

Easter Teaching No. 9

The Second Trial before Pilate

Luke 23:13-15

'Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers and the people and said to them "You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him, neither has Herod for he sent him back to me, as you can see he has done nothing to deserve death. Therefore I will punish him and then release him."

Mark 15:6-10 tells us that at this Feast it was custom for Pilate to release a prisoner of their choice. So in an attempt to have Jesus released, he offered to either release Jesus or Barabbas. Barabbas had been imprisoned for insurrection and murder. Pilate assumed that the crowd would rather have Jesus released. We are told that Pilate had come to know that it was due to envy that the religious authorities wanted Jesus done away with.

As Pilate was sitting on the judgement seat, he received an urgent message from his wife, who by tradition was called Claudia, informing him that she'd had a dream about Jesus and suffered all day with what she had dreamt, she warned her husband to have nothing to do with Jesus as he was a righteous man.

However, Pilate had to contend with his own conscience, the warning from his wife and the crowd that had gathered below (don't forget trials were conducted in public)

Pilate asked the crowd Matthew 27:20-22

'Which of the two do you want me to release to you', but the chief priests and elders had stirred up the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed' 'Barabbas', they cried. 'What shall I do then with Jesus who is called the Messiah?' Pilate asked, 'Crucify him', they shouted, ' but what crime has he committed?' 'Crucify him, crucify him' they shouted.

Pilate could see that the crowd was becoming agitated and that he could have a riot on his hands, so he took a bowl of water, stood in front of the crowd and washed his hands in front of them and said

'I am innocent of this man's blood, it is your responsibility', to which the crowd replied, 'His blood is on us and our children'.

The religious leadership had rejected Jesus as the Messiah in Matthew chapter 12, and here the people reject Jesus as the Messiah. Here they invoke a curse upon themselves, saying that the blood of Jesus is on them and their children. Something that became very real only 40 years later in 70AD when the city and Temple of Jerusalem were totally destroyed and the Jews dispersed all over the world (the Diaspora). Many of those standing before the trial of Jesus and their children would have been part of the terrible siege and destruction of Jerusalem only 40 years after the crucifixion of their Messiah. They had indeed received the penalty brought on them by the judgement of God for the crucifixion of Jesus.

Pilate on the wishes of the crowd, then released Barabbas

Now here we have the irony. Barabbas is known from other sources to have been called Jesus Barabbas, his name meaning: Jesus bar (son of) Abbas (Father), so Jesus son of the father had committed insurrection and sedition against Rome and he was being released instead of Jesus the Son of the Father who although being accused of insurrection and sedition, was totally innocent. The guilty party was being released and the innocent party punished.

Have you noticed how originally the charges made by the Jewish leadership against Jesus were those of blasphemy because he made himself the Son of God, therefore the Messiah. But Jewish authorities then changed the charges when Jesus was brought before Pilate because they knew that Pilate would not be interested in any points of religious law. And so they cleverly made a trumped up charge that he was inciting crowds wherever he went, from Galilee to Jerusalem and was a competitor to Caesar. Clever, but tragic when we know that Jesus had done nothing worthy of a trial, punishment or death.

And so Jesus goes on to the next stage of the proceedings, ever closer to his crucifixion.