

JESUS' TRIAL BEFORE PILATE

John 18:28-37

Right now we are in the season of Advent. We are looking forward to Christmas when we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, our Savior. With all the decorations, and music, and Christmas programs, along with preparations of various sorts, it is obviously a great event. But as we look at John 18, we see that the time was drawing close for by far the greatest event in all history. Jesus knew the time had arrived. He had taught a great deal about grace and life and light, and also of the darkness that surrounds people who chase after their lusts for personal satisfaction. “How deeply is the world entrenched in darkness? How great are God’s love for us, and His grace to us? How vital is the life that Jesus offers? How bright is the light by which we are invited to live? The answer to each of these questions is found in the events of the final night and day of Jesus’ life on earth ... and in His resurrection.”¹

John 18:28-37 NLT:

²⁸ *Jesus’ trial before Caiaphas ended in the early hours of the morning. Then he was taken to the headquarters of the **Roman governor**. His accusers didn’t go inside because it would defile them, and they wouldn’t be allowed to celebrate the Passover.*

²⁹ *So **Pilate**, the governor, went out to them and asked, “What is your charge against this man?”*

³⁰ *“We wouldn’t have handed him over to you if he weren’t a criminal!” they retorted.*

³¹ *“Then take him away and judge him by your own law,” Pilate told them. “Only the Romans are permitted to execute someone,” the Jewish leaders replied.*

³² *(This fulfilled Jesus’ prediction about the way he would die.)*

³³ *Then Pilate went back into his headquarters and called for Jesus to be brought to him. “Are you the king of the Jews?” he asked him.*

³⁴ *Jesus replied, “Is this your own question, or did others tell you about me?”*

³⁵ *“Am I a Jew?” Pilate retorted. “Your own people and their leading priests brought you to me for trial. Why? What have you done?”*

¹ Richards, Larry; Richards, Lawrence O.: *The Teacher's Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1987, S. 750.

³⁶ Jesus answered, “**My Kingdom is not an earthly kingdom.** If it were, my followers would fight to keep me from being handed over to the Jewish leaders. But my Kingdom is not of this world.”

³⁷ Pilate said, “So you are a king?” Jesus responded, “You say I am a king. Actually, I was born and came into the world to testify to the truth. All who love the truth recognize that **what I say is true.**”

There is a clue in verse 28 that should jump out at us immediately. Why did the Jewish leaders take Jesus to the Roman governor, Pilate? Why would they not have Him tried and sentenced before their own Sanhedrin? It was simply because right from the outset the Jewish leaders intended for Jesus to be executed. You see the Jews could conduct a trial for another Jew who broke their laws and they could even condemn him to death, but they were not permitted to enforce the sentence by crucifixion unless the Roman government supported such a decision. Only the Roman governor had such authority. If the Jews had tried Jesus and sentenced Him to death, He would have been killed by stoning, as Steven would be killed (Acts 7:57-60). But God had determined that Jesus would be crucified as we read in John 8:28 NLT:²

²⁸ So Jesus said, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man on the cross, then you will understand that I Am he. I do nothing on my own but say only what the Father taught me.

Jesus was to bear the curse of the law and become a curse for us; and in order to do this, He had to hang on a tree according to Deuteronomy 21:22–23 and Galatians 3:13.

Deuteronomy 21:22-23 (NLT)

²² “If someone has committed a crime worthy of death and is executed and hung on a tree,

²³ the body must not remain hanging from the tree overnight. You must bury the body that same day, **for anyone who is hung is cursed** in the sight of God. In this way, you will prevent the defilement of the land the Lord your God is giving you as your special possession.

Jesus would take on Himself the curse of the Law **that we would have** received for breaking that Law, and it resulted in His death so that we might have eternal life. He sacrificed His life for ours **WILLINGLY.**

Galatians 3:13 NLT:

¹³ But Christ has rescued us from the curse pronounced by the law. When he was hung on the cross, **he took upon himself the curse for our wrongdoing.** For it is written in the Scriptures, “Cursed is everyone who

² Also see John 3:14; 12:32–33.

is hung on a tree.”

Jesus Himself predicted crucifixion in Matthew 20:18-19 NLT:

¹⁸ *“Listen,” he said, “we’re going up to Jerusalem, where the Son of Man will be betrayed to the leading priests and the teachers of religious law. They will sentence him to die.*

¹⁹ *Then they will hand him over to the Romans to be mocked, flogged with a whip, and **crucified**. But on the third day he will be raised from the dead.”*

Two ways God shows us that the Bible is without error are **prophecy** and **miracles**. God gave the prophets predictions about the future which all came true exactly as they had been prophesied. He also had miracles performed that were so extraordinary that no other being could perform such miracles. Anyone who thoroughly understands their Bible will have no doubts as to who its author is.

