

194. The Gospel of John 19:6-16

Jesus on Trial-Part 6

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In our study of John's Gospel—we find ourselves this morning looking at (and finishing) the final stage of Jesus' civil trial.

At this point, Jesus endured two trials the morning of His crucifixion—the first being a *religious* trial and the second a *civil* trial.

This first trial took place before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish high council—the second one before Pilate the Roman governor of the region.

Each trial had 3 phases to it—in Jesus' civil trial He first stood before Pilate, then Herod, and finally before Pilate once again—and that is where we pick up our study this morning

II. The Civil Trial of Jesus

- A. Jesus stands before Pilate the first time
- B. Jesus stands before Herod
- C. Jesus stands before Pilate the second time

Luke 23:13-15 (NKJV)

¹³ Then Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests, the rulers, and the people, ¹⁴ said to them, "You have brought this Man to me, as one who misleads the people. And indeed, having examined *Him* in your presence, I have found no fault in this Man concerning those things of which you accuse Him; ¹⁵ no, neither did Herod, for I sent you back to him; and indeed nothing deserving of death has been done by Him.

Now, at this point, Pilate tries to end this charade of the Jewish leadership seeking to railroad an innocent Man. He does so by putting into practice his annual goodwill gesture toward the Jewish population living in and around Jerusalem—and that was to release a Jewish prisoner every year at Passover time:

John 18:39 (NKJV)

³⁹ "But you have a custom that I should release someone to you at the Passover. Do you therefore want me to release to you the King of the Jews?"

Pilate knew Jesus was innocent and wanted to let Him go. So, he chose the most hardcore, wicked criminal in his jail—a man named Barabbas and stood him next to Jesus in front of the crowd.

Pilate figured the people would no doubt choose Jesus to be released instead of Barabbas—after all the Jews called Jesus their King—certainly they would choose their King over a notorious criminal—but that's not what happened:

John 18:40 (NKJV)

⁴⁰ Then they all cried again, saying, "Not this Man, but Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a robber.

So, then Pilate thought that if he had Jesus **scourged**—that would satiate the Jew’s lust for blood, and they would finally agree for him to let Jesus go free.

John 19:1–2 (NKJV)

¹ So then Pilate took Jesus and scourged Him. ² And the soldiers twisted a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and they put on Him a purple robe.

As covered previously—scourging was one of the most barbaric practices ever developed—it was so brutal in fact that Rome forbid its own citizens from being scourged—and eventually outlawed the practice altogether.

Again, Pilate knew that Jesus was innocent, and that the Jewish leadership wanted Him killed because of envy—so he thought that by scourging Jesus it would satisfy their bloodlust and allow him to let this so-called Jewish Prophet to go free.

However, that’s not how it played out—as Pilate underestimated the level of hatred the crowd had for Jesus.

The **robe** probably was a military cloak flung around Jesus’ shoulders, intended to mock His claim to be King of the Jews.

John 19:3 (NKJV)

³ Then they said, "Hail, King of the Jews!" And they struck Him with their hands.

The verb tenses in the Greek text in verse 3 indicate that the soldiers *repeatedly* came to Him, mocked Him, and beat Him with their hands.

One author had this to say—

"The soldiers took this opportunity to have their fun with Him before He was crucified. When it says "they smote him with their hands," it means they played a cruel Roman game with Him... All the soldiers would show the prisoner their fists. Then they would blindfold the prisoner and all but one would hit him as hard as they could. Then they would remove the blindfold, and if the prisoner was still conscious, he was to guess which soldier hit him. Obviously, the prisoner could never guess the right one. They would continue this until they had beaten the prisoner to a pulp."

John 19:4–6 (NKJV)

⁴ Pilate then went out again, and said to them, "Behold, I am bringing Him out to you, that you may know that I find no fault in Him." ⁵ Then Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. And Pilate said to them, "Behold the Man!" ⁶ Therefore, when the chief priests and officers saw Him, they cried out, saying, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" Pilate said to them, "You take Him and crucify Him, for I find no fault in Him."

For the third time, Pilate announced, "**I find no fault in Him!**"

The crowd might well have shouted, "*Then why did you have Him scourged?*"—Pilate’s actions contradicted his words.

