

# THE UNJUST TRIAL OF THE INNOCENT KING

## Mark 15:1-5

### INTRODUCTION

A pastor by the name of Peter Miller lived in Pennsylvania during the Revolutionary War. Although Miller was greatly loved by everyone in the community, there was one man who lived near the church who hated him and had earned a reputation for his abuse of the minister. His name was Michael Whitman. This man was not only a hater of the church, but it also turned out that he was a traitor to his country. He carried aid and information to the British in Philadelphia. He was taken to West Chester and tried by court-martial. He was convicted of treason and sentenced to death.

The trial was conducted in Philadelphia, and no sooner did Miller hear of it than he set out on foot to visit General George Washington. On the evening of the day before the execution, Peter Miller appeared in Valley Forge.

Many of the soldiers greeted him as he passed. "Who is that old fellow?" asked a young sergeant from Virginia.

"He is one of our best friends," was the answer. "He lives over near Lancaster, and has nursed and brought many soldiers back to life."

Meanwhile, Peter Miller had made his way to the door of General George Washington's headquarters. His name was announced.

"Peter Miller?" said Washington. "Show him in at once."

The old pastor went in, scarcely raising his eyes to meet the welcoming look of the general.

"General Washington, I have come to ask a great favor of you."

"I will be glad to grant you almost anything," said Washington; "for we surely are indebted to you for many favors. Tell me what it is."

"I hear that Michael Wittman has been found guilty of treason and is to be hanged at Turk's Head to-morrow. I have come to ask you to pardon him."

Washington stared back, and a cloud came over his face. "That is impossible," he said. "Wittman is a bad man. He has done all in his power to betray us. He has even offered to join the British and aid them in destroying us. In these times we cannot be lenient with traitors; and for that reason, I am sorry that I cannot pardon your friend."

"Friend!" cried Peter Miller. "Why, he is no friend of mine. He is my most bitter enemy. He has persecuted me for years. He has beaten me and spit in my face, knowing well that I won't strike back. Michael Wittman is no friend of mine."

Washington was puzzled. "And you wish me to pardon him?"

"I do. I ask it of you as a great personal favor."

"Tell me," said Washington, "why is it you ask for the pardon of your worst enemy?"

**"I ask it because Jesus did as much for me,"** was the old man's brief answer.

Washington turned away and went into another room. He returned with the pardon of Michael Wittman.

"My dear friend," he said, as he placed it in the old man's hands, "I thank you for this example of Christian love."

It was fifteen miles from Valley Forge to West Chester; and the road at that time was almost impassable. The evening was already gone, and Michael Wittman was to be hanged at sunrise in the morning.

With the pardon folded in his pocket he set out on foot for Turk's Head. All night long, through snow and slush and along unbeaten paths, he toiled.

He ran when he could even though he was old and feeble. Finally from the top of a little hill, he could see the straggling village of Turk's Head before him. The sun hadn't yet risen. He saw a commotion in the street. Soldiers were already there, lined up in order beneath a tree.

Summoning all his strength, Peter ran and entered the village. Michael Wittman stood next to the tree with his hands tied behind him. A rope was dangling from one of the branches.

In another minute the sun would begin to peep over the snow-clad hills. An officer had already given orders to place the rope around the traitor's neck. Peter Miller, still running, shouted with all his might. "Stop!"

When Michael Wittman saw Miller hurrying toward the place, "There is old Peter Miller. He has walked all the way from Ephrata to have his revenge gratified today by seeing me hung." But he had barely spoken the words when Miller pushed his way through to the condemned man with the pardon that saved his life.

**"I ask it because Jesus did as much for me,"**

**READ Mark 15:1-5**

**Proposition:** Not typical sermon today. More of a running commentary as we take in the gravity of this narrative of the Unjust Trial of the Innocent King.

2 Themes run throughout the test → The Innocence of Jesus. The Guilt of man.

**So That:** Jesus is an Innocent Man. He is the Innocent King.

His Innocence Magnifies:

- His Love
- His Sacrifice
- His Holiness
- Our Guilt

Recall: this is a mock trial, an unjust trial of Jesus. There are 2 trials:

1. Religious Leaders
2. Political Authorities

Who killed Jesus Christ? Jews and Gentiles → Guilt of All

**John 18:13-24** – Jesus had appeared before Annas.

Then he appeared before Caiaphus and Sanhedrin – this was still at night.

