

MARK

Chapter 15

Jesus Before 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. ² “Are you the king of the Jews?” asked Pilate. “Yes, it is as you say,” Jesus replied. ³ 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. ⁶ Now it was the custom at the Feast to release a prisoner whom the people requested. ⁷ A man called Barabbas was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising. 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. 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!” ¹⁵ Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

15:1-39 Chapters 14 through 15 of Mark’s Gospel contain the story of Jesus’ passion and cross. They begin with the story of his anointing at Bethany in the home of Simon the Leper. There a woman pours costly perfume (of pure nard) over his head in an act of love, yet she is condemned by some present precisely because the display is costly. In Mark’s account, this is the reason Judas approached the chief priests to betray Jesus. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 2)

From then on, the prominent feature of the story is his rejection. First his disciples flee in fear at his arrest, one terrified enough to run away naked, leaving his garment in the hand of the one who tried to hold on to him. And later Peter denies that he even knows Jesus—finally with oaths calling down curses from God on himself if he’s lying. The Sanhedrin reject Jesus, calling him a blasphemer. Pilate rejects him, apparently thinking him a fool. And finally God himself forsakes him, refusing to help or intervene on his behalf. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 2)

15:1-20 Standing Silent before Pilate

For the second time, Jesus responds to accusation with silence (15:4–5; cf 14:61). He certainly fulfilled the words of the prophet: “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” (Is 53:7). Yet by silence he expressed a willingness to do all that was necessary for our salvation. Jesus’ silence was not obstinacy, or even resignation, but willingness. Those who respond when accused often make claims of innocence and assert their rights. Jesus does no such

thing, because he will take our sin upon himself. His only words affirm that he is the Son of God, the King of the Jews. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 2)

15:1 *Very early in the morning.* The working day of a Roman official began at daylight. (CSB)

morning. Friday of Passion Week. (CSB)

Sanhedrin. See note on 14:55. (CSB)

All the members summoned. (TLSB)

reached a decision. Apparently to accuse Jesus before the civil authority for treason rather than blasphemy (see Lk 23:1–14 and note on Lk 23:2). (CSB)

Luther: “The Jews and Pilate, however, were our God’s chisels, picks, and stone mallets, which He used to polish this Stone [Jesus] so that He might lay the foundation of His new temple” (AE 20:219). (TLSB_

There is some disagreement about whether *sumbouvlion poihsante* means that the Sanhedrin “called a council” or “reached a decision.” Based on the use of *sumbouvlion* in similar contexts (e.g., Mt 12:14; 22:15; Mk 3:6), the phrase here most likely means “reached a decision.” The decision of the Sanhedrin is to take Jesus to Pilate and force Pilate to have him killed. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 2)

Pilate. The Roman governor of Judea from A.D. 26 to 36, whose official residence was in Caesarea, on the Mediterranean coast. (In 1961 archaeologists working at Caesarea unearthed a stone contemporary with Pilate and inscribed with his name.) When he came to Jerusalem, he stayed in the magnificent palace built by Herod the Great, located west and a little south of the temple area. Mark uses the word “Praetorium” to indicate this palace in v. 16, and it was here that the Roman trial of Jesus took place. (CSB)

15:2 *asked Pilate.* Judgment in a Roman court was the sole responsibility of the imperial magistrate. (CSB)

King of the Jews? I.e., a political rival to Rome. (TLSB)

Pilate, however, seems unwilling to play along. Instead, he presents Jesus with the opportunity to deny the charges, which, it appears, will be enough for his release. But from Pilate’s perspective, Jesus doesn’t have the good sense to know when someone is doing him a favor. Everyone should know, Pilate seems to think, that this one cannot be king of the Jews. And yet Jesus answers Pilate’s direct question with a positive though not unambiguous answer. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 2)

You have said so. Enigmatic answer. Jesus at times misdirects His opponents during arguments. Jesus is not the kind of king Pilate would understand. Luther: “Not one of the saints thinks or says that he is righteous but rather always prays and waits to be justified, and for this reason he is regarded by God as righteous, because He has regard for the humble. Thus Christ is King of the Jews, that is, of those who confess that they are always sinners and yet seek to be justified and hate their sins” (AE 25:246). (TLSB)

