knew if he killed hundreds of Jews on the first day of his job he wasn't likely to hold his job very long. So he had to back down on his bluff.

Immediately we see a couple of character traits of Pilate. First, we see his love of power. Nothing else would explain why he would immediately force this issue. He was going to show these people who was who. And he, Pilate, could do whatever he chose.

Second, we see that his decisions had no backing of principle. If Pilate truly believed he was representing Rome by what he did, he would have been willing to kill as many Jews as it took to get this done. But that was not the case at all. Pilate knew he was doing this thing in the name of Pilate. If it would benefit Pilate, it would continue. If it would hurt Pilate, it could be called off. Every decision was for sale, depending upon how it affected Pilate.

Third we see that there was no concern for what was in his Jewish constituent's best interest. He was in no sense a servant leader, or one who cared for the people he ruled.

Fourth, justice is not really a concern of his. Even from the first day on the job we have his writing on the wall. The writing says, this man is for sale. Pilate is all about Pilate.

Anyone knowing about this event would have immediately seen Pilate's Achilles heel. The way to make Pilate change is to cause a **negative personal outcome** for Pilate if he goes through with his plan. It is that simple.

Now, Pilate being Pilate, he was sure to prove himself again. And he did.

Pilate next set up gold plated shields in his palace. His excuse is that they were to honor Tiberius. Philo says they were really set up to annoy the Jewish people.

The Jews wrote to Pilate's boss, Vitellius. Vitellius wrote to his boss Tiberius, the Emperor. And Tiberius wrote to Pilate with a host of reproaches and rebukes for his audacious violation of precedent and bid him at once to take down the shields and have them transferred from the capital to Caesarea.

Pilate eventually took money given to the temple- the Corban money that Jesus talked about at one point, money pledged to the temple even at the expense of those who truly needed it. Pilate took this money to build an aqueduct. It was a

25 mile aqueduct so we can guess this took a great deal of money. The Jewish people rioted and Pilate killed a bunch of them.

After Christ was gone, Pilate finally ruined his career. A Samaritan put out a claim that Moses had hidden golden articles from the Tabernacle at the top of Mt Gerizim. So this man led a bunch of people in a quest to go there and check it out. Pilate had his men kill these people at the foot of Mt Gerizim. Evidently the Jews had armed themselves. That was obviously a mistake.

But this time the Jewish people complained to Pilate's boss, and Pilate's boss had had enough by this time. Vitellius sent Pilate home to defend himself to Tiberius. And by the time he got to Rome, Tiberius was dead. Pilate was never heard from again.

We learn so much about Pilate's character in all of this. He was a power hungry person. He wanted to be able to do whatever he wanted whenever he wanted to whoever he wanted. But he had bosses to answer to. And he deeply resented it when those who he was abusing **appealed to authority**. He was vindictive. He acted like a spoiled rotten kid. He seemed to have impulse control issues. He could predict that the selfish things he was doing would have bad consequences, but he could not restrain himself.

We see that, for sure, he was not a fit leader. He would never be able to run the country the way Rome wanted it run. There would always be unrest. And that unrestrained behavior was Pilate's undoing.

That is Pilate. And that is his condition when Jesus comes before him. He has already gone through the emblem event and the gold shield event. And he may have gone through the aqueduct event. Pilate is on shaky ground with his bosses. He cannot afford to be reported to his bosses for another event, no matter whose fault it is. And Pilate was going to do what Pilate perceived was in the best interest of Pilate.

There is a principle here. **Love will spend one's self** for the **best interest of others**. **Selfishness will spend others** for the **best interests of one's self**.

Jesus was the perfect example of love. Pilate was a very good example of selfishness.

We may look at Pilate and think, well at least I am not like him. But the truth is, all of us can probably look back in our lives and see how we were willing to spend another human being because they interfered with what we wanted most. That is all that Pilate did. That is the Pilate disease. We have done it in our homes. Maybe we take something out on our kids that we know is not their fault. But it makes us feel better. Maybe we have watched as others committed injustice to those we are responsible for, but we did not want to pay the price to intervene. Maybe we have allowed others to suffer because it was inconvenient to intervene. We all have it in us. We all have that impulse to maximize our own

pleasure and minimize our own pain, no matter what it costs someone else. And we might say, but it was Pilate's **job** to **promote justice**. Well, every position we have of authority is for the same purpose. Who of us have not spent an innocent party in our quest for our best interest? I would venture to guess that none of us would avoid that charge. But our sins, most of the time, don't result in the person's death. Just their unnecessary suffering.

