

Theme: Pilate, the religious leaders, and the crowd worked together to wrongfully crucify Jesus in the place of a wicked man. This act mirrors the Gospel - we are freed from the punishment we deserve because Christ willingly takes our place.

I. Intro - 12 Angry Men

- A. Classic movie; all in one room; with only 12 main actors!
- B. Eleven of the twelve want a quick guilty verdict
- C. Some are prejudiced; one has baseball tickets; some just go with the crowd.
- D. Only Henry Fonda stands and keeps asking questions until they agree the defendant is innocent!
- E. We see similar forces as Jesus is on trial before Pilate

II. The Background To This Trial

- A. Mark is the briefest account of this portion of the trial
 - 1. He is often the shortest account!
 - 2. He gives main points but not some famous details
 - a. Dream of Pilate's wife (Matthew 27:19)
 - b. Pilate washes his hands (Matthew 27:24)
 - c. Jesus sent to Herod (Luke 23:6-12)
 - d. Discussion between Pilate and Jesus (Jn 18:33-38)
 - 3. We will supplement Mark's record with the other Gospels as necessary
- B. The Sanhedrin has convicted Jesus but can't kill Him
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. Mark 15:1

- 1. Mark returns to the Sanhedrin and its verdict
- 2. They hand Jesus over to Pilate for judgment
- 3. This is why they had to do the trial at night, so they could go to Pilate at the crack of dawn when Romans tried cases (as noted by Seneca).
- 4. The Sanhedrin can't put Jesus to death - only the Roman "prefect" can do this.
Pilate said, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law." "But we have no right to execute anyone," the Jews objected. John 18:31

C. The judge: Pontius Pilate

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**. Mark 15:1

- 1. Pilate was the Roman prefect from AD26-37 - the longest of any Roman governor of Judea!
- 2. He was capable, but disliked the Jews and could be harsh - which was why he was eventually fired!
 - a. Philo said Pilate was "inflexible, stubborn, and cruel"
 - b. He introduced Roman standards with the image of the Emperor into Jerusalem, which caused protests - and he eventually relented.
 - c. He raided the Temple treasury to pay for an aqueduct - and then harshly crushed the protest with force leading to many deaths.
 - d. His final act was crushing a Samaritan uprising - which led to his removal
 - e. Pilate could care less about the Jews or their religion - he simply wanted Roman peace and interests maintained.
 - f. The High Priest knows Pilate well, and the trial will show them working Pilate to their ends.

III. Jesus On Trial Before Pilate

A. The charge: treason

“Are you **the king of the Jews?**” asked Pilate. “Yes, it is as you say,” Jesus replied. Mark 15:2

1. The Sanhedrin convicted Jesus of blasphemy - but Pilate won't care about that!
2. So they changed the charge to Jesus claiming to be the King of the Jews, which would be treason.
3. Luke gives more information on how this was done
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.**”³ So Pilate asked Jesus, “Are you the king of the Jews?” “Yes, it is as you say,” Jesus replied. Luke 23:2-3
 - a. Subversion, taxes, claim to be king - treason!
 - b. They are putting his in terms that Pilate can't ignore
4. The irony is that Jesus REFUSED to be a political or military Messiah - but this is what He is accused of being!

B. Pilate questions Jesus

“Are you the king of the Jews?” asked Pilate. “Yes, it is as you say,” Jesus replied. Mark 15:2

1. “Are you the King of the Jews?”
2. Jesus' answer - literally “You said it”
 - a. Jesus is somewhat evasive, for He is the King but not in the sense that He is being charged and in which Pilate would think.
 - b. Jesus will not deny it, but He is careful in His answer

3. John gives a fuller account of the conversation

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 talk to you about me?”³⁵ “Am I a Jew?” Pilate replied. “It was your 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 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. John 18:33-38

- a. Notice how Pilate senses there is more going on - what have you done?
- b. Jesus clarifies the nature of His Kingdom and Kingship.
- c. Jesus relates His Kingship to truth - amazing amid all the lying and pretense that is happening!
- d. A sad statement of weary disillusionment: What is truth?
- e. The one judging does not even know the meaning of truth! How can he possibly give a righteous verdict?