So the Jewish leaders brought Jesus to Pilate and were willing to lie and cheat in order to produce evidence that would convince Pilate that Jesus was intending to overthrow the Roman government and set Himself up as king. Talk about a kangaroo court. The Jewish leaders would accept nothing else from Pilate but a death sentence for Jesus. Both the Jewish leaders and Pilate had no idea however that they were being used by God to accomplish His will at this crucial point in time.

Did Jesus try to defend Himself? No. Instead, He knew this was the time for Him to accomplish the major purpose for which He came. There would, therefore, be no reason to defend Himself. He was intent on allowing this sacrifice for the sins of the world to go forward. He could have called upon the angel armies to come and rescue Him if that is what He wanted, but He did not because He knew what He had to do to provide salvation for all who were willing to accept it.

“Abraham Bininger, a Swiss boy from Zurich, came with his parents to this country on the same ship that brought John Wesley. The father and mother of the lad both died on the voyage and were buried at sea, and he stepped alone from the gangway on to a strange continent, where there was not a single familiar face. When he had grown to manhood, he asked to be sent to tell the story of the cross to the Negroes of the island of St. Thomas, having heard of their great misery and degradation.

When he arrived at the island, he learned that it was against the law for any person but a slave to preach to the slaves. It was the policy of the planters to keep the blacks in ignorance and superstition. Shortly after this the governor of St. Thomas received a letter signed Abraham Bininger, in which the writer begged urgently to become a slave for the rest of his life,

promising to serve as a slave faithfully, provided he could give his leisure time to preaching to his fellow-slaves.

The governor sent the letter to the King of Denmark, who was so touched by it that he sent an edict empowering Abraham Bininger to tell the story of the Messiah when and where he chose—to black or white, bond or free.”³

Bininger chose slavery in order to preach the Word of God to those who would otherwise never hear it. Christ chose to die for those who would otherwise never see Heaven. That is the extent to which a true follower of Christ must be willing to go to serve the King. We believe this sentiment is expressed very well by the following poem entitled **God Counted Crosses:**

“I counted **dollars** while God counted **crosses**,
I counted **gains** while He counted **losses**,
I counted **my worth** by the things gained in store
But He sized me up **by the scars that I bore**.
I coveted **honors** and sought for degrees,
He wept as He counted **the hours on my knees**;
I never knew until one day by the grave

How vain are the things that we spend life to save;

I did not yet know until my loved one went above

That richest is he who is rich in God’s love.”

—*The Brethren Evangelist*⁴

That is the blessing one feels who follows the example of Christ going to the cross. It is not a pleasant thing to go through, but the glory of the reward for those who commit will last for all eternity. So let us try as best we can to understand exactly what was going on during this so-called trial of Jesus before He was sentenced to crucifixion. Mark gives us a little more detail on the trial than John does, so let us read his report before continuing.

Mark 14:53-65 NLT:

⁵³ *They took Jesus to the high priest’s home where the leading priests, the elders, and the teachers of religious law had gathered.*

³ Tan, Paul Lee: *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: A Treasury of Illustrations, Anecdotes, Facts and Quotations for Pastors, Teachers and Christian Workers.* Garland TX: Bible Communications, 1996, c1979.

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⁵⁴ *Meanwhile, Peter followed him at a distance and went right into the high priest's courtyard. There he sat with the guards, warming himself by the fire.*

⁵⁵ *Inside, the leading priests and the entire high council were trying to find evidence against Jesus, so they could put him to death. But they couldn't find any.*

⁵⁶ *Many false witnesses spoke against him, but they contradicted each other.*

⁵⁷ *Finally, some men stood up and gave this false testimony:*

⁵⁸ *"We heard him say, 'I will destroy this Temple made with human hands, and in three days I will build another, made without human hands.'"*

⁵⁹ *But even then they didn't get their stories straight!*

⁶⁰ *Then the high priest stood up before the others and asked Jesus, "Well, aren't you going to answer these charges? What do you have to say for yourself?"*

⁶¹ *But Jesus was silent and made no reply. Then the high priest asked him, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?"*

⁶² *Jesus said, **"I Am.** And you will see the Son of Man seated in the place of power at God's right hand and coming on the clouds of heaven."*

⁶³ *Then the high priest tore his clothing to show his horror and said, "Why do we need other witnesses?"*

⁶⁴ *You have all heard his blasphemy. What is your verdict?" "Guilty!" they all cried. "He deserves to die!"*

