

## **The Gospel of John (109): Jesus before Pilate (2)**

### **Introduction:**

We have shown that in John's account of our Lord's Passion focus is given to two trials of Jesus, the first is His trial before Annas and the second His trial before Pontius Pilate.<sup>1</sup> And although John mentions Jesus having been brought to the house of Caiaphas (18:13, 24), nothing is said of what transpired there. John's account of our Lord before Pilate is the lengthiest and most detailed record of our Lord before His prosecutors. The first part of this trial with John 18:28 and continues until the end of the chapter. Part two of His trial is in John 19:1-16. We addressed John 18:28-38 last Lord's Day. Today we will continue our consideration of the last few verse of John 18 and then we will begin to give our attention to the record in John 19. Let us read the entire account for its context and content.

<sup>18:28</sup>Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas to the Praetorium, and it was early morning. But they themselves did not go into the Praetorium, lest they should be defiled, but that they might eat the Passover.

<sup>29</sup>Pilate then went out to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this Man?"

<sup>30</sup>They answered and said to him, "If He were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him up to you."

<sup>31</sup>Then Pilate said to them, "You take Him and judge Him according to your law."

Therefore the Jews said to him, "It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death," <sup>32</sup>that the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled which He spoke, signifying by what death He would die.

<sup>33</sup>Then Pilate entered the Praetorium again, called Jesus, and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?"

<sup>34</sup>Jesus answered him, "Are you speaking for yourself about this, or did others tell you this concerning Me?"

<sup>35</sup>Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me. What have You done?"

<sup>36</sup>Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here."

<sup>37</sup>Pilate therefore said to Him, "Are You a king then?"

Jesus answered, "You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."

<sup>38</sup>Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?" And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, "I find no fault in Him at all. <sup>39</sup>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?"

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

<sup>19:1</sup>So then Pilate took Jesus and scourged Him. <sup>2</sup>And the soldiers twisted a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and they put on Him a purple robe. <sup>3</sup>Then they said, "Hail, King of the Jews!" And they struck Him with their hands.

<sup>4</sup>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."

<sup>5</sup>Then Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. And Pilate said to them, "Behold the Man!"

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to these, the other Gospels record trials by Caiaphas, the Sanhedrin, and King Herod.

<sup>6</sup>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.”

<sup>7</sup>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.”

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

<sup>10</sup>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?”

<sup>11</sup>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.”

<sup>12</sup>From then on Pilate sought 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.”

<sup>13</sup>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. <sup>14</sup>Now it was the Preparation Day of the Passover, and about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, “Behold your King!”

<sup>15</sup>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!”

<sup>16</sup>Then he delivered Him to them to be crucified. Then they took Jesus and led Him away.

This episode (pericope) of Jesus’ trial before Pilate serves to set Him before us as the king over the kingdom of God, a kingdom that would eventually encompass the whole world. One wrote of this,

This pericope guides the reader to see more clearly how the impending death of Jesus is the sacrifice of God for the world. Like the previous pericopae (plural) (18:1-12; 13-27), even while being arrested, bound, and questioned Jesus is in complete control, dictating the terms and guiding His own interrogation. The reader is exhorted to see Jesus as the true King and the answer to Pilate’s question, “What is truth?” Through this pericope the reader is coming to understand the true meaning of Passover and how Jesus fulfills the roles of both the King of kings and the Lamb of God.<sup>2</sup>

As we continue our study our Lord’s trial before Pontius Pilate, I would like us to review and contemplate what had transpired that we addressed last Lord’s Day.

Although John did not record the events, the other Gospels relate that before our Lord was brought to Pontius Pilate, He had already encountered and endured a great deal of injustice and suffering through the long night that He was held by the Jewish leaders. He had been mocked and humiliated, beaten and abused. But John focused on what transpired between Jesus and the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. Although the Jewish leaders had falsely accused Jesus before Pilate, having prejudiced Pilate against Jesus before he had spoken to Him, and though Pilate began his inquiry in a rather directly stated charge against Him, Jesus early on seemed to take control of the proceeding. Yes, Jesus was on trial, but to the reader it begins to appear that it was Pilate on trial, for Jesus, who was being interrogated, began to interrogate Pilate.

