

## Message #58

## Mark 15:1-15

The pledge of allegiance is a pledge we say to the flag of the United States of America. It was originally written by George Balch in 1887 and it was later revised by Francis Bellamy in 1892. It was formally adopted by Congress in 1942.

Now one of the things recited in the pledge is that under the flag of the United States there is supposed to be “justice for all.” It doesn’t matter what the race of the person, what the rank of a person, what the gender of a person, what the age of the person; there is supposed to be “justice for all.” What is right and just is supposed to take place for everyone with no partiality.

But frankly, it doesn’t work like that. If you have enough money or enough political clout you can skirt justice. If you have enough power you can live above the law. Things that would get the average person in legal trouble won’t get you in legal trouble if you know the right people.

This fact, and it is a fact, is not a new phenomenon to the United States. This fact was fully operative in Biblical times. If you have enough political power you can get away with murder. If you don’t believe that, just take a look at what happened to Jesus Christ.

What we need to understand is that for the most part most politicians (not all) are not really interested in the truth of the Word of God and the truth as it relates to Jesus Christ. This was true in Christ’s day and this is true in our day. Secular politicians, for the most part, have never been in love with God’s Word and the Lord. In fact, if they are given a choice between obeying the Word of God or maintaining their political status, they do not, for the most part, choose the Word of God.

For example. The Islamic religion is a false religion that makes total mockery of Jesus Christ. Mormonism is a false religion that makes total mockery of Jesus Christ. Do you think most leaders will say that?

This struggle between the political world and Jesus Christ was fully operative when Jesus Christ was here on earth. The politicians turned against Him. In fact, the politicians were instrumental in Jesus being executed on a cross.

One politician is specifically singled out and his name was Pilate. Josephus (A.D. 37-100), the Jewish historian, said it was Pilate who condemned Christ to the cross. Tacitus (A.D. 56-120), the Roman historian, said that Christ received the death penalty from Pontius Pilate. So you cannot separate the political world from the spiritual world and you also cannot help but see the political world is corrupt. **But what the politicians didn’t realize is that this death of Jesus Christ was all part of the plan of God so sinners could be saved.**

What we see here is this:

**THE KEY POLITICIAN PILATE WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN THE CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS CHRIST, BUT THIS CRUCIFIXION WAS ALL PART OF THE SOVEREIGN PLAN OF GOD TO PROVIDE SALVATION FOR SINNERS.**

In this text we move from the religious leaders of Israel to the political world of the Romans. Jesus has been condemned by every religious institution in existence, but to get Him crucified you needed the support of secular government. They could not execute someone without Roman approval, so very early in the morning they got Pilate up out of bed.

We read in **verse 1** that very early in the morning a whole bunch of religious leaders hauled Jesus to see Pilate.

The chief priests were in on this—the ruling priests of the temple.

The elders were in on this—the leaders of social and religious life.

The scribes were in on this—the scholars of the Bible.

The whole council or Sanhedrin was in on this—the religious group that oversaw everything.

**They all wanted Jesus Christ dead.**

Now Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea from A.D. 26-36. Judea was under the political control of Rome and the Caesar of Rome (Tiberius) appointed governors to run things for the government in various provinces. Pilate had been a harsh ruler. Frankly, he did not like the Jewish people and their religious customs.

Pilate lived in Caesarea on the Mediterranean coast (Acts 23:23). But he would often make political appearances in Jerusalem, especially when the main festivals occurred. Passover time was a good time for him to be there because lots of Jewish people could see him. This was good politics for him to make an appearance before the masses. But he lived in Caesarea.

In 1961 a two foot by three foot stone was found in Caesarea that read in Latin: “Pontius Pilate, Prefect of Judea, has presented the Tiberieum to the Caesareans.” This was obviously some building or monument that Pilate dedicated to Tiberius Caesar (Mark Strauss, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament-Mark*, p. 673).

When he was in Jerusalem, he stayed at Herod’s palace which was located to the N.W. of the Temple. Big time political leaders don’t stay in some “Red Roof Inn” or “Motel 6.” So the Jews led Christ to appear before Pilate early in the morning.

