**They Chose Barabbas Over Jesus**

**By Pastor Fee Soliven**

**Mark 15:1-16**

**Wednesday Evening**

**October 23, 2019**

**1 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.**

Saints, the entire high council of Jewish leaders had already reached their verdict (14:64), but they had to make the decision at a meeting during the daytime in accordance with their law.

It was very early in the morning, they made it official that Jesus was worthy of death. So, Jesus was bound like a common criminal and sent off to Pilate, the Roman governor. The council had to get permission from Pilate in order to carry out the death penalty.

Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor for the regions of Samaria and Judea from A.D. 26–36. Jerusalem was located in Judea. Pilate’s normal residence was in Caesarea on the Mediterranean Sea, but he was in Jerusalem because of the Passover festival.

With the large crowds that flocked to the city for that celebration, Pilate and his soldiers came to help keep the peace. He stayed in his headquarters, called the Praetorium. Pilate was a harsh governor who felt nothing but contempt for the Jews; they, in turn, felt the same about him.

Pilate was not popular, but the religious leaders had no other way to get rid of Jesus. So they interrupted his breakfast on this early Friday morning, bringing a man whom they accused of treason against Rome! Ironically, when Jesus, a Jew, came before Pilate for trial, Pilate found him innocent.

**2 Then Pilate asked Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" And He answered and said to him, "It is as you say."**

Saints, Pilate asked Jesus directly if he claimed to be King of the Jews. Jesus’ answer was yes, but with a qualification attached.

**John 18:36**

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."

Saints, Jesus did claim to be a king—to remain silent would be denying it.

**Mark 14:62**

And Jesus said, "I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven."

But he wasn’t claiming kingship in any way that would threaten Pilate, Caesar, or the Empire. Jesus’ kingship was spiritual. Pilate could sense that the council’s case was embarrassingly weak and that the solemn rabbi standing before him was unlikely to lead a revolt against Rome.

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

Saints, Luke records the essence of these charges in Luke 23:1-2.

**Luke 23:1-3**

1 Then the whole multitude of them arose and led Him to Pilate. 2 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." 3 Then Pilate asked Him, saying, "Are You the King of the Jews?" He answered him and said, "It is as you say."

Saints, the Jewish leaders had to fabricate new accusations against Jesus, so they accused Jesus of many crimes. These accusations were false, but the religious leaders were determined to have Jesus killed.

Pilate knew the charges were preposterous, and he obviously expected Jesus to say something in self-defense against the false charges. But Jesus said nothing. Jesus’ silence had been prophesied in Scripture (Isaiah 53:7).

**Isaiah 53:7**

“He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth.

Jesus had no reason to try to prolong the trial or save himself.

Nothing would stop Jesus from completing the work he had come to earth to do. Luke recorded a middle phase in all of this action. When Pilate found that Jesus was from Galilee, he sent him off to Herod Antipas, who was also in town for the Passover. But Herod only mocked Jesus and returned him to Pilate (Luke 23:6-12).

**Luke 23:6-12**

6 When Pilate heard of Galilee, he asked if the Man were a Galilean. 7 And as soon as he knew that He belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time.

8 Now when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceedingly glad; for he had desired for a long time to see Him, because he had heard many things about Him, and he hoped to see some miracle done by Him. 9 Then he questioned Him with many words, but He answered him nothing.

10 And the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused Him. 11 Then Herod, with his men of war, treated Him with contempt and mocked Him, arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe, and sent Him back to Pilate. 12 That very day Pilate and Herod became friends with each other, for previously they had been at enmity with each other.

**6 Now at the feast he was accustomed to releasing one prisoner to them, whomever they requested. 7 And there was one named Barabbas, who was chained with his fellow rebels; they had committed murder in the rebellion.**

**Chart of the Feasts>**

Saints, each year, during the Jews’ Passover festival, Pilate had made it a custom to release any prisoner they requested.

Barabbas had taken part in a murder during an insurrection against the Roman government. Although he was a murderer, he may have been a hero among the Jews. Barabbas had no hope of acquittal, so he must have been surprised when the guards came to get him on that Friday morning.

**8 Then the multitude, crying aloud, began to ask him to do just as he had always done for them.**

Saints, the proceedings of this hearing by Pilate were held in public, so a crowd was hearing all that transpired, and the crowd probably grew larger as news spread. Perhaps this was all part of the religious leaders’ plan—to incite the crowd to ask that Pilate release a prisoner as usual, but that it be someone other than Jesus.