The Jews had brought Jesus before Pilate in order to assure the death of Jesus by crucifixion. Although the Jews had desired and had sought to put Jesus to death on several occasions, this way they could do so legally and in a manner that was probably commonly done.<sup>3</sup> This way they could feign that justice had been rightly executed. As one once wrote,

That He might be put to death with less reproach to them. It was an invidious thing to put one to death that had done so much good in the world, and therefore they were willing to throw the odium upon the

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<sup>2</sup> Edward W. Klink, III, **John**. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan, 2016), p. 769.

<sup>3</sup> Probably due to it being during the Passover, the Jews did not believe their law would permit the execution of a lawbreaker, even though their law had called for the death penalty for him. If Jesus were to be executed now, Pilate must give the order.

Roman government, to make that the less acceptable to the people, and save themselves from the reproach. Thus many are more afraid of the scandal of a bad action than of the sin of it.<sup>4</sup>

But the Jews also desired to have Pilate judge Jesus for other reasons, or so it would seem. If it were Pilate that ordered the execution of Jesus, the Jewish leadership might avoid the hostility and rejection of the general Jewish populace, many of which had come to view Jesus as a great prophet of God.<sup>5</sup> If they could employ the Romans to do their work, there would probably be no danger of an uprising of the people.

They also purposed to bring Jesus before Pilate early in the morning. This would have been before a great many people were moving about, and his trial would take place within the confines of the Roman Praetorium, where there would be no Jewish observers or witnesses of the judicial proceedings. The prophet Micah once wrote of this kind of treachery:

Woe to those who devise wickedness and work evil on their beds! When the morning dawns, they perform it, because it is in the power of their hand. (Mic. 2:1)

John revealed their duplicity and hypocrisy. They would not enter Pilate's residence lest they become ceremonially defiled which would have resulted in an interruption of them keeping the Feast of Unleavened Bread that had begun that very morning. **Matthew Henry** (1662-1714) commented on their sinful actions.

Their superstition and vile hypocrisy: *The chief priests and elders*, though they came along with the prisoner, that the thing might be done effectually, *went not into the judgment-hall*, because it was the house of an uncircumcised Gentile, *lest they should be defiled*, but kept out of doors, *that they might eat the Passover*, not the paschal lamb (that was eaten the night before) but the Passover-feast, upon the sacrifices which were offered on the fifteenth day, *the Chagigah*, as they called it, the Passover-bullocks spoken of (Deut. 16:2; 2 Chron. 30:24; 2 Chron. 35:8f). These they were to eat of, and therefore would not go into the court, for fear of touching a Gentile, and thereby contracting, not a legal, but only a traditional pollution. This they scrupled, but made no scruple of breaking through all the laws of equity to persecute Christ to the death. *They strained at a gnat, and swallowed a camel.*<sup>6</sup>

Pilate had inquired of the Jewish leaders as to the specific charges against Jesus that they were laying before him. He had gone outside of his residence to meet with them, showing deference to their religious scruples. He wanted a serious and specific charge against Jesus by which to try Him. Here we see a few commendable traits of Pilate, for although he was a hard and cruel man, not always governing the people in justice, he did show several positive qualities. First, although it must have been quite early in the day, perhaps "too early", Pilate showed concern for his role and duty to convene court on matters concerning the people under his governance. And that Pilate "went out" to these Jewish leaders showed consideration of them, perhaps more than what some might have given them. But he demanded a clearly stated accusation from them; he wanted a legitimate charge that would warrant their desire for a death sentence for Jesus. But in addition to a charge, Pilate wanted evidence from them as to the validity of their accusations. It is injustice to convict a man who cannot be proved to have committed a capital offense. Pilate purposed that Roman law would be served.

The Jews at the first did not charge Jesus before Pilate with His claim to be the Son of God. They would do so later (19:7). Rather they charged Jesus with being a "doer of evil" (18:30), one who was worthy of death. They charged the best of men as being a practitioner of evil. They testified to Pilate that He was a doer of evil, the one who "went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him" (Acts 10:38). But it would seem that this general indictment would not be sufficient, so they charged Jesus with a crime they knew would bring forth Pilate's concern and scrutiny of Him, and perhaps motivate him to action. They said that Jesus claimed to be a king, a direct threat to Roman authority over Palestine. Here we see a common trait of those who vehemently oppose our Christian faith and practice. They

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew Henry, **Matthew Henry's Commentary**, vol. 5 (Fleming H. Revell Company), p. 1182.