⁶⁵ *Then some of them began to spit at him, and they blindfolded him and beat him with their fists. "Prophecy to us," they jeered. And the guards slapped him as they took him away.*

Now let us pick up on the story as we go back to John 18:28-32 NLT:

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²⁹ *So Pilate, the governor, went out to them and asked, "What is your charge against this man?"*

³⁰ *"We wouldn't have handed him over to you if he weren't a criminal!" they retorted.*

³¹ *"Then take him away and judge him by your own law," Pilate told them. "Only the Romans are permitted to execute someone," the Jewish leaders replied.*

³² *(This fulfilled Jesus' prediction about the way he would die.)*

Jewish law did not permit them to enter a Gentile house. They were allowed, however, to enter the courtyard. Pilate, therefore, probably came out into the courtyard to speak with them. Is it not interesting that they were so concerned about defiling themselves yet did not give a second thought to the treachery they needed to do in order to murder Jesus?

When Pilate asked the Jewish leaders what the charges were, they did not give him a straight answer. However Luke 23:2 lists three “official charges”: (1) He led the nation astray; (2) He opposed paying tribute to Caesar; and (3) He claimed to be the Jewish Messiah and King. None of these three charges could be supported by any tangible evidence. Pilate did not in any way want to get involved in a Jewish court case, especially during the Passover celebration, so he tried to evade the issue by telling them to take Jesus away and conduct their own trial.⁵

John 18:33-37 NLT:

³³ Then Pilate went back into his headquarters and called for Jesus to be brought to him. “Are you the king of the Jews?” he asked him.

³⁴ Jesus replied, “Is this your own question, or did others tell you about me?”

³⁵ “Am I a Jew?” Pilate retorted. “Your own people and their leading priests brought you to me for trial. Why? What have you done?”

³⁶ Jesus answered, “My Kingdom is not an earthly kingdom. If it were, my followers would fight to keep me from being handed over to the Jewish leaders. But my Kingdom is not of this world.”

³⁷ Pilate said, “So you are a king?” Jesus responded, “You say I am a king. Actually, I was born and came into the world to testify to the truth. All who love the truth recognize that what I say is true.”

In John 18:33 through 19:15, we get a good idea of just how much of a coward Pilate was. At least seven times Pilate went to the Jews outside, trying to work out a compromise. In the end Pilate had Christ crucified because Pilate was a weakling who would do anything to keep the people peaceful. After all, if there was political unrest in Judea, Rome might get rid of Pilate and appoint another governor.

Mark 15:9-15 NLT:

⁹ “Would you like me to release this ‘King of the Jews’?” Pilate asked.

¹⁰ (For he realized by now that the leading priests had arrested Jesus out of envy.)

¹¹ But at this point the leading priests stirred up the crowd to demand the release of Barabbas instead of Jesus.

¹² Pilate asked them, “Then what should I do with this man you call the

⁵ Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Jn 18:28.

king of the Jews?”

¹³ *They shouted back, “Crucify him!”*

¹⁴ *“Why?” Pilate demanded. “What crime has he committed?” But the mob roared even louder, “Crucify him!”*

¹⁵ *So to pacify the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He ordered Jesus flogged with a lead-tipped whip, then turned him over to the Roman soldiers to be crucified.*

How many people do you think are and will be in Hell because they were afraid of what other people would do or think if they did not go along with what everyone else was doing? We believe the number would be beyond comprehension.

Now Pilate would have been satisfied if Jesus would simply have said that He was not a king. That would have gotten Pilate off the hook, and he could have thrown the whole matter back upon the Sanhedrin. But Jesus would not say that He was not a king. He would only say that His kingdom was not of this world. We would imagine this statement would have confounded Pilate. What in the world could this guy mean? Did He come from outer space or the depths of the earth? Pilate had most likely never read the book of Isaiah where Isaiah says:

Isaiah 11:1-9 NLT:

¹ *Out of the stump of David’s family will grow a shoot— yes, a new Branch bearing fruit from the old root.*

² *And the Spirit of the Lord will rest on him— the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of **knowledge** and the fear of the Lord.*

³ *He will delight in obeying the Lord. He will not judge by appearance nor make a decision based on hearsay.*

⁴ *He will give justice to the poor and make fair decisions for the exploited. The earth will shake at the force of his word, and one breath from his mouth will destroy the wicked.*

⁵ *He will wear righteousness like a belt and truth like an undergarment.*

⁶ *In that day the wolf and the lamb will live together; the leopard will lie down with the baby goat. The calf and the yearling will be safe with the lion, and a little child will lead them all.*

⁷ *The cow will graze near the bear. The cub and the calf will lie down together. The lion will eat hay like a cow.*

⁸ *The baby will play safely near the hole of a cobra. Yes, a little child will put its hand in a nest of deadly snakes without harm.*

⁹ *Nothing will hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, for as the waters fill the sea, so the earth will be filled with people who know the Lord.*

Pilate may not have known this prediction, but the Jews should have been familiar with

Isaiah's prophecies, which means they either must have intentionally ignored them or, like many Christian leaders today, they misled the people about God's Word in order to satisfy their own agenda. Once again the Jews chose to ignore God's Holy Word in order to satisfy their own worldly lusts.

