

Mark 15:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And Pilate answered and said again unto them, What will ye then that I shall do unto him whom ye call the King of the Jews?

Analysis

This verse reveals the tragic irony of Christ's trial: Pilate recognized Jesus' innocence but yielded to political pressure, while the Jews rejected their true King. "Pilate answered and said again" shows this was ongoing dialogue, not a single exchange. Pilate had already examined Jesus and found no fault (Luke 23:4, 14, 22). "What will ye then that I shall do" exposes Pilate's moral cowardice. As Roman governor, he held absolute judicial authority. He needn't ask the crowd's will—he should pronounce justice. But political calculation overrode legal duty. "Unto him whom ye call the King of the Jews" drips with irony. Pilate distanced himself by saying "whom ye call"—he didn't personally affirm Jesus' kingship, but he recognized the accusation's absurdity. The inscription he later placed on the cross was meant mockingly but spoke profound truth. The phrase "King of the Jews" appears repeatedly in the Passion narrative. The accusation before Pilate was political sedition—claiming kingship challenged Caesar. But Jesus told Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). He was indeed the Messiah-King prophesied in Scripture, but the Jews rejected Him.

Historical Context

Pontius Pilate governed Judea AD 26-36, appointed by Emperor Tiberius. Historical sources (Philo, Josephus) describe him as cruel, corrupt, and contemptuous of Jewish customs. Roman law gave governors absolute judicial authority (imperium) in their provinces. Pilate could execute, pardon, or release at will. His question to

the crowd was political theatre, not legal necessity. The title "King of the Jews" was politically charged. Rome's client kings (like Herod) ruled only by Caesar's permission. Any unauthorized claim to kingship was treason (*crimen maiestatis*), punishable by crucifixion. Ironically, Jesus was the rightful King of Israel, descended from David (Matthew 1:1), heir to the eternal throne promised in 2 Samuel 7:12-16. But His kingship wasn't political-territorial. He came first to suffer (Isaiah 53) before returning to reign (Revelation 19:16). The crowd's choice of Barabbas over Jesus fulfilled prophetic typology. Barabbas ("son of the father") was a rebel and murderer—representing sinful humanity. Jesus (the true Son of the Father) died in Barabbas' place, just as He died in our place.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How does Pilate's question 'What will ye then that I shall do' reveal his moral cowardice, and what modern parallels exist where people know what is right but yield to public pressure?
2. What does the crowd's rejection of Jesus as 'King of the Jews' teach us about human nature's tendency to reject God's authority?
3. How does the irony of Pilate's phrase 'whom ye call the King of the Jews' demonstrate that even Jesus' enemies spoke truth unknowingly?
4. In what ways did Jesus demonstrate a different kind of kingship than what both the Romans and the Jews expected or understood?
5. How should understanding Christ as our rejected King shape our expectations of how the world will respond to the gospel today?

Interlinear Text

ο δὲ Πιλᾶτος ἀποκριθεὶς πάλιν εἶπεν αὐτοῖς Τί¹
G3588 **And** **Pilate** **answered** **again** **and said** **unto them** **What**
G1161 G4091 G611 G3825 G2036 G846 G5101

οὖν θέλετε ποιήσω ὅν λέγετε βασιλέα τῶν
then **will ye** **that I shall do** **unto him whom** **ye call** **the King** G3588
G3767 G2309 G4160 G3739 G3004 G935

Ἰουδαίων
of the Jews
G2453

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