<sup>5</sup> See John 4:19, 44; 6:14; 7:40; 9:17.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

will charge us with doing evil things, interpret our motives as evil, and charge us as the cause of great disruption to good order and decency in society. When God's judgment fell on Israel due to King Ahab's sins, and after Elijah had confronted him, Ahab called Elijah "the troubler of Israel" (1 Kings 18:17). Elijah responded to him: "I have not troubled Israel, but you have, and your father's house, because you have abandoned the commandments of the LORD and followed the Baals. (1 Kings 18:18). These Jews had accused Jesus before Pilate that He was a troubler of Israel, an evil doer. Our Lord said that those of the world will treat us as they treated Him, so we should not be surprised or alarmed when it occurs. Jesus said to His disciples,

"It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household?" (Matt. 10:25)

And He said,

"Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you." (John 15:20)

And Jesus promised great blessing on those who suffer for His name's sake.

"Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." (Matt. 5:11, 12)

It is no new thing that in these days the disciples of Jesus are often declared to be evil workers by the people of the world who do not know God through Jesus Christ.

Pilate had sought first to appease these men. He condescended to them in a measure when he said to them "You take Him and judge Him according to your law." But this would not satisfy them. They were implacable and intractable. They acknowledged their legal constraints (18:31). The Law of Moses would not permit them to execute Jesus on the basis of the evidence that they claimed to possess and during that time of their festival. They then pressed upon Pilate further their desires and perhaps even demands.

But the Lord was, of course, superintending all that had transpired. Clearly they were responsible for their sin, for their evil desires and designs. And Pilate was not without fault, clearly so. But God was controlling them even in their "freedom" to do their evil deeds. Peter would later charge these leaders before God with their crime, even when exalting God's sovereign control over them. In his prayer to God, Peter declared,

"For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together <sup>28</sup>to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done. <sup>29</sup>Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, <sup>30</sup>by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus." (Acts 4:27-30)

And so, divine providence directed all that had transpired. God was controlling the Jews' wickedness and Pilate's sinful compromise and concession to them, in order to accomplish His purpose in offering Jesus as sacrifice for sinners. It was in the plan and purpose of God for Jesus Christ to die the death of one who had been forsaken by God for sin. God had cursed His Son in the place of His people, and His death on the cross declared that to have happened when Christ died. For this reason it was necessary for Christ to die in this manner, by crucifixion. Paul wrote these words:

For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them." <sup>11</sup>But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for "the just shall live by faith." <sup>12</sup>Yet the law is not of faith, but "the man who does them shall live by them."

<sup>13</sup>Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, **“Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”**), <sup>14</sup>that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit<sup>7</sup> through faith.

John had declared that these things happened in order “that the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled which He spoke, signifying by what death He would die” (18:32). What sayings did Jesus make that were fulfilled by the Jews declining to judge Him according to their law? He declared two happenings that would transpire. First, Jesus had told His disciples that He would be “delivered unto the Gentiles”, that is, the Romans. Jesus said,

“Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death, and **deliver Him to the Gentiles** to mock and to scourge...” (Matt. 20:18f; Mark 10:33)

And secondly, Jesus said that He would be crucified:

“You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and **the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified.**” (Matt. 26:2)

Pilate then returned to his residence to try Jesus privately. Jesus was judged and condemned by Pilate, so that we will not be judged and condemned by God.

Pilate challenged Jesus as to whether or not He claimed to be a king. In verses 36 and 37 we read,

<sup>36</sup>Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.”

<sup>37</sup>Pilate therefore said to Him, “Are You a king then?”

Jesus declared that His kingdom was not like a physical nation or kingdom in this world with geographic boundaries with concerns of military expansion to the detriment of other nations. His kingdom was no physical threat to Rome.

Notice first that Jesus described his kingdom negatively, what it was not: “My kingdom is not of this world.” This may have alleviated any concern of Pilate that this man was a political or military threat to him or the rule of Rome. But by our Lord’s words He also implied what was positive regarding His kingdom. His kingdom was the kingdom of heaven, not of this world. He was pressing upon Pilate the spiritual arena of God and His will for mankind on earth. Jesus has a kingdom, but not one of, or like, the kingdoms of this world.

