

Easter Teaching No. 10

The Messiah is Mocked and Abused

Pilate made another attempt at releasing Jesus. He thought that by scourging him the crowd would have mercy on him and leave it at that.

Scourging or flogging was a dreadful punishment and one that often rendered a person's body into shock, many died as a result of this punishment.

The leather thongs on the end of the handle had pieces of glass and metal attached to the end of each thong. The prisoner would be bound by his hands, his back stripped bare and then the lashes would be given, all 40 of them. It did not take long before the flesh was torn away and lacerated, even so far as exposing muscle, tendons and bone. The thongs were so long that they wrapped around the victim, gouging flesh from the face, chest and arms.

Isaiah 52:14 prophesies that many were appalled when they looked at him, ' his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human likeness'.

John 19:1-6 'Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. The Roman soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They clothed him in a purple robe and went up to him again saying 'Hail, king of the Jews!' and they slapped him in the face'.

Jesus had survived the flogging; he would have been physically weak at this point and lost a lot of blood which would have put a strain on the functioning of his internal organs. His back would have been a bloody mess, and the flesh on his legs and arms torn and lacerated. His face would have been marred and almost unrecognisable. But this wasn't enough for the soldiers. They then put a robe around him, even the touch of the cloth onto his body would have been agony. Then they pushed a crown of thorns on his head, piercing his scalp and temples, gouging deep into the already open and bloody wounds from the scourging. We see images of the crucified Jesus with just a trickle of blood on his temples from the crown of thorns and the nails in his hands and feet and a tidy little incision into his ribs. In reality he would have been a pulpy mess, and that is before the crucifixion.

The crown of thorns is significant here. In *Genesis 3:18* thorns represented the result of God's curse upon creation after the fall of man. When Jesus wears the crown of thorns, it signifies that he is taking the curse upon himself, on our behalf.

Pilate brought Jesus out in front of the crowd but instead of having pity on him, they called all the more for him to be crucified. Pilate questioned Jesus once more but Jesus refused to speak.

Pilate said

John 19:10 'Do you refuse to speak to me? Don't you realise I have the power either to free you or to crucify you?'

Jesus replied, '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'.

Outside the crowds were still agitated and shouting and the Jewish Leaders were still stirring them up - the leaders then played their trump card:-

'If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesars. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar'. With this Pilate saw he had no choice but to have Jesus crucified.

Why did Pilate buckle under these words? Pilate, who was originally an equestrian knight, was given the job as Procurator of Judea by his friend Sejanus. Sejanus was the Chief Administrator of the Roman Empire for the emperor Tiberius. He was a close advisor to Tiberius and hoped to become his successor. But he plotted against Tiberius and before the plan could be executed, someone informed the emperor. Sejanus and his co-conspirators were being held and questioned at the time and were awaiting execution. The emperor was questioning the allegiance of every associate of Sejanus and imprisoning those who he thought may be involved in the plot. The emperor had already received several complaints about Pilate and his rulership.

The last thing Pilate needed was a report going back to the emperor that he had failed to quash a riot in troublesome Judea, especially as they were accusing him of being in opposition to Caesar. He saw his own fate in their cries

Pilate asked the crowd 'Shall I crucify your king?'; the crowd replied 'we have no king but Caesar'.

And so after attempts to have this innocent Jewish man released, this man who had done nothing wrong by either the Jewish religious or Roman civil law. Jesus who was failed by the protection of the Sanhedrin laws, and failed by Rome on an accusation that Pilate could not afford to ignore, Pilate handed over to the soldiers to be crucified. Pilate is remembered for his part in the crucifixion of Jesus in the Apostles Creed:

*'He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.
He descended to the dead.'*

We now move onto the next horror Jesus had to endure