

## 10. The Trials and Scourging of Jesus

### Jesus' Final Days on Earth

Politics has been a part of the human experience since civilization has existed. The Wikipedia definition of politics is from the Greek word, *politikos*, which means of, for, or relating to citizens: “the practice and theory of influencing other people on a civic or individual level.”

The comedian, Robin Williams, had another definition of the word. He said the word politics is derived from the word "poly," meaning "many," and the word "ticks," meaning "blood-sucking parasites." There has been political satire for as long as political parties have existed. Often, politicians promise one thing and deliver another. One comedian has defined the word politician as “One who shakes your hand before elections and your confidence thereafter.” It is hard to marry politics and truth. In the quest for truth, politics will often usurp or ignore the truth in a bid to gain or maintain power. In thinking about the trials of Jesus, we need to understand that Jesus caused a political dilemma for the ruling leaders and Pontius Pilate, those presented with the decision as to his guilt or innocence.

In our present day, we have seen politics divide the country, communities, and even our families. It was no different in Jesus' day. Christ was born into a world suffering under political oppression. It is against this backdrop of injustice, the schemes of men, and their power struggles that Jesus suffers as a man and conquers death as Savior. He is light in the midst of the darkness, exposing and challenging it.

### The Trial of Jesus Before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin

After the interview with Annas, the deposed high priest, Jesus was sent over the courtyard to the high priest Caiaphas for the trial before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling elders. This trial, according to Jewish law, was an illegal trial in so many ways. For one thing, it was conducted during the night, and Jewish law forbade a trial at such a time. Also, Jesus had no defense attorney while the high priest was trying to intimidate him. The witnesses also could not agree with one another, so finally, the exasperated Caiaphas straight out commanded Christ to reply to the charges under oath, thus binding Christ under the witness of the Living God: “**I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God**” (Matthew 26:63). Mark gives us Jesus' response:

<sup>60</sup>Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, “Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?” <sup>61</sup>But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer. Again the high priest asked him, “Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?” <sup>62</sup>“**I am,**” said Jesus. “**And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.**” <sup>63</sup>The high priest tore his clothes. “Why do we need any more witnesses?” he asked. <sup>64</sup>“You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?” They all condemned him as worthy of death. <sup>65</sup>Then some began to spit at him; they blindfolded him, struck him with their fists, and said, “Prophecy!” And the guards took him and beat him (Mark 14:60-65).

Notice again Jesus' use of the divine name for God, *I AM* (v. 62). This reply is what sealed Jesus'

fate as it concerned the Jewish ruling elders. The trial was over at this point, “**Why do we need any more witnesses**” (v. 63). Christ was convicted for telling the truth about Who He is. Jesus stood up to the High Priest and to his face claimed that He is the One written about by the prophet Daniel, i.e., the One called the Son of Man, the Messiah, Who will sit on the throne of David, and will be worshiped:

<sup>13</sup>In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a **son of man**, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. <sup>14</sup>He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, **nations and men of every language worshiped him**. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed (Daniel 7:13-14 Emphasis mine).

After Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin passed judgment on Christ, Mark wrote that they spat upon Jesus for speaking words that, to them, were words of blasphemy. Then, Christ was blindfolded so that He could not anticipate the punches of those in the Sanhedrin that morning (Mark 14:65). Luke also wrote that they struck Him with their fists and beat Him before leading Him to Pilate (Luke 22:63).

### **The Politics Influencing Pontius Pilate**

It was politics again that influenced the difficult decision Pilate had to make when confronted with the truth Himself, the Lord Jesus. At first glance, it may seem that only Jesus was on trial, but looking closer, we can see that Pontius Pilate and the complicit ruling elders of Israel were on trial for their souls. Let's look closer at the politics surrounding the Roman governor.

The Jewish civil and ceremonial law book called the *Talmud* records that, forty years before the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem, i.e., two years before the crucifixion of Christ, judgment in matters of life and death was taken away from Israel. Tiberius Caesar decreed that only the governor or procurator had the authority to execute a man.