Of course we know from His teaching recorded elsewhere that His kingdom was entirely spiritual in nature. It is a kingdom in the hearts and minds of men and women, boys and girls, regardless of where they dwell or under what form of government that they live out their daily lives. This kingdom is in the realm of how and why His citizens live, not where they dwell. His kingdom cannot be entered through physical birth, but only through spiritual birth (John 3:3), a spiritual birth from above that creates a new desire and opens a new way of living for this citizen of the kingdom of heaven. The riches and possessions of those in this kingdom are not enjoyed now, but there will be an occasion when they are translated out of this world and brought into the presence of their Lord. Then they will receive their inheritance as a reward (Col. 3:24). Earthly armies do not secure possessions for the citizens of His kingdom, but rather God Himself reserves for them what He promised them (1 Pet. 1:4). Nothing about His kingdom would directly impinge upon any national entity or authority. Pilate could be assured that the kingdom over which Jesus was king was of a different nature and of different concerns than that for which Pilate was responsible.

And so, Jesus affirmed to Pilate in **verse 37**, **“You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice”** (18:37). Matthew Henry described this kingdom with regard to the “truth”:

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<sup>7</sup> I.e. the spiritual life that comes through the Holy Spirit.

(1) The foundation and power, the spirit and genius, of Christ's kingdom, is truth, divine truth. When He said, *I am the truth*, He said, in effect, I am a king. He conquers by the convincing evidence of truth; He rules by the commanding power of truth, and *in His majesty rides prosperously, because of truth* (Psa. 45:4). It is with His truth that He shall judge the people (Psa. 96:13). It is the sceptre of His kingdom; He *draws with the cords of a man*, with truth revealed to us, and received by us in *the love of it*; and thus He *brings thoughts into obedience*. He came *a light into the world*, and rules as the sun by day.

(2) The subjects of this kingdom are those that are *of the truth*. All that by the grace of God are rescued from under the power of *the father of lies*, and are disposed to receive the truth and submit to the power and influence of it, will hear Christ's voice, will become His subjects, and will bear faith and true allegiance to Him. Every one that has any real sense of true religion will entertain the Christian religion, and they belong to His kingdom; by the power of truth He makes them willing (Psa. 90:3). All that are in love with truth will hear the voice of Christ, for greater, better, surer, sweeter truths can nowhere be found than are found in Christ, by whom *grace and truth came*; so that, by *hearing Christ's voice*, we know that we are *of the truth* (1 John 3:19).<sup>8</sup>

Pilate was apparently unconcerned and uninterested to know what truth was, according to Jesus. He asked Jesus, what seems to have been in a dismissive manner, "What is truth?" Pilate had the opportunity before him to hear and learn the grand mysteries that thoughtful men and women have always desired to learn and know. "Who am I? "Why am I here?" "What or who is God?" How may I know Him?" "How may I know what He would have me believe and how would He have me to live?" But Pilate was unconcerned. And so it is that multitudes will pass into a Christless eternity for they neither cared nor did they believe when the truth was revealed to them by God through the Holy Scriptures. Of Pilate's insincere question, we quote Matthew Henry again,

It is certain that this was a good question, and could not be put to one that was better able to answer it. Truth is that *pearl of great price* which the human understanding has a desire for and is in quest of; for it cannot rest but in that which is, or at least is apprehended to be, truth. When we *search the Scriptures*, and attend the ministry of the word, it must be with this enquiry, *What is truth?* And with this prayer, *Lead me in Thy truth, into all truth*. But many put forth this question that have not patience and constancy enough to persevere in their search after truth, or not humility and sincerity enough to receive it when they have found it (2 Tim. 3:7). Thus many deal with their own consciences; they ask them those needful questions, "What am I?" "What have I done?" but will not take time for an answer.

The fact is that when God begins to call a sinner unto Himself, that one to whom He has purposed to reveal Himself savingly, He puts within him or her a spirit of inquiry, a desire to know the truth. Paul wrote of some who are unbelieving who are deceived by the "man of sin" who would arise in the church:

The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders,<sup>10</sup> and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, ***because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.***<sup>11</sup> And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie,<sup>12</sup> ***that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.*** (2 Thess. 2:9-12)

They did not want to know the truth; rather, they wanted to continue to enjoy their sin. The judgment of God upon them was that they would receive their desire. God would not reveal to them the truth but cause them to be given a lie. And then He would see to it that they believe that lie, so that they will be damned in their damnable condition.

