
Jesus: Judged, Beaten, and Crowned with Thorns

SCOTT HOEZEE

The *Apostles' Creed* is among the oldest of all Christian confessions. In the course of the creed, only three people get mentioned by name: Jesus, as you would expect; his mother, Mary, also as you would expect; and Pontius Pilate, as you most certainly would not expect. It is a curiosity of Church history that this otherwise obscure Roman official was memorialized in the *Apostles' Creed* in a way not a single apostle or Old Testament figure was. Today on *Groundwork*, as we continue our stations of the cross series, we will consider Pilate—his encounter with Jesus, and Jesus' subsequent mistreatment by the Romans. Stay tuned.

DARRELL DELANEY

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, this is now the third program in a seven-part series that traces the traditional stations of the cross. As we have been noting, there are fourteen stations in all according to a revised list created by Pope John Paul II, and we are picking up two stations per program in this series. So, we have already seen Jesus in Gethsemane, the betrayal by Judas and Jesus' arrest, Jesus before the Sanhedrin, and the three-fold denial of Jesus by the disciple Simon Peter. Today, we will arrive at stations five and six, which is Jesus before Pontius Pilate, and Jesus being scourged and crowned with thorns.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, Scott; in the teaser, you mentioned that Pontius Pilate would be the person we least expected to be mentioned in the beloved *Apostles' Creed* that we recite in many churches all over, weekly in some cases. So, it is really interesting that his name would be mentioned, and I am glad we are going to get into some background on why he is mentioned, and where he even comes from.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we can remember the historical setting here. So, Israel was defeated by Babylon in the early 6th Century B.C.; and after that, Darrell, Israel would never be a fully independent nation again because once Persia defeated Babylon, the Persian emperor Cyrus permitted the Israelites to return to Judea, but then they were under Persian rule. Later, Alexander the Great conquered most of the world; and later still, the Roman Empire took over much of what is now known as Palestine, and therefore Judea. So, Rome was an occupying power; and back when Jesus was still a young boy, Augustus Caesar formally created the Roman region in Judea. He appointed kings and governors over Judea; and now, at the time of Jesus' arrest and crucifixion, a man known as Pontius Pilate was now the fifth magistrate over Judea; and Pilate had been appointed by the Roman Emperor Tiberius.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, we got a little bit of background on how we got here, and a lot of this stuff was foreseen and foretold by Daniel in the Old Testament book of Daniel, of how the government would go. So, we got a little bit of background on how we got to this place, but could you tell us a little bit more, Scott, about Pilate the man?

SCOTT HOEZEE

We don't know much about him from secular histories of the time. We do know that Pilate could be brutal, especially cracking down on anything he perceived to be a Jewish uprising or insurrection against Rome. In fact, it was said that Pilate was suspected of having stolen money from the temple to build a 50-mile aqueduct, and after that, there was an uprising, where many Jews were angry about that and Pilate cracked down pretty hard on them, and a lot of Jewish people died.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, we want to talk about the entire coming of Jesus before Pilate as we get to it in the earliest written Gospel of Mark in Chapter 15, where it reads: Very early in the morning, the chief priests, with the elders, the teachers of the law and the whole Sanhedrin, made their plans. So they bound Jesus, led him away and handed him over to Pilate. ²“Are you the king of the Jews?” asked Pilate. “You have said so.” Jesus replied. ³The chief priests accused him of many things. ⁴So again Pilate asked him, “Aren't you going to answer? See how many things they are accusing you of.” ⁵But Jesus [still] made no reply, and Pilate was amazed. ⁶Now it was the custom at the festival to release a prisoner whom the people requested. ⁷A man named Barabbas was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising. ⁸The crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did. ⁹“Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?” asked Pilate, ¹⁰knowing it was out of self-interest that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him. ¹¹But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead. ¹²“What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?” Pilate asked them. ¹³“Crucify him!” they shouted. ¹⁴“Why? What crime has he committed?” asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, “Crucify him!” ¹⁵Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Interestingly, there is no historical record of any Roman official having the annual custom or practice of releasing someone from prison around the time of Passover, but Mark says it was a common practice to release a prisoner of the peoples' choice; and in this case, Pilate offered up a man accused of murder; in fact, Barabbas may have been part of that insurrection that we referred to just a minute ago; but of course, the people chose Barabbas over Jesus, and they asked Pilate to crucify Jesus. All of this happened, Mark tells us, at the instigation of the Jewish religious leaders at the time.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, Scott, we see that there is a foregone conclusion in the mind of the Jewish leaders in the Sanhedrin. They had an axe to grind. They wanted Jesus nailed...no pun intended...they wanted Jesus nailed for all the things they had trumped up charges for...that they had accused him of; and their minds were made up that they would have to bring him to Pilate because the historical account says that they could not bring the death penalty, and they had to go to Roman government to get that death penalty, and Pilate was the guy they had to go through. So, they brought Jesus to him, and they wanted him crucified in the first place. There was no other way for them to get it done.