OK, now to our text. But as usual to get the full picture we need to look at another text as well. In fact, we are going to focus our time on the **John text** as it will include most of what is in Mark along with a lot of detail Mark skips.

### **John 18:28-38**

**<sup>28</sup> Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas to the Praetorium, and it was early morning. But they themselves did not go into the Praetorium, lest they should be defiled, but that they might eat the Passover.**

We have got to always keep this in mind. Never forget how serious religious people, who are devoid of true spirituality, can be about their religion. People who are very devoted to a concept of God, even when they use the name of **our God**, are not necessarily our friends. People who we meet on the street may impress us with their sincerity and devotion, but it is too soon to tell if they are in our same family. We always need to be careful.

These Jewish leaders were too spiritual to defile themselves in a Gentile's home. But they were not too spiritual to kill their Savior sent from God to save the world from their sins.

**<sup>29</sup> Pilate then went out to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this Man?"**

Pilate probably didn't think much of having to go outside to talk to this crowd. Think about it. They were essentially calling Pilate unclean, inferior to their state of cleanness. Knowing what little we know of Pilate, this must have been hard on his pride. But probably he didn't want to deal with the hassle that would be created if he didn't go.

So he goes outside and asks them, what charges are you bringing?

So far, so good. If Pilate is going to try Jesus, he needs to know what the crime is so he can find out if Christ is guilty or innocent. The very nature of the question communicates to the leaders that **Pilate intends to hold a trial**. That makes what the leaders say next more understandable.

**<sup>30</sup> They answered and said to him, "If He were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him up to you."**

Pilate asks, what has Christ done wrong? They respond with the logic that says Christ is here because we have already determined He is guilty. If he wasn't, he wouldn't be here, would he? The insinuation is that a trial isn't necessary. He is guilty. I think if it were to be stated in its honest intent the sentence from the

leaders would be, we didn't bring Christ here for a trial. We brought Him for a crucifixion.

Pilate doesn't like this at all. He immediately knows they are trying to use him. So he responds-

<sup>31</sup> **Then Pilate said to them, "You take Him and judge Him according to your law." Therefore the Jews said to him, "It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death,"** <sup>32</sup> **that the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled which He spoke, signifying by what death He would die.**

Pilate may not have known exactly what the Jews were trying to pull at first. So he tells them to take care of it themselves and leave him out of it. He didn't want to be pulled in. By saying this he quickly got to their point.

Their response- we can't do it. We can **try** Christ, but we can't **punish** Him. We want Him killed. And only you can do that.

Now, while it was true that it wasn't lawful for them to put anyone to death, it is not true that they never did so. And they may have tried to do it here, but they had some of the same restraints that Pilate did. They were worried about what **the people they were leading** would do to them. The leaders really needed **Pilate** to put Christ to death. They had to be able to spin this as **Pilate's** fault. They needed someone to blame besides themselves.

John here points out what was really going on from a prophetic perspective. It is like John **takes us into heaven** from God's perspective and we see what is really happening. Christ had to be Crucified. That is what was prophesied. Crucifixion was not used for a terribly long period in human history. But a death like one Crucifixion causes is what was prophesied. This is just one more of those proofs that God gives us that the Bible is true. Christ's death and those things that accompanied a crucifixion were prophesied well before the author would have even known what a crucifixion was.

Ps 22:1 12-18 Isa 53:5 Zech 12:10

So after the leaders said they could not kill Christ they begin to lay out their accusations against Christ. Luke 23:2 gives us the specifics.

**Luke 23:2**

<sup>2</sup> **And they began to accuse Him, saying, "We found this *fellow* perverting the nation, and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, saying that He Himself is Christ, a King."**

Isn't it interesting? These aren't the crimes He was on trial for. He was on trial for blasphemy. And that wasn't true, but for a show the leaders felt they at least needed to pretend to have real witnesses that would look like an actual trial.

There was a pretense, at least, of truth.

Now the pretense is gone. The ends justify the means to these leaders. They believe that Jesus is worthy of death due to blasphemy. Now any lie is

appropriate to see that Jesus is killed. And as usual in the devil's business, lies are mixed with truth. Jesus never forbade paying taxes to Caesar. In fact he told His followers that they should pay taxes if taxes are owed. But He did say that He was the Christ. Although He never referred to Himself as a king that I can recall. Now the leaders have forced Pilate's hand. They have just made this Pilate's responsibility. Now there is no way that Pilate could have been completely unaware of what was going on with Christ. His guards would not have accompanied the Jewish temple guards to get Christ without Pilate's knowledge. So Pilate knows something, but we don't know how much. Now that Pilate has been giving specific charges against Christ, it is his job to check them out. And they are charges Pilate's Roman bosses would care about.