One commentator had this perspective of Pilate—

“He was a weak-willed man who, like many politicians, hoped to find a happy compromise that would please everybody. The Chinese teacher Confucius defined “cowardice” as “to know what is right and not do it.”

Matthew records the scene this way—

Matthew 27:21-22 (NKJV)

²¹ The governor answered and said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" They said, "Barabbas!" ²² Pilate said to them, "What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said to him, "Let Him be crucified!"

The big mistake Pilate made (the one that will forever torture him) was allowing the crowd to make the decision for him as to what he was going to do with Jesus!

Make no mistake about it—Jesus wasn't on trial that day in Pilate's court—Pilate was!

In that regard Pilate becomes an example of the place every human being finds him or herself in when presented with the gospel—**“What am I going to do with Jesus who is called Christ?”**

Each person has to decide for themselves what they are going to do with Jesus—but the one thing you must never do is let the crowd make that decision for you—too much is at stake!

Proverbs 29:25 (NKJV)

²⁵ The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD shall be safe.

One author put it well—

“The fear of man’ results in yielding to human pressure to commit evil or to refrain from doing what is right. How many have gone to hell because they were afraid of what their friends would say if they trusted Christ!”

But something else we brought up last time but ran out of time before we could deal with it fully. Upon hearing the accusations against Jesus and questioning Him personally—Pilate knew Jesus was innocent and was being railroaded by the Jewish leadership.

That in and of itself wasn't so unusual—people are falsely accused all the time by those who have it in for them for whatever reason—Pilate knew that—nothing out of the ordinary. However, what *was* odd was that this Man being falsely accused—wasn't trying to defend Himself—and that struck Pilate as extremely odd to say the least.

Pilate had heard many a man accused of a crime (or crimes) over the years loudly defending himself, declaring his innocence—or at very least begging for mercy. Yet when Pilate tried to get Jesus to say something in His own defense—He was silent so as to cause Pilate to *“marvel greatly.”* (Matthew 27:14)

We know that Jesus' silence was a fulfillment of prophecy (Isaiah 53:7).

Jesus was silent because He had come to die—that was His mission (*“For this cause I came into the world”* John 12:27).

So, we know why Jesus was silent that morning—but to Pilate this was extremely odd behavior to the point of being somewhat disturbing that this Man being accused of a capital crime wasn't defending Himself. On top of that Matthew records something that no other gospel writer records—something which no doubt added to Pilate's dissolving composure (taking into account that the Romans were very superstitious people).

Right in the middle of this trial Pilate's wife, Procula, sent him a message—

Matthew 27:19 (NKJV)

¹⁹ While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent to him, saying, "Have nothing to do with that just [righteous/innocent] Man, for I have suffered many things today in a dream because of Him."

Whether or not this dream came from the Holy Spirit we're not told but one thing *is* for sure—the Romans believed that the gods used dreams to communicate to mortals. The fact that Pilate's own wife had a dream warning him not to pass judgment on this righteous Man seemed to have so unnerved Pilate (*was this a message from the gods?!*)—that it could have been the main reason he tried so hard to let Jesus go.

But Pilate was about to go from anxiety to full blown panic—

John 19:6-9 (NKJV)

⁶ Therefore, when the chief priests and officers saw Him, they cried out, saying, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" Pilate said to them, "You take Him and crucify Him, for I find no fault in Him."

⁷ 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." ⁸ Therefore, when Pilate heard that saying, he was the more afraid, ⁹ and went again into the Praetorium, and said to Jesus, "Where are You from?" But Jesus gave him no answer.

This is where Pilate starts to really become *unglued*—as he is now wondering if he is sitting in judgment on—a son of one of the gods!

The Greeks and Romans believed the gods and their children often took human form and came down to interact with mortal men and women on earth. Well, Pilate's fears were justified—he was sitting in judgment on—not one of the sons of the gods—but on the only begotten Son of the one and only true and living God!

John 19:10–12 (NKJV)

¹⁰ 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?" ¹¹ Jesus answered, "You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin [Caiaphas]." ¹² From then on Pilate sought [all the more] to release Him, but the Jews cried out, saying, "If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar's friend. Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar."