Tiberius Caesar entrusted administration in Rome to his right-hand man, Lucius Sejanus. Because the land of Judea (Israel) was known to be a problematic land to rule, Sejanus picked Pontius Pilate as the procurator of Judea because he was known to be one who would take no nonsense from the people under his rule. Upon Pilate's arrival, though, he began making mistakes. He marched his soldiers up to Jerusalem from their seaside garrison resort of Caesarea, bearing Caesar's image on their standards. The Romans believed that Caesar was a god, which was, of course, objectionable to the Jewish people. Pilate determined that the Roman province of Judea and Jerusalem should be treated like any other province of Rome. All kinds of religious protests broke out. Josephus, the historian, wrote that when the Roman forces and Pilate returned to Caesarea, a host of Jews followed him imploring him to hear their case. Here's what Josephus wrote:

On the sixth day [of the protest] he ordered his soldiers to have their weapons [hidden], while he came and sat upon his judgment seat, which seat was so prepared in the open place of the city, that it concealed the army that lay ready to oppress them: and when the Jews petitioned him again, he gave a signal to the soldiers to encompass them round, and

threatened that their punishment be no less than immediate death, unless they would leave off disturbing him, and go their ways home. But they threw themselves upon the ground, and laid their necks bare, and said they would take their death willingly, rather than the wisdom of their laws should be transgressed; upon which Pilate was deeply affected by their firm resolution not to have their laws broken, and presently commanded the images to be carried back from Jerusalem to Caesarea.<sup>1</sup>

Not long after this incident, another riot broke out that was suppressed with brute force by Pilate which resulted in many people being killed. Within days of this incident, the Jewish leadership petitioned Tiberius Caesar for Pilate to be dismissed from his post. Pilate knew he had to be careful of Jewish sensitivities. One more riot or uprising could lose him his job. He was in a precarious situation.

### **The Demand for Pilate to Execute Jesus (John 18:28-32)**

This appearance of Jesus before Pilate was expected because the large detachment of soldiers that arrested Jesus during the night must have had Pilate's permission. It was now daylight and probably around 6 a.m. when the procession of elders, the Lord Jesus, and the high priest got to Pilate's headquarters in Jerusalem. The Jews would not enter the building due to a scribal law that the homes of Gentiles were not ceremonially clean for a Jew. Alfred Edersheim, in his book, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, brings out the fact that the Jews believed that the Gentiles aborted their babies and put the remains down the drains. Being in contact with a dead body required seven days of ritual cleansing.<sup>2</sup> Passover law also stipulated that, days before the Passover, the home had to be meticulously swept clean and all leaven (yeast) removed before the start of the seven days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the first day of which was Passover (Exodus 12:15). After being in a Gentile residence, ritual cleansing would take anywhere between one day and seven days, depending on what was touched in the building.

<sup>28</sup>Then the Jewish leaders took Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor. By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness they did not enter the palace, because they wanted to be able to eat the Passover. <sup>29</sup>So Pilate came out to them and asked, "What charges are you bringing against this man?" <sup>30</sup>"If he were not a criminal," they replied, "we would not have handed him over to you." <sup>31</sup>Pilate said, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law." "But we have no right to execute anyone," they objected. <sup>32</sup>This took place to fulfill what Jesus had said about the kind of death he was going to die (John 18:28-32).

The religious leaders forgot justice and mercy and had illegally hauled their Messiah into a criminal court, beating and bruising Jesus for telling them the truth about being the Messiah, yet here they were, worried about ritual uncleanness by entering the home of a Gentile! So often, church people make a big deal about small things while leaving out the more essential matters of the spiritual life.

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<sup>1</sup> Flavius Josephus. *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*. Trans. William Whitson. Peabody, MA. Hendrickson, 1987, p. 392.

<sup>2</sup> Alfred Edersheim. *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*. Hendrickson Publishers, p. 865.