**9 But Pilate answered them, saying, "Do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?" 10 For he knew that the chief priests had handed Him over because of envy.**

Saints, Pilate asked if the people wanted the King of the Jews released. This is the second time Pilate used that title for Jesus, and he would use it again, probably in mockery.

**Mark 15:2**

Then Pilate asked Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?"

**Mark 15:12**

Pilate answered and said to them again, "What then do you want me to do with Him whom you call the King of the Jews?"

**Mark 15:18**

and began to salute Him, "Hail, King of the Jews!"

**Mark 15:26**

And the inscription of His accusation was written above: THE KING OF THE JEWS.

Saints, in any event, Pilate could see that this was a frame-up. Why else would these people, who hated him and the Roman Empire he represented, ask him to convict of treason and give the death penalty to one of their fellow Jews? Pilate understood that the Jewish leaders had arrested Jesus out of envy. Remember What Jesus Called these religious leaders!

**Mathew 23:29-33**

29 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, 30 and say, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.'

31 "Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. 32 Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers' guilt. 33 Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?

**11 But the chief priests stirred up the crowd, so that he should rather release Barabbas to them. 12 Pilate answered and said to them again, "What then do you want me to do with Him whom you call the King of the Jews?"**

Saints, the power of the religious leaders took precedence with the Jewish crowd who would hardly side with the Roman governor.

**Luke 11:47-52**

47 Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and your fathers killed them. 48 In fact, you bear witness that you approve the deeds of your fathers; for they indeed killed them, and you build their tombs.

49 Therefore the wisdom of God also said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and persecute,' 50 that the blood of all the prophets which was shed from the foundation of the world may be required of this generation,

51 from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah who perished between the altar and the temple. Yes, I say to you, it shall be required of this generation.

The leading priests stirred up the mob to demand the release of Barabbas. This left Pilate wondering what to do with Jesus.

**13 So they cried out again, "Crucify Him!"**

Saints, the people made their choice, stated their preference, and confirmed their sin. This is just what the Jewish religious leaders wanted. Only slaves or those who were not Roman citizens could be executed by crucifixion.

**John 10:14-18**

14 I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. 15 As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. 16 And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd.

17 Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. 18 No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father."

If Jesus was crucified, he would die the death of a rebel and slave, not of the king he claimed to be. In addition, crucifixion would put the responsibility for killing Jesus on the Romans; thus, the crowds would not blame the religious leaders.

**14 Then Pilate said to them, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they cried out all the more, "Crucify Him!"**

Saints, the region of Judea where Pilate ruled as governor was little more than a hot and dusty outpost of the Roman Empire. Because Judea was so far from Rome, Pilate was given just a small army.

The Roman government could not afford to put large numbers of troops in all the regions under their control, so one of Pilate’s main duties was to do whatever was necessary to maintain peace. We know from historical records that Pilate had already been warned about other uprisings in his region.

Although he may have seen no guilt in Jesus and no reason to condemn him to death, Pilate wavered when the Jews in the crowd threatened to report him to Caesar (John 19:12).

**John 19:12**

From then on Pilate sought to release Him, but the Jews cried out, saying, "If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar's friend. Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar."

Such a report, accompanied by a riot, could cost him his position and hopes for advancement. Pilate became afraid. His job was in jeopardy. The last thing Pilate needed was a riot in Jerusalem at Passover time, when the city was crowded with Jews from all over the Empire. Pilate asked the people to specify some crime that would make Jesus worthy of death. But the mob kept on shouting more wildly to crucify Jesus.

**15 So Pilate, wanting to gratify the crowd, released Barabbas to them; and he delivered Jesus, after he had scourged Him, to be crucified.**

Saints, Pilate decided to let the crowds crucify Jesus. Although Pilate washed his hands of responsibility (Matthew 27:24), the guilt would remain.

**Matthew 27:24**

“When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather that a tumult was rising, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it."

Pilate had no good excuse to condemn Jesus, but he was wanted to please the crowd. So he released Barabbas, then flogged Jesus before handing him over to the Roman soldiers to crucify him.

**16 Then the soldiers led Him away into the hall called Praetorium, and they called together the whole garrison.**

Saints, the Romans had to execute Jesus, so the soldiers took him from the post where he had been flogged and led him, beaten and bleeding, back inside the Praetorium (Pilate’s headquarters).

The entire battalion was called together, probably about two hundred men who had accompanied Pilate from Caesarea.

**Let’s Pray!**

**Benediction**

**"May The LORD bless you and keep you, May The LORD make His face shine upon you, May The LORD be gracious to you, May The LORD lift up His countenance upon you, and give you His (Shalom) peace.”**