“Are you the king of the Jews?” Pilate asks. *su; levgei*”, “You are saying [it],” Jesus answers. The commentators disagree somewhat regarding how direct or how ambiguous is Jesus’ reply. This is reflected in the translations. For instance, the NIV translates, “Yes, it is as you say.” But the NRSV translates, “You say so.” It seems that Jesus is indicating that the statement is true, yet inadequate as Pilate understands it. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 2)

15:3-5 At this point, the chief priest jumps in with further accusations, presumably to support the charge of sedition that they have concocted to force Pilate to have Jesus executed. Their response is intended to confirm Pilate’s misunderstanding of what it means that Jesus claims to be the king of the Jews. Pilate is *qaumavzein*, “amazed,” when Jesus refuses to answer the charges. After all, any reasonable person would try to defend himself. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 2)

15:3 *many things.* See note on Lk 23:2. Multiple charges were common in criminal cases. (CSB)

15:4 *Aren’t you going to answer?* If Jesus made no defense, according to Roman law Pilate would have to pronounce against him. (CSB)

15:5 *no further answer.* Silence presumed guilt under Roman law. (TLSB)

15:1–5 The Jewish leaders bring Jesus to Pilate, hoping to get a death penalty conviction from him. The world does not understand the kingdom of God, where God rules by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, nor does the world understand its King. Jesus endures His trial silently, without making a legal defense. He willingly goes to the cross for us. • “O mighty King, no time can dim Thy glory! How shall I spread abroad Thy wondrous story? How shall I find some worthy gifts to proffer? What dare I offer?” Amen. (*LSB* 439:8) (TLSB)

15:6 *custom.* See note on Jn 18:39. (CSB)

Local custom designed to reduce tensions among crowds at the feast and thus to keep a lid on anti-Roman sentiment. (TLSB)

15:7 *Barabbas.* Probably a member of the Zealots, a revolutionary Jewish group. (CSB)

Aram “son of the father.” (TLSB)

in the uprising. Nothing from other sources is known about this insurrection, though Mark speaks of it as if it was well known. Under the Roman prefects such revolts were common (see Lk 13:1). (CSB)

Recent uprising against the ruling authorities. Only Mk records this event. (TLSB)

15:9 Pilate offers a sarcastic reply. (TLSB)

15:10 The priests were jealous of Jesus' popularity. (TLSB)

15:11 Jesus' enemies called for the release of Barabbas, and the crowd fell in line with them. (TLSB)

15:13 *Crucify*. See note on v. 24. (CSB)

Punishment so horrific that it was illegal to inflict it on Roman citizens. (TLSB)

15:15 *flogged*. The Romans used a whip made of several strips of leather into which were embedded (near the ends) pieces of bone and lead. The Jews limited the number of stripes to a maximum of 40 (in practice to 39 in case of a miscount), but no such limitation was recognized by the Romans, and victims of Roman floggings often did not survive. (CSB)

Common prelude to crucifixion, adding to its physical agony. (TLSB)

15:6–15 Despite knowing that Jesus is innocent, Pilate condemns Him to death by crucifixion under pressure from the Jewish leadership and the crowds. Even though Pilate wants to release Jesus, he sentences Him to death to keep himself out of trouble. Often, Christians face similar temptations to act contrary to God's Word and will for their own safety. We can pray that the Lord would grant us courage to trust His will and share His will. He has promised to give us His Holy Spirit to strengthen us for every challenge. • "I'll think upon Thy mercy without ceasing, That earth's vain joys to me no more be pleasing; To do Thy will shall be my sole endeavor Henceforth forever." Amen. (*LSB* 439:12) (TLSB)

The Soldiers Mock Jesus

¹⁶ The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium) and called together the whole company of soldiers. ¹⁷ They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. ¹⁸ And they began to call out to him, "Hail, king of the Jews!" ¹⁹ Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him. Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him. ²⁰ And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

15:16 *Praetorium*. The word was used originally of a general's tent, or of the headquarters in a military camp (see note on v. 1). (CSB)

the whole company. The soldiers quartered in the Praetorium were recruited from non-Jewish inhabitants of Palestine and assigned to the military governor.