SCOTT HOEZEE

In Mark's account, Jesus only says one thing to Pilate, but otherwise, he refuses to answer any questions or say anything. Pilate says: Are you the king of the Jews? And Jesus, in essence, says: Hey, you said it, not me. And Pilate, we are told, is amazed that Jesus refused to defend himself, but here, in Mark's account, Pilate does not overtly indicate that he knew the case against Jesus was a fake—it was a sham; but we get a little fuller picture of that if we go to John 18; and so, we read this, starting at verse 33:

Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?” ³⁴“Is that your own idea,” Jesus asked, “or did others talk to you about me?” ³⁵“Am I a Jew?” Pilate replied. “Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What is it you have done?” ³⁶Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.” ³⁷“You are a king, then?” said Pilate. Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world it to testify to the truth. Everyone

on the side of truth listens to me.”³⁸“What is truth?” retorted Pilate. With this he went out again to the Jews gathered there and said, “I find no basis for a charge against him.”

DARRELL DELANEY

So, at least we get an idea in a sense that Pilate knew Jesus was innocent; otherwise, why would he keep questioning him in this way? If he knew he was guilty, it would have been a swift place to get him crucified, right? So, it is really interesting that Pilate asked the question: What is truth? What was he getting at?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; it maybe was kind of a philosophically cynical question. Of course, the irony is that the man who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life was standing right in front of Pilate...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But Darrell, let's go to Matthew 27, to another gospel to pick up another famous image that is associated with Pilate.

DARRELL DELANEY

It reads: ²²“What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called the Messiah?” Pilate asked. They all answered, “Crucify him!” ²³“Why? What crime has he committed?” asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, “Crucify him!” ²⁴When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. “I am innocent of this man's blood,” he said. “It is your responsibility.” ²⁵All the people answered, “His blood is on us and on our children!”

SCOTT HOEZEE

And you know, Darrell, to this day, if somebody wants to distance themselves from something, they say: Hey, I am washing my hands of this whole business. You know, it is a way of saying: I don't want anything to do with something that I regard as a mistake. You kind of wonder if, to this day, people who say that, if they all actually know where that came from. That it actually came from Matthew 27 and was something that Pontius Pilate did in front of the crowds to, indeed, distance himself from what he regarded to be some pretty bad business.

But in just a moment, we will reflect on all of this a little bit more, and then we will look back to that question of why Pontius Pilate, of all people, ended up in the *Apostles' Creed*. So, you will want to stay tuned for that.

Segment 2

DARRELL DELANEY

I am Darrell Delaney, with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And Darrell, we have seen so far in this program that Pontius Pilate was a Roman magistrate in charge of Judea; and though he had been known to crack down fiercely on any Jewish uprisings or revolts, in the case of Jesus, he took a pretty dim view of what the religious authorities were up to, and Pilate suspected correctly that they just wanted to leverage Rome to get rid of an meddlesome rabbi and a wannabe messiah that they themselves had thus far been unsuccessful in shutting up, or even in minimizing in the eyes of Jesus' followers.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, of course, they didn't like the power that they thought Jesus had influencing the people, and they wanted to squash that in any way they could. So, they had to come up with these false charges that were no way true to even get Jesus in front of Pilate to get in this situation. It has been interesting to unpack what

Pilate's position has been while we are looking at that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

In fact, you know, although it is only recorded in John, it was the last of Jesus' mighty signs in the Gospel of John that was the straw that broke the camel's back. When Jesus raised Lazarus, as recorded in John 11. I mean, the Pharisees and Scribes just despaired. As they say in Texas: They wanted the Jewish people to believe that Jesus was all hat and no cattle. But raising the dead, especially a man who had been dead for four days already...that kind of had a way of catching people's attention; and so, the religious leaders realized they were getting nowhere in convincing the people Jesus was a fake. So, once Lazarus came back to life, they knew that they had to get Jesus to die. It is going to be the only way to get rid of him in what they perceive to be as blasphemy and false claims.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, they have two problems: They had Lazarus coming back from the dead, who is testifying to what God had done for him; and we have Jesus, who is speaking and living according to this truth; and the Pharisees at that moment knew they had to get rid of him; and it is interesting how even Pilate's wife got a message from the Lord concerning how they should handle Jesus as well.

