

Truths Behind the Story

The Gospel of Mark: Mighty and Mild / Mark 15:1-15/ August 11, 2024

Introduction:

Our story today holds Mark's account of the sentencing of Jesus, which is strikingly thin on details. Mark doesn't record the dream of Pilate's wife, her telling him to have nothing to do with Jesus, or Pilate washing his hands of Jesus' blood like Matthew does. There are no details of the charges brought by the chief priests to Pilate and the examination by Herod Antipas that Luke includes. Nor does he recount the depth of discussion between Pilate and Jesus around his kingship and kingdom like John does. Leaving these details out seems odd until we consider how intentional Mark has been in what he does and doesn't include. It would appear that intentionality carries over into this story to keep our attention centered on the purpose of his gospel. Remember again how this gospel opened in Mark 1:1-3, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, 'Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way, the voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight."'" From the opening lines, Mark launches right into declaring good news that fulfilled the promise of the way of the Lord coming. This news is centered on the person of Jesus Christ, whom his readers would have heard about. They would have known Jesus was crucified and heard the claims of His resurrection. They may have even personally heard His teaching and seen some of His miracles. However, the good news for Mark involves more than retelling the story of Jesus of Nazareth. It involves revealing how the way of the Lord had come through the sacrifice of Jesus. In our passage today, Mark focuses on truths behind the crucifixion sentence of Jesus to draw out what it meant about the way of the Lord. Consider two things from this trial with me. First,

The True Amazement Found in Jesus' Silence

Verses 1-5 briefly recount Jesus' interaction with Pilate, focusing on how Pilate was amazed by something unique in Jesus' silence. Look there with me, "And 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. And Pilate asked him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' And he answered him, 'You have said so.' And the chief priests accused him of many things. 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." During their trial, the Sanhedrin proclaimed Jesus blasphemous for claiming to be the Son of God. Yet, instead of following their custom for blasphemy of death by stoning, they move in haste to bind Jesus and hand him over to Pilate, "as soon as it was morning." Note how the scene moves quickly to Pilate's question, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Though the Sanhedrin had charged Jesus with blasphemy, they needed to adapt their charge for Rome to do their dirty work. So, they focused on His claim to be the Christ. The phrasing of Pilate's question, "King of the Jews," becomes a focal point of the narrative and will be mentioned five more times through verse 32. Further, like the high priest's question, it comes in the form of a statement, "You are the King of the Jews?" A true statement is once again declared by Jesus' opponent. This time, however, Jesus neither confirms nor denies this testimony but responds, "You have said so." Jesus ensures Pilate couldn't condemn Him as an insurrectionist, without denying He was King. He won't perpetuate a misunderstanding of what His kingship means. In verses 3-5, we discover there were many other charges Jesus refused to respond to, but Mark keeps the focus on the question of His kingship as what led the chief priests to deny Him and the Romans to crucify Him. And note how this scene ends with Pilate's amazement. Pilate is amazed at Jesus' silence because He could have given Pilate a reason to release Him. However, this silence is even more amazing when we see the truth behind it. Pay attention to the term "delivered" in verse 1. Mark used this term seven times in chapter 14 to speak of the betrayal of Judas. In this scene, it will be used three times, twice to speak of the chief priests delivering Jesus to Pilate, and once of Pilate delivering Jesus to be crucified.

Previously, Jesus used the same term twice in His final passion prediction in Mark 10:33, predicting both His betrayal and the chief priests delivering Him over to the Gentiles. Its repetition connects back to that prediction, reminding us it was all declared by Jesus. But I think there is even more at play here. After Jesus is raised and ascended into heaven, Peter uses this term during his sermon at Pentecost, saying in Acts 2:23, “this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.” Mark was most likely writing through Peter’s testimony, which suggests this term’s frequent use is purposefully designed to help us understand that Jesus was both betrayed by the wickedness of men and delivered up according to God’s plan of redemption. As Isaiah 53:7 declares, the suffering servant of God, “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.” Christ was led to His death by the evil intentions of men, yet behind those intentions was the sovereign goodness of God. The way of the Lord meant He would be given for us as the sacrificial lamb of God. Family, His silence was not from defeat but from surrender. Let this amaze you, the silence of our King provides the glories we now sing. The second thing I want to consider is,

