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Condemned by Pilate (Part 2)



The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

In "Condemned by Pilate (Part 2)," Steve Gregg recounts the trial and crucifixion of Jesus Christ, highlighting Pilate's reluctance to condemn him and ultimate decision to prioritize his own reputation over Jesus' release. Jesus remained calm and composed during his trial, rebuking those who sought to corrupt and manipulate the system to achieve their goals. The place where Jesus was crucified, known as Place Skull, is believed to be named for its skull-like appearance or as a common place for execution.

Transcript

Generally speaking, the Romans used a cat of nine tails, a whip with nine lashes on it, and at the end of the leather, lashes were chunks of broken glass or metal hooks and things, which when it was lashed on a person, the whip would just, the nine whips would wrap all the way around their body, and then these glass and hooks would no doubt grab into the body on the back, and then they'd pull the whip off and rip the flesh and give them 39 lashes like that. Actually, this scourging was a process that was normally used to exact a confession out of a criminal. And Pilate had not yet condemned Jesus.

You see, Jesus was not a Roman citizen like Paul was. Therefore, Jesus could not claim immunity from being flogged without a trial, without being condemned in trial. Remember, Paul was going to be flogged, and he said, hey, you can't, I'm a Roman citizen, I can't be flogged without being condemned in court.

Jesus had not yet been condemned, and this flogging does not reflect Pilate having, you know, submitted to the Jews in this matter. It was more a means of getting a confession out of Jesus, because Pilate was, you know, desperately looking for some way to get out of this situation, and if he could get Jesus to confess to some crime, then he could turn him over with more of a good conscience. And the cat of nine tails flogging, the 39 lashes, you know, often would come close to killing a man, and he'd be bloodied, his back and his sides would look like hamburger when he was all done.

But the idea was that the lash was given, after each lash, the man was given an opportunity to confess a crime. If there was no confession, then the next lash would be

harder, and so forth through all 39. If he gave a confession of some crime, the lashes would be made lighter.

So, Jesus, obviously having committed no crime, didn't confess to any, and therefore his lashes would have gotten increasingly harder and harder through the entire 39. And that is passed over in a single short verse. Pilate took him and scourged him, but no doubt this is how Jesus was treated specifically.

Verse 2, the soldiers, who would have been the ones who conducted the scourging, having not gotten any confession out of him, but having heard that he was claiming to be the king of the Jews, they twisted a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they put on him a purple robe. Then they said, Hail, King of the Jews, and they struck him with their hands. And Pilate went out again and said to them, with Jesus at his side apparently, Behold, I am bringing him out to you, that you may know that I find no fault in him.

Then Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, and Pilate said to them, Behold the man. Now, what was the point of this display? In all likelihood, Pilate felt that he was going to, in this way, maybe save Jesus' life. Of course, Pilate could have saved his life just by being more gutsy and saying, Get out of here, you Jews.

But he was somewhat intimidated. He never knew what kind of trouble they might cause for him if he didn't lay into their hands. And he was no doubt hoping that by having beaten Jesus so severely, and you know, his skin and his flesh was all torn and chunks of it hanging off, and this crown of thorns on his head.

Some of you may have had the opportunity, as I have, it's not unusual to see, even in this country, people bring home from the Holy Land crowns made out of the actual thorns of that region, which were not little thorns at all. I mean, the points on the thorns are like an inch or two long, jammed down on his head. The Bible says in Isaiah 53, his visage was so marred, more than any man.

And in Isaiah 50, it talks about how he did not turn his cheeks away from those who plucked out the hair. We don't read of that particular here in the Gospels, but in Isaiah, it indicates that they plucked his beard out of his cheeks too, which is a rather painful thing. And so his face was, you know, bloodied, his body was bloodied and shredded, thrashed.

And Pilate, bringing him out like this, no doubt thought, maybe this will placate the Jews in their bloodlust. You know what I mean? Maybe they'll say, oh, okay, that's enough. The guy, you know, he's taken enough.

And no doubt that's why Pilate brought him out and said, look, look at this guy, look at this man. Look at the condition he's in. And hoping that he could then get off the hook so

that the Jews would be satisfied and he wouldn't have to condemn Jesus to death.

