

**Jesus on Trial**  
Mark 15:1-20  
Rev. Brian Bill  
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Have you ever thought about the power of one person?

A dry goods salesman shared the gospel with a shoe salesman named Edward Kimball, who was then converted. Kimball went on to teach Sunday School and developed an intentional plan to share the gospel with every boy in his class. He was particularly burdened for a young man named Dwight, who often fell asleep while he was teaching. Here's how he explained what happened when he shared the gospel with the boy, *"I put my hand on his shoulder, and as I leaned over I placed my foot upon a shoebox. I asked him to come to Christ."* Kimball left thinking he had blown his opportunity, but D.L. Moody left the store that day a new person and eventually became the most prominent evangelist in America at that time.

Under Moody's ministry, a man named Wilbur Chapman was saved. Billy Sunday, a professional baseball player, had a day off and attended one of Wilbur Chapman's evangelistic meetings and was converted to Christ (BTW, former Major League Baseball player Darryl Strawberry is one of the speakers at the Men's Iron Sharpens Iron Conference in three weeks). Through Sunday's preaching, a man named Mordecai Ham was saved.

And it was at a Mordecai Ham crusade in 1934 that a high school student named Billy Frank embraced the gospel and was born again! Billy had told people he would never go to this crusade but when he heard some students were going to interrupt the speaker, he went to see what would happen. Here's how Mordecai Ham recalls what happened: *"Two young high school boys attended our meeting. They thought that everything I said was directed their way, so they decided to take seats in the choir, where I couldn't point my finger at them. They didn't pretend to be singers, but they wanted to be behind me."* Billy later wrote: *"I got out as soon as I could and said, 'I am through.'" But he was miserable all night and all the next day and recalled, "I couldn't get there soon enough the next night!"* And that was the night that Billy Graham was saved.

God used Billy Graham to preach the gospel in person to over 215 million people in 185 countries! The gospel was preached again on Friday when his funeral was picked up by 458 media outlets. Buried in a plywood casket made by prisoners from Louisiana, his funeral was his final crusade.

I watched the live stream of the service and loved that these words scrolled at the bottom of the screen: *“Go to [stepstopeace.org](http://stepstopeace.org) to learn more about salvation.”* I celebrate what will be on his grave marker: *“Billy Graham: Preacher of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”* And the reference John 14:6 will appear at the bottom: ***“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”*** I’m reminded of what is on his wife Ruth’s marker. After driving through a construction zone some time before she died, she saw a sign that she wanted on her gravestone: *“End of construction. Thanks for your patience.”*

A salesman who shared the gospel shows us the power of one person! I’m reminded of the saying, *“Anyone can count the seeds in an apple, but only God can count the number of apples in a seed.”*

### **The Perplexed Politician**

As we begin, let’s focus on the impact of another man. His name is Pilate. He served as the governor of the southern half of Palestine and was directly responsible to Rome. His job description listed two primary responsibilities: *collect taxes* and *keep the peace*. He struggled with the second one because there were constant revolutions and threats, much like the turmoil in the Middle East today. Incidentally, archaeology has confirmed that what the Bible says about Pilate actually happened. Here’s a picture of an inscription on a stone tablet found at Caesarea, which was where he resided.

When Pilate first came to power, he marched his armies through the city of Jerusalem. His troops carried the Roman banner, complete with an image of Caesar. The Jewish people objected to this graven image and protested for five days. Pilate agreed to meet but then surrounded them with soldiers and threatened to kill them. The Jews were so angry that they bared their necks, daring him to do so. Pilate backed down and the graven images were reluctantly removed.

Some time later, Pilate built an aqueduct and financed it by stealing from the temple treasury! The people were angry and started rioting in the streets. Pilate had his soldiers dress as civilians and as they mingled with the mob, they clubbed

many to death. Luke 13:1 describes one of the brutal atrocities committed by Pilate: ***“There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.”*** Caesar received a number of written complaints and Pilate was on the hot seat. He couldn’t afford another Jewish uprising.