Pilate came out to the elders and the crowd in the courtyard. He asked them, “**What charges are you bringing against this man?**” (John 18:29). The chief priests and Pharisees did not like being asked this question because they had no charge against Christ for a Roman court. Their indictment was a religious one, i.e., the charge of blasphemy against God. They knew that charge would not hold up before Pilate, they thought they already had an agreement with Pilate. “**If he were not a criminal,**” they replied, “**we would not have handed him over to you**” (John 18:30). Pilate already knew of the jealousy and hatred for Jesus and distrusted them (Matthew 27:18), so his reply to them was, “**You take Him and judge Him by your own law,**” Pilate told them (John 18:31). Pilate was not expecting the high priest and elders to be after the death penalty for Jesus, so he told them to take care of the situation with Christ on their own, outside of his court. Perhaps it was at this point that Pilate’s wife came out to him with a strong warning message that came in the form of a dream. God will often use a thought, a dream, a message in church, or even a friend’s words to restrain us before we sin if we have the heart to listen and receive it:

While Pilate was sitting on the judge's seat, his wife sent him this message: Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him (Matthew 27:19).

Pilate permitted them to judge Christ themselves. Why didn't they take Pilate at his word and execute Him immediately? (John 18:31). It is possible that the high priest and elders planned to blame Christ’s death upon the Romans, that way they could declare themselves free of blame. In reply to Pilate’s judgment, they said, “**But we have no right to execute anyone,**” they objected. This reply was spoken to fulfill what Jesus had said about the kind of death he was going to die (John 18:32). Jesus had prophesied some time earlier that He would be crucified: “**The Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death<sup>19</sup> and will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified**” (Matthew 20:18-19), and John records Jesus as saying that He would die by being lifted up: “**But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself**” (John 12:32). The Jewish leadership also wanted to disprove His claim to be Messiah (Christ) by putting a curse upon Him. They wanted Christ to die by crucifixion rather than the Jewish method of execution, which was to be stoned to death. To be hanged on a piece of wood (a tree) was to be cursed by God:

<sup>22</sup>If someone guilty of a capital offense is put to death and their body is exposed on a pole, <sup>23</sup>you must not leave the body hanging on the pole overnight. Be sure to bury it that same day, because **anyone who is hung on a pole is under God’s curse**. You must not desecrate the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance (Deuteronomy 21:22-23).

Behind it all, God was at work to substitute His Son for us. Jesus would take the curse that hung over us. Paul, the Apostle, wrote to the Galatian church that there was a reason that God allowed His Son to be hung on a tree and bear a curse:

<sup>10</sup>For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: “**Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.**” <sup>11</sup>Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because “the righteous will live by faith.” <sup>12</sup>The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, it says, “The person who does these things will live by them.” <sup>13</sup>**Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by**

**becoming a curse for us**, for it is written: **“Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole.”**

<sup>14</sup>He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit (Galatians 3:10-14).

Commentator William Barclay tells us that crucifixion "originated in Persia; and its origin came from the fact that the earth was considered to be sacred to the god Ormuzd, and the criminal was lifted up from it that he might not defile the earth, which was believed by the Persians to be the god's property. From Persia, crucifixion passed to Carthage in North Africa; and it was from Carthage that Rome learned it."<sup>3</sup> The Romans crucified at least 30,000 Jews during the Roman occupation of Israel to warn people that this is what happens to people who go against Rome. The Jewish leadership wanted the worst possible death for Jesus and, at the same time, to shock the ordinary people by putting a curse on the One whom the people thought was the Messiah. God was showing us that Jesus bore the thorns of the curse upon His head. In the Garden of Eden, when Adam chose to obey the serpent's voice instead of God's, the Lord said: **“Cursed is the ground because of you...both thorns and thistles it will yield you”** (Genesis 3:17-18). In fulfillment of the curse brought to the cross, they **“twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head”** (Matthew 27:29 Emphasis mine)

### **Pilate Questions Jesus about His Kingship (John 18:33-38a)**

<sup>33</sup>Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?” <sup>34</sup>“Is that your own idea,” Jesus asked, “or did others talk to you about me?” <sup>35</sup>“Am I a Jew?” Pilate replied. “Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What is it you have done?” <sup>36</sup>Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.” <sup>37</sup>“You are a king, then!” said Pilate. Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.” <sup>38</sup>“What is truth?” retorted Pilate. With this he went out again to the Jews gathered there and said, “I find no basis for a charge against him. <sup>39</sup>But it is your custom for me to release to you one prisoner at the time of the Passover. Do you want me to release ‘the king of the Jews?’” <sup>40</sup>They shouted back, “No, not him! Give us Barabbas!” Now Barabbas had taken part in an uprising (John 18:33-40).