15:17 Luther: “Now sin, as we well know, is removed by nothing but the suffering of Christ. For that is the power and the fruit of His suffering, the forgiveness of sins, as Is. 53 and Peter and Paul teach in many places” (AE 20:219). (TLSB)

purple robe. Probably an old military cloak, whose color suggested royalty (see Mt 27:28). (CSB)

Used in mockery of a royal robe. (TLSB)

crown of thorns. Made of a prickly plant (the Greek word means simply “briers”), of which there are many in Palestine. Both robe and crown were parts of the mock royal attire placed on Jesus. (CSB)

A sadistic imitation of a crown. (TLSB)

15:16–20 Roman soldiers mock Jesus as the King of the Jews, inflicting terrible physical and emotional pain. Paying for the sin of the world was costly. Jesus’ tremendous love for us kept Him on course to the cross. • “Whence come these sorrows, whence this mortal anguish? It is my sins for which Thou, Lord, must languish; Yea, all the wrath, the woe, Thou dost inherit, This I do merit.” Amen. (LSB 439:3) (TLSB)

15:18 *Hail, king of the Jews!* A mocking salutation that corresponded to “Hail, Caesar!” (CSB)

15:19 *spit on him.* Probably a parody on the kiss of homage that was customary in the Near East when in the presence of royalty. (CSB)

The Crucifixion

²¹ **A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross.** ²² **They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means The Place of the Skull).** ²³ **Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it.** ²⁴ **And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get.** ²⁵ **It was the third hour when they crucified him.** ²⁶ **The written notice of the charge against him read: THE KING OF THE JEWS.** ²⁷ **They crucified two robbers with him, one on his right and one on his left.** ²⁹ **Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, “So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, ³⁰ come down from the cross and save yourself!”** ³¹ **In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. “He saved others,” they said, “but he can’t save himself! ³² Let this Christ, this King of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe.” Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him.**

15:21 *Cyrene.* An important city of Libya in North Africa that had a large Jewish population. (CSB)

Simon. Probably a Jew who was in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover (cf. “Jews of Cyrene” in Ac 6:9). (CSB)

A man from the northeast coast of Africa who had come to Jerusalem for the festival. As an eyewitness to these events, he could share his experience with the Gospel writers. (TLSB)

Alexander and Rufus. Only mentioned by Mark, but referred to in such a way as to suggest that they were known by those to whom he wrote. Rufus may be the same person spoken of in Ro 16:13. (CSB)

Known to the original readers (cf Rm 16:13). (TLSB)

carry the cross. Men condemned to death were usually forced to carry a beam of the cross, often weighing 30 or 40 pounds, to the place of crucifixion. Jesus started out by carrying his (see Jn 19:17), but he had been so weakened by flogging that Simon was pressed into service. (CSB)

Just the crossbeam, which could weigh as much as 100 lb. (TLSB)

15:22 *The Place of the Skull*. It may have been a small hill (though the Gospels say nothing of a hill) that looked like a skull, or it may have been so named because of the many executions that took place there. (CSB)

15:23 *wine mixed with myrrh*. The Talmud gives evidence that incense was mixed with wine to deaden pain (see Pr 31:6). Myrrh is a spice derived from plants native to the Arabian deserts and parts of Africa (see note on Ge 37:25). (CSB)

Narcotic offered to make the condemned prisoner easier to control. (TLSB)

He did not take it. Jesus was nailed to the cross without any drugs, fully experiencing the Law’s punishment for the sins of the world. (TLSB)

15:24 *crucified*. A Roman means of execution in which the victim was nailed to a cross. Heavy, wrought-iron nails were driven through the wrists and the heel bones. If the life of the victim lingered too long, death was hastened by breaking his legs (see Jn 19:33). Archaeologists have discovered the bones of a crucified man, near Jerusalem, dating between A.D. 7 and 66, which shed light on the position of the victim when nailed to the cross. Only slaves, the basest of criminals, and offenders who were not Roman citizens were executed in this manner. First-century authors vividly describe the agony and disgrace of being crucified. (CSB)

Dividing up his clothes. It was the accepted right of the executioner’s squad to claim the minor possessions of the victim. Jesus’ clothing probably consisted of an under and an outer garment, a belt, sandals and possibly a head covering.

lots. Dice made from bone. (TLSB)

15:26 *charge against him*. It was customary to write the charge on a wooden board that was carried before the victim as he walked to the place of execution, and then the board was affixed to the cross above his head. *THE KING OF THE JEWS*. The wording of the charge differs slightly in the Gospels, but all agree that Jesus was crucified for claiming to be the king of the Jews. (CSB)