There are three main events that Mark brings out here involving Pilate:

**EVENT #1 – Pilate questions Jesus Christ. 15:2-5**

When Jesus got before Pilate, Pilate asked him three questions:

**Question #1 - Are you the King of the Jews? 15:2**

This is was one of the things the Jews are alleging. They are alleging that Jesus is trying to usurp the authority of Caesar by saying, “He is king.” When Pilate asks Him the question, it is a politically charged question.

Now this title “the King of the Jews” is used for the first time in Mark right there and it will become a title that will be repeated often concerning Christ from here on out (15:2, 9, 12, 18, 26).

This title was closely connected with Him being the Messiah and the King of Israel (15:32). Now the religious leaders were using these titles to mock Jesus Christ, but the fact is, He not only was the King of the Jews and King of Israel and the Messiah, but He is the King of Kings and one day He will be seen and honored as that (Rev. 19:16).

Now the answer Christ gives in **verse 2** is “It is as you say.” So Jesus is affirming that He is in fact the King of the Jews but He is doing so in a Pilate’s understanding context. Let me explain. Pilate is thinking about Jesus being some Jewish King, politically speaking. He has no idea of the ramifications to this statement. In fact, John brings out this very point concerning Pilate in John 18:34-37. Jesus says to Pilate, “yes as you say and think.” I am the King of the Jews, but frankly your understanding of My real identity is far beyond anything you can begin to grasp. I am King and My sovereignty is not even of this world.

Now according to **verse 3**, when the chief priests heard this they started making accusations against Christ. Mark doesn’t say what they were. Luke tells us they were saying He was subverting the nation and forbidding the people to pay taxes to Caesar and claiming to be Messiah and King (Luke 23:2). Mark simply says they were accusing Him “harshly.” The imperfect tense of the verb “accuse” means they were on a verbal rampage of continual and intense accusations.

They probably alleged that He broke the Mosaic Law and defiled the Temple and undermined religious and political authority. They were really assaulting Him.

**Question #2 - Why don’t you answer their accusations? 15:4a**

In Greek, Mark uses a double negative (ouk, ouden) to describe the fact that Jesus was absolutely silent. Jesus is standing there and not saying a word.

Pilate could not believe that Jesus didn’t say a word. He did not try to verbally defend Himself. Now Pilate had been in enough of these settings to know that most people who are being tried in a capital punishment case speak up and defend themselves. Not Jesus. He just stood there. He just listened to the false allegations and never tried to even defend Himself.

**Question #3** - Do you see and understand all the charges these leaders bring against you? **15:4b**

Pilate must have thought maybe He doesn't even understand what they are saying. He says do you see all of these charges they are bringing against you? Do you understand all of this? Do you realize what is happening here?

According to **verse 5**, Pilate was amazed that Jesus did not open His mouth to verbally defend Himself. Again Mark uses the double negative "ouk, ouden" which means Jesus is stone silent.

Pilate could not figure this out. He had no idea why Jesus wouldn't defend Himself, but we know. Isaiah told us why. **He would not open His mouth but would be like a lamb led to slaughter (Is. 53:7).** Why would He permit these things to happen to Him? The reason is because of our sin and our transgression.

Jesus had said multiple times that He was going into Jerusalem to die as a ransom for our sins (Mark 9:31; 10:33, 45).

**EVENT #2** – Pilate questions the crowd concerning clemency for Jesus Christ. **15:6-11**

Back during Roman times there were two ways a person could be released. A Roman leader could pronounce acquittal on someone not yet condemned and he could pardon a prisoner who was already condemned.

**Pilate knew Jesus did not deserve to die.** In fact, his conclusion was I can find nothing in Jesus that makes Him guilty of death (John 18:38).

Pilate decided to appeal to a Jewish Passover custom in which he normally would grant some prisoner a "Passover clemency." He probably figured that Jesus is real popular with these Jewish people so if I give them the choice, they will release Jesus.

According to **verse 7**, there was a man named Barabbas who was in prison for murdering a man in some insurrection uprising. Barabbas was a robber, an insurrectionist and a murderer. In the first century there were many different uprisings against Rome from those who sought to overthrow the government. Barabbas was some "Jewish freedom fighter."