Pilate already did not like the way this was going. He brought Jesus aside from the religious elite and spoke to Christ privately from inside his quarters. He flat-out asked Christ, **“Are you the king of the Jews?”** He said this because that was the accusation the Jewish leaders were making to Pilate to get Christ convicted. Rome could only have one king and to them that was Caesar. Inside his heart, though, Pilate felt that Jesus was innocent, but if he was to give in to the Jewish elders, he needed some indictment.

**What do you think caused Pilate to begin to bend under the pressure of the ruling elders? What causes a man to compromise his values?**

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<sup>3</sup> William Barclay. *The Gospel of Matthew*, Vol. 2. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975, p. 365.

Pilate felt the pressure from these rulers of the Jews because he already knew that they would take the matter further and complain to Caesar, thus making him look incompetent to handle this situation. The fear of losing face or his position is a strong motivator to compromise his inner values. He said to Jesus, “**Are you the king of the Jews?**” (John 18:33). In Christ’s reply, the Lord wanted to know the context for the question. If Pilate is asking the question from a political or worldly standpoint, then no, in that respect, Jesus was not a king. Christ’s kingdom is not one of this world system of force and intimidation, but if Pilate is asking the question from a scriptural point of view—then yes, He is the King of the Jews, and He has come to bear witness to the truth of God, to conquer, and bring to nothing Satan’s rule over the earth.

Christ’s rule is of a completely different order. The response of Jesus gave no evidence for Pilate to convict Him of being one who would take up arms against Rome. Jesus said, “**The reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me**” (v. 37). The Lord was allowing Pilate to respond to the truth he heard, just as He seeks to do with all of us, i.e., to opt-out of a sin that we know will be damning to the soul if we continue to march forward into it. If a man has an honest heart and is searching for the truth, then the truth will have a certain ring to it. The truths of God are like a sword that provokes us to choose a side. When the truth is presented to us, there is a dividing line that comes, i.e., a choice: either we will respond with a hunger for more, or we will close our mind and heart to it and reject the truth of God.

**Do you remember a time when you first heard the truth of the Gospel? Were there painful circumstances that caused you to search for the truth?**

Jesus was saying that all who love the truth listen to Him. When we hear the truth about Jesus, we each fall on one side or the other. There is no middle ground, i.e., no fence on which to sit, and we either reject the Word of God or hunger for more. Jesus said, “**Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters**” (Matthew 12:30). Truth is a remarkable thing. If a man is on the side of truth, he will listen and draw near to the person of Christ, the living embodiment of truth: “**I am the Way, the Truth and the Life**” (John 14:6).

Pilate was blind to the truth and answered with an abrupt and sharp, “What is truth?” He thinks Truth is what the victors of any war make it. Ungodly men will often shape history for their own agenda’s sake, blinding people to the truth. Unfortunately, Pilate did not inquire further to seek the truth from Jesus’ lips.

### **Pilate Finds Jesus Not Guilty**

Pilate realized that there was no evidence to convict Jesus to death. He went outside again and spoke to the crowd now gathered and gave his verdict: not guilty (v. 38). The crowd, though, did not take this answer, and Luke wrote that at this point some in the crowd shouted out that Jesus had stirred up problems in Galilee and everywhere He went (Luke 23:5-6). When Pilate realized that Jesus was from Galilee, he thought he could pass judgment on Jesus to Herod Antipas, the ruler over the Galilee region visiting Jerusalem at the time.

John mentions nothing in his Gospel about this appearance before Herod Antipas, but Luke wrote that this, too, was fruitless for Pilate (Luke 23:6-12). After Jesus said nothing and did no miracle

to appease Herod's curiosity, He was mocked and humiliated and sent back to Pilate for him to judge. Inside his heart, Pilate knew that there was something different about the Lord Jesus, and he was in an inner battle wanting to release Him, especially after thinking of his wife's dream. When the Lord came back from Herod, the crowd in the courtyard was getting bigger and even more unruly. Religious fervor was a scary thing for Pilate as well as it would be for any of us. Pilate had to do something.