The criminal charge against the condemned (cf Jn 19:19–22) was written on a board hung around his neck; then it was placed on the cross at the execution site. (TLSB)

15:27 Luther: “And all the prophets saw this, that Christ was to become the greatest thief, murderer, adulterer, robber, desecrator, blasphemer, etc., there has ever been anywhere in the world... In short, He has and bears all the sins of all men in His body—not in the sense that He has committed them but in the sense that He took these sins, committed by us, upon His own body, in order to make satisfaction for them with His own blood” (AE 26:277). (TLSB)

two robbers. According to Roman law, robbery was not a capital offense. Mark’s term must signify men guilty of insurrection, crucified for high treason. (CSB)

Likely, rebels who sought the violent overthrow of the Romans in Judea. (TLSB)

15:28 The earlier and more reliable Greek manuscripts do not have this verse (see NIV text note on v. 27). It was probably added from Lk 22:37 (quoting Isa 53:12). Mark does not include many OT quotations. (CSB)

15:29 See note on 14:58. (CSB)

derided. Lit, “blasphemed,” insulted and mocked. (TLSB)

15:32 *Christ*. See NIV text note on Mt 1:17. (CSB)

Those crucified with him. One of the criminals later repented and asked to be included in Jesus’ kingdom (Lk 23:39–43). (CSB)

15:21–32 Jesus is crucified, bearing the punishment for the sins of the world. This is what it costs to atone for sins. At any time, Jesus can halt the proceedings, save Himself, and condemn His enemies. His love for us and His obedience to the Father lead Him to make this sacrifice instead. • “The sinless Son of God must die in sadness; The sinful child of man may live in gladness; Man forfeited his life and is acquitted; God is committed.” Amen. (*LSB* 439:5) (TLSB)

The Death of Jesus

³³ At the sixth hour darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour. ³⁴ And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?”—which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” ³⁵ When some of those standing near heard this, they said, “Listen, he’s calling

Elijah.”³⁶ One man ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a stick, and offered it to Jesus to drink. “Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to take him down,” he said.³⁷ With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.³⁸ The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.³⁹ And when he centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, “Surely this man was the Son of God!”⁴⁰ Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome.⁴¹ In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there.

15:33 *sixth hour.* 12:00 noon. (CSB)

ninth hour. 3:00 P.M. (CSB)

15:34 *loud voice.* A crucified man died of asphyxiation and was quiet at the end; therefore, Jesus’ cry required superhuman effort. *Eloi.* Aram. Sounded identical to “Elijah.” Ambr: “Christ, in naming God as His God, does so as man... He suffers as a man” and “as man, therefore, He is distressed, as man He weeps, as man He is crucified” (NPNF 2 10:216, 230). (TLSB)

The words were spoken in Aramaic (but with some Hebrew characteristics), one of the languages commonly spoken in Palestine in Jesus’ day. They reveal how deeply Jesus felt his abandonment by God as he bore the sins of mankind (but see introduction to Ps 22 and note on Ps 22:1). (CSB)

15:35 *Elijah.* The bystanders mistook the first words of Jesus’ cry (“*Eloi, Eloi*”) to be a cry for Elijah. It was commonly believed that Elijah would come in times of critical need to protect the innocent and rescue the righteous (v. 36). (CSB)

15:36 *wine vinegar.* A sour wine used by laborers and soldiers. (CSB)

Cheap drink used by Roman troops. (TLSB)

15:37 *With a loud cry.* The strength of the cry indicates that Jesus did not die the ordinary death of those crucified, who normally suffered long periods of complete agony, exhaustion and then unconsciousness before dying. (CSB)

Crucifixion made this extremely difficult. (TLSB)

breathed His last. Christ gave up His life of His own accord. (TLSB)

15:38 *curtain of the temple.* The curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place (Ex 26:31–33). The tearing of the curtain indicated that Christ had entered heaven itself for us so that we too may now enter God’s very presence (Heb 9:8–10, 12; 10:19–20). (CSB)

Tearing of the curtain, which separated the Most Holy Place of the temple from the Holy Place, symbolized the opened fellowship between God and people through Christ (cf Heb 10:19–22). (TLSB)

15:39 Climax of Mk. Luther: “For we are sinners and thieves, and therefore we are worthy of death and eternal damnation. But Christ took all our sins upon Himself, and for them He died on the cross” (AE 26:277). (TLSB)

centurion. A commander of 100 men in the Roman army. (CSB)

saw how he died. See note on v. 37. *the Son of God.* See notes on Mt 27:54; Lk 23:47. (CSB)

Truly this man was the Son of God! Major theme of Mk (cf 1:1; 8:29). The centurion may not have understood his confession, but Mk’s readers recognized that Jesus is true God and true man.