When the Jews said this—Pilate knew it was over—they had him over a barrel.

They pressured Pilate to execute Jesus or else they would turn him in to Caesar as one who was aiding and abetting a Man who claimed to be the King of the Jews in place of Caesar—which amounted to treason.

John 19:13 (NKJV)

¹³ When Pilate therefore 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, Gabbatha.

One commentator rightly observed—

"As Pilate sits down in his judgment seat to make a decision—the irony is that he himself is being judged on the basis of his response to Jesus Christ. So, too, some of you will sit back and say, 'I'm going to analyze, scrutinize, and evaluate Jesus Christ.'

In reality, however, you're not judging Him, but your reaction to Him is judging you because He is the King of kings regardless of what you decide. He's going to have His way whether you choose to get on board or not. Thus, the judgment seat you're occupying right now is that of your own judgment. And how you respond to Him will determine whether you go to heaven or spend eternity in hell."

John 19:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴ Now it was the Preparation Day of the Passover, and about the sixth hour...

'**Preparation Day**' was the day before the Sabbath (which meant every Friday was Preparation Day—because every Saturday was a Sabbath, leading many to conclude that Jesus was crucified on Friday). However, there were 7 other special Sabbaths sprinkled throughout the Jewish religious year—these were called '*high Sabbaths*'—and the day before every one of them was a '*preparation day*.'

The Gospels make it clear that Jesus was crucified on Passover (Paul affirms this in 1 Corinthians 5:7) which I believe was on Thursday that year (I'll tell you why I believe that when we get to the resurrection).

So, if Jesus was crucified on Thursday (Passover), that would mean that the next day (Friday) was the beginning of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Leviticus 23:4-8).

This feast started with one of these special or high Sabbaths—which meant that Thursday (Passover) was also a "*Preparation Day*" (and was one every year since the Feast of Unleavened Bread always started with a Sabbath). Yet it sounds from verse 14 ("*Now it was the Preparation Day of the Passover*") that Jesus was crucified on the day *before* the Passover—so what about that?

As we have said a few weeks ago—Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the Feast of Firstfruits (all taking place in a consecutive 8-day period)—were often all lumped together and called '**Passover**' as in '*Passover week*' or '*Passover time*'—like when we know that Christmas Day is on Dec. 25th and yet we call the whole month of December, "*Christmas time*".

When John says in verse 14 that it was "**...about the sixth hour**"—it is likely that John used Roman time, so that "**the sixth hour**" would have been 6 A.M. (3 hours from Jesus' crucifixion).

Mark tells us that Jesus was crucified "*the third hour*"—which, in Jewish reckoning, would have been 9 A.M.

John 19:14–16 (NKJV)

¹⁴ Now it was the Preparation Day of the Passover, and about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, "Behold your King!" ¹⁵ 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!" ¹⁶ Then he delivered Him to them to be crucified. Then they took Jesus and led Him away.

To fully understand why Pilate caved to the bloodthirsty mob so quickly—a little background is necessary.

One historian had this to say about Pilate—

"Pontius Pilate had been appointed the fifth governor of Judea by Emperor Tiberius in A.D. 26 and held that position for about ten years. Both the Gospels and extrabiblical sources portray him as proud, arrogant, and cynical (cf. 18:38), but also as weak and vacillating. His tenure as governor was marked by insensitivity and brutality (cf. Luke 13:1)."

Pilate seemed to have had a—"I'm going to show them who's boss" type of leadership style with regard to the Jewish people he was put in charge of—totally underestimating their resolve and tenacity.

You see, by this time Pilate had backed himself into a corner with the Jewish population in and around Jerusalem—and with the emperor himself. Pilate had been in power as governor of the region for about five or six years at this time (John 18 & 19)—and he hadn't always exercised the best judgment in his dealings with the Jewish people.

First, he had deliberately offended the Jews by having his soldiers carry ensigns (flags) into Jerusalem that carried the likeness of Caesar.

To the Jews such images were considered to be idolatrous since the Caesars were worshipped as gods in the Roman Empire (Exodus 20:3-4).

Previous governors had carefully avoided displaying the ensigns in public (especially in the holy city of Jerusalem) so as not to offend the deeply religious Jewish population living there.