### The Passover Substitute Option

Suddenly, an escape clause came to him; he remembered that due to Passover starting in a few hours, there was a tradition of releasing one prisoner as an act of grace and mercy. With the crowd before him, Pilate raised his voice and suggested this act of kindness to them. He gave them a choice, feeling sure that they would choose Christ. After all, only a few days previously, the ordinary people had been laying down palm branches before Christ as He came into Jerusalem riding on a donkey. They were crying out then, "**Hosanna to the Son of David**" (Matthew 21:9). Pilate felt sure that the ruling elite would not want Barabbas, a murderer, and insurrectionist (Luke 23:19), but he underestimated the hatred and jealousy of the religious elite in power. They rejected the Son of David and chose to free Barabbas, the one who wanted to upset the order of things.

Let's now imagine what it was like for Barabbas in the dungeon underneath the courtyard. He couldn't hear individual conversations, but he could listen to the crowd shouting. When Pilate gave a choice to the crowd of people, whom they wanted to be released, Jesus or Barabbas, the corrupt elders went through the crowd whispering for the crowd to shout for Barabbas (Matthew 27:20). The crowd yelled at the top of their lungs for Barabbas. Imagine what that would have been like for Mary, the mother of Jesus, and the apostle John, for the elders to manipulate the crowd against Jesus. Down in the dungeon, perhaps Barabbas heard his name shouted followed by the words "Crucify Him."

<sup>20</sup>But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed. <sup>21</sup>Which of the two do you want me to release to you? asked the governor. **Barabbas**, they answered. <sup>22</sup>What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ? Pilate asked. They all answered, "**Crucify him!**" <sup>23</sup>"Why? What crime has he committed?" asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, "Crucify him!" (Matthew 27:20-23).

Surely the heart of Barabbas skipped a beat at the thought of his impending crucifixion. Up in the courtyard, Pilate then went back to the crowd. Imagine what it would have been like moments later for Barabbas to hear a Roman soldier coming down the hallway with the sound of keys in his hand. Barabbas must have thought to himself that his time was up. Imagine his shock to be told of his release and that someone else had taken his place. He was free to leave and go wherever he wanted. All charges against him were dropped! I like to think that, later, as he got out of the city of Jerusalem, he saw Jesus crucified in his place as his substitute.

[Can you relate to Barabbas? Can you imagine how this decision could have affected his life from that point on?](#)

Like Barabbas, we, too, have deserved a just death penalty for our sins. Like him, we also are offered a free pardon for our sinful deeds in this world. Jesus took our place and offered Himself as the substitute for all sin. This substitutionary death is charged to our spiritual account when we place our faith and trust in His death for us and as us on the cross. Imagine if Barabbas chose to stay inside his small cell and not walk outside into the light. Wouldn't that seem crazy to you? If such a thing were to happen, the grace offered to Barabbas would have done him no good at all. Like Barabbas, we have at one time or another been in a prison of our own making. Thank God, Jesus sets us free. Who are you most like today: Pilate or Barabbas? When the truth is presented, will you compromise, as Pilate did, or walk out of your cell like Barabbas and thank God for sending a Substitute?

### **The Scouring and Humiliation of Christ**

Matthew wrote that after the release of Barabbas, Pilate tried one more time to release Jesus by having Him flogged:

<sup>1</sup>Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. <sup>2</sup>The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They clothed him in a purple robe <sup>3</sup>and went up to him again and again, saying, "Hail, king of the Jews!" And they slapped him in the face. <sup>4</sup>Once more Pilate came out and said to the Jews gathered there, "Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against him." <sup>5</sup>When Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, "Here is the man!" (John 19:1-5).