SCOTT HOEZEE

In Matthew 27:19: While Pilate was sitting on the judge's seat, his wife sent him this message: "Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him." Kind of curious little addition there, found only in Matthew. Some later traditions in Christianity actually assign the wife a name. They called her Claudia Procula; and in the Eastern Orthodox Church, she is regarded as a saint for trying to intervene on behalf of the Jesus whom she knew from a dream to be innocent. I don't think we actually do know what her name was, and we don't know exactly the origin or meaning of her dream, but it is kind of a striking thing that Matthew threw in there.

DARRELL DELANEY

I think it is interesting for two reasons, Scott. The first reason is because God gave her a dream anyway; and the second reason is because when Pilate had that knowledge of the information of the dream, he still chose to wash his hands...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

And not release Jesus, like the dream had told her to tell him to do. So, he didn't do exactly what he was actually supposed to do in that situation. He tried to absolve himself, which does not work in that situation when they are hollering: Crucify!

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, let's look back at that question we asked at the very beginning of this program: Why did the early Church put Pilate in the Apostles' Creed? I mean, the Creed does not mention Abraham or Moses; Peter, Paul, James, John; just Pilate; and some think his inclusion was a way for the Church to establish all these events really did take place. So then, Pontius Pilate serves as a kind of historical marker, right? It is like saying: This really happened in history and here is the man who was in charge when it did.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, if they could actually pinpoint where in the Common Era that you can trace Pontius Pilate when he was the fifth magistrate, you can historically say this is a fact; this is something that you cannot deny that happened in real history; and that is why they use him as a historical marker.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And some think, too, that he was theologically important because it proves Jesus' innocence. He really was innocent; he was pure; he was righteous. Even a secular Roman magistrate saw that much. So, that is why millions of people say Pontius Pilate's name every week in the *Apostles' Creed*. Pilate would probably be amazed if he knew that; but now we need to get to the next station of the cross in John 19: Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. ²The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They clothed him in a purple robe ³and went up to him again and again, saying, "Hail, king of the Jews!" And they slapped him in the face.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; this moment here is really, really intense because they are mocking him. He has been called the king of the Jews. We will see later in the other stations of the cross, they put that marker on his actual cross; and they are saying: Hail, king of the Jews; but they are not really interested in worshipping him. They are interested in disrespecting him and mocking him; and this is the Son of God, who...you know, he is the most innocent person in the history of people, and he is being treated like a criminal.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; mockery is, you know, one of the worst things you can do to a person. So yes; you think you're a good king? Fine; here is a purple bathrobe. Hey, a king should have a crown. Let's make it one of thorns so he will bleed. Just terrible, terrible things to read there; and you know, many of us cannot read about this scene without remembering the prophetic words in Isaiah 53:

³He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. ⁴Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by (God) him and afflicted. ⁵But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities, the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; this verse is being fulfilled in real time in the scripture with Jesus being flogged and beaten; and the fact that Isaiah reminds us to look at it the right way, where it is our sins that put him on the cross; it is our iniquities...our transgressions...we are the reason why he was going through what he was going through; and also, it is redemptive in the fact that it is showing us that by these wounds...these very wounds...we are being healed and we are being forgiven. So, it is really powerful.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; and again, this mockery, you know...Neal Plantinga tells a story about in one of the Jewish concentration camps during World War II, the Nazis took a rabbi and demanded that he preach a sermon, but the Nazis made the rabbi stand naked on a table to do so. When the rabbi asked if he could wear his yarmulke on his head, the Nazis said: Sure thing; a naked man wearing only a little hat; what fun! Mockery is among the cruelest things that humans can do to each other; and when we see it happening to the very Son of God, and when, as you just said, Darrell, you know, when you recognize that is really our sins that are doing that to him. As the old hymn said: I crucified you. That then becomes the generator for all the thanksgiving, all the gratitude, all the praise that we can give to Jesus, because he endured all of that; and of course, it is actually only going to get worse from here.

Well, in just a moment, we are going to keep thinking about this particular station of the cross—Jesus' abuse by the Roman soldiers, and we will wonder a little bit more as we close out the program, what all it means to our lives. So, stay tuned for that.

