

HE COULD BUT HE WOULDN'T

Mark 15:1-32

In the early years of our marriage, Cathy and I did not own a television. That was our choice. Being in graduate school and working, our lives were busy. What free time we had we thought best to spend together talking or walking or reading.

At least twice in the first three years of our marriage we received televisions anonymously on our doorstep. All we can think is that in the course of conversation when it had been shared that we were without a television it had been interpreted as a complaint. I suppose it was and perhaps is, difficult for some people to imagine anyone not wanting a television. What these dear people thought was an unfortunate circumstance was, in fact, what we wanted.

Such was the case for our Lord Jesus. Thinking Jesus was an ordinary man, His enemies assumed that He would do anything necessary to escape the cross. But as we will see, such was not the case.

Our text picks up the story at the point that the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council, ratified its verdict and delivered Jesus to Pilate.

JESUS BEFORE PILATE (15:1-5)

Mark 15:1-32 (ESV)

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. ² And Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" And he answered him, "You have said so." ³ And the chief priests accused him of many things. ⁴ And Pilate again asked him, "Have you no answer to make? See how many charges they bring against you." ⁵ But Jesus made no further answer, so that Pilate was amazed.

It was necessary for the Sanhedrin to deliver Jesus to the Roman governor Pilate since it lacked authority to carry out death sentences. Pilate was in Jerusalem to keep the peace during the Jewish feast of Passover but Caesarea Maritima on the coast was his main residence. As governor, he had the authority to ratify or rescind the Sanhedrin's verdict.

Cleverly, the Sanhedrin accused Jesus before Pilate not of blasphemy, but treason. Blasphemy would be of no concern but a challenge to Rome's authority required Pilate's attention. Pilate echoed the Sanhedrin's charge in asking Jesus, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus' answer is ambiguous. However Pilate took it, he did not consider Jesus a threat to Roman rule deserving death (cf. 15:10, 14).

Jesus' silence amazed Pilate. Though His life was on the line, Jesus did not defend Himself.

Why?

Because the cross was His destiny (10:45). His silence manifested His settled resolve to drink the cup required of Him (14:36). Though he didn't understand the reason for it, Pilate at least noticed and was amazed.

If Pilate did not seem convinced Jesus was guilty, why did he condemn Him?

In a sense he got played by the Sanhedrin. It was the crowd, manipulated by the chief priests, which ultimately pressured Pilate to crucify Jesus.

PILATE BEFORE THE CROWD (15:6-15)

⁶ Now at the feast he used to release for them one prisoner for whom they asked. ⁷ And among the rebels in prison, who had committed murder in the insurrection, there was a man called Barabbas. ⁸ And the crowd came up and began to ask Pilate to do as he usually did for them. ⁹ And he answered them, saying, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" ¹⁰ For he perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up. ¹¹ But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release for them Barabbas instead. ¹² And Pilate again said to them, "Then what shall I do with the man you call the King of the Jews?" ¹³ And they cried out again, "Crucify him." ¹⁴ And Pilate said to them, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify him." ¹⁵ So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.

Pilate mismanaged the crowd. The crowd may have been recruited by the Sanhedrin; they were certainly manipulated by the Sanhedrin. It is significant to know that most probably this crowd consisted of Jewish citizens of Jerusalem, not Jewish pilgrims from Galilee. This is relevant because the Jews from Jerusalem were not as favorably disposed to this prophet from Galilee, Jesus, as were His fellow Galileans. In other words, those who hailed Jesus at the triumphal entry (11:1-11) were not the same people as those who cried out for His crucifixion.

Pilate inadvertently put the power into the hands of the crowd when he asked if they wanted Jesus released. In dramatic irony, Pilate twice referred to Jesus as "King of the Jews". Whipped up by the chief priests the crowd demanded Jesus be crucified. To placate them, Pilate gave the order that Jesus be crucified and that Barabbas be released.