Pilate doesn’t fare very well in the creeds of the church. The Apostle’s Creed affirms that Jesus Christ was *“born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead and buried.”* The Nicene Creed states that the Lord Jesus Christ *“was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate.”*

While we’re going to focus primarily on Mark’s account, since the other gospel writers fill in the details surrounding the trial, we’ll draw from them as well. In order to gain a new perspective on a familiar story, I’ve adapted an outline from Pastor George Kreger.

We learned last weekend that Jesus had two primary trials, each with three parts. The religious trial ends in Mark 14 and we pick up the Roman trial in chapter 15. As we follow the details of the trial, let’s put ourselves in Pilate’s sandals in order to feel his *dilemma*, wrestle with his *deliberations*, and learn from his *decision*.

### **Pilate’s Dilemma**

Verse 1 tells us, ***“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.”*** Pilate only met with the public from sunrise until noon so the religious leaders are first in line at the palace.

It’s incredible how so much of what happens here fulfills prophecy. For example, this ***“consultation”*** hearkens back to Psalm 71:10-11: ***“For my enemies speak concerning me; those who watch for my life consult together and say, ‘God has forsaken him; pursue and seize him, for there is none to deliver him.’”*** This also fulfills Psalm 2:2: ***“The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed.”*** They had consulted but they needed Pilate to condemn Jesus to death.

Notice that Jesus is ***“bound,”*** which was a way to give the impression that Jesus was dangerous and a threat to public order. We see this in our culture as well when defendants are dressed in orange jumpsuits and shackled. Defense lawyers

try hard to get permission for their client to wear a tailored suit in the hopes that he will look less threatening. The word “*delivered*” fulfills Mark 10:33 when Jesus declared, “*The son of man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles.*”

The Jewish leaders charge Jesus with blasphemy but they know that charge won't matter to Pilate so they accuse Him of treason. That brings us to Mark 15:2: “*And Pilate asked him, ‘Are you the King of the Jews?’ And he answered him, ‘You have said so.’*” The word “*asked*,” means, “*to accost with an enquiry.*” The word “*you*” is emphatic as Pilate asks a direct and pointed question. We could translate Jesus' response this way: “*So you say*” or, “*You are correct.*”

It's noteworthy the title “*king*” for Jesus is used six times in this chapter. This was the same title that shook Herod up 33 years earlier in Matthew 2:2 when the wise men asked, “*Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?*” The religious leaders want Pilate to see Jesus as a threat to Caesar.

Verse 3 tells us that the chief priests “*accused Him of many things.*” And in verses 4-5 we read: “*And Pilate again asked him, ‘Have you no answer to make? See how many charges they bring against you.’ But Jesus made no further answer, so that Pilate was amazed.*” This literally reads, “*Jesus answered no longer nothing.*”

These witnesses were making accusations, not giving testimony. Jesus did not reply to any of the charges because they were absurd and it was obvious to all that He was innocent. Interestingly, Pilate was “*amazed*” which means he was “*full of wonder and astonishment.*” We're reminded again of Isaiah 53:7: “*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.*”

But his dilemma became more pronounced because according to verse 10 he perceived that they had delivered Jesus “*out of envy.*” In Luke 23:4, Pilate declares to the chief priests and the crowd: “*I find no basis for a charge against this man.*” In other words, “*case dismissed.*”

## Pilate's Deliberation

When Pilate couldn't dismiss his dilemma by telling the leaders to do their own lynching, he is forced to deliberate, and in the process he tried at least five different ways to avoid having to make a decision.

**1. He passed the buck.** According to Luke 23:5, Pilate discovers that Jesus was from Galilee, the territory Herod was in charge of. This was a loophole that provided a way out for him. Luke 23:7: ***“And when he learned that he belonged to Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent him over to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time.”*** Herod was the one who had murdered John the Baptist and threatened to kill Jesus in Luke 13:31-32.

Jesus is silent before Herod, refusing to perform miracles or answer any of his questions. While Pilate saw Jesus as eccentric; Herod viewed Him as an entertainer. The religious leaders followed Jesus and according to Luke 23:10, they were ***“vehemently accusing him”*** because they saw Pilate waffling. They put the full court press on Herod just in case Pilate lets them down. When Herod didn't get what he wanted, he ***“and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked”*** Jesus and sent him back to Pilate.