May the Lord renew in each of us, or impart to some of us for the first time, a deep longing to know the truth of God as it is in Jesus Christ. And may He bless that desire with its discovery of that truth in Him. For if God implants that desire and longing for truth in your soul, you will be led to the Son of God, who is truth

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<sup>8</sup> Matthew Henry, **Matthew Henry's Commentary**, vol. 5 (Fleming H. Revell Company), p. 1186.

itself. Jesus said, “I am the way, *the truth*, and the life, and no one comes unto the Father except by Me” (John 14:6).

We next read that Pilate left Jesus and went out before the Jewish leaders. **Verse 38** records, “*And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, ‘I find no fault in Him at all.’*” The official finding of Pilate was that Jesus was not guilty of the crimes charged against Him. He gave his conclusion to the Jewish leaders. **Donald Carson** (b. 1947) wrote:

His statement *I find no basis for a charge against Him* (cf. Luke 23:14) shows that he understood Jesus’ answer well enough to grasp that the formal ‘Yes, I am a king’ really meant, ‘No, I am not a king in any mere political sense, a king who might endanger the Empire.’

And apparently in an attempt to diffuse the situation, an effort to clear the matter, Pilate was willing to pardon Jesus of the whole affair so that all could move onward past this difficult event. Pilate said to the Jewish leaders, “*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?*” (v. 39). Pilate attempted to exonerate Jesus before them. He could not justly condemn Jesus if he could “find no fault in Him at all.” He had purposed to represent Jesus and make a magnanimous offer on His behalf. But the Jews would have none of that.

The chapter ends with **verse 40**, “*Then they all cried again, saying, ‘Not this Man, but Barabbas!’ Now Barabbas was a robber.*” John says nothing about Barabbas as do the other Gospel writers. The Synoptics seem to take note that he was a murderer—a taker of life—who was preferred by the Jews over Jesus—the giver of life. From the other accounts Barabbas was shown to have been an insurrectionist, a fomenter of rebellion against Rome (Mark 15:7). And so, John conveys a sense of irony here, as he has in many places in his Gospel. **Donald Carson** rightly stated,

Thus, at the instigation of the chief priests, who normally had nothing to do with Zealots and others interested in armed rebellion, the crowds call for the release of a man who has committed murder in his struggle against Rome, while condemning a man falsely accused of being a danger to Rome. Pilate cannot fail to see the irony. What will he do?<sup>9</sup>

But the name, Barabbas, is itself ironic. It literally means “son of the father.” “Instead of him, the true Son of the Father died.”<sup>10</sup>

Of course if Pontius Pilate were truly a just judge, having found Jesus innocent of charges, he would have released Him. But he was concerned more for the opinion and reaction of these angry and corrupt Jewish leaders, than he was concerned about being a just judge.

We now arrive to John 19:1-16, which some have referred to as “part 2” of Jesus’ trial before Pilate. Before us we read of the sentence of Jesus by Pilate. As we consider this account, we may apply the following outline:

1. The treatment of the King (19:1-3)
2. The presentation of the King: “Behold the Man!” (19:4-7)
3. The authority “from Above” (19:8-11)
4. The Judgment Seat (19:12-16)

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## **I. Treatment of the King (19:1-3)**

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<sup>9</sup> Carson, p. 596.

<sup>10</sup> Sproul, R. C., gen. ed., **The Reformation Study Bible** (Reformation Trust, 2015), p. 1701.

Pilate once again entered his residence to deal with Jesus.

<sup>19:1</sup>So then Pilate took Jesus and scourged Him. <sup>2</sup>And the soldiers twisted a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and they put on Him a purple robe. <sup>3</sup>Then they said, “Hail, King of the Jews!” And they struck Him with their hands.

We read of the violent and unjust treatment of Jesus, treatment that included not only intense physical suffering on His part, but also public mocking and ridicule of Jesus when those who whipped him called out, “Hail, King of the Jews!” These men further abused Him by assaulting Him, striking Him with their hands.

