

Gerard van Honthorst - The Denial of St. Peter

## Peter's Denial of Jesus | 14:66-72



- 66-68 – Mark introduces this narrative back in v. 54 to capture two events occurring at the same time. So he goes back and forth in his narrative between Jesus and Peter.
  - The narrative suspended in 54 is taken up again. This flashback storytelling technique indicates Mark intends us to contrast Peter's interrogation with Christ's interrogation.
  - The stark transition from vs 65 to 66 is ironic.
  - At the moment Christ was being asked to prophesy (tell the future) blindfolded, Peter was being asked to prophesy (tell the truth) as to the truth of Christ.
  - At the moment court attendants were heaping scorn on Christ's claim to be the Messiah, Peter was heaping scorn on him through denial.
  
- We need appreciate Peter here. Peter either narrated these very events to Mark or he authorized the account. In either case, Peter's humility in personally including his story is laudable. Peter often got it wrong. But "it is how you leave something that matters." And Peter leaves no doubt as to his love for his Lord.

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- *Jn 18:15-17 tells us John was known to the high priest & brought Peter into the courtyard.*
  - *Peter found the courtyard busy with attendants waiting to see the outcome of the extraordinary meeting of the Sanhedrin, as opposed to going home.*
  - *Perhaps the servant girl who recognized Peter was the one sent to call Peter to the courtyard.*
  - *Her scornful observation "You also were with the Nazarene, this Jesus" was calculated to unsettle and embarrass Peter.*
  
- *69-71 – Shifting his position in the courtyard did not relieve Peter from attack.*
  - *Now the girl not only singled him out but involved others as well.*
  - *"One of them" = Jesus was leading a significant following of men. Peter again denies.*
  - *Bystanders sense his discomfort and refuse to leave him alone. Galileans had a distinct dialect marked by the inability to pronounce the guttural sounds in Semitic languages.*
  - *Peter was not cursing God. He was cursing both himself and those around him.*
  - *"This man of whom you speak" = deliberate attempt to distance himself from Jesus.*
  - *Jesus' prophecy Peter would be "ashamed of me and of my words" (38) has come true.*

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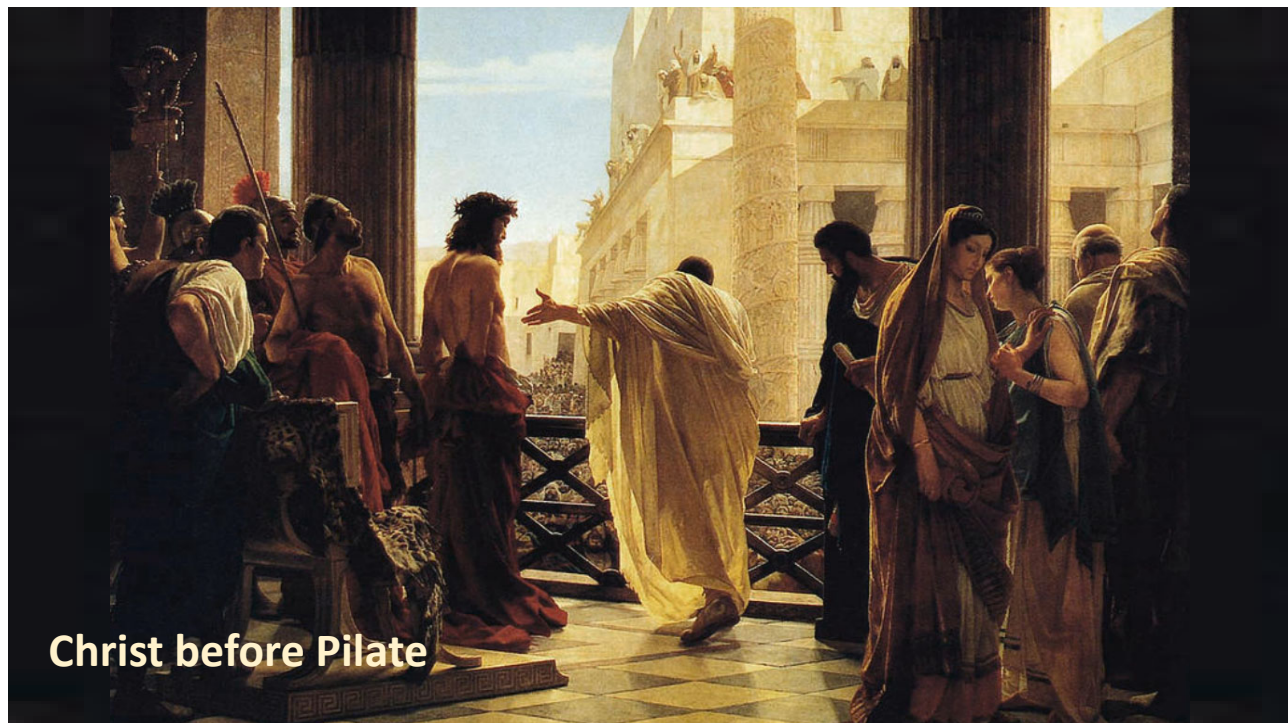
- *72 – Peter's emphatic denial is punctuated by the second crowing of the cock.*
  - *The third watch of the night was designated "cock crow" (35) because of the habit of roosters to crow three times between midnight and 3 AM.*
  - *The first cock crows about a half-hour after midnight, the second an hour after that, and the third an hour after that. Thus we can guess the timing of Christ's trial and of Peter's denials.*
  - *Peter recalls his commitment of 27-31 and realizes now his failures began with that pride, then with failing to watch and pray 37, then with the futile attempt to defend Jesus with the sword, then with following timidly behind, and finally in the three denials themselves.*
  - *Peter fled in shame from those who witnessed his betrayal.*
  