**Mark 15:1** – Jesus was condemned by the Sanhedrin (entire council) after dawn

- Before Pilate                      Mark 15:2-5
- Before Herod Antipas          Luke 23:6-12
- Before Pilate again              Mark 15:6-15

**Mark 15:1** – “**And early in the morning the chief priests with the elders and scribes, and the whole Council, immediately held a consultation; and binding Jesus, they led Him away, and delivered Him up to Pilate.**”

**Luke 22:66** – “when it was day, they led Him away to their council chamber”

- before the Sanhedrin
- after sunrise to give a façade of legality
- sunrise in Jerusalem is around 5:40am in April

Mark brings “**the chief priests**” to the front – they are the primary leaders in this action, “**the elders and scribes**” “**... and the whole Council**” – The Sanhedrin are willing followers – deliberate action by all ... followed after by the people

“**and binding Jesus**” – The binds placed on Him in the garden had been removed after Jesus was inside the court of Caiaphus.

The One who came to set men free allows Himself again to be bound. This is all part of God's perfect plan to bring Him glory and for our salvation.

“**and delivered Him up to Pilate**” – The power of enforcing capital punishment had been taken from the Sanhedrin at this time in Israel. The Sanhedrin led Him through the city from their Council chamber to the Praetorian, Pilate's House.

Prophecy – **Luke 18:31** – fulfillment of prophecy

“He took the twelve aside and said to them, “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things which are written through the prophets about the Son of Man will be accomplished.”

**Turn to: John 18:28** – “Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas into the Praetorium, and it was early; and they themselves did not enter into the Praetorium so that they would not be defiled, but might eat the Passover”

- Tremendous hypocrisy!
- The chief priests and council are concerned with becoming defiled or unclean
- Meanwhile, they are murdering an innocent man!
- Straining gnats and swallowing camels

They are **Guilty!**

Most of the Promised Land was ruled by three sons of Herod the Great.

- Herod Antipas ruled Galilee and Perea
- Philip ruled the sparsely populated northeast area
- Archelaus ruled Judea, Samaria, and Idumea.

Archelaus (**Matt 2:22**) was banished by the emperor Augustus, so Judea was governed by a procurator (governor) appointed by the emperor. The governor was the personal servant of the emperor.

➔ **Pilate** – the 5<sup>th</sup> Roman governor of Judea, A.D. 26-36.

Pilate normally stayed at Caesarea by the sea, but would stay in Jerusalem at the Praetorium during the Passover season.

**Turn to: John 18:29-33**

Pilate is already aware of who Jesus is and of the hatred the Jewish leaders have for Him. Because their concerns are purely religious, the governor has no desire to become involved and therefore tells them, “Take Him yourselves, and judge Him according to your law” (**v. 31**).

The Sanhedrin reply – “We are not permitted to put anyone to death” (**John 18:31b**)

- This is a lie.
- They want to avoid responsibility for Jesus' murder,
- They want to avoid possible repercussion from their own people, by having the Romans execute Him for a political crime.

The religious leaders want to get Pilate to confirm their sentence against Jesus. Pilate insists on hearing the case for himself.

We see in **Luke 23:2** that 3 charges were against Jesus:

1. misleading the nation
2. forbidding the payment of taxes
3. claiming to be a King

Pilate is concerned with insurrection.

The evil enemies of Jesus turn His acknowledgment that He is Messiah into a political claim – treason against Caesar.

As virtually every Jew and many Gentiles in Palestine well knew, however, Jesus was a man of peace and was in submission to Roman political authority. He willingly paid taxes and taught His followers the same. He even taught that if a soldier commanded a person to carry his gear for a mile, which by Roman law he was permitted to do, the person should carry it two miles (**Matt. 5:41**).

Jesus not only did not rebel against the emperor but had publicly declared that citizens should “render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s” (Mark 12:17).

**15:2** – “**And Pilate questioned Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" And answering He said to him, "It is as you say."**”

Only appearance of “**the King of the Jews**” in the New Testament, other than this occasion of His crucifixion, is the magi from the East in **Matthew 2:2** – “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east, and have come to worship Him.”

- friends the first time - believing gentiles
- enemies the second time - pagan hostile gentiles
  - it is used 5 times in **Mark 15 – vv. 2, 9, 12, 18, 26**

“**"It is as you say."**” – Jesus’ response leaves opening for discussion.