Luke wrote that Pilate's motive in having Jesus flogged was to appease the Jews. Pilate said, "Therefore, I will punish him and then release him" (Luke 23:16). He hoped that the scourging of Christ's back would elicit some sympathy and mercy for this innocent Man and would satisfy the mob's bloodlust when they saw Jesus. Roman scourging was called "the halfway death" because it was supposed to stop just this side of death. It was not administered in addition to another punishment. The two "thieves" also to be crucified were not scourged. A Jewish law, the Mithah Arikhta, forbade prolonging death for condemned criminals and exempted those who were to die from the shame of also being scourged. Considering both Jewish and Roman law were disregarded in the matter of Christ's punishment, Jesus was treated worse than a common criminal.

Flogging or scourging was a terrible way to inflict pain on a man. Jesus' back would have been stretched over a whipping post so that He could not move, while two men on either side would prepare themselves by choosing the implements of scourging. Scourging by the Romans took one of three forms. There was the *fustes*, a light beating with strips of leather administered as a warning, and then there was the *flagella*, a severe beating, and *verbera*, which was much more severe and delivered with a whip with several leather thongs with pieces of metal or bone tied on the ends. Chuck Smith, author, and pastor states that with each stripe of the whip, the victim was expected to confess his crime. If the one being scourged shouted out one of his sins, the lictor (the one administering the scourging) would ease up on the punishment until, in the end, the implement used was just the leather strap. The easing up of the scourging didn't happen with Jesus, for He had no sins to confess, and so as a sheep before its shearers is silent, the Lord did not open His mouth (Isaiah 53:7).



The silence of Christ and the lack of confession of any sin would have brought the lictor's to use the severest form of scourging, the *verbera*. This kind of scourging would tear pieces of skin off of His back and leave Him with bone and entrails exposed. The prophet, King David, saw this and wrote in the book of Psalms: "**All my bones are on display; people stare and gloat over me**" (Psalms 22:17). The Gospels do not tell us how many times they whipped Jesus, but the Apostle Paul had thirty-nine lashes on five different occasions (2 Corinthians 11:24). Tradition has it that this was so with Jesus as well.

The Law of Moses limited scourging to forty lashes (Deuteronomy 25:3), so if Jesus did receive thirty-nine lashes, then the Romans were falling short of the maximum Jewish sentence. There was no set number of lashes to be administered under Roman law. Under the Roman system, the scourging would continue until the victim was just on the verge of unconsciousness and close to death. According to a forensic pathologist, the scourging typically resulted in rib fractures, severe lung bruises, and lacerations with bleeding into the chest cavity and partial or complete pneumothorax (collapse of the lung).

Six hundred years before, the prophet Isaiah wrote of the suffering of the Messiah in these terms:

**<sup>4</sup>Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. <sup>5</sup>But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. <sup>6</sup>We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. <sup>7</sup>He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth** (Isaiah 53:4-7 Emphasis mine).

In the above prophetic Scripture, the Hebrew word, *chabbuwrah*, is translated by the New International Version (NIV) as "His wounds" (v. 5). This Hebrew word means a stripe or bruise, the mark, or stripes on the skin. The King James Version of the English Bible translates the passage as "**by his stripes we are healed**" (Isaiah 53:5). Many people believe that the scourging at the hands of the Roman soldiers accomplished healing for our bodies. Others say that the wounds that heal us are indicative of His substitutionary death on the cross. Whatever your view, Jesus opened a fountain of healing by what He experienced on that day.

When the scourging was over, the Roman soldiers were still not finished with Him. The hatred for the Jews by the Roman soldiers found expression in the Praetorium, the Roman barracks, for they took turns beating Christ and humiliating Him. Mark records that the whole company (450-600 men) or cohort (Greek *speira*) took turns hitting Him on the head with a staff and spitting on Him before mocking Him by bowing before Him as they would to Caesar:

**<sup>16</sup>The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium) and called together the whole company of soldiers. <sup>17</sup>They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. <sup>18</sup>And they began to call out to him, "Hail, king of the Jews!" <sup>19</sup>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. <sup>20</sup>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 (Mark 15:16-20).

They put a staff in His right hand and Herod's scarlet robe around His back over His gaping wounds. Then, they twisted a crown of thorns and pierced His head with it. The crown of thorns takes us back to the curse on the ground in the Garden of Eden. Christ bore the symbol of that curse, i.e., the thorns, taking it to the cross with Him.

