

Introduction

1. Today, we add the top slice to our Markan sandwich (cf., 14:53-72).
2. This lesson tops our eighth Markan sandwich as the account of Jesus' trial before Pilate (cf., Mk 15:1-15) completes the sandwich begun with His trial before the Sanhedrin (cf., Mk 14:53-65) with Peter's denial in-between (Mk 14:66-72).
3. Jesus was condemned to death by Pilate according to the wish of the Sanhedrin and the cries of the crowd.
4. **Read Mk 15:1-15.**

A. Before Pilate (1-5)

1. The Sanhedrin escorted Jesus to His trial before Pilate (1)
 - a. "Very early in the morning . . ." (*Kai euthus proi* – "And immediately at first light")
 - b. ". . . the chief priests, with the elders, the teachers of the law and the whole Sanhedrin, made their plans (Gk., *desantes*)."
 - c. "So they bound Jesus, led him away and handed (Gk., *paredokan*) him over to Pilate."
 - 1) The verb is in the perfect tense which points to completed action with abiding results. They had made their decision and were done with him. All that remained was to see Jesus executed.
 - 2) Roman governors normally heard cases first thing in the morning.
 - 3) The Sanhedrin needed a quick ruling from Pilate in order to have Jesus executed before the start of the Sabbath at sundown that day (Good Friday).
 - 4) Pilate was the Roman procurator (i.e., governor) of Judea AD 25-36.
 - 5) Daniel Akin notes, "Pilate was a cruel and harsh governor who despised the Jews and enjoyed antagonizing them. He was also an expedient ruler who would gladly make compromises to keep the peace and stay in the good graces of Rome" (Daniel Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Mark*, 345).
 - d. Warren Wiersbe notes, "The Jewish council had to convince Pilate that Jesus was guilty of a capital crime and therefore worthy of death (John 18:31-32). In spite of their political corruption, many Roman officials had an appreciation for justice and tried to deal fairly with prisoners. Furthermore, Pilate had no great love for the Jews and was not about to do them any favors. He knew that the Jewish leaders were not interested in seeing justice done; what they really wanted was vengeance (Mark 15:10)" (Warren Wiersbe, *Be Diligent*, 172).
2. Pilate asked Jesus, "Are you the king of the Jews?" (2a)
 - a. The Sanhedrin had charged Jesus with blasphemy (v. 61) for claiming to be the Messiah.
 - 1) The Romans didn't care if Jesus was the Messiah or had blasphemed the name of the Jewish God. They cared if He would lead an insurrection to try to overthrow the Roman government.
 - 2) The Sanhedrin had cleverly made the charge one of sedition against Rome rather than blasphemy against God.
 - 3) As Wiersbe notes, "The council had only one capital crime that they might be able to present to Pilate: Jesus claimed to be a king and He stirred up the people. They tried to pass Him off as a dangerous revolutionary who was undermining the authority of Rome" (Wiersbe, 172).
 - b. Jesus gave a simple reply to Pilate's charge: "You have said so" (2b).
 - c. Akin notes, "Jesus responds in a cryptic fashion to his question: 'You have said so.' This is neither a direct affirmation nor a denial. I think Jesus' intension is something like, 'Yes, I am a king, but not the kind of king you are thinking of.' As Jesus said, 'My kingdom is not of this world' (John 18:36)" (Akin, 345).
 - d. William Lane adds, "If a concise, unreserved affirmation was implied in his response, Pilate would have declared the examination ended and pass sentence. The restrictive wording of Jesus' admission, however, made necessary an examination of the accusers for the purpose of obtaining further information" (William Lane, *Mark*, 551).

3. There were many other charges brought against Jesus by the Jewish leaders, but Jesus remained silent as He had earlier in His trial before the Sanhedrin (cf., Mk 14:61).
 - a. The other charges brought are found in Lk 23:2 “And they began to accuse him, saying, ‘We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Messiah, a king.’”
 - b. All of these additional charges ultimately relate to sedition and rebellion against the Romans.
 - c. As the high priest had prompted Him before the Sanhedrin (cf., Mk 14:60), so Pilate prompted Jesus, “Aren’t you going to answer?” (4)
 - 1) “But Jesus still made no reply, and Pilate was amazed (Gk., *thaumazein*)” (5)
 - 2) Lane notes, “Mark’s readers sense in Jesus’ passivity and silence that the sovereign Lord of history is accomplishing his mysterious purposes to which even the Son of Man must be submissive” (Lane, 352).

