

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Mark 15:1-15

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. This week we'll be reading Mark chapter 15, and today we'll read from verse 1 to verse 15.

Jesus underwent three trials in the Jewish religious court: first at the house of Annas, the second at the residence of the high priest Caiaphas, and the third at the Jewish council, where the Sanhedrin voted to condemn Jesus to death. The charge against Him was quoting His own words, claiming to be the Son of God, the Christ.

Verse 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."

"In the morning": If Jesus was arrested on Tuesday night, after the Passover meal of the Essenes, He would have been interrogated overnight at the houses of Annas and Caiaphas, collecting evidence. By the daylight hours of Wednesday, He would have been formally accused before the Jewish council. The Jewish council's procedural rules did not allow for a death sentence and trial to occur on the same day, allowing members of the council time to reflect and vote the next day. Because Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, both believers in Jesus, were members of the council, the high priest had to follow these rules, giving him ample time on Wednesday to draft the indictment to be sent to the Roman court. This verse's "morning" should be early on Thursday, when the Jewish council formally voted. Joseph and Nicodemus likely voted against it, allowing Jesus's death sentence to be decided because the Jewish council's rules did not allow for a unanimous decision to impose the death penalty.

After the Jewish council condemned Jesus to death, they couldn't execute Him since they lacked authority under Roman rule. Therefore, after consultation among all

members of the council, including the chief priests, elders, and scribes, they bound Jesus and handed Him over to Pilate. Pilate was the Roman governor at the time, serving from AD 26 to 36, with his headquarters in Caesarea. During the Passover period, governors would be stationed at Antonia Fortress in Jerusalem to guard against potential uprisings as Jews from various regions gathered in Jerusalem for the festival. Jewish historian Josephus describes Pilate as a ruthless man. When he first took office, he intended to move the governor's headquarters from Caesarea to Jerusalem. However, when his troops entered Jerusalem, they carried banners with the Emperor's image, which Jews considered idolatrous, leading Jewish representatives to negotiate with Pilate. When Pilate tried to use force to make the Jews comply, they all lay down on the ground, prepared to be killed. Their determined resistance forced Pilate to relent and abandon the idea of relocating the headquarters to Jerusalem. Since then, Pilate had been cautious in dealing with Jewish affairs.

According to Luke 23:2, the Jewish council accused Jesus of sedition, claiming He incited the people to revolt, forbid paying taxes to Caesar, and declared Himself as the king of the Jews. So, the charges against Jesus by the Jewish council were threefold: first, seducing the people; second, prohibiting Jews from paying taxes to Caesar; and third, claiming to be the king of the Jews. The Jewish council wanted to turn the religious case against Jesus, which was of no interest to the Romans, into a political case, so they accused Him of sedition and treason.

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

Because the Jewish council accused Jesus before the Roman court as a political case, insinuating His intention to overthrow Roman rule, this was a serious charge. Therefore, Pilate's first question was, "Are You the King of the Jews?" Whenever Jesus was asked about His identity, He would answer, fulfilling His mission on earth. Jesus replied, "It is as you say." Mark's Gospel is concise, while John's Gospel 18:34-38 adds more details. In fact, Jesus and Pilate engaged in a dialogue on this issue. Jesus clearly told Pilate, "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." Through this conversation, Pilate understood that this was fundamentally a religious dispute. Jesus said He was a king, but not of this world. Therefore, in Luke 23:4, "Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowd, 'I find no fault in this Man.'" Here, this is the first trial of the Roman court, where Pilate declared he found no fault.

However, because the Jews vehemently argued that Jesus had incited the people, preaching throughout Galilee, Pilate sent Jesus to Herod, who was in Jerusalem at the time since Galilee fell under Herod's jurisdiction. Thus, Luke 23:6-12 records Pilate sending Jesus to Herod, which was the second trial of Jesus by the Roman court. Similarly, Herod found no fault and mocked Jesus before sending Him back to Pilate. The third trial by the Roman court, as recorded in Mark's Gospel, followed because Jesus was found faultless in the previous two trials.

Verses 3-4: "Then the chief priests accused Him of many things, but He answered nothing. Then Pilate asked Him again, saying, 'Do You answer nothing? See how many things they testify against You!'"

Because the previous two Roman trials found no fault in Jesus, the chief priests added many charges. Consequently, Pilate asked Jesus, "Do You not answer? See all these things of which they accuse You?" If Jesus wanted to exonerate Himself, it would have been very easy. However, after three prayers in Gethsemane, Jesus was determined to let God's will be done in Him. Jesus was the Passover Lamb chosen by God, and He had to undergo scrutiny to prove His innocence and qualify as the sacrificial Lamb. After the three Roman trials, finding no fault in Jesus, Pilate found it strange. Clearly, Jesus could have easily refuted the charges brought against Him by the Jews. Therefore, Pilate repeatedly asked Jesus, "Do You not answer?"

Verse 5: "But Jesus still answered nothing, so that Pilate marveled."