**Cursed** is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. <sup>18</sup>It will produce **thorns** and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field (Genesis 3:17b-18).

More than five hundred years earlier, in the Old Testament, Isaiah the prophet spoke of the Suffering Servant of God sent to Israel. He wrote:

I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting (Isaiah 50:6).

All of what happened to Christ was according to God's plan. On the Day of Pentecost, the Apostle Peter said to the more than 3,000 Jews before him, "This man was handed over to you by **God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge**; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross" (Acts 2:23 emphasis mine). Under the sovereign hand of God, the Father gifted His Son to us to be our substitutionary sacrifice for sin, and in the darkness of our hearts, Jews, and Gentiles, i.e., all of humanity, took turns to humiliate Him. The soldiers then brought Christ out to Pilate and the crowd.

### **Jesus Found Not Guilty by Pilate a Second Time (John 19:6-12)**

<sup>6</sup>As soon as the chief priests and their officials saw him, they shouted, "Crucify! Crucify!" But Pilate answered, "You take him and crucify him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against him" <sup>7</sup>The Jewish leaders insisted, "We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God." <sup>8</sup>When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid, <sup>9</sup>and he went back inside the palace. "Where do you come from?" he asked Jesus, but Jesus gave him no answer. <sup>10</sup>"Do you refuse to speak to me?" Pilate said. "Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?" <sup>11</sup>Jesus answered, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin." <sup>12</sup>From then on, Pilate tried to set Jesus free, but the Jewish leaders kept shouting, "If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar" (John 19:6-12).

When the soldiers finished their humiliation of Jesus, they returned Him to Pilate. I imagine that Pilate was shocked at the mess of the Man before him. In all, Pilate made five attempts to free the Lord as we may learn from Luke 23:4, 15, 20, 22; John 19:4, 12, 13. This terrible scene of the scourged Lord Jesus before the crowd was prophesied about more than five hundred years previously by Isaiah:

Just as there were many who were appalled at him—his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being and his form marred beyond human likeness (Isaiah 52:14).

Christ was so severely beaten that His form was now disfigured to the degree that He hardly looked human anymore. Pilate presented Jesus to them, "**Here is the man!**" (John 19:5b). Before them all was the most perfect, loving, and compassionate Man the earth had ever witnessed. Here was God in the flesh, showing us what God is like in a way that we could understand, yet humanity rejected Him. The Scriptures describe Jesus as rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief (Isaiah 53:3).

When Jesus was presented to the crowd after the scourging, the chief priests, leaders, and officials allowed no time for the crowd to feel sympathy. They were the ones who immediately initiated the shouting, "Crucify! Crucify!" Imagine the feelings of His mother and brothers and the disciples if they had been in the crowd (we are not told), especially as they looked upon their beloved Christ after the company of soldiers did their worst. They must have been shocked and horrified to hear the crowd cry out, "**Crucify! Crucify!**" (John 19:6a).

We should not think that, if we had been there, it would have been any different. The same human nature and sin problem rest in our hearts as much as in theirs. We each see ourselves there in that courtyard. There was only one way of deliverance from our sinful nature. There had to be a substitute who would take our guilt upon Himself and do away with it. Thank God for Jesus. He is the perfect Lamb of God.

Again, Pilate responded to the crowd a second time when he found Jesus not guilty, saying, "**You take him and crucify him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against him**" (John 19:6b). Why didn't Pilate close the proceedings at that point? If Jesus was pronounced not guilty, why listen any longer to these manipulative men? <sup>7</sup>The Jewish leaders insisted, "**We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God.**" <sup>8</sup>When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid" (John 19:7-8a).

Occasionally, I meet people who say to me that Jesus never claimed to be the Son of God. I don't know what Bible they read, but here in this passage, even the enemies of Jesus were saying that He said that He was the Son of God (John 19:7). The Jews now appealed to Pilate from the Law of Moses, which states: "**Anyone who blasphemes the name of the LORD must be put to death**" (Leviticus 24:16).