John wrote that it was “Pilate”, who “took Jesus and scourged Him.” We should understand that Pilate had his soldiers afflict him on his behalf, for “they” struck Him with their hands. We might not grasp the severity of His maltreatment. Here is a description of this event:

The term “flogged” (ἐμαστίγωσεν) is the normal term for punishment by “whipping” or “scourging.” It was a common form of punishment that was used in both Jewish and Roman legal systems. Although the narrator does not explain the details of the flogging, the first-century reader would have certainly been familiar with the general procedure. The actual flogging would have been extremely violent. It is likely that Jesus was stripped, tied to a post or thrown to the ground, and beaten with the *flagella*—leather whips to which were attached pieces of iron, bone, or spikes, which would shred the skin, often leaving it hanging from the victim’s back in strips. Unlike the thirty-nine maximum lashes prescribed by Jewish law (Deut. 25:3), the Romans did not limit the number of lashes, thus leaving the victim helpless to the cruelty of the supervising soldiers. The flogging would have been a public event, which added shame and familial humiliation to the physical pain. Even before the announcement of the verdict, the punishment of Jesus has been officially initiated.<sup>11</sup>

Here we see Pilate mistreating this one that he had declared was innocent, who was not guilty of any charges, one whom Pilate and declared to be “without fault” (18:38). We see the great injustice perpetrated by this man who had been entrusted with the duty to administer righteous judgment. **J. C. Ryle** (1816-1900) addressed this:

Let us learn what miserable creatures great men are, when they have no high principles within them, and no faith in the reality of a God above them. The meanest (most common) labourer who has grace and fears God, is a nobler being in the eyes of his Creator than the king, ruler, or statesman, whose first aim it is to please the people. To have one’s conscience in private and another in public—one rule of duty for our own souls, and another for our public actions,—to see clearly what is right before God, and yet for the sake of popularity to do wrong,—this may seem to some both right, and politic, and statesmanlike, and wise. But it is a character which no Christian man can ever regard with respect.<sup>12</sup>

But though we are rightly dismayed by reading of Pilate and his men perpetrating their injustice upon our Savior for He was “holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners” (Heb. 7:26), let us reaffirm that even as He received the unjust treatment of Pilate, Jesus was receiving the *just* treatment from God His Father upon His Son as our sin-bearer. It should have been you and me receiving that maltreatment, but our Savior bore it in our place. This is what the Scriptures declare:

Surely He has borne our griefs  
And carried our sorrows;  
Yet we esteemed Him stricken,  
Smitten by God, and afflicted.  
<sup>5</sup>But He was wounded for our transgressions,  
He was bruised for our iniquities;

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<sup>11</sup> Edward W. Klink, III, **John**. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan, 2016), p. 776.

<sup>12</sup> J. C. Ryle, **Expository Thoughts on John**, vol. 3 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987, orig. 1869), p. 301.



The chastisement for our peace was upon Him,  
*And by His stripes we are healed.*  
<sup>6</sup>All we like sheep have gone astray;  
We have turned, every one, to his own way;  
***And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*** (Isa. 53:4-6)

Fallen man treated Jesus the opposite of what He deserved. And this is true today, in that those void of the grace of God in their souls show low regard for Him and His exalted role as the exalted and enthroned Lamb of God. There are myriads of angels and saints who are before Him now celebrating and singing His praises. John later wrote of what he “saw” when he was taken up to the heavenly throne room:

Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, <sup>12</sup>saying with a loud voice:

“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain  
To receive power and riches and wisdom,  
And strength and honor and glory and blessing!”

<sup>13</sup>And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying:

“Blessing and honor and glory and power  
Be to Him who sits on the throne,  
And to the Lamb, forever and ever!”

<sup>14</sup>Then the four living creatures said, “Amen!” And the <sup>14</sup>twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped Him who lives forever and ever. (Rev. 5:11-14)

But here before us in John 19:2f we read that Pilate through these men “twisted a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and they put on Him a purple robe. Then they said, ‘Hail, King of the Jews!’ And they struck Him with their hands.” This reflects just how desperately wicked and errant fallen mankind is apart from God working His grace in their hearts. We, too, would have either joined with them in heaping this abuse on Him, or we would have justified them for having done so if we had learned of it.

## **II. The presentation of the King: “Behold the Man!” (19:4-7)**

Pilate again went out to the Jews, who waited for his sentence upon Jesus. But Pilate would first prepare them for His appearance, then Jesus would come forth before them.

<sup>4</sup>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.”

<sup>5</sup>Then Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. And Pilate said to them, “Behold the Man!”

<sup>6</sup>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.”

<sup>7</sup>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.”