A delegation of Jewish leaders went to Pilate and kept demanding that he remove the ensigns—which so infuriated Pilate that he rounded them up into an amphitheater and threatened to have his soldiers cut off their heads if they did not cease and desist! But instead of being frightened they defiantly exposed their necks and threw themselves on the ground daring Pilate to make good on his threat.

Pilate knew they had him—he had been sent to the region to keep peace and not to stir up a riot which a massacre of these men would have surely caused—so he gave in to their demand.

Not long after that Pilate decided to build an aqueduct which would have brought water into the city of Jerusalem from fifty miles away. This would have been a good public works project and would have benefited the Jewish population in the city—the problem was he didn't have the money to finance the project!

So once again, exercising bad judgment, he forcibly took money from the Temple treasury—which in the mind of the Jews was dedicated to YHWH, the God of Israel, and could only be used for the worship of Him.

As you can imagine the Jews revolted and so to counter this uprising Pilate sent his soldiers into the crowd dressed like civilians but secretly carrying knives and clubs—and when the signal was given, they brutally slaughtered many of these unarmed protestors.

Pilate's third offense against the Jewish people almost got him executed by the emperor.

He had special shields made for his soldiers that were stationed at the Fortress of Antonia right there on the Temple Mount. But in a blatantly transparent attempt to flatter the emperor, Tiberius Caesar, Pilate ordered the likeness of Tiberius engraved on the shields.

Well, as Pilate should have already learned, the Jews saw these images as a form of idolatry. This time the Jewish leaders by-passed Pilate altogether and went straight to Caesar himself to file a formal complaint.

The emperor didn't care about empty flattery—all he wanted was for Pilate to keep peace in the region and not to do anything that would foment a revolution. Tiberius demanded that the shields be removed immediately and warned Pilate that if he caused one more uprising among the Jewish population—it would mean his head!

So, you can see that when it came to the trial of Jesus—Pilate was caught between the proverbial rock and a hard place. Pilate knew Jesus was innocent and wanted to let Him go—but the people kept demanding that he give the order to have Jesus crucified.

However only John records what finally forced Pilate to give into their demands—“...**the Jews cried out saying, ‘If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar’s friend. Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar.’”** (John 19:12)

When Pilate heard that he felt he had no other choice but to put Jesus to death.

To do the right thing, to let Jesus an innocent Man go free, would have caused a riot—and Pilate couldn’t afford that—not if he wanted to save his own neck—and so we read:

Matthew 27:24 (NKJV)

²⁴ When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather *that* a tumult was rising, he took water and washed *his* hands before the multitude, saying, “I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see *to it.*”

The problem was that Pilate couldn’t wash away the guilt and sin of crucifying an innocent Man simply by washing his hands in a basin of water.

**How ironic for Pilate that the only thing that could wash away his sin—
was the very blood he had ordered spilled!
As Robert Lowry’s beautiful hymn declares—
“What can wash away my sin?—
nothing but the blood of Jesus!”**

You might be wondering what ever happened to Pontius Pilate? Well, we’re not completely sure—some sources say that he fell out of favor with Emperor Caligula and was exiled to Gaul (France) where he eventually committed suicide.

Many in the early church attributed the downward spiral Pilate’s life seems to have taken, which they say started from the time he condemned Jesus to death—as a judgment of God upon his life. No one can know for sure—all we know for sure is that Pilate had a chance—to do the right thing and let Jesus go—instead he chose to save his life—

Matthew 16:25–26 (NKJV)

²⁵ For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. ²⁶ For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?

Matthew 27:24–25 (NKJV)

²⁴ When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather *that* a tumult was rising, he took water and washed *his* hands before the multitude, saying, “I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see *to it.*” ²⁵ **And all the people answered and said, “His blood *be* on us and on our children.”**

That statement seems almost prophetic in that thirty-eight years later (70 A.D.), the city of Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans—killing many of the Jewish population and scattering the remaining Jews throughout the world.

Jesus said, “*By your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned.*”—Why?

Because “*Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.*”

The trials are over—all that is left is for the King to be crucified!

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower— please, reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

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