15:40 *Mary Magdalene.* From 16:9 and Lk 8:2 we learn that Jesus had driven seven demons from her. (CSB)

Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses. See v. 47; 16:1. (CSB)

Salome. Probably the wife of Zebedee and the mother of James and John (see Mt 27:56). (CSB)

15:33–41 Jesus pays for the sins of the world on the cross, opening the way to God through faith in Him. As God and man in one person, He dies under the curse of the Law (Gal 3:13–14). The penalty for sin is death (cf Rm 6:23a). Jesus pays that penalty for us all (cf Rm 6:23b). • “What language shall I borrow To thank Thee, dearest Friend, For this Thy dying sorrow, Thy pity without end? O make me Thine forever! And should I fainting be, Lord, let me never, never, Outlive my love for Thee.” Amen. (LSB 450:5) (TLSB)

The Burial of Jesus

⁴² It was Preparation Day (that is, the day before the Sabbath). So as evening approached, ⁴³ Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus’ body. ⁴⁴ Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. ⁴⁵ When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph. ⁴⁶ So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. ⁴⁷ Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where he was laid.

15:42 *evening.* Between 4 and 5 p.m. (TLSB)

Preparation Day. Friday. Since it was now late in the afternoon, there was an urgency to get Jesus' body down from the cross before sundown, when the Sabbath began. (CSB)

15:43 *Arimathea.* See note on Mt 27:57. (CSB)

Council. The Sanhedrin (see note on 14:55). (CSB)

kingdom of God. See note on Mt 3:2. (CSB)

Joseph had found hope in the Messiah. (TLSB)

Pilate. See note on v. 1. (CSB)

asked for Jesus' body. See note on Lk 23:52. (CSB)

He requested permission to bury the body of Jesus. This was risky because Jesus had been executed for treason. That Pilate released the body (v 45) reflects his belief that Jesus was innocent. (TLSB)

15:44 *surprised.* Crucified men often lived two or three days before dying, and the early death of Jesus was therefore extraordinary. (CSB)

already died. A man ordinarily lasted at least 24 hours on the cross. To hasten death and remove the bodies before the Sabbath, legs of the criminals were broken (cf Jn 19:31). (TLSB)

15:45 *he gave the body to Joseph.* The release of the body of one condemned for high treason, and especially to one who was not an immediate relative, was quite unusual. (CSB)

15:46 *tomb cut out of rock.* Matthew tells us that the tomb belonged to Joseph and that it was new, i.e., it had not been used before (Mt 27:60). The location of the tomb was in a garden very near the site of the crucifixion (see Jn 19:41). There is archaeological evidence that the traditional site of the burial of Jesus (the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem) was a cemetery during the first century A.D. (CSB)

a linen shroud. Used to wrap the body for burial. (TLSB)

laid Him in a tomb. Luther: "Christ tells us how He destroys death and how I am rescued from death. He will be death's venom. Death and Law, to be sure, will condemn Him. Therefore He will have to die and be buried. But He will rise again from the dead. And where I shall be then, the devil will have to retreat. But how do I approach this Savior and Redeemer? By means of ... rules? No! Just cling to the Son in faith" (AE 22:355–56) (TLSB)

stone. A disc-shaped stone that rolled in a sloped channel. (CSB)

15:47 The women watched and so knew the location of the tomb (cf 16:1). (TLSB)

15:42–47 Friends bury the body of Jesus quickly. The approaching Sabbath Day was holy to the Lord, and no work could be done (Ex 20:8–11). Even in the tomb, death does not conquer Jesus—His body does not decay (cf Ac 2:31). Jesus completes His mission with this last step in His state of humiliation. He has fully paid for the sins of the entire world! • Grant me patience, dearest Jesus, to bear the reproaches of those who do not know and confess the blessings of Your death and resurrection. Give me boldness to confess You before the world. Amen. (TLSB)