- It is deliberately ambiguous.
- Jesus does the same with Pilate as He did with the Sanhedrin in **Luke 22**

Point – Jesus does not do this for the purpose of further examination

- not of Him, but of them!

- this is for the further examination of the chief priests, the scribes, the elders, Pilate, Herod Antipas, and the people!

→ They are **guilty!**

**Jeremiah 17:9** - “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” – we see this in vivid color!

Jesus does explain the true nature of His kingdom. **Turn to: John 18:34-38**

**18:36** – Notice He says that “My Kingdom is not of this world.”

The Kingdom of Christ on earth does not, at this time, represent a rebellion against Pilate’s Roman authority. Jesus is not a competitor of Caesar. Since this Kingdom on earth doesn’t represent a rebellion against his Roman authority, Pilate is willing to release Jesus.

**v. 38** – “I find no guilt in Him”

- The False Witnesses testify to the **Innocence of Jesus** - **Mark 14:55-59**
- Judas testifies to the **Innocence of Jesus** – Matthew 27: 3-5
  - worldly remorse not Godly remorse
- Pilate testifies to the **Innocence of Jesus**
  - Pilate is guilty. He should release Jesus.

**15:3** – “**And the chief priests *began* to accuse Him harshly.**”

The “**chief priests**” are the leaders of the pack.

“**accuse**” – legal term, to speak against, *to accuse*; a. before a judge: Imperfect – “***began to accuse***” – accusing repeatedly

**Mark 15:4** – “**And Pilate was questioning Him again, saying, "Do You make no answer? See how many charges they bring against You!"**”

Jesus refuses to dignify these false charges by replying to them. He shows great courage in His humanity. His silence is astonishing to Pilate. He is our Silent Lamb.

**15:5** – “**But Jesus made no further answer; so that Pilate was amazed.**”

On 4 separate occasions, Jesus does not open His mouth to defend Himself:

1. before Caiaphus (**Mark 14:60,61**)
2. before Pilate (**Mark 15:4,5**)
3. before Herod Antipas (**Luke 23:9**)
4. again before Pilate (**John 19:9**).

His silence speaks louder than words. He refuses to dignify these false charges.

**Isaiah 53:7** – “He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth.”

→ The Silent Lamb → The Silent King

“**amazed**” – wonder and astonishment

- consistent theme in the ministry of Jesus → there is admiration here

Pilate is amazed but he is stuck. He is convinced of Jesus’ innocence. But his own position with Rome is at jeopardy due to previous mistakes.

Pilate is afraid that another riot by the Jews will cost him his governorship.

In this Trial, Jesus is found **Innocent**

In this Trial, Pilate is found **Guilty**

**Luke 23:5** – “But they kept on insisting, saying, "He stirs up the people, teaching all over Judea, starting from Galilee, even as far as this place."”

- This is an escape for Pilate!
- With the mention of Galilee, Pilate to transfer the case to Herod Antipas
- Galilee was under Herod’s jurisdiction
- Herod was in Jerusalem at this time for the Passover

**Before Herod Antipas** turn to **Luke 23:6-12** - from Praetorium to Herod’s fortified palace

Jesus has even less to say to Herod than to Pilate.

“Herod with his soldiers, after treating Him with contempt and mocking Him, dressed Him in a gorgeous robe and sent Him back to Pilate” (**Luke 23:11**).

Although Herod acknowledges no charge against Him, and once again Christ’s innocence is manifested. The tetrarch mocked and mistreated Christ, but he could find no fault in Him.

→ The False Witnesses testify to the **Innocence of Jesus** 14:55-59

→ Judas testifies to the **Innocence of Jesus**

→ Pilate testifies to the **Innocence of Jesus**

→ Herod testifies to the **Innocence of Jesus** (by sending back)

## CONCLUSION

Despite the viciousness of this tragic night, it is not really Jesus who is on trial, but the rest of the world.

- The Jewish religionists condemn themselves as they viciously demand His crucifixion.
- The fickle multitudes condemn themselves as they mindlessly go along with their leaders.
- Herod condemns himself as he mocks the King of kings.

- Pilate condemns himself as he willingly allowed an innocent man to be put to death, choosing the world above the Son of God.

The cross strips us of all pretense. It is God's great plowshare, ripping through the hypocrisy of our lives, laying us bare for all to see, including ourselves. This is what we see happening here. As Jesus remains silent before these priests, before Pilate, before Herod, they are forced to make clear the hatred in their own hearts against him.

11/20/11