Now it may be that Pilate treated Jesus in this fashion to perhaps the Jews, and in so doing spare Jesus from dying. One might conclude this from Pilate’s presentation of Jesus after He had endured this treatment.

Pilate said before them, “Behold, I am bringing Him out to you, that you may know that I find no fault in Him.” Matthew had added a detail that we might cite here. While Pilate had been examining Jesus, his wife had come to him in order to warn him. Matthew 27:19 reads,

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

Pilate announced a second time, “I find no fault in Him.” But they would not listen. Pilate presented Him to them, “Behold the Man!”

The other Gospel writers do not record these words of Pilate. This also is a manifestation of John’s literary irony.

*Once more* Pilate steps out of the *Praetorium* (cf. 18:28) to address the Jews. He delivers his verdict (cf. 18:38), and then dramatically presents Jesus—a sorry sight, swollen, bruised, bleeding from those cruel and ridiculous thorns. Aware as he is that *the people* who must choose the man who will receive the governor’s amnesty, he presents Jesus as a beaten, harmless, and rather pathetic figure to make their choice of Him as easy as possible. In his dramatic utterance *Here is the man!* (in Latin, *Ecce homo!*) Pilate is speaking with dripping irony: here is the man you find so dangerous and threatening: can you not see He is harmless and somewhat ridiculous? If the governor is thereby mocking Jesus, He is ridiculing the Jewish authorities with no less venom. But the Evangelist records the event with still deeper irony: here indeed is the Man, the Word made flesh (1:14). All the witnesses were too blind to see it at the time, but this Man was displaying His glory, the glory of the one and only Son, in the very disgrace, pain, weakness and brutalization that Pilate advanced as suitable evidence that he was a judicial irrelevance.<sup>13</sup>

In **verse 5** we read of the presentation of Jesus by Pilate: “***Then Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe.***” But notice how John set forward Jesus by making Him the subject of the verb. He did not say, “Then Pilate brought Jesus out, who was wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe”, although that was mentioned in verse 4. But in verse 5 it reads, “Then ***Jesus came out...***” Jesus is the subject of the verb. Jesus is the Man front and center, displayed before the world “wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe.” Here are the words of **J. C. Ryle**:

A mock royal robe was thrown over our Lord’s shoulders, in order to show how ridiculous and contemptible was the idea of His kingdom. The colour, “purple,” was doubtless meant to be a derisive imitation of the well-known imperial purple, the colour worn by Emperors and Kings. Some have thought that this robe was only an old soldier’s cape, such as a guard-house would easily furnish. Some, with more show of probability, have thought that this “robe” must be the “gorgeous robe” which Herod put on our Lord, mentioned by St. Luke, when he sent Him back to Pilate (Luke 23:11), a circumstance which John has not recorded. In any case we need not doubt that the “robe” was some shabby, cast-off garment. It is worth remembering that this brilliant colour, scarlet or purple, would make our blessed Lord a most conspicuous object to every eye, when He was led through the streets from Herod, or brought forth from Pilate’s house to the assembled multitude of Jews. – Once more we should call to mind the symbolical nature of this transaction also. Our Lord was clothed with a robe of shame and contempt, that we might be clothed with a spotless garment of righteousness, and stand in white robes before the throne of God.<sup>14</sup>

John then wrote, “***And Pilate said to them, ‘Behold the Man!’***” The Greek word translated “Behold” (Ἴδοὺ) before “the Man” serves to draw great attention to the declaration.<sup>15</sup> John the Baptist did the same when he had called out, “***Behold***, the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). When John

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<sup>13</sup> Carson, p. 598.

<sup>14</sup> J. C. Ryle, **Expository Thoughts on John**, vol. 3 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987, orig. 1869), p. 305.