C. The accusations continue

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. Mark 15:3-5

1. The chief priests continue hurling accusations about Jesus in front of Pilate.

2. A hot-headed insurrectionist would fire back with angry words - but Jesus is silent!
3. Pilate tries to entice Jesus to defend Himself, but Jesus remains silent!
4. Pilate is amazed at Jesus' demeanor, self-restraint, and apparent lack of fear - this is no hot-headed insurrectionist! He KNOWS Jesus is not guilty!
 "What is truth?" Pilate asked. With this he went out again to the Jews and said, "I find no basis for a charge against him." John 18:38

D. The Passover pardon and Pilate's maneuver

Now it was the custom at the Feast to release a prisoner whom the people requested...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. Mark 15:6, 8-10

1. At Passover, Pilate does a goodwill gesture to release a prisoner from their sentence.
2. Pilate knows the chief priests are lying and envious, so he offers to let Jesus, the King of the Jews, go.
3. He thinks the people will want the "king of the Jews" to be released from a Roman sentence!

E. The priests manipulate Pilate through the crowd

A man called Barabbas was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising...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!" Mark 15:7, 11-14

1. The priests knew Pilate and were ready for this!
2. They have a crowd ready to ask for Barabbas - not Jesus!
3. Barabbas was a murder involved in an uprising
 "The rich man's terrorist is frequently the poor man's Robin Hood."
4. Pilate knows he has been outmaneuvered but asks what to do with Jesus then (since he knows Jesus is not guilty)
5. To his shock the crowd wants Jesus crucified!
 - a. The priests have probably hand-selected this crowd
 - b. They have also probably spread lies about Jesus
 - c. The crowd goes along and demands Jesus' death by crucifixion
6. Pilate appeases the crowd
 Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified. Mark 15:15
 - a. Pilate's concern is not truth or justice, but keeping the mob appeased, so he releases the murder and condemns Jesus to death.
 - b. This seals the fate of Jesus - He will be flogged and crucified, just as He had prophesied.
7. Thus ends the most unjust trial in the annals of human history, as the sinless Son of God is condemned to death.

IV. Applying the Word

A. The Law: all are guilty of putting Jesus to death

1. Many decry the Gospel texts for “blaming” Jews for Jesus’ death - and the Church often did just that!
2. But the Scripture is clear: everyone is to be blamed!
3. It is not Pilate, or the religious leaders, or the common people in the crowd - it is all of them!
4. The Law compels me to recognize that it was my sin that condemned Jesus to the cross!
5. The Law compels me to recognize and confess that it was my sin that fastened Him to the Tree!
6. Don’t look for others to blame in this story - we are the ones whose sin necessitated the death of Jesus

B. The Gospel: Christ dies in the place of the wicked

1. The outcome of this trial mirrors the Gospel!
2. Like a mirror, it shows us the reality:
 - a. Like Barabbas, we are guilty and condemned to die!
 - b. But Jesus takes our place, dying so that we might be set free!
 - c. What a glorious truth - Jesus was condemned and died so that we might be justified and live!
3. But like a mirror, the image is in some way reversed
 - a. Pilate was an unjust judge who caved to unjust demands from a wicked crowd
 - b. But God is the Just Judge, who judges with absolute justice and righteousness!

c. Furthermore, Pilate sat in judgment of Jesus, but on Judgment Day Pilate will stand with everyone else to be judged by Jesus!

4. Be prepared for that Day when there will be no mob to avert true justice: we will stand before God!
5. Look to Christ - He is Your substitute!

C. The Table of the Gospel

1. This Table reminds us of the Gospel
2. Here we recite our faith: The Apostles Creed
3. Here we remember Christ’s sacrifice for us
4. Here we receive Christ as our Substitute, Savior, and Lord!
5. Come, recite, remember, and receive!

Jesus On Trial - Pilate

Mark 15:1-15

March 23, 2025

Communion

2 Corinthians 13:14

Teaching keywords: Christology; atonement; Law and Gospel; judgment; biblical characters

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. 2 Corinthians 13:14

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