**<sup>33</sup> Then Pilate entered the Praetorium again, called Jesus, and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" <sup>34</sup> Jesus answered him, "Are you speaking for yourself about this, or did others tell you this concerning Me?"**

Here is the million dollar question asked for all the wrong reasons. Are you the King of the Jews? Pilate is asking the right person the right question. The answer to this question could have been Pilate's salvation. But it was not enough. Even though it was the right question to the right person, it wasn't the right reason. And I think that is reflected in Christ's response.

Jesus answered- Is this from you or from them? Essentially Christ is asking- why are you asking me this Pilate? Are you personally looking for the King of the Jews in order to worship Him and follow Him and surrender your life to Him? Because if you are, this is your lucky day. Or are you doing the bidding of the Jewish leaders and this is just a curiosity in your day, a job you must do, a chore to accomplish. If so this will be your worst day.

I think this was an appeal by Christ to Pilate's heart. It is Christ's way of providing an opportunity for Pilate to repent, to come at this from a different angle. Christ is saying, will you come at this as a spiritual seeker of truth, or as an obstacle to your self serving plans today?

Christ's question may also have been seeking to know exactly what Pilate meant as King. If the question is coming from Pilate, he is asking about a political king that stands against the Roman government. If he is asking about what the Jews outside are saying, then that is a whole different matter.

**<sup>35</sup> Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me. What have You done?"**

Whether Christ's question was intended as a ministry to Pilate or not, Pilate lets Christ know that he is only reflecting the charges coming from the Jewish leaders. So Pilate wants to know. What are you really guilty of? Pilate can see that the Jewish leaders were envious of Jesus. He has made them angry enough to kill Christ. So what did Christ do to cause this?

So Jesus begins to tell Pilate what kind of a king Jesus is. He begins laying out the spiritual kingdom that Christ is the head of. He does not deny that He is a king. In fact he affirms it by describing His kingdom.

Notice the truth Christ affirms here.

**<sup>36</sup> Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here."**

"Of this world" means "out of the midst of this world". It's source is not natural. And if it is not natural, it must be supernatural.

We have got to make sure we understand this. Christ's kingdom is not expanded through political or physical force. There may be times for Christians to use political or physical force, but it is not to expand the kingdom of God. The church has been too often confused about this.

Neither Hillary Clinton nor Donald Trump are going to expend the Kingdom of Christ, nor will they deter it. It will march right on no matter what circumstances are created by their quest for physical and political power. Our salvation will never come in our election of a president. It has already come in God's selection of a King.

Notice too what Christ told Pilate. He is essentially saying, if my kingdom were an earthly kingdom, there would already have been a fight. We would have stood up to the Roman guards that brought Christ to Pilate. The fact that there was no fight should be evident to Pilate of the truth of what Christ was saying.

**<sup>37</sup> Pilate therefore said to Him, "Are You a king then?"**

We have to at least admire that Pilate was listening. Logically, if Christ says "my kingdom" that means He must have a kingdom. If He has a kingdom, He must be a king. So Pilate asks the most obvious question. Are you a king then?

**Jesus answered, "You say *rightly* that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."**

Pilate asked the right question to the right person and now Christ tells him he came to the right conclusion. But that still did not save Pilate. Because even though he got the facts right, he never believed in Jesus.

Is Jesus a King?

YES. He cannot be clearer about that. Jesus affirms His Kingship of God's kingdom here without question.

Look at the opportunity here. Pontius Pilate is given a short interview with the King of kings and Lord of Lords. And Christ reveals to Pilate the reality of His mission to this planet.

First, if there is a cause for Christ's birth, there had to be someone causing that purpose to be fulfilled. Christ's statements imply that God was the one doing this. So Christ is here as a result of God's plan for Christ.

Notice the wording Christ uses. He says that He was both born and has come into the world. Christ is essentially telling Pilate that He was pre-existent and that He came in an incarnation. God sent His Son then, for what purpose? Why was Christ made King? To bear witness of the truth. Christ was the Word in flesh. He was the exact representation of God.

Christ was sent to bring the message of God. The ones who saw Christ saw the Father.

And what is the expected outcome? There will be two responses to Christ's mission. There will be those who hear the truth of Christ and they get it at the core of themselves. They repent. They cry out for forgiveness. And they receive the glorious salvation that God has prepared for them. They enter this kingdom of Christ's.