- *How many times has my bold affirmation failed to guarantee faithfulness to my Lord? How many times have I wandered from Christ days before falling into sin, content with my distance from him? How many times have I failed to be "with Christ"?*
  
- *Note the promise to Peter in 16:7!*

## Transformation of Peter | Acts 4:1-22



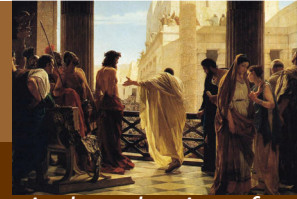
- 1 – Priests + temple guard + Sadducees = similar contingent that accosted Christ
- 2 – Greatly disturbed because (1) teaching the people and (2) proclaiming resurrection in Jesus = same accusations levied at Christ (1) we heard him say and (2) I will destroy this temple and build it again in three days (resurrection though they did not understand it)
- 4 – These disciples were leading a large group. So was Christ.
- 5-6 – Rulers + elders + teachers = Sanhedrin (confirmed in 15)
- 8-9 – Like Christ, Peter only addresses the critical question.
- 10 – “Know this!” = “I am!” Clarity from both men.
- 10 – “Jesus, whom YOU CRUCIFIED but whom GOD RAISED” = Peter & Christ invoke God as witness
- 13 – Sanhedrin recognized courage of Peter & John and “took note these men had been with Jesus” = How did they recognize such courage? They had seen it in Christ when they condemned him. Peter denied he was “with Christ” but here was undeniable evidence, he had been “with Christ!”

*Peter’s “sins, which [were] many, [were] forgiven; for [he] loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.” (Luke 7:47 about the woman in 14:3-9)*



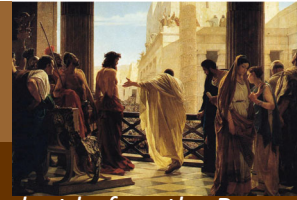
**Christ before Pilate**

## Jesus Before Pilate | 15:1-15



- *Here Mark sketches the course of events, not details. His purpose is the salvation of mankind, not history.*
- *The account follows the pattern of Jesus before the Sanhedrin: (1) the interrogation, (2) condemnation and (3) subsequent mockery of Jesus. But there are profound differences.*
  - *Before the Sanhedrin, Christ was condemned of blasphemy. But before Pilate he is condemned for high treason.*
  - *Thus Jesus is mocked by the Sanhedrin's attendants for his pretension as a messianic prophet. While the rude treatment from Pilate's soldiers showed contempt for his pretension of kingship.*
  - *What is of utmost importance to Mark is that both the Sanhedrin and Pilate condemned Jesus to die as the Messiah. Thus this course of events could be nothing less than the sovereign will of God.*