Segment 3

DARRELL DELANEY

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, let's look at Matthew's account of this sixth station of the cross. This is Matthew 27 again, at verse 27: Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. ²⁸They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, ²⁹and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand. Then they knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said. ³⁰They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. ³¹After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, this is actually another account of the same situation, where they are flogging him, they are mocking him, they are crucifying him; but Matthew is adding a few more details: The crown has thorns on it and the robe is purple...it is a colorful robe; and then they gave Jesus a staff. So, there is a lot more going on in Matthew's version of this than the one we just read.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it is just all demeaning. It is hard to read that kind of abuse. You know, mockery like this kills the human spirit, and I think we should not doubt for a moment that Jesus, being divine, meant that that treatment didn't sting and didn't wound him on many levels. It really did. Theologian Neal Plantinga...it is kind of an extended quote here, but I just want to pick up a few things that he said: What is it about mockery that hurts us so much? We all know mockery causes shame; it strips us; it exposes us. Mockery isolates some feature of another human being then holds it up so everybody can see it and laugh at it and whistle. You isolate what you find peculiar about another human being. Maybe you imitate it, or best of all, you force your victim to mock himself. So, if you are a Nazi, you capture a rabbi and you make him preach; if you are Babylonian guards, you force the Jewish exiles to put on a nightclub act for you with their sacred temple songs. Much childhood mockery seems to arise from ignorance and insecurity. Provincial children mock and accent of a style of clothing; cruel children mock another child for being clumsy or homely; ignorant children ridicule classmates who are artistic or gay; but ignorant sources of mockery remove none of its sting. Mockery is meant to hurt, and it does. Most 12-year-olds would rather be slugged than mocked. If you are the parent of a child who is being mocked by a group and you see it just once, you will never forget.

DARRELL DELANEY

Now, when we consider the sufferings of Jesus, which we will be doing in this entire series from here on out, we will also remember what the Apostle Peter said about this in 1 Peter 2, where it reads: ^{20b}But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. ²¹To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." ²³When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. ²⁴"He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by his wounds you have been healed." ²⁵For "you were like sheep going astray," but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, the suffering of Jesus that the Church concentrates in a focused way during the season of Lent...that sets the tone, Peter says, for Christian living. Peter said this; Paul, and other writers in the New Testament will likewise make that plain. We suffer as Christ suffered; and you know, Jesus told his disciples to expect that much, you know; I mean, Jesus would say on the Sermon on the Mount: Blessed are you when you get persecuted; and it is going to happen, right? Look, they persecuted me; they mocked me; I am the Son of God. The disciple is not greater than his master. You are going to suffer as well. So, this is, you know, suffering as Jesus suffered is a mark of discipleship.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; I don't think that anybody really wants to hear that to be close to Jesus and to follow Jesus is actually going to be taking up a level of suffering; suffering that you do not cause; that you do not deserve upon yourself. Because he was the innocent one and he walked around on this earth and he did good—that is what he did: Acts 10:38 tells all the disciples to go around...and Jesus actually went around doing good; and he actually got persecuted for doing good; and those who follow Jesus will be in that situation as well.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; now, we are not to desire suffering; we are not masochistic as Christians; and we don't make ourselves so obnoxious that we earn a degree of scorn or suffering. I mean, we don't have to go out and seek suffering. Just being associated with Jesus...just being associated with the name of Jesus...is enough to cause us to suffer; and as you just said, Darrell, that is not the message anybody relishes hearing; it is not something that we should want to have happen; but Jesus says it inevitably will happen because it is still a broken world, Darrell; and when the goodness of Jesus...and now the goodness of Jesus through also us, his followers...when that goodness enters into the brokenness of our world, inevitably there is going to be pushback.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; I mean, here is the good news: Jesus warned us that that would happen...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

He also said that he would give us peace in the middle of those kinds of situations. He would also give us the words that we need to say, should we need to say anything; and we will always be prepared to give an answer for the hope that is within us when we are in those situations. We have seen and we have heard of situations where people have been martyred for their faith, but they did not give up on their belief in Christ, even in the midst of those hard times; and Jesus is actually going before us, modeling what it means to surrender his life to God and show that even through suffering, he can remain faithful; and he gives us the strength to do the same.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; now, unfortunately, the Church all along the ages, right to this very day, sometimes it tries to avoid that by amassing political power to itself or sidling up next to powerful political leaders; and then we can force other people to do what we want so *they* will suffer and we won't. That has to be pretty close to the opposite of the Gospel when the Church behaves that way; and it always does harm to the good news of the Gospel when we try to act like worldly powerbrokers in the Church.

Well, Darrell, as we close out this program and these two stations of the cross of Jesus before Pilate and also his abuse by Roman soldiers, maybe we can conclude by remembering these biblical lines from the Apostle Paul in Romans 5: ⁶You see, at just the right time, when we were powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

DARRELL DELANEY

⁹Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! ¹⁰For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! ¹¹Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And to all of that what can we say, Darrell, except what we almost always say when we conclude our *Groundwork* programs: For the suffering of Jesus and our salvation, thanks be to God.

Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Scott Hoezee and Darrell Delaney. Join us again next time as we continue our journey reflecting on the stations of the cross with the accounts of Jesus taking up his cross and Simon helping Jesus carry the cross.

Connect with us at our website, groundworkonline.com, to share what *Groundwork* means to you, and make suggestions for future *Groundwork* programs.

DARRELL DELANEY

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