

EXPOSITION OF JOHN

Message #71

John 18:28-38

It is absolutely amazing to me as to how careful we are to protect the rights of convicted criminals. For example, when terrorists had been captured and taken to the place where they would be held, there were actual agencies that went in to inspect the conditions of the prisoners, to make certain that no one's rights were ever violated. It is too bad that Jesus Christ did not get this kind of fair treatment. He never did or said one thing wrong and what happened to Him is horrific. Never is that more evident than when you come to the trial that Jesus has before Pilate.

The Apostle John now leaves the religious trials and jumps to the civil trials before Pilate. John gives us much more insight as to what took place between Jesus and Pilate than any other Gospel writer. Pilate is specifically one who is charged by God as being a leader who was responsible for the crucifixion of His Son (Acts 4:27). John is really going to zero in on matters between Jesus and Pilate.

After Jesus had been analyzed by Annas (John 18:12-14) and Caiaphas (John 18:24), John picks up the story of Jesus being led before Pilate. What actually happened is that Jesus was taken before the Sanhedrin (Matt. 27:1-2) and they condemned him and so immediately they took Jesus to the palace where Pilate lived. Pilate would question him and send him to Herod . (Luke 23:6-12) and then Herod would send him back to Pilate again. John just solely focuses on matters that relate to Pilate .

What we ultimately and actually see here is:

WHEN JESUS WAS TRIED BY PILATE, PILATE'S CONCLUSION WAS THAT JESUS WAS TOTALLY INNOCENT ; BUT INSTEAD OF RELEASING HIM, HE HAD HIM BEATEN AND PERMITTED HIM TO BE CRUCIFIED.

Pontius Pilate held office of governor of Judea from A.D. 26-36 (Luke 3:1). He was not a man who was greatly liked by the Jews. He was a Roman Gentile ruler in Jerusalem and the Jews didn't like that or him. According to Luke, Pilate one time killed some Jews and mingled their blood with their sacrifices (Luke 13:1-2). Pilate was a weak politician who was more concerned in protecting his job and himself than handing out justice. According to secular accounts, Pilate was from Spain and joined the Roman legion and married his way into power by marrying Claudia Procula, who was the granddaughter of Emperor Augustus. He was not a solid leader of good quality character. He had married his way into power. He lacked the necessary backbone to be a good leader. He was wishy-washy, but like so many in political power, it is not what you know but who you know or to whom you are related that counts.

The palace where Pilate stayed when in Jerusalem was called the Praetorium (John 18:28). He normally lived in the governor's mansion in Caesarea (Acts 25:1) but was in Jerusalem to monitor the Passover. You did not just walk into Pilate's house in the early morning hours any more than you would walk into the White House to chat with the President. What must have happened is that someone went in and got Pilate and as **verse 29** says, Pilate "went out to them."

Furthermore, the Jews would not enter Pilate's Gentile palace for fear of being defiled, but they would go into the outer court area just as **verse 28** says. These religious people are total hypocrites because they will kill an innocent Jesus Christ, but they are so afraid of defiling themselves at Passover time by stepping foot on Gentile soil. These are religious phonies who pretend to have such high moral scruples.

Actually when we analyze what happens between Pilate, the Jews and Jesus, outside and inside the palace, it breaks down this way:

- 1) John 18:28-32 occur outside the palace - Pilate and the Jews
- 2) John 18:33-38 occur inside the palace - Pilate and Jesus at his first examination
- 3) John 18:38-40 occur outside the palace - Pilate and the Jews
- 4) John 19:1-4 occur inside the palace - Pilate and Jesus with scourging and mockery
- 5) John 19:5-7 occur outside the palace - Pilate and the Jews
- 6) John 19:8-11 occur inside the palace - Pilate and Jesus at his second examination
- 7) John 19:12-16 occur outside the palace - Pilate and the Jews, his last attempt to rescue Christ
- 8) John 19:16 occur outside the palace - Pilate delivers Christ to the Jews

Now a good way to systematize this part of Pilate's trial of Jesus is to do it by way of Pilate's questions. In this context, Pilate asks four main questions:

QUESTION #1 – Pilate asks the Jews about their charges against Jesus. **18:29-32**

Verse 29 was Pilate's first meeting with the Jews and with Jesus. It takes place outside the palace. Pilate had heard of all the things that had taken place in the past few days. He knew of the parade in which Jesus rode into the city on the donkey and he knew of the way Jesus blasted the Jewish religious leadership. He also knew that these Jews envied Jesus Christ (Matt. 27:18).

When Pilate asked the Jews about their legal accusations (**verse 29**), this question apparently caught the Jews somewhat by surprise. Their answer to Pilate was, "Well we wouldn't bring Him before you if He were not an evildoer." That certainly is not a solid defense. It is very abstract. What these Jews are basically saying to Pilate is that you should be willing to condemn Him simply because we brought Him to you for trial. You don't need any evidence; just give us your stamp of approval to kill Him.

According to Luke's account they stumbled to come up with something and they invented three false charges: 1) Misleading the nation - Luke 23:2a. Actually Israel's leaders were misleading it. 2) Forbidding paying taxes - Luke 23:2b. Jesus specifically said to pay them - Matt. 22:21. 3) Saying that He was the Messiah and King - Luke 23:2c. He was the Messiah and King.