The True Exchange Foreshadowed in Barabbas’ Release

Following Pilate’s amazement, we are moved immediately to his attempts to release Jesus before delivering Him to be crucified. Look at verses 6-14, “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. And he answered them, saying, ‘Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?’ For he perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release for them Barabbas instead. And Pilate again said to them, ‘Then what shall I do with the man you call the King of the Jews?’ And they cried out again, ‘Crucify him.’ And Pilate said to them, ‘Why? What evil has he done?’ But they shouted all the more, ‘Crucify him.’” Mark draws our attention to a custom of Pilate to release a prisoner requested by the Jews during the feast. He then details “a man called Barabbas,” identified as one of the “rebels in prison, who committed murder in the insurrection.” The scene rapidly moves through Pilate encouraging the crowd to choose Jesus, their supposed king, because he perceived the motives of the chief priests, and the chief priests stirring up the crowd to ask for Barabbas’ release instead. As Pilate asks what he should do with Jesus, the crowd cries out “Crucify Him.” He asks why, when He has done not evil, but they shouted even louder “Crucify Him.” The tension of this scene is palpable with Jesus and Barabbas at the center. Consider the contrast of these men. Jesus Christ was falsely charged as an insurrectionist, while Barabbas actually was one. Jesus’ innocence is emphasized, while Barabbas’ sin is clear as day. There couldn’t be a starker contrast which only increases when we understand some additional things about this “man called Barabbas.” The name “Barabbas” is derived from two Aramaic words, “bar,” meaning “son,” and “abba,” meaning “father or teacher.” So, his name may mean “son of the father.” The irony goes deeper, as Matthew identifies his given name being Jesus. So, essentially the choice is between Jesus Barabbas, a captured insurrectionist, and Jesus Christ, the one true King. A choice between a convicted means whose name means “son of the father” and the innocent only begotten Son of the Father. Look at verse 15, “So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.” Out of a desire to satisfy the crowd, a murderous criminal is released, and our innocent savior is scourged and crucified. Mark doesn’t detail what would have been a torturous act of scourging which Josephus says involve being stripped, bound to a post, and struck with a leather whip that had pieces of bone and metal woven in (Josephus, War 2.306). This might have tugged on the hearts strings a little more. No, instead, he keeps our attention on the exchange of Jesus in Barabbas’ place. Later on the cross, we will see two convicted rebels next to Jesus, likely companions of Barabbas. As Jesus hangs in the middle of them, we should realize that is where Barabbas would have been.

Church, the innocent King of the Jews, the true Son of the Father, is scourged and crucified, while the vile and murderous sinner goes free. And Peter says Jesus was “delivered up according of the definite plan and foreknowledge of God.” This exchange foreshadows the true exchange taking place on the cross. As Sinclair Ferguson comments, “Without knowing it, the religious leaders and Pilate and Barabbas were all part of a tapestry of grace which God was weaving for sinners. Their actions spoke louder than their words, louder than the cries of the crowds for Jesus’ blood. Jesus was not dying for His own crimes, but for the crimes of others; not for His own sins, but the sins of others. He did not die for Himself, he died for us! (Sinclair Ferguson, Mark, 257) Church, part of the good news of the gospel is this great exchange. Christ receives the wrath for our sin, we receive His righteousness. Christ dies so we can live. The Father turns His face away from the Son, so He might turn His face towards us. As 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” And 1 Peter 3:18 likewise, “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.” This is foreshadowed in the exchange of Barabbas for Jesus Christ so we would understand what truly took place when we see Jesus crucified. This is the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. This is the way of the Lord. As you see Jesus experiencing the tortures of crucifixion over the next few weeks, will you see Him experiencing it all in your place? Will you see Him suffering once for sins, bearing under the weight of God’s wrath for your sin? Will you see Him delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God to provide your redemption and reconcile you to God? These moments before we see the crucifixion are designed to lead you to contemplate these truths. Now, before we close, I want to consider another question that comes from this story,

How Do You Value Christ’s Kingdom?