B. A Choice – Jesus or Barabbas? (6-15)

1. Pilate unsuccessfully tries to pass the buck to Herod.
 - a. **Read Lk 23:6-12.**
 - b. Wiersbe concludes, “Pilate thought he could avoid making a decision by sending Jesus to Herod, the ruler of Galilee (Luke 23:6-12), but Herod only sent Jesus back after mocking Him” (Wiersbe, 172)
2. “Now it was the custom at the festival to release a prisoner whom the people requested” (6)
 - a. Apparently there was a tradition put in place by the Roman governor to pardon a criminal at Passover to appease the people and keep them pacified.
 - b. There were two candidates for release: Jesus and Barabbas.
 - c. We know Jesus, but who was Barabbas?
 - 1) His name means “son of the father.”
 - 2) He was “. . . in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising” (7)
 - a) He was a true revolutionary who sought the violent overthrow of Roman rule.
 - b) He did in action what Jesus was accused of doing in word.
 - 3) Akin writes, “The true Son of the Father, sinless and innocent, will be beaten and crucified. The other ‘son of the Father,’ Barabbas, sinful and guilty, will be set free because Jesus became his substitute! The sovereign providence and plan of God could not be more clearly on display” (Akin, 345).
 - d. “The crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did” (8)
 - e. Wiersbe suggests that Pilate may have thought “. . . surely sanity would prevail and they would ask to have Jesus released” (Wiersbe, 172). But Pilate was wrong!
3. Pilate asked the crowd, “Do you want me to release (Gk., *apuluso*) to you the king of the Jews?” (9)
 - a. It was a loaded question that was framed to goad the Jewish leaders since Pilate knew “. . . it was out of self-interest (Gk., *phthonon*) that the chief priests had handed (Gk., *paradedokeisan*) Jesus over to him.” (10)
 - b. Wiersbe states, “Pilate repeatedly stated that he found no fault in Jesus (John 18:38; Luke 23:14; John 19:4; Luke 23:22; Matt. 27:24). His problem was that he lacked the courage to stand for what he believed. He wanted to avoid a riot (Matt. 27:24), so he was ‘willing to content the people’ (Mark 15:15). Pilate did not ask, ‘Is it right?’ Instead, he asked, ‘Is it safe? Is it popular?’” (Wiersbe, 172).
 - c. “But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead.” (11)
 - d. Barabbas was released, but what will be the fate of Jesus?
4. Pilate asked the crowd about the punishment of Jesus: “What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?” (12)
 - a. The crowd, which had been stirred up by the self-interest and jealousy of the Jewish leaders, shouted “Crucify him!” (13)
 - 1) This is the first time that the means of Jesus’ death was declared. Jesus had predicted His death (cf., Mk 8:31, 9:31: 10:33-34) but had not given the means by which he would be killed.
 - 2) The normal means of execution for the Jews was stoning but for the Romans it was the shocking spectacle and warning of crucifixion.

- b. Pilate was perhaps shocked by their outcry and asked “Why? What crime has he committed?” (14a)
- 1) I don’t believe Pilate thought Jesus was worthy of a death sentence and probably wanted to frustrate the plans of the Jewish leaders.
 - 2) However, to keep the peace he acquiesced to the demands of the crowd which “. . . shouted all the louder, ‘Crucify him!’” (14b)
- c. “Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them.” (15a)
- d. First, “[Pilate] had Jesus flogged (Gk., *phragellosas*) . . .” (15b1) which fulfills prophecy in Isa 53:3-8 and Mk 10:34.
- 1) William Lane writes, “A Roman scourging was a terrifying punishment. The delinquent was stripped, bound to a post or pillar, or sometimes simply thrown to ground, and was beaten by a number of guards until his flesh hung in bleeding shreds. The instrument indicated by the Marcan text, the dreaded flagellum, was a scourge consisting of leather thongs plaited with several pieces of bone or lead so as to form a chain. No maximum number of strokes was prescribed by Roman law, and men condemned to flagellation frequently collapsed and died from flogging . . . although scourging was a customary preliminary to execution after a capital sentence . . . It was also inflicted as an independent punishment” (Lane, 557).
 - 2) Wiersbe suggests, “[Pilate] had Jesus scourged, hoping that the sight of the suffering prisoner would somehow arouse their pity (Mark 15:15; John 19:1ff.). But the plan did not work. The governor gave in and delivered Jesus to be crucified” (Wiersbe, 172).
- e. Finally, “[Pilate] . . . handed (Gk., *paredoken*) [Jesus] over to be crucified (Gk., *staurothe*)” (15b2).
- f. We will take up the story in the next lesson as the soldiers mock Jesus in preparation for His crucifixion.

C. Questions/Thoughts for Reflection

1. Whom do you choose? Jesus or the world?
2. Are you only a fair-weather Christian or are you a Christian even when things go wrong/bad?
3. Contemplate the loneliness, abandonment, and brutality of Jesus’ treatment mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and physically. His suffering was much more than physical though that was bad enough. He underwent it all for you and for me. What amazing grace!