Jesus's silence astonished Pilate. Luke 23:14-16 records Pilate's words to the chief priests and the people, "You have brought this Man to me, as one who misleads the people. And indeed, having examined Him in your presence, I have found no fault in this Man concerning those things of which you accuse Him; no, neither did Herod, for I sent you back to him; and indeed nothing deserving of death has been done by Him. I will therefore chastise Him and release Him." Pilate said since no fault was found in Him, Jesus should be released. However, although Pilate intended to release Him, he felt the need to make some concessions to the chief priests to maintain a peaceful relationship with the Jews. Therefore, he planned to chastise Jesus before releasing Him.

Verses 6-8: "Now at the feast he was accustomed to releasing one prisoner to them, whomever they requested. And there was one named Barabbas, who was chained with his fellow rebels; they had committed murder in the rebellion. Then the multitude, crying aloud, began to ask him to do just as he had always done for them."

Every year during the Passover, there was a custom of granting amnesty and releasing one prisoner to the Israelites. At that time, there was a man named Barabbas, where "Bar" means son, and "abbas" means father, so Barabbas was the son of a father. This man was likely a leader of the zealots, involved in a rebellion where he had committed murder and was subsequently imprisoned. The Jews approached Pilate requesting the release of a prisoner according to tradition, and the people involved in approaching Pilate probably had connections to Barabbas. However, releasing a murderer required careful consideration, as releasing someone guilty of violence could have negative implications for societal stability.

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

Pilate seized this opportunity to inquire whether they wanted him to release the King of the Jews, knowing that Jesus was being falsely accused. The chief priests, envious of Jesus due to His popularity among the people for His exorcisms and healings, had handed Him over to Pilate. Pilate, although not blind, was a typical politician. A ruler should uphold justice and show compassion to rectify societal customs, but politicians often lack the moral courage to do what is right for their own political interests. Thus, Pilate asked the people whether they wanted Jesus to be released.

Verse 11: "But the chief priests stirred up the crowd, so that he should rather release Barabbas to them."

The chief priests incited the crowd to demand the release of Barabbas instead of Jesus. Religion is meant to promote goodness, and choosing between Jesus and Barabbas should have been an obvious choice to release Jesus. However, the religious leaders chose to release the murderer Barabbas out of jealousy. This choice was made with a disregard for conscience, fulfilling God's purpose: allowing Jesus to become the sacrificial Lamb for redemption. Jesus, innocent, died, while Barabbas, guilty, was released. Barabbas serves as a symbol of each one of us, as we are all sons of a father. In John 8:44, Jesus said that everyone born of Adam is a slave to sin, a son of the devil.

Verses 12-13: "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?' So they cried out again, 'Crucify Him!'"

The chief priests instigated the crowd to demand the release of Barabbas, and Pilate asked the Jewish people what he should do with the one they called the King of the Jews. Some cried out for Him to be crucified. Jewish executions were typically by stoning, but in Roman punishment, crucifixion was reserved for those guilty of heinous crimes. When the Jews sacrificed the Passover lamb, they would first secure it to a wooden cross before killing it, then apply its blood to the doorposts.

Under God's sovereignty, Jesus died by Roman punishment, crucified in a cruel manner, fulfilling His role as the Passover Lamb.

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

Pilate indeed knew that Jesus was innocent, but politicians often lack the moral courage to do what's right. Despite his protests, he was ultimately overwhelmed by the crowd's voices, leading to the decision to crucify Jesus. Thus, religion and politics combined to execute Jesus.

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

Politicians often prioritize pleasing people over upholding justice. Pilate released the guilty Barabbas to satisfy the crowd's demands and had Jesus scourged and crucified. This action fulfilled God's purpose, as Jesus willingly obeyed the Father's will, sacrificing Himself for humanity's sins on the cross. The collusion between Jewish religious leaders and Roman political authority resulted in Jesus' crucifixion. While it seemed that evil prevailed, it unknowingly fulfilled God's plan. The crux of the matter lies in Jesus Christ Himself, who willingly gave Himself, allowing sinful humanity to be set free through His death. Without Jesus' willingness, they would not have been able to convict Him of any crime.

Today, religion often colludes with politics to persecute God's children. However, Jesus tells us not to fear or worry because the time will come when Christ Himself will descend with power and glory to establish God's kingdom. Let's pray for a vigilant heart, filled with assurance that God's will shall be done.

Let's pray together: Lord, as Psalm 2 says, "Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against His Anointed." Just as You were crucified, so shall it be upon Your return. We are nearing the end of the age, and we know that

everything will be accomplished according to Your plan. Grant us a submissive spirit to understand and obey Your will. Let us, as a church, build up the body of Christ and eagerly await Your return. We need not fight for ourselves, for You will fight for us. Your first coming was as the sacrificial Lamb for our redemption, and Your second coming will establish Your kingdom on earth. Help us to embrace the salvation brought by Your first coming and to vigilantly await Your return. Bless our daily lives, in Jesus Christ's holy name I pray.