## Jesus Before Pilate | 15:1-15



- *Many of Mark's readers would be keenly interested in Jesus' conduct before the Roman leaders. Many of them would be compelled to stand trial before a pagan tribunal.*
  - *Should expect no preferential treatment. Jesus said they would be "handed over" (13:9-13)*
  - *The encouragement from I Timothy 6:13 was real "Who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made a good confession."*
  - *Understanding Jesus' trial under the canopy of the will of God made all the difference to Mark's readers.*
- *1 – Jerusalem and its province, Judea, were designated "subject territory" meaning matters of legislation, justice and government were subject to Rome's supervision.*
  - *Romans permitted local magistrates to remain some level of self-governance.*
  - *So the Sanhedrin exercised not only religious, but also civil and criminal jurisdiction.*
  - *Except death sentences which Rome reserved for itself as the sole imperial authority.*
  - *So Sanhedrin had to surrender their prisoner to Rome for the sentence to be carried out.*

## Jesus Before Pilate | 15:1-15



- *Naturally Pilate had to acquaint himself independently with the reasons for conviction in order to render a Roman verdict.*
  - *This required a new trial before a Roman court.*
  - *blasphemy was not a capital offense under Roman law, it was of no interest to Pilate.*
  - *A new charge was required to incite Rome to confirm the capital conviction. The incendiary charge was high treason which the Roman court could not possibly dismiss.*
  - *“Reached a decision” = not the Sanhedrin decision to convict, but the decision to charge Christ with high treason before the Roman court. This terminated the all-night session.*
- *Mark locates Pilate’s courtroom in “the Praetorium” (16) =official residence of governor. Most likely the public square outside the palace of Herod, where Roman officials took up residence during Jewish festivals.*

## Jesus Before Pilate | 15:1-15



- *Pilate belonged to a special class of imperial administrators, beneath the rank of Senator, in the equestrian class or Roman “knights”.*
  - *These magistrates were used especially in small territories requiring careful supervision.*
  - *He possessed senatorial authority.*
  - *He reigned 10 years harshly despising the Jewish people and their sensitivities.*
- *“Very early in the morning” = historically accuracy as the working day of a Roman official began at the earliest hour of daylight. Legal trials were often held shortly after sunrise.*
  - *If the Sanhedrin had come later, they would have missed court.*
  - *This is why the Jewish court was conducted in the middle of the night – the Sanhedrin wanted to take the case to the Roman court in time.*

## Jesus Before Pilate | 15:1-15



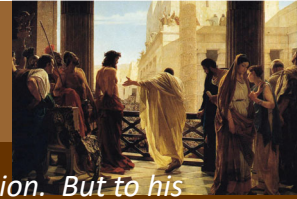
- 2 – *While Sanhedrin was a bench of judges, Roman court was under sole control of the imperial magistrate. Those who sat with Pilate had no authority but were only advisors.*
  - *Greek was the language of the court. Rome conducted proceedings through interpreters.*
  - *Proceedings were public and open to indictment by plaintiffs and magisterial cross-examination. Statements of the defendant and of witnesses was the main evidence.*
  - *Closure of evidence was announced, the magistrate rendered a verdict, and the sentence had to be carried out immediately.*
  
- *Opening question “Are you the king of the Jews?” indicates Pilate had already been informed.*
  - *The designation “king of the Jews” is a secular form of “Messiah” which permitted Jesus’ messianic claim to be transposed into a political key requiring Pilate’s attention.*
  - *The Sanhedrin certainly calculated that “king of the Jews” would provoke an entirely different reaction than “Messiah”. This claim meant “leader of a resistance” to Pilate.*
  - *Josephus records rioters following Herod the Great’s death, where seditious groups would give leadership to anyone, creating a king immediately, in order to confuse the public.*

## Jesus Before Pilate | 15:1-15



- *It is beyond ironic that the Sanhedrin branded Jesus a blasphemer because he failed to correspond to messianic ideal, but now wanted him condemned for high treason as a rebel*
  - *Jesus was “king of the Jews” because he is the Messiah. Claims of insurrection were false.*
  - *Jesus admitted to being the Messiah. BUT his choice of words indicated he did not admit to political treason. If he had the trial would have been over with a guilty verdict.*
  - *Jesus’ reserved answer required Pilate to examine the accusers for further information.*
  
- 3 – *Chief priests seize the opportunity to sustain their charges. Only Luke 23 records the details.*
  - *According to Luke, it was a threefold charge (1) Jesus was inciting to riot; (2) he was forbidding payment of taxes to Caesar; and (3) he had royal pretensions.*
  - *Such multiple accusations were common in criminal prosecutions in the provinces.*
  - *When Pilate remained unconvinced, the Jewish leaders doubled down on the first charge of inciting riots.*