These were all trumped up charges and Pilate saw right through their charade and basically said, "since He is such an evildoer, take Him and judge Him according to your law" (**verse 31**). Pilate's view is, if He is as bad as you say, then judge Him by your law. The problem is, Jesus had done nothing against their law but had kept every jot and tittle. So the Jews responded that they were not permitted the right to execute someone. Apparently, when a short time later the Sanhedrin (Acts 6:15) killed Stephen (Acts 7:54, 59) by stoning him, they forgot about the fact they didn't have the right to execute people. Truth is, this was just more of their hypocrisy.

Now the Jewish way of execution was typically stoning. That is why **verse 32** is so critical, for it shows that the whole reason for Pilate's involvement in this was so that Jesus could fulfill prophecy and die on the cross (Psalm 22:16). God is sovereignly involved in this whole thing and He is even orchestrating the person and the means of His own Son's death. Rome crucified people and Pilate was in this picture for that reason.

The Apostle John perceived that what was actually taking place in this business between Pilate and the Jews was the foreordination of God. John saw God's sovereign hand in this meeting between the Jews and the Gentile ruler even though it was pure evil. God was behind the scenes working out His will.

We need to see an important point here. It is possible for a group of very religious people to become so hardened against God and the truth that they hate and want to get rid of the one who brings them under conviction in communicating it. Even when this kind of thing happens, God is still sovereign in what He is doing.

QUESTION #2 – Pilate asks Jesus if He is the King of the Jews. **18:33-37**

Pilate took Jesus into his palace for questioning. Every gospel writer records the fact that Pilate asked Jesus this question. Pilate asked Jesus if He were the King of the Jews. In Greek the text is specifically asking if Jesus is “the King of the Jews” (ο βασιλευς των Ιουδαιοι).

There does not appear to be any contempt or mockery in asking the question. It appears to be very legitimate. According to Matthew, when Pilate asked Jesus this question, Jesus said, “Yes, it is as you say” (Matt. 27:11). What John picks up on is the fact that Jesus asks Pilate whether or not he had come up with this question on his own initiative or because others had told him to ask it. Jesus obviously knows the answer to the question, but he is trying to get Pilate to understand it.

The question was important, for if Pilate were asking this himself he would have in mind a Roman political king. If Pilate were asking this because this is what he had heard from the Jews, he would have had in mind a Jewish religious King. The difference would be that a Roman king could be viewed as a political insurrectionist or, as Wiersbe said, a “rebel.” On the other hand, a Jewish religious King would not be viewed this way by Pilate.

Pilate's answer in **verse 35** makes it clear that this was all about the Jews, not about Rome. Pilate said, look I didn't arrest you for being some Roman king; it was your own nation and its leaders who arrested you. In other words, Pilate had heard that the religious leaders were claiming that He was the king of Israel. So he asks Jesus if He is the King of the Jews. In all reality, Jesus will inform Pilate that His kingdom is not an earthly Kingdom. He is not a political king; He will be a theocratic King.

QUESTION #3 – Pilate asks Jesus what exactly He did that got Him arrested. **18:36-37**

Jesus said to Pilate, “I am a king.” In fact, Jesus is the King of Kings (Revelation 19:16). But He further tells Pilate that His kingdom, at the present time, is not of this world. What that actually means is at the first coming of Jesus Christ, His plan was not to take charge of the world, but to provide a means by which the world could have a relationship with the Holy God.

If Christ's program had been of the world, His servants, including angels and humans, would be fighting right now and He would not have been delivered up to the Jews.

Jesus came to this earth the first time to tell the truth of God and do the will of God and to offer the grace of God to the world and that meant He had to die and that meant He needed to be in this meeting with Pilate. God must first make people spiritually right with Him before He can allow them to share in His Kingdom, which for the Jews meant the Kingdom on earth.

What Jesus actually says to Pilate is what I did to get arrested was to be born into this world and to communicate the truth of God to this world. That is why I am hated and that is what got me arrested and that is why I am going to die. In other words, **the Kingdom program of God demands that I be delivered up to the cross right now.** But Jesus is clear to point out that there were those who were responding to Him. There was a remnant who had heard His voice.

To hear the voice of Jesus Christ is to hear the voice of God concerning our sin and our need to believe in Jesus Christ.

The truth is, this whole world is sinful and evil and I am going to die on the cross to make it possible for people to have a relationship with God. Every person who knows the truth understands this point.

QUESTION #4 – Pilate asks Jesus what exactly is the truth . **18:38**

By virtue of the fact that Pilate asks Jesus what truth is, proves he doesn't hear the voice of Jesus Christ; it proves he doesn't get it. Truth is standing right before him. For the first time in his life, he had someone who was truth and who always told the truth, right in his house. Truth is God and truth is the Word of God. Jesus is the way, *the truth* and the life.

When Pilate had said this - he went out of the palace and said to the crowd there is nothing that he could find in Jesus Christ for which He could be blamed, tried and executed. There were no civil violations of law nor could he discern any ecclesiastical violations of law. Jesus was no revolutionist, trying to cause some political overthrow. He was no criminal who deserved to die and Pilate marched right outside to the religious wolves and told them that.

Notice carefully **verse 38**, Pilate found no guilt whatsoever in Jesus Christ. He went to the religious leaders who were waiting outside and said I do not find any guilt in Him.

Pilate doesn't realize it but he is sure testifying of truth right here. Jesus Christ is guilty of nothing. There has not ever been anything that Jesus did or said that makes him guilty. He is the only sinless Person Pilate would ever meet. It was right here when Pilate should have set Christ free.

Christ was not in this situation because of His own guilt, He is in it because of our guilt. He did not die for His sin; He died for our sin. He is not condemned for His crimes against God, but for our crimes against God. Do you understand this truth? Do you believe this truth?