When we consider the charge of Jesus’ kingship and everyone’s response to it, we see a telling reality. Listen to how Luke describes the charges brought against Jesus in Luke 23:2, “And they began to accuse him, saying, ‘We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king.’” They had been waiting for over 400 years for the Messiah to come. They heard the testimony of John the Baptist preparing the way of the Lord, and Jesus’ confirmation that He was the Christ. Yet, they delivered Him over to Pilate, using that claim as the reason for His deserved crucifixion. The crowds throughout the gospel are amazed and marvel at Jesus’ unique authoritative teaching, powerful miracles, and profound wisdom. Yet, they are easily led to cry out “Crucify Him!” and beg for the release of a murderous insurrectionist. Why did the Sanhedrin and crowds deny Jesus? Because His kingdom wasn’t what they expected. Christ came to provide victory over sin and death, securing eternal rewards for those who belong to the kingdom of God. They only desired the Messiah to overthrow Roman rule and provide temporary comforts in this life. They wanted power and exclusivity to the kingdom of God, Christ came preaching service of others and welcomed all to repent and enter into the kingdom. So, they failed to see what His reign meant and crucified their King. Pilate marvels at Jesus and proclaims Him innocent, personally seeing no concern of Him as a threat to Roman rule. Yet, he releases a known violent threat and mocks the kingship of Jesus. Why did He respond like this? Because he didn’t understand Christ’s kingdom. In John 18:36-38, we discover more of Jesus’ conversation with Pilate, where John records, “Jesus answered, ‘My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.’ Then Pilate said to him, ‘So you are a king?’ Jesus answered, ‘You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.’ Pilate said to him, ‘What is truth?’” Pilate couldn’t comprehend the true scope of Jesus’ kingdom and failed to listen to His witness to the truth. So, he mocked Jesus and sentenced the King of the world to a criminal’s death. Everyone in this scene set their minds on earthly kingdoms and temporal things. Church, though we have seen the truth, we are tempted to do the same.

We can be so consumed with our own earthly kingdoms and storing up treasures on earth, that we fail to properly value the kingdom of Christ. C.S. Lewis rightly said, “It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased” (C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, 26). Family, I will never stop encouraging you to take your eyes off of the fleeting pleasures of this world and put them onto the infinite joys found in Christ Jesus and His kingdom. As Paul says in Colossians 3:1-4 “If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.” Nothing can compare with the glory that awaits us and when it comes, no sorrow, pain, or joy experienced in this life will outweigh the treasure we will receive. We should treasure the kingdom of Christ above all things. This means Christ alone gets our allegiance. It also means we seek to follow His Word, seeing it as our highest good. We love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. We consider others as more important than ourselves. We honor our father and mother. We love our spouses well. We don’t exasperate our kids. We pray for and submit to all rulers and authorities, even the ones we think are evil. We refuse to participate in slander and gossip. We strive for holiness and purity. We follow Christ in service. We give of our time and resources to build His kingdom. We seek to glorify our King in all we do.

Conclusion:

As the worship team is coming to lead us in a time of reflection and response, the questions for our hearts this morning are, do we see the truth of Christ’s sacrifice? And do you value and long to live in light of His kingdom? We have the perfect chance to dwell on the sacrifice of Christ this morning as it is communion Sunday. In communion, we remember Christ’s body and blood given for us. We reflect on Him standing in our place, shedding His blood on the cross to secure the blessings of the new covenant for all who trust in Him. If you don’t know Christ as your savior, we ask you not to participate in communion but encourage you to see Him moving toward the cross to receive the payment for the sin of all who trust in Him. Ask Him today for forgiveness and mercy and receive Him as your all-satisfying treasure and King. If you are a follower of Christ, think on the truths of His sacrifice while we sing this next song and thank God for the forgiveness of your sin. Confess all your sin to Him, knowing He is faithful and just to forgive you and cleanse you of all unrighteousness. Prepare your hearts during this song to partake of the Lord’s supper and declare His death until He comes. And set your minds on His kingdom and His glory, striving to live to honor Him. As always, you are welcome to come and kneel before Him in humility, sit and reflect, or stand and sing as you respond. We also have a team of people ready to pray with you and for you if that is needed, whom you will find worshipping on the front rows or bottom of the stairs in the back. Let’s respond to these amazing truths and have His amazing grace mold and shape our lives.

Would you pray with me?