**2. He looked for an easy out.** If he can't dismiss the case altogether, and he can't transfer it to Herod, then maybe he can try a political maneuver. Mark 15:6-8: ***“Now at the feast he used to release for them one prisoner for whom they asked. And among the rebels in prison, who had committed murder in the insurrection, there was a man called Barabbas. And the crowd came up and began to ask Pilate to do as he usually did for them.”*** To keep a lid on the explosive Passover celebration, Pilate agreed to release one political prisoner each year, provided that there was no trouble. He's hoping the offer of a Passover pardon will solve his problem.

Barabbas was a zealot, likely a member of the *Sicarii*, or “dagger-men.” They were all about overthrowing Roman rule and were known to kill Jews who opposed their call for war against Rome. The Bible calls Barabbas an insurrectionist and Matthew 27:16 indicates that he was ***“notorious.”*** Pilate believed that if he allowed them to choose between the most despicable prisoner and Jesus, they would pick Jesus to be set free. Mark 15:11 tells us that the leaders stirred up the crowd ***“to have him release for them Barabbas instead.”*** Pilate's hope for an easy out is dashed.

This past Easter our topic was *The Great Exchange* as we heard a first-person sermon from Barabbas. We pondered how a righteous man ended up trading places with a rotten man. In the greatest exchange in history, Jesus was crucified on Barabbas' cross and we concluded that I am Barabbas...and so are you. The main point is that Jesus exchanged His life for ours so our lives can be changed.

The theme for our five services this year (March 31 and April 1) is the *Case for Easter*. Sometimes people say that faith is blind but are you aware there is actually credible evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ? Join us as we examine the case for Easter. The evidence is in. The verdict is up to you.

**3. He ignored good advice.** In the midst of this maneuvering, Matthew 27:19 reveals that Pilate's wife sent him a message: "***Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much because of him today in a dream.***" His wife is alarmed by a nightmare she had and tries to warn her husband to be careful. Notice that she refers to Jesus as righteous. Tragically, he chooses to ignore his wife. I tried hard to find a principle in this, but I couldn't! Just kidding. Guys, we're always better when we listen to our wives.

**4. He appealed to reason.** When he was not able to fully shut the door on the mob action, Pilate asked in Mark 15:12: "***Then what shall I do with the man you call the King of the Jews?***" Notice he says, "***...The man you call the King of the Jews.***" He's rubbing it in at this point, maybe even needling them.

The answer is deafening and unified in verse 13, "***Crucify Him!***" Pilate then tried to reason with them in verse 14 by asking, "***Why? What evil has He done?***" I'm reminded of Isaiah 53:9: "***...although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.***" They weren't at all interested in rational discourse at this point because their minds were made up as they shouted all the more: "***Crucify Him!***"

**5. He tried to please the people.** When the crowds cried out to have Christ crucified, we read in Mark 15:15: "***So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.*** Mark passes over the scourging quickly, with just three words in English: "***having scourged Jesus.***"

*“The usual instrument was a leather whip in which small iron balls or sharp pieces of bone or metal were tied at intervals...The condemned person was stripped and fastened to a low post, thus bending the back so as to stretch the skin. Blood spurted at the first blow...as the soldier repeatedly struck the victim’s back with full force, the iron balls would cause deep contusions, and the leather straps and bone would cut into the skin and subcutaneous tissues. As the flogging continued, the lacerations would tear into the underlying skeletal muscles and produce quivering ribbons of bleeding flesh. It was not uncommon for the inner organs to be exposed”* (<http://jama.ama-assn.org>).

All of this fulfills Isaiah 50:6: **“I gave my back to those who strike.”** Jesus is then presented to the people. Pilate was hoping they would relent but he misjudged their venom. The smell of blood was blowing in the air and they were not to be dissuaded.