Pilate said to Jesus, "*So you are a king?*" Jesus replied, "*You say I am a king. Actually, I was born and came into the world to testify to the truth. All who love the truth recognize that what I say is true.*"

Roman soldiers may have been great warriors, but apparently they were not the greatest thinkers, because at this point we believe Pilate started to get a little confused. First, he tries to understand how somebody can be a king and His kingdom is not on this earth. Then Jesus tells Pilate in effect that He did not say that He was a king; it was Pilate who suggested Jesus was a king. Then before that subject can be explored any further, Jesus tells Pilate that the real reason He came was to teach the truth of the Word of God. It seems that Pilate might have been scratching his head at this point wondering what in the world this fellow was talking about. Was He crazy? Was He drunk?

What Pilate did not realize is made quite clear by Paul in **Romans 2:12-16 NLT**:

¹² *When the Gentiles sin, they will be destroyed, even though they never had God's written law. And the Jews, who do have God's law, will be judged by that law when they fail to obey it.*

¹³ *For merely listening to the law doesn't make us right with God. It is obeying the law that makes us right in his sight.*

¹⁴ *Even Gentiles, who do not have God's written law, show that they know his law when they instinctively obey it, even without having heard it.*

¹⁵ ***They demonstrate that God's law is written in their hearts, for their own conscience and thoughts either accuse them or tell them they are doing right.***

¹⁶ *And this is the message I proclaim—that the day is coming when God, through Christ Jesus, will judge everyone's secret life.*

You see, God has built into every human being ever born the ability to recognize His truth when they hear it. That is why Jesus can say in John 18:37 that "*All who love the truth recognize that what I say is true.*" This simply means that anyone who is willing to open his or her heart and mind to receive God's teaching will know that it is true. He has given everyone that great gift. It does not always mean that they will accept God's truth because they may not want to stop doing what God tells them to stop doing, or to start doing what God tells them they should be doing. They may prefer lies, sin, and spiritual death to eternal life. Satan is not an adversary to trifle with. He will draw you away from the things that will bring you the most happiness with lies that he promises will bring you happiness, when in reality they will bring you misery. Be prepared!

Jesus was not about to tell Pilate that He would one day rule this world as King of kings

and Lord of lords. That would probably have confused Pilate even more and would not have accomplished any purpose. Jesus said in effect that His Kingdom was not going to be like the kingdoms that have ruled the world system. It will not be a power structure built on politics. It will not come as the result of normal conquering strategies. Jesus will not be elected King by either the Democrats or the Republicans or by the United Nations. His kingdom is not going to be built upon war, hatred, and bitterness. Pilate, himself, was a crooked politician who bought his job and was a puppet of Rome. He hated the Jews, but he was afraid to offend them because he might lose his job. But Jesus will not come to His Kingdom by political maneuvering. Praise God for that!

Jesus said, *"If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight."* He was offering no resistance. Peter had tried to defend Him, and Jesus had told him to put his sword in the sheath, just as earlier in His ministry He had forbidden violence on His behalf (Luke 9:51-56). Misguided but zealous Christians over the centuries have missed this point. So we had the Crusades and other religious wars that have given Christianity a bad name in the view of others.

Christ was not going to build His Kingdom out of the political system of the day.⁶ Jesus was going to build His kingdom in a totally different way. The Bible teaches us clearly that in this present age, from the time of Jesus' first coming to when He comes again at the end of the age, Christ is calling people to represent Him in this world. (See Acts 15:13-15.)

Today, right now, you and I are being called to live in the world but not to be of the world. The time will come when the Lord will completely remove the Church from the world. Then, when Christ returns to the earth, all His saints will be with Him to set up His everlasting, eternal kingdom.⁷ Are you sure you will be part of that kingdom? If not, please e-mail us at www.villagechurchofwheaton and we will send you information fully explaining what it is all about.

⁶ J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1983), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, under: "Chapter 18."

⁷ Ibid.