And the Jews would not make trouble for him. However, that didn't placate them. In verse 6, therefore, when the chief priests and officers saw him, they cried out saying, crucify him, crucify him.

Which, of course, was holding out for much more severe punishment than Pilate had already now inflicted. Pilate said to him, you take him and crucify him, for I find no fault in him. Now, it sounds like Pilate is giving them permission, but obviously they didn't understand it that way because they still tried to argue their case.

So, I think what he's saying is, if he's going to be crucified, I'm not going to do it, you do it. But you'll be breaking the law if you do it. I haven't found any fault in him.

He's not condemned by me. You crucify him if you want to, but then implying you'll have to suffer the consequences of law for doing it. Although it sounds like he's giving them what they want in this, you go take him and crucify him, the Jews did not crucify people.

Romans did, and so he's obviously telling them to do something that was illegal for them to do. He's basically kind of defying them. You do it if you want.

It's against my wishes. It's against my judgment. I haven't found any fault with him.

The Jews answered him, we have a law, and according to our law, he ought to die, because he made himself the son of God. Now, here's where they get honest all of a sudden, because they're desperate. They've tried everything.

You see, they came with the charge that he was king of the Jews, implying that he's against Caesar, that he's involved in sedition, and so forth, and that therefore he was a threat to Caesar, and he was a concern to the Romans, and so forth. And they had failed to make those charges stick. Neither Pilate nor Herod put any stock in them.

They could tell that Jesus was harmless. He wasn't a rabble-rouser. He wasn't threatening them.

And so Pilate just wasn't going to play into the Jews' hands here, and having failed to get what they wanted by bringing this trumped-up false charge that they first brought, they came out and told the truth, their real objection to him, which they had decided the night before in court, he should die for blasphemy, which they had not brought initially, because they've sensed that Pilate would not care about that charge. But since he didn't seem to care about the false charge they brought, they had very little left, and so they were becoming more vehement, and they said, We have a law. You Romans may not, but you should honor our laws if you care about us, that according to our law he should die because he said he was the Son of God.

Now, therefore, when Pilate heard that saying, he was more afraid. Now, why was he afraid? Was he afraid of the Jews? Hardly. Who was he afraid of? I think he was afraid of Jesus.

You mean he said he was the Son of God? Now, the Jews didn't put any stock in that claim, and Pilate hadn't heard until now that that claim had ever been made by Jesus. Son of God, huh? You know, the Jews mocked Jesus' claim to be the Son of God, and sought to kill him for it, and were angry at him for it. Pilate didn't.

Pilate didn't mock. And, you know, the distinct impression is that Pilate thought, You know, if anyone is, this guy could be. You know, I mean, he was so impressed with Jesus' demeanor, something about Jesus, the way he conducted himself, and so forth.

You know, if he claimed to be the Son of God, you know, I haven't found him to be a liar, you know, in my inquisition of him. I haven't found any fault in him. If he really said he was the Son of God, I wonder if he might really be.

It's interesting that Pilate seemed to be more open to this than the Jews themselves were. And he was more afraid. He knew he really had trouble on his hands now, because if he condemned Jesus, it would not just be to condemn an innocent man, but possibly, you know, a deity.

Now, of course, Pilate would have been a worshipper of many gods, not of the Jewish God. Yet, there were in Roman mythology sons of gods. You know, Hercules was the son of, you know, Zeus.

I guess that's Greek mythology, but they were the counterparts in Roman mythology, too. And the idea that a god might have a son on earth was not, you know, it was not beyond the consideration of the belief system of the Romans. And when they heard that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, this unnerved Pilate, because, you know, it might even be.

Pilate had very possibly heard of Jesus' reported miracles and so forth before, but never heard that it was from God that he was doing it. We don't know what Pilate knew about all that. But from his contact with Jesus, he apparently found it at least somewhat plausible that this claim of Jesus could be true, because it scared him when he heard it.

And he went again to the Praetorium and said to Jesus, Where are you from? Now, Pilate already knew he was from Galilee. That had been established. But he's not asking where you're from in that sense.

He had just heard that Jesus is the Son of God, and he's wondering, you know, is this guy from earth or from heaven? And it's amazing that Pilate would even take this seriously without just mocking and laughing at the suggestion. It speaks volumes for the way that Jesus conducted himself under this trial and under this pressure. Pilate said, Where are

you from? But Jesus gave him no answer.