## Jesus Before Pilate | 15:1-15



- *After hearing the evidence, Pilate asked Jesus to define his position. But to his astonishment, he remained silent.*
  - *Jesus refused to defend himself, manifesting the exalted, sublime silence of the suffering Servant of God (Isaiah 53:7).*
  - *Such silence was wholly unusual and demonstrated a dignity which puzzled Pilate.*
  - *Nevertheless, without a defense, it would be necessary to pass a confirming sentence.*
  - *Those who refused to defend were given 3 opportunities to change their minds. But Jesus remained silent.*
  - *Magistrates were not inclined to sentence an undefended man inadequately accused.*
  - *Jesus' further explanation of the nature of his kingship (recorded by John alone (John 18:33-38) indicates Pilate did not believe Jesus was a political offender.*
- *Throughout Jesus' two trials, Jesus remains the passive voice making only two brief responses. He is shouldering the duty of the Messiah. He MUST suffer and die (8:31). We sense in Jesus' silence the sovereign God's mysterious purposes to which ever the Son of Man must submit.*

## Jesus Before Pilate | 15:1-15



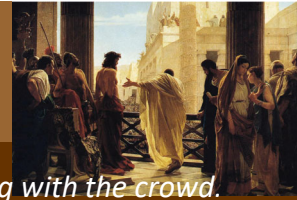
- *Though Pilate believed Christ innocent, he thought it better not to acquit but to dispense with the case through amnesty.*
  - *Two types of amnesty were available – one granted before sentencing and one granted after sentencing. Clearly, Pilate was appealing to the first type.*
  - *So he requested from the people their preference as to who he should release believing they would choose Jesus. His calculation was mistaken.*
- *7-9 – Apparently the arrest of Barabbas for insurrection was well-known. Revolts and bloodshed were common occurrences.*
  - *He appears to have been a popular hero. His name Bar Abba = “son of the father”.*
  - *The introduction of Barabbas in vs. 7 indicates his supporters had come to the Praetorium prior to the trial of Jesus to ask for his release.*
  - *A larger crowd forms as the morning wanes on, and Pilate seizes this opportunity to appeal to the people. So he presents his own candidate for release, “The king of the Jews”. No doubt a sarcastic offer, he still felt the crowd would go along.*

## Jesus Before Pilate | 15:1-15



- 10 – Pilate’s primary motive was his antisemitic bias. He despised the Jews, whom he regarded as a rebellious race, and he took every opportunity to show it.
  - His attitude of resistance to the Sanhedrin in the matter of Jesus demonstrated this.
  - His selection of Jesus over Barabbas demonstrated this.
  - He perceived the hidden agenda. His resistance increased when he learned the prisoner was to be put to death and again when he realized Jesus was no political agitator.
- 11 – Pilate failed to consider the people, incensed over a Roman presence, would actively work against him. His recommendation over that of the Sanhedrin did not stand a chance.
  - The crowd had already decided to ask for the release of freedom-fighting Barabbas.
  - In Judea it was customary to confront the Roman authorities with as large and boisterous a crowd as could be mustered.
  - And so the chief priests roused the crowd to reject Pilate’s offer.
  - The crowd’s decision can be explained: (1) Jesus had been formally condemned by the Sanhedrin and (2) Jesus’ release was a threat to the release of their man, Barabbas

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- 12-14 – The rejection surprised Pilate who continued negotiating with the crowd.
  - When asked what should be done with Jesus, they doubled down “Crucify him!” (Mat 27:22-26). Sentence was no longer death, but escalated to most ignoble form – crucifixion.
  - When Pilate protested sufficient cause had not been demonstrated, they shouted louder.
  - Just as the Sanhedrin had mocked, punched and spit on Christ because the verdict demanded it. So the verdict of high treason demanded the cruelest extent of the law.
- 15 – Faced with losing control, he yielded releasing Barabbas & ordering Jesus scourged.
  - Roman scourging was a terrifying punishment. The prisoner was bound to a post or pillar, stripped and beaten by a number of guards until his flesh hung by bleeding shreds.
  - Sometimes they were beaten until bones or intestines showed. Scourging was an independent punishment in addition to a prerequisite to execution.
- The language of the verdict “delivered him to be crucified” recalls the Father “giving over, delivering over” Christ to his humiliation and death in Isaiah 53:6, 12. The early church was less interested in whether the verdict was legal, than it was fulfillment of prophecy.