### **Power and Accountability (John 19:9-11)**

The Romans were ruled by fear of their pantheon of different gods. It was one thing to answer to Caesar, but the Roman gods were even more scary! Perhaps, Pilate noticed that there seemed no fear in Jesus, i.e., that He regally stood up to the torture of the scourging without confession. Christ's demeanor brought the possibility home to him that, maybe this Man was the Son of God. He may have also recalled his wife's comment not to have anything to do with that innocent man (Matthew 27:19). Pilate now took Jesus into his residence again to talk with Him privately. "**Where do you come from?**" he asked Jesus, but Jesus gave him no answer" (John 19:9). Even though He was a bloody mass with blood dripping on Pilate's floor, Jesus was regal in His silence and entirely

in control. It was Pilate who was the one on trial. There was no pleading by Jesus for a way out. He was fully committed to the plan of the Father.

Pilate again tried to set Jesus free (v. 12), but the Jewish leaders were insistent. They had one manipulative card still up their sleeve, and after Pilate's last intimate conversation with Jesus and the third declaration to them of his belief in Christ's innocence, the Jewish leadership turned up their ace card, shouting, "If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar" (John 19:12).

### Rejection of King Jesus (John 19:13-16)

Pilate was put in a difficult situation, for he had to decide which kingdom he would serve. To render a verdict of "not guilty" would have ruined his political career. Rome would punish him for not convicting someone who openly challenged the authority of Caesar. Pilate was comfortable in his role as governor and would rather condemn an innocent man than for Caesar to hear of his poor leadership. In exasperation, he gave in. Instead of submitting to the kingdom of God, Pilate set aside truth for power, worldly success, and short-term comfort.

<sup>24</sup>When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. "I am innocent of this man's blood," he said. "It is your responsibility!" <sup>25</sup>All the people answered, "His blood is on us and on our children!" (Matthew 27:24-25).

I wish that guilt and accountability for our sins could be taken away by washing of the hands. If only it were as easy as that! There is only one thing that takes away sin: the shed blood of Christ on the cross in full payment for sin. It was a tragic utterance by the people on that day: "His blood is on us and on our children!" (Matthew 27:25). For nearly two thousand years, i.e., from 70 A.D. until the year 1948, the Jewish people were banished from their land. It is a distinct possibility that God has disciplined them as a nation but, at the same time, used those early Jewish believers to export the Gospel to the Gentiles.

Pilate gave in to them: "'Here is your king,' Pilate said to the Jews. <sup>15</sup>But they shouted, 'Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!' 'Shall I crucify your king?' Pilate asked. 'We have no king but Caesar,' the chief priests answered. <sup>16</sup>Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified" (John 19:15-16). It is incredible to think that the Jews claimed Caesar as their king at this point. God's people saw themselves as separate and holy, not to be ruled by another king, but the leaders of Israel were saying that they were willing to be ruled by Caesar rather than by Jesus. Each of us must be careful not to make the same choice as to whom we will serve.

Their attitude was one found in many human hearts continuously over the past twenty centuries: "We don't want this man to rule over us!" That is the most basic way of deciding who is a true Christian and who is not. When Jesus talked about the Kingdom of God, He had in mind the reign and rule of the King. Jesus is that King and His demand is for His rightful place in every human heart as King and Lord. We either let Him be the boss of everything, or we make ourselves the boss of everything. It is that simple and that fundamental. Two thousand years ago, the masses rejected God's rule and reign. Today, it is the same story. Most people reject Jesus for the simple reason that they love their sin, and refuse to bow down to anyone else. They do not want Jesus

because that means saying no to ourselves and yes to Him. It is a radical change of allegiance. The road we travel forks more than once. Our initial decision to trust in Jesus Christ is the most crucial choice we will make, but it is the first of many. Each day, we must choose which kingdom we will serve. Will you submit to the truth or succumb to power?

Thank God for Jesus, the perfect Lamb of God. He is the only One Who could pay our price in full, i.e., being a perfect, sinless sacrifice, just like the Passover Lamb. Thank God that death does not have any hold over us because of His sacrifice of love.

A Prayer: Thank You, Father, for sending Your Son into the world to forgive me of the debt of my sin. Today, I ask Christ to come into my life and forgive me for all my sin. I want to be clean and free from my prison of slavery to sin. Amen!

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