Then Pilate said to him, Are you not speaking to me? Do you not know that I have power to crucify you and power to release you? And Jesus answered, You could have no power at all against me unless it had been given to you from above. Therefore, the one who delivered me to you has the greater sin. Now, the first part of Jesus' statement, You would have no power over me at all against me unless it had been given to you from above, is understandable enough.

It means, I mean, it sounds a lot like what Paul said in Romans 13. There is no authority but that which is of God. God has ordained the governmental authorities to be executioners of criminals.

And that's what Pilate had. He had that kind of power from God. And he says, Don't you respect my power? And Jesus said, I know you've got power, but you don't have it in yourself.

You got it from my Father. I'm not afraid of you. But he said, The fact that your power has been given to you from above makes the sin of those who have delivered me over to you greater.

Now, what is the meaning of that statement? I believe what he means by that is these Jews, they just perceive you to be a Roman official for them to manipulate to their own ends. They don't recognize that in fact, you are a God-ordained governmental official. And you have a God-ordained task to do the righteous thing.

And for them to try to coerce you to be unrighteous and to coerce you to do an unjust thing is not simply to take advantage of a gullible pagan. It is to seek to corrupt a minister of God, which is what Paul calls the governmental authorities. And he was talking about the Roman authorities then too, in Romans 13.

That these people are not just trying to corrupt some pagan pawn, but they're trying to corrupt an official who is an instrument of God's justice. Therefore, their sin is against God. And that makes their sin the greater than they imagined.

They know they're sinning. They know they're lying. They know they're lying to Pilate and trying to get a Nisanite killed.

But the fact that they're corrupting a minister of God in the person of Pilate is not what they're taking into consideration. That makes their sin even worse than what they consider or what it would otherwise be if this were not a man ordained by God to do the right thing. Verse 12, from then on, Pilate sought to release him.

Even though Jesus kind of didn't give him straight answers about whether he was the Son of God or whether he came from heaven or whatever. He just wasn't comfortable

with the idea of condemning him. So he sought to release him.

But the Jews cried out saying, If you let this man go, you are not Caesar's friend. Whosoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar. Now, this was the thing that finally broke Pilate's back.

He was unable to get anything from Jesus that could deliver Jesus. Jesus didn't speak in his own defense. He didn't believe the charges against him.

This was a veiled extortion. If you don't get rid of this Jesus the way we're talking about, you're not a friend of Caesar. Now, there's hardly anything any Roman governor could afford less than to have the reputation get around that he was not a friend of Caesar.

Caesar was the emperor. Pilate was an appointed official of Caesar. And no doubt, Pilate, like any governor of Palestine, was hoping that Caesar might show him some favor someday of getting him out of that stinking place because no Roman official liked governing Palestine.

It was the most ungovernable province in the world. And it was almost like a punishment to a governor to send him over that area. And it would make matters only worse if the Jews would start sending letters to Caesar saying, you know that Pilate guy, he's very disloyal.

We pointed out to him somebody who was trying to be the new emperor. In fact, we even put the man in his hands and he released him. That wouldn't look real good for a governor.

And it could even have him brought before Caesar for trial himself. And he just didn't want that kind of hassles. And so when he heard that saying, he brought Jesus out and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called The Pavement, but in Hebrew it's called The Gabbatha.

Now, it was the preparation day of the Passover and about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, Behold your king. But they cried out, Away with him, away with him.

Crucify him. Pilate said to them, Shall I crucify your king? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar. So they outright rejected God as their king.

They renounced the kingdom of God and said, We have nothing to do with it. So he delivered him to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus away.

They led him away. Now, other Gospels have told us that Jesus, that Pilate washed his hands also as a ceremony to say I have nothing to do with the death of this innocent man. So Pilate hoped to do the wrong thing and then washed his hands of it.

And that just doesn't work. He should have taken the risk. You know, there's something

about all the accounts in the Gospels that tends to make us, I don't know about you, but I think it tends to make you a little sympathetic toward Pilate.

It certainly makes him out to be, he smells like a rose compared to the Jewish leaders. But there's no excuse for what he did. He was the man in the position to release Jesus or not, and he wouldn't.