Then there are those who may hear the words, they are like Pilate and they don't get it. They can walk away from Christ. They can walk away from His words. They can leave unaffected. They can go on with their merry lives without a concern.

Isn't it interesting how Jesus describes this to Pilate? While Christ was sent as a King, when He describes the purpose of His Kingship, it is truth. Christ was King for truth's sake. He was the deliverer of truth. His existence was all about truth. And His kingdom was built only of those who were responsive to truth, who loved it, who had to have it. Truth. What a noble, wonderful concept. What a tremendous conversation this could have spawned. Pilate could have learned all the truth needed to live forever. Christ could have told Pilate the truth about everything Pilate ever did. He could have told Pilate the truth about eternal life. What a precious commodity. And what does Pilate say about truth?

<sup>38</sup> **Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?" And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, "I find no fault in Him at all.**

What a sad brush off to truth when standing in the very presence of truth. Here is cynicism at its finest. Pilate was displaying his utter disregard for the value of truth. Pilate had other things he was far more interested in than truth. He wanted power. He wanted wealth. He wanted to politically survive. He wanted these pesky Jews to leave him alone. But truth. No Pilate had no appetite for truth.

I read a quote from Winston Churchill recently that fits Pilate pretty well. He was talking of another politician and said, "He occasionally stumbled over the truth but hastily picked himself up and hurried on as if nothing had happened." Here is Pilate stumbling on as if nothing ever happened.

What a lost opportunity. Imagine what Pilate will think one day as his knees bow and he confesses that this Jesus Christ who was so battered and broken before him on this day, **truly was** the King of truth, the King of kings, the Lord of lords. And Pilate had Jesus Christ witnessing to Him. And Pilate blew Him off.

There is an interesting application here. Don't get too bent out of shape when you witness to someone and they don't want to hear what you are saying. It doesn't mean you aren't doing it correctly. The same thing happened to Christ, Himself, when He was witnessing **about Himself**. People who don't love truth are not going to be moved by truth. That is just how it is.

Now at least Pilate got the point. Jesus was not a threat to Rome. No matter what **Christ was**, Pilate knew what **Christ wasn't**. He wasn't going to run a political insurrection. He was not a political threat to the powers that be. So Pilate announces that to the religious leaders. And in Mark we find that the leaders are less than satisfied.

**Mark 15:**

**<sup>3</sup> And the chief priests accused Him of many things, but He answered nothing. <sup>4</sup> Then Pilate asked Him again, saying, "Do You answer nothing? See how many things they testify against You!" <sup>5</sup> But Jesus still answered nothing, so that Pilate marveled.**

Pilate was used to dealing with people like himself. Pilate understood selfish motives. Pilate understood the desire for survival.

So Pilate expected all of the same things from those around us. That is how we are. We always project our reasons on everyone else. So what Pilate expected was for Christ's instincts for survival to kick in. He expected Christ to fight for his life. He expected Christ to defend Himself. Pilate could not have known that Christ came into this not only **expecting** to die but **needing** to die. This had to really be a novelty to Pilate.

Along with this, Jesus had completed His ministry to Pilate. If Pilate did not respond to the truth Christ just told Pilate, Pilate wouldn't respond to anything. So there was really nothing to be gained by opening Christ's mouth again. If anything, it may have interfered with the process of Christ's verdict under Pilate's hands. Pilate knew Christ was innocent. Pilate knew what Christ was all about. Pilate had heard the truth of Christ and had spit on it. Now there was nothing for Christ to do but to wait for the end.

I think the most appropriate application for us this morning is to look at our lives and ask the question, who is my life most like? Is it most like Jesus or most like Pilate?

Do I make my decisions based on that which is the best interest of others? Will I love truth and represent it no matter what the cost? Will I spend myself in that

pursuit? Do I really love others? Is there evidence in my life that I make decisions that benefit others and cost me? If we love others, there will be evidence. What is ours?

Or am I like Pilate? Do I calculate my benefit in everything I do? Do I measure what is in my best interest and spend others in that effort? Relationally that will look like defenses that kick in every time someone challenges us. We will be above criticism. We will pick strategies that silence others when they start hitting too close to home. We will spend anyone or anything when it crosses the line into those things we think **we must have** or **must keep**. Pilate was fine with truth, until it intruded into his self interest. Then suddenly he was willing to spend an innocent man to maintain those things in his life he most valued. We will do the same thing if we aren't careful.

So, here we are again in the life of Christ, it is Friday, but Sunday is coming.