<sup>15</sup> “Although the particle of exclamation, ‘Behold’ (Ἴδοὺ), serves as a “prompter of attention” before a verb, when it is used before a noun, as in this case, it serves as a ‘marker of great emphasis.’” Edward W. Klink, III, **John**. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan, 2016), p. 777.

recorded that Pilate presented Jesus, saying, “Behold the Man!”, John was conveying to his readers through Pilate’s words more than what Pilate himself intended. Where Pilate was simply presenting a rather pitiful and pathetic man before the crowd, “Behold the man!”, John, or rather the Holy Spirit, was setting before the readers of this Gospel a much greater presentation. Here is a rather extended but a very good setting forth of the truth of this declaration:

Whatever the political (or simply cruel) intentions of Pilate regarding the introduction of Jesus, in the cosmological context of the Fourth Gospel this title provides for the reader rich insight into the person and work of Jesus Christ. A brief explanation of the use of the title in Genesis 3:22 is necessary in order to make the connection to its use here. Although the LXX (OT Greek Septuagint) uses a different noun for “the man” (Αδάμ) than the Gospel (ἄνθρωπος), the noun not only means “man/humanity,” but the Hebrew term can be translated as “the man,” which is how most English translations render it.<sup>16</sup> Even the article “the” in “the man” (ὁ ἄνθρωπος) is significant in the title, suggesting that the allusion is in reference to a particular man, Adam. The title is spoken by God in Genesis 3:22 in the context of God’s announcement of the guilty verdict to be placed on all creation (Adam, Eve, and the serpent). In Genesis 3, then, the title declares the mortality of Adam and assumes an ironic reality, for “Behold, the man” announces Adam’s alienation from God and his existence in a state of death. The title announces to the first human life that it now exists in a state of depravity and impending death.

In the Gospel of John, however, a reversal of this state of death has begun with the coming of Jesus. Jesus is the life (1:4; 14:6) who has entered into the depraved condition of the world, into the depraved flesh condition of “man” (1:14), in order to recreate. This is why the Genesis motif is so central to the Gospel. What started “in the beginning”<sup>17</sup> in the first week of creation (ch. 1) will be finalized by a renewal of “Adam” in a “garden” (chs. 18-20). The “exaltation” of Jesus and His “glory” has continually been directed at the cross, the place of death and humiliation that most clearly expresses the nature of His kingship. By this declaration Pilate’s words make the point explicit to the reader. Rather than garnering sympathy for Jesus, as is often assumed, Pilate is extending publicly the application of shame to Jesus performed by the soldiers inside the Praetorium, serving to expose before the same public his own prideful ignorance. But to the reader Pilate is an “unconscious witness to Christian truth.”<sup>18</sup>

We must stop here. Let us contemplate the shame and contempt, the pain and the torment, that our Lord endured in order to save us from our sin and to enable God to justly confer upon us unspeakable glory. He endured what we should have suffered, so that through His sufferings we would be secure in everlasting presence before Him and His Father in glory.

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To Jesus Christ be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. (2 Pet. 3:18)

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. NRSV, NIV, ESV, NKJV, NASV, NJB, NEB.

<sup>17</sup> Both Genesis 1:1 and John 1:1 open with the words, “In the beginning.”

<sup>18</sup> Edward W. Klink, III, **John**. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan, 2016), pp. 778f.

## Charles Spurgeon

from his devotional, "Morning and Evening"

"He shall not be afraid of evil tidings."

(Psalm 112:7)

Christian, you ought not to dread the arrival of evil tidings; because if you are distressed by them, what do you more than other men? Other men have not your God to fly to; they have never proved His faithfulness as you have done, and it is no wonder if they are bowed down with alarm and cowed with fear: but you profess to be of another spirit; you have been begotten again unto a lively hope, and your heart lives in heaven and not on earthly things; now, if you are seen to be distracted as other men, what is the value of that grace which you profess to have received? Where is the dignity of that new nature which you claim to possess?

Again, if you should be filled with alarm, as others are, you would, doubtless, be led into the sins so common to others under trying circumstances. The ungodly, when they are overtaken by evil tidings, rebel against God; they murmur, and think that God deals hardly with them. Will you fall into that same sin? Will you provoke the Lord as they do?

Moreover, unconverted men often run to wrong means in order to escape from difficulties, and you will be sure to do the same if your mind yields to the present pressure. Trust in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him. Your wisest course is to do as Moses did at the Red Sea, "Stand still and see the salvation of God." For if you give way to fear when you hear of evil tidings, you will be unable to meet the trouble with that calm composure which nerves for duty, and sustains under adversity. How can you glorify God if you play the coward? Saints have often sung God's high praises in the fires, but will your doubting and desponding, as if you had none to help you, magnify the Most High? Then take courage, and relying in sure confidence upon the faithfulness of your covenant God, "let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

*God thunders marvelously with His voice;  
He does great things which we cannot comprehend. (Job 37:5)*

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