He wouldn't because his own career, his own security was under fire. And, you know, given the choice between releasing an innocent man and even one that he suspected to be maybe a son of God, he would rather still surrender the man to his enemies to be killed when he had the power to keep him from it than to endanger his own reputation and his own career. So, I mean, there's nothing excusable about what Pilate did, although he showed tremendous reluctance to do it.

And in that he was obviously not as onerous or not as offensive as the Jews. Verse 17, And he, bearing his cross, went out to a place called the Place of the Skull, which is called in Hebrew Golgotha, and in Greek it's called Calvary. That means the Place of the Skull.

No one knows exactly why it was called the Place of the Skull. There is a mountain outside Jerusalem today which doesn't have that name, but it does have a very skull-like appearance. I've seen photographs of it, and taken from a certain angle, it looks very much like a huge human skull.

And some people believe that must be the mountain that was in those days called the Place of the Skull because of its skull-like appearance. And Golgotha is the Hebrew name for it, Calvary is the Greek name for it. Could be, could be that mountain.

I mean, it looks remarkably like a skull from the photograph I've seen. Others have speculated that it's called the Place of the Skull not because of its appearance, but because it was possibly a regular place of execution of criminals and skeletons and skulls and so forth may have been laying around unburied from criminals that had been previously killed there. So it was the Place of the Skull.

But actually I think I've been told it means the Place of a Skull. And that's what it says here, the Place of a Skull rather than skulls. And therefore probably the shape of the place is what it's referred to.

Now I want to just draw attention in verse 17 to the fact that this verse is the only verse in any of the Gospels that refers to Jesus carrying his own cross. It says, And he, bearing his cross, went out to a place called the Place of the Skull, which is called in Hebrew Golgotha. Now we pick up the story after this by turning to Matthew 27.

And there are parallels in Mark and Luke. But in Matthew 27, we want to pick it up at verse 27. This again is going to overlap for a few verses.

Actually, we don't have to start at verse 27. Verse 27 through 31 all overlaps. So we could start at verse 32 and then we wouldn't have the overlap.

From where we left off in John, we turn to Matthew 27.32. It says, Now as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name, him they compelled to bear his cross. Now it doesn't tell us why they compelled this man to bear Jesus' cross. We are told in John that Jesus was bearing his own cross.

And there is a tradition, I don't know that it's an official tradition, or if it just comes up in preaching a lot, that Jesus fell under his cross and he was unable because of the abuse, physical abuse he'd taken so much he had no sleep the night before and he'd been on trial six times and he'd received 39 lashes and so forth. That he just lost so much blood and even before he was arrested he was sweating as it were great drops of blood. He was under great stress.

It's certainly understandable that Jesus may well have collapsed and been unable to carry his cross. However, I just point out to you for your information, the Bible nowhere says that that happened. All we know is that John tells us Jesus went out bearing his own cross and the synoptic gospels tell us of this man Simon of Cyrene bearing Jesus' cross.

So, some scenario is called for. Jesus bore his cross initially but he didn't bear it all the way to Golgotha. Either because he collapsed as is commonly thought or maybe just because the Romans decided, well this guy's had enough, let's let someone else carry his cross.

Remember the Romans had power legally to press any citizen into service to carry any load for up to a mile. I believe that Golgotha is less than a mile from Jerusalem and therefore Simon was the guy probably standing in the crowd. He was from Cyrene which is an African nation.

He was a black man in all likelihood. It's a black African nation. Well, I shouldn't say he was a black man.

It doesn't say he was a Cyrenian necessarily. He was a man of Cyrene. He might have been a Jew of the dispersion who lived down in that area.

However, many have thought that he was actually a black native of Cyrene. Now, why would he be in Jerusalem at this time then? He may have been a Gentile God-fearer or even a proselyte to Judaism. We don't know.

But since it was Passover, probably Gentiles would not ordinarily be going to Jerusalem at this time. They may be so clogged with people and so forth unless they were going to worship and participate in the festivals. So, we don't know much about the guy.

He could have been a Jew from the dispersion or he could have been an actual Cyrenian

Gentile who was there either as a God-fearer or as a proselyte. One thing though is that the man apparently became a Christian although it's not mentioned in the Gospels and his sons also and his family. This is a deduction from evidence that is not altogether conclusive.