Scourging was part of crucifixion. Jesus was stripped, beaten with a bone and metal laced whip then led away to the barracks.

JESUS BEFORE THE ROMAN SOLDIERS (15:16-20)

¹⁶ And the soldiers led him away inside the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters), and they called together the whole battalion. ¹⁷ And they clothed him in a purple cloak, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on him. ¹⁸ And they began to salute him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" ¹⁹ And they were striking his head with a reed and spitting on him and kneeling down in homage to him. ²⁰ And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. And they led him out to crucify him.

John Mark continues to highlight the irony of how the true "King of the Jews" was treated. How Jesus was even standing at this point is hard to comprehend. Beaten by members of the Sanhedrin, His shoulders and back flayed and bleeding from the scourging Jesus next endured the mockery and beating from the soldiers. Having satiated their cruelty, the soldiers redressed Jesus and led Him to Golgotha.

JESUS CRUCIFIED (15:21-32)

²¹ And they compelled a passerby, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross. ²² And they brought him to the place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull). ²³ And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. ²⁴ And they crucified him and divided his garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take. ²⁵ And it was the third hour when they crucified him. ²⁶ And the inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." ²⁷ And with him they crucified two robbers, one on his right and one on his left. ²⁹ And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, ³⁰ save yourself, and come down from the cross!" ³¹ So also the chief priests with the scribes mocked him to one another, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. ³² Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also reviled him.

Jesus was crucified at 9AM. So weakened by the scourging and beatings, Jesus was unable to carry the cross beam of His cross. Simon of Cyrene was forced by the soldiers to carry it for Jesus. The fact His sons Alexander and Rufus are named indicates that they may have been believers known to John Mark's audience in Rome.

John Mark may have had Psalm 22 in mind when he wrote this section. Psalm 22:18 predicted that Messiah's clothing would be divided amongst His captors.

Psalm 22:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.

And Psalm 22:7 prophesied that the Messiah would be mocked by His enemies.

Psalm 22:7 (ESV)

⁷ All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads;

The men crucified with Jesus may very well have been from among the insurrectionists mentioned in 15:7. "Robber" is not an accurate translation; Josephus used the same word to refer to an insurrectionist.

Jesus was mocked on all sides; by the men crucified to His left and right, by passers-by and by members of the Sanhedrin. The ultimate irony is found in the mockery of the chief priests and scribes recorded in verse 32. What they considered to be Jesus' ultimate defeat was, in fact, the essential, necessary sacrifice to be made by the true Messiah (Isa. 53:4-9). They assumed that, like any ordinary man, Jesus wanted to get off that cross with every thing in His being, but He couldn't. But the truth is, as Jesus hung on the cross, He was exactly where He intended to be. The Sanhedrin had not bested Jesus, but, in fact, had served the purposes of God. Jesus could very well have saved Himself and come down off the cross, but He wouldn't. He was exactly where He purposed to be, in obedience to the Father's will, to pay the penalty for our sins.

1 Peter 2:24 (ESV)

²⁴ He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.

It has been stressed throughout the study of Mark that Jesus was not a victim of circumstance or of His enemies. Three times He plainly foretold His rejection, death

and resurrection to the disciples (8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34). It was Jesus Who incriminated Himself when the Sanhedrin failed to indict Him (14:62). Before Pilate Jesus refused to defend Himself in order to escape the cross (15:4-5). In these ways we see Jesus conducting Himself in a manner that brought Him to the cross albeit through the machinations of His enemies.

Jesus did this so that you and I might “die to sin”, that is be separated both from the penalty of sin and the practice of sin. Positively, so that we might live in the sphere of God’s righteousness, joining Him in a life of goodness and righteousness.

Jesus loves you and went to the cross for you. His blood shed on the cross paid the penalty for all your sin that separates you from God. You can be forgiven and restored to God by placing your confidence in what Jesus has done for you. You will begin a new life with God; a life of healing change and satisfying purpose.