Many people were poor and there were some rebels who hated Roman authority and those who were wealthy and they would steal and even kill. Some of the people viewed these insurrectionists as almost a Robin Hood, who would steal from the rich and give to the poor.

According to **verse 8**, the crowd went to Pilate and asked him to grant his Passover clemency to one of the prisoners. We aren't sure who "the crowd" is. I am convinced though that most in the crowd didn't even know that Jesus had been arrested.

It is possible that some of the people were in cahoots with the religious leaders, but probably this was more of a fan club for Barabbas and the crowd gathered to see if they could get him out.

**Verse 9** says that when Pilate saw the crowd, he asked them do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews? He probably figured they would say, “Yes.”

**Verse 10** says Pilate knew that the reason they were against Jesus is because they were jealous of Him. Pilate saw that and knew that. He knew Jesus was innocent.

He assumed that they would want him to release the King and miracle worker who had done so much for so many.

But according to **verse 11**, the chief priests stirred up the crowd and got the crowd to ask Pilate to release Barabbas. This is amazing. They somehow convinced and manipulated this crowd to do evil. They convinced them to choose Barabbas over Jesus.

The chief priests were persuasive. Religious leaders can often get a crowd to do just the opposite of what is right. They know how to stir up the people. Do not be deceived. False religions and false religious leaders can persuasively lead you and your family right into hell.

Now it was probably at about this point when Pilate’s wife came in to Pilate and said you better let Jesus go (Matt. 27:19). She had a sense this was something he had better not do. But Pilate did not listen.

### **EVENT #3 – Pilate decides to crucify Jesus Christ. 15:12-15**

The people’s choice put Pilate in a real quandary. Pilate knew Jesus was innocent. He did not see Jesus as some threat against him or Rome. He knew that these religious leaders were acting from evil and personal motives.

In fact, those Jews said if you release Jesus you are not a friend of Caesar (John 19:12). They are literally blackmailing Pilate. Pilate was in a real mess here. These evil Jews would tattle on him to Caesar and he could be in trouble here. So he caved in to their pressure.

The problem with Pilate is the problem of most politicians, they want the support of the people and they know when to back down for their own political good. When a politician is faced with what is right, versus the will of the people, most of the time “right loses.”

Pilate said if you want Barabbas, what shall I do with Jesus, your King (**15:12**)? Since when does a Roman official consult the people regarding judicial decisions?

According to **verse 13**, the crowd started yelling crucify Him, crucify Him.

According to **verse 14**, Pilate asked what evil has He done? In fact, the imperfect tense of the verb indicates that Pilate kept asking the question over and over again. But the crowd does not answer him. They just keep shouting crucify Him, crucify Him.

So in **verse 15** you come to the typical response of a politician—"wishing to satisfy the crowd." Most politicians don't care about the Word of God or will of God. All they want to do is satisfy the crowd. That is their goal.

So wishing to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas and after scourging Jesus, he handed Him over to be crucified. He probably beat Christ thinking the crowd might think that's enough, let him go, but it didn't work.

Pilate allows Jesus to be scourged with a whip that would tear into His skin, muscles and bone and he allows Him to be led away to be crucified and he knows He is innocent. He is a politician who is only interested in satisfying the crowd.

Pilate did not feel good about this; he felt dirty. He got some water and started washing his hands (Matt. 27:24); but you cannot wash away your sin with water. You cannot get rid of your guilt by some ritualistic baptism.

What happened to Pilate? There are two views to that question: 1) Caligula ordered him to be given a choice of execution or suicide, to which he chose suicide. 2) Pilate committed suicide of his own choice in A.D. 39.

Now of course the reason Jesus stood there and took this was because He was going to that cross to save sinners. All need to think very seriously about this. No religion can save you. No religious ritual can save you. Only Jesus Christ can save you. This is why He came into this world.

If you trust in anything but Jesus Christ to save you from your sins, you are as guilty as the religious leaders and Pilate because you are denying who He is and what He came here to do for you.

It was our sin that put Jesus on that cross and if you will believe on Him, He will save you from all of your sins.