But in Mark 15.21, when it speaks of this man, Mark 15.21, he is described as Simon a Cyrenian, the father of Alexander and Rufus. Now, when Mark wrote this Gospel, of course, it was considerably later than the events themselves. It was possibly 20, maybe 30 years after the crucifixion of Jesus that this account was written.

And when Mark wrote it, he didn't just say a man named Simon a Cyrenian like Matthew said, but he said this man Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus. The implication is that Mark was trying to more clearly identify this man as someone that his readers might connect with through his sons, the father of Alexander and Rufus. Now, the suggestion is very strong that Alexander and Rufus were therefore known to Mark's original readers.

And he was clarifying who this man was by saying it was their father. Now, Alexander and Rufus, we don't know very much about. But it is believed that Mark wrote the Gospel that he wrote to a Roman audience, probably to the Roman church.

And when Paul wrote to the Roman church, in Romans 16.13, Romans 16.13, Paul said, chosen in the Lord and his mother in mind. He doesn't greet his father, maybe by this time dead. But his mother was still living.

And Paul said, you know, Rufus' mother was like a mother to him too. This Rufus, many commentators feel, is likely to be the Rufus who was the son of Simon a Cyrenian that Mark mentioned. So that this man Simon had no doubt become a Christian as a result of this.

And his family likewise. His wife had become at a later date like a mother to Paul. And his sons, Alexander and Rufus, became churchmen who were of note, Paul being acquainted at least with Rufus of the two.

Anyway, let's go on. Matthew 27.33 And when they had come to a place called Golgotha, that is to say a place of the skull, they gave him sour wine mingled with gall to drink. And when he had tasted it, he would not drink.

Okay? Now, he wouldn't drink the wine at this point in time. So, he later did actually, just before his death. As he was hanging on the cross for six hours, he at a later time said, I thirst.

And they brought him wine and gall and vinegar mixed together. And he did drink that. And then he gave up the ghost.

But on this occasion he didn't take it. It's not certain why. Sour wine and gall is thought by some to have been a mixture that was there to sort of alleviate pain.

It might have been sort of a mild anesthesia. There seems to be very little reason why they ought to have such a mixture at a place of crucifixion otherwise. I mean, it's not what most people would drink, sour wine with gall in it.

Gall is some bitter stuff, presumably from the gallbladder. I don't know if it's the gall of an animal or the gall of a human. But why would they have such a strange mixture around there that they'd give to drink to these criminals? It is probable, I think, that it did have pain-killing properties to a certain extent.

I mean, after all, if you get drunk, that would kill pain a certain amount. And the Bible even says that. In Proverbs it says that a man who drinks too much wine, he'll say, they beat me and I didn't feel it.

And when I wake, I'll go out and get some more. And in Proverbs 31, it also talks about giving wine to him who is perishing so that he might drink and forget his misery. So wine has the potential, at least, if taken in large quantities, of numbing.

And it's possible that the addition of gall to the mixture may have even increased that quality so that they would have this strange mixture, which no one would ordinarily drink, of course, around the place of crucifixion to be a little bit more humane to the criminals who were going to be dying by the most excruciating form of execution imaginable. Apart from torture. I mean, torture can be much longer.

But crucifixion often had a man hanging by his hands or by his wrists for three days before he died. Peter, it is said by church tradition, was crucified upside down in Rome and he lived three days in that condition or something before he died. And men often did.

The reason that Jesus died quickly after six hours is because he gave up the ghost. He said, no one can take my life from me. He didn't die as just a natural result of what men did to him.

He died by choice. He gave up his ghost. He gave up his spirit.

But he didn't do so until he had suffered for six hours. And at the beginning of his suffering, he refused to take this mixture, which was probably to ease the pain. He was determined to drink the cup the father gave him, not drink the cup of relief.

He suffered. I suppose he just refused to be alleviated of any of the suffering that his father had wanted to go through. Okay.

This actually brings us to the end of the material I had hoped to cover. And instead of

trying to broach a new segment, I think I'll give you an early end here. And we'll be right on schedule starting Monday.

Right? Yeah.