### **Pilate’s Decision**

When Pilate was faced with a *dilemma*, he *deliberated* as long as he could. Now, he has to make a *decision*. Unfortunately, his decision was more a “non-decision” than it was anything else. Look at Matthew 27:24: **“So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, ‘I am innocent of this man’s blood; see to it yourselves!’”**

No matter how hard Pilate scrubbed there was no way for him to wash away the blood on his hands or get rid of the guilt in his heart. Legend has it that years after the crucifixion, Pilate was still frantically washing his hands trying to cleanse his conscience from the blood of Christ.

Pilate hands down his sentence at a place called, **“Gabbatha”** according to John 19:13, which refers to a stone pavement in front of his judgment seat. Archaeologists believe they have uncovered this exact spot located 10 feet under current street level. Notice the striations in the rock, which was how they prevented slippage of animal hooves and chariot wheels. Beth and I stood on this stone six years ago with tears streaming down our faces. I remember thinking I could be standing right where Jesus stood when He was sentenced for my sins.

The area includes a flagstone inscribed by Roman soldiers with a pattern of etchings on which they would have played the ‘*Game of Kings*.’ This was a dice

game in which the playing piece was a prisoner, mocked as a trumped-up king—which is exactly what happened to Jesus in verses 16-20: “***And the soldiers led him away inside the palace (that is, the governor’s headquarters), and they called together the whole battalion. And they clothed him in a purple cloak [the color of royalty], and twisting together a crown of thorns [images of ancient crowns show radiating points, symbolizing glory emanating from the head of a monarch], they put it on him. And they began to salute him, ‘Hail, King of the Jews!’ And they were striking [to smite repeatedly] his head with a reed [to look like a scepter] and spitting on him and kneeling down in homage [worship] to him. And when they had mocked him [they were hazing the Holy One, lampooning Him as King], they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. And they led him out [outside the city] to crucify him.***”

### Decision Time

If you are not yet saved, like Pilate, you have a *dilemma* on your hands. Maybe you’ve been *deliberating* for a while. It’s time to *decide*. And remember, to not decide, is to decide. To not choose Christ is to opt against Him. To not receive Him as Savior now is to face Him as Judge later. Do nothing and you’ll end up in Hell. Will you try to wash your hands, or will you worship Him as your sin substitute?

If you recognize that you have a dilemma and you’ve deliberated long enough, will you decide right now to begin a relationship with the Redeemer? If you’re ready, you could pray this prayer: “*Lord Jesus, I **admit** that I am a sinner and that I cannot save myself. I repent of my sins by changing my mind about the way I’ve been living. By faith I gratefully receive your gift of salvation and I open the door to you. Thank you, Lord Jesus, for coming to earth and experiencing all that you did for me. With all my heart I believe you are the Son of God who died as my substitute on the cross for my sins and that you rose from the dead on the third day. Thank you for bearing my sins and giving me the gift of eternal life. I believe your words are true. I **accept** you into my life and receive you by faith. Be my Savior and Lord. I surrender to your leadership. Make me into the person you want me to be. Amen.*”

One day in May 1934, 15-year-old Billy Graham came home from school to do chores with one of the hired hands at his family farm in North Carolina. While they were working they heard singing from behind the barn, and the hired man asked Billy what was going on.

Billy answered, *“I guess they’re some fanatics that have talked Daddy into using the place.”*

Little did he know that he himself would be an answer to one of the prayers offered up that day behind the barn. One of the men at the prayer meeting was a salesman named Vernon Patterson. He was earnestly praying that God would raise up someone from Charlotte to preach the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

Through the power of one person praying God called Billy Graham to conversion and have him a commitment to preach the gospel around the globe. As we prepare for communion, I’d like you to get the name of one person in your mind that lives in the QCA but doesn’t yet know Jesus Christ. That could be a family member, a neighbor, a co-worker, a classmate or someone you know in the community. And then I’d like you to pray for that person’s conversion and that God would give you the courage to invite that individual to one of our Case for Easter services.

## **Communion**

Let’s focus now on the power of the only perfect man who ever lived – our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ as we remember what He went through for us. Listen to 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, 28: *“For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, ‘This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes...Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.”*

As the elements are distributed, would you do these four things?

- **Remember** what Jesus did for you
- **Reflect** and do a spiritual inventory
- **Repent** from any known sins
- **Request** salvation for one person

## **Distribution of Elements**