

## The King Before Pilate (John 18:28–19:16)

By Pastor Jeff Alexander (10/30/2022)

### Introduction

1. The arrest and trial of the Son of God reveals not only the total depravity of the human condition but the determined hatred of sinners for the true God. God used this animosity to bring about His plan for the redemption of His elect (1 Corinthians 2:7, 8).

In their hatred and justified by worldly wisdom, wicked men murdered the Son of God. Thus, God was pleased to use what the world calls *folly* to save those who believe (1 Corinthians 1:22, 23). God had two goals in the crucifixion of Christ; (1) to destroy the wisdom of the world, and (2) to save those who believe in Jesus.

2. Jesus declared, “*Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out*” (John 12:31). Satan was the driving force behind the Jews’ wicked plot (John 11:47, 48, 53). Even when they were confronted with the proof that Jesus was God come in the flesh, they pressed on with their evil purpose. Jesus was condemned to death; now the Jews needed to find a crime suitable to the condemnation.
3. After arresting Jesus, they led him first to Annas, who was the real high priest. He questioned Him about His disciples and teaching. Jesus responded by simply asking him to investigate for himself. This first inquiry was frustrated, and the response revealed it. They could point to nothing Jesus did wrong to justify a death sentence.
4. He was then taken to Caiaphas, the son-in-law of Annas. The Sanhedrin, the ruling council of the Jews (scribes and elders), also came to this inquiry. False witnesses were drafted to support false accusations. These failed miserably. Where was the crime? Although Jesus factually confessed to be the Son of God (Matthew 26:62–64), the high priest regarded the confession as blasphemy, and the whole council voted to condemn Him to death. The problem with their plan to execute Jesus was that the Romans would not allow the Jews to do so (John 18:31).

### I. Political Tensions (18:28–32; 18:38b–19:7, 8, 12–16)

1. When the morning came, the Jews led Jesus to the praetorium, the governor’s headquarters, in order to persuade Pilate to crucify Jesus. The party refused to enter the Gentile-contaminated quarters. They did not want to be defiled so they could eat the Passover that evening. There is a bit of an issue here: John tells us that the disciples ate the Passover meal the previous evening (Chapter 13). So, when was Passover? In the plan of God, Jesus was crucified at the very time the Jews were slaughtering the lambs to be eaten at Passover feasts that evening (Luke 22:7; 1 Corinthians 5:7, 8).
2. Pilate accommodated the Jews by his coming out to them. He asked, “*What accusation do you bring against this man?*” (John 18:29).
  - a. Since they had no legitimate accusation, they used a bluff (v. 30). What they meant was, “He really has done nothing wrong, but we ask you to trust us and put Him to death because we want you to.” Pilate put the onus back on them (v. 31).
  - b. Ah, but here was the complication: “*It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death*” (v. 32). Luke informs us that when they brought Jesus to Pilate, they began to accuse him of misleading the nation and forbidding them to give tribute to Caesar, because he himself was king. They were lying to Pilate. Earlier, when they sought to trick Jesus into something they could accuse Him with, they had asked Him about paying taxes to Caesar (Luke 20:24). He told them, “*Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s*” (v. 25). Jesus did not forbid tribute to Caesar.

The second part of their charge was that He claimed to be a *king*, by which they meant He was an insurrectionist seeking to overthrow the Roman rule. Here is where the real tension came because the Jews themselves wanted their Messiah to come and to rule over them. If Jesus was the Christ, then, according Jewish messianism, they would *all* be in opposition to the Romans.

3. After examining Jesus, Pilate went back outside and informed them that he found Him not guilty of any crime against Rome (v. 38).
  - a. Pilate sought a compromise. It was customary at Passover to release a political prisoner. Pilate would either release Jesus or Barabbas to them. The implication was that Barabbas was an actual bad guy. The Jews would probably not want him released back into society.
  - b. Pilate sought another compromise. If he could abuse Jesus, he would illicit sympathy for His suffering, which might dispense the problem. Pilate had Jesus flogged, put a crown of thorns on His head, dressed Him in a royal robe, and put Him on display (19:4, 5). That also did not work. If Pilate needed a law, they had one (v. 7). The designation, *Son of God*, was reserved for Caesar himself.
  - c. After the second interrogation, He came back again, seeking to release Jesus. The Jews, however, put the ultimate pressure on him (v. 12). This was a covert threat. Pilate was a *politician*. In such circumstances, justice yields to expediency (vv. 14–16).

## II. Kingdom Facts (18:33–38) and Delegated Authority (19:7–12)

1. In the first interrogation, the governor asked Him about His being King of the Jews (18:33). Was Pilate charging Him with something or was the question merely hearsay? Only then did Pilate confess that it was the chief priests who delivered Him to Pilate. Was the indictment *political* or *religious*? If it were the latter, Pilate would have no interest in pursuing it. Jesus explained that His kingdom was not political, the proof being the lack of military action. His kingdom was not from the world (v. 36). Jesus was a king (v. 37).
2. Later, when Pilate returned from speaking to the Jews, he was shaken by the determination of the Jews and the political implications if he resisted. His conviction that Jesus was innocent was compounded by his wife’s warning (Matthew 27:19). Pilate asked, “*Where did you come from?*” Jesus gave him no answer. This prompted Pilate to assert his authority (19:10). Jesus again rebuked him: “You have no power over me at all except what God has allowed you by special divine appointment and for a special end” (v. 11). In response to this, “*Pilate sought to release him,*” but the Jews cried out the more, “*Away with him, away with him, crucify him!*” (19:15).

### Application

1. The natural state of mankind is exceedingly wicked. In this state, sinners hate God—the God who has revealed Himself in the Scriptures. Although many claim to believe in God and claim to serve Him, like the Jews of Jesus’ day, they have reshaped the true God into an image of their own liking (See Luke 19:11–27).
2. Pilate asked, “*What is truth?*” His question revealed his own condition before God. Those who have been truly born from above hear the truth and believe the truth. They worship God in Spirit and in truth (John 4:24). Jesus had told the Jews, “*Because I tell the truth, you do not believe me*” (John 4:45). John wrote, “*I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth. Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ?*” (1 John 2:21, 22).

Is Jesus Lord of your life? Do you submit to Him in all things? Paul declared, “*Every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*” (Philippians 2:10). One day both Pilate and the Jewish mob will bow the knee to Jesus. They will do so in hate, but they will be forced to confess that He is truly King of kings. Will you confess Him in hatred or submissive and saving love? Either way, you will confess Him as Lord.