

The Cast | People Engaged In the Story of Jesus Christ

The Interrogators

John 18:28-38

March 25, 2016 (Good Friday)

Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas into the Praetorium, and it was early; and they themselves did not enter into the Praetorium so that they would not be defiled, but might eat the Passover. ²⁹ Therefore Pilate went out to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this Man?" ³⁰ They answered and said to him, "If this Man were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him to you." ³¹ So Pilate said to them, "Take Him yourselves, and judge Him according to your law." The Jews said to him, "We are not permitted to put anyone to death," ³² to fulfill the word of Jesus which He spoke, signifying by what kind of death He was about to die.

³³ Therefore Pilate entered again into the Praetorium, and summoned Jesus and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" ³⁴ Jesus answered, "Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about Me?" ³⁵ Pilate answered, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You to me; what have You done?" ³⁶ Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm." ³⁷ Therefore Pilate said to Him, "So You are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." ³⁸ 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 guilt in Him. ³⁹ "But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover; do you wish then that I release for you the King of the Jews?" ⁴⁰ So they cried out again, saying, "Not this Man, but Barabbas." Now Barabbas was a robber.

We've been looking at the minor characters in the Four Gospels and tonight we look at those who interrogated Jesus Christ after His arrest...specifically, Pontius Pilate.

If you add what all the Four Writers had to say about the trials and interrogations, you'll see there were actually SIX PHASES – three religious and three civil or secular phases.

After the arrest, He is taken to the High Priest emeritus, Annas. Then, Jesus Christ is taken to the home of Caiaphas and finally (a third phase) the whole religious council (Sanhedrin) is gathered for a trial. Then they decide to send the Prisoner to the Roman Governor, Pilate ...because PILATE has authority to carry out the death penalty.

Pilate interrogates Jesus Christ and finds Him not guilty...BUT when the religious leaders are angry with the verdict (very, VERY ANGRY!) and they mention how much damage this Jesus has

done in Galilee...then Pilate decides to send the Prisoner to the Tetrarch of that region who happens to be IN Jerusalem i.e. Herod Antipas (the Herod who had John the Baptist beheaded).

Herod is delighted to meet Jesus and makes a mockery of Him and then sends Him back to Pilate... and Pilate has to make a decision. Matthew adds that Pilate's wife had a bad dream about Jesus and begs her husband to let the Prisoner go...so Pilate washes his hands...but the religious leaders are too angry (they'd rather have Barabbas, the robber) and Pilate then delivers Jesus Christ to be crucified.

I want to think about John's portrait of Pilate. It's a long section (28 vv!) but my comments will be short:

- #1 – The Potential Evil in Simply Doing Your Job
- #2 – The Utmost Expression of This Evil
- #3 – Rescue From Outside the System

Pilate is just doing his job. He's there to keep the peace. He is no friend of the Jewish people or of Jerusalem. He lives on the coast...but is in Jerusalem on the occasion of the Passover because...well, it's his JOB... There can be trouble at these big holidays and he'd better be there if there IS.

He interrogates this rebel Rabbi...and he repeatedly finds no fault in Him...but it's his job to keep the peace... So...just to show that he's taking their complaints seriously, he has Jesus beaten and mocked badly and then brings Him out and says, "Look! I took your charges to heart – I heard YOU – and behold the Man." ("Ecce Homo" in Latin).

But none of this will DO...and politics is the art of compromise... and THAT'S Pilate's job...and it's not always a pleasant job...but SOMEONE has to do it. You get the sense that he respects Jesus...that he wants to let him go free...that he agrees with his wife...that he's genuinely torn up over it...but...he has to do his job.

And here we're reminded of how many atrocities in world history are carried out by people who are simply following orders. AND I am reminded of how I quite often...just do what has to be done...just minding our own business... "stay calm and carry on".

We don't have time to stop and ask questions...to reflect... to ponder...to be "pro-active". It's not that we're monsters... but just ...doing what I get paid to do. And all around, there are needs and little injustices and a world of pain crying out for relief...and I'm just trying to do what I have to do.

And when we continue to do what we have to do ("I get up every morning to the alarm clock's warning – take the 8:15 into the city...") and little by little we become "focused"...we learn to tune out the sounds of need around us...successfully stop thinking of pie-in-the-sky...and just get

it done... WHEN WE LEARN THE SYSTEM...and stay attentive to the next step...and then become good at what we do...focus becomes tunnel-vision... becomes pessimism...then

The ultimate expression of this is called despair. And isn't that what we hear coming from the mouth of the bureaucrat? Jesus Christ speaks about "TRUTH" and Pilate utters his infamous expression of despair and cynicism, "TRUTH? What IS truth?"

And while we DON'T know his facial expression or posture or even his real meaning in that question, we DO know that he didn't stick around for an answer!

Despair is giving up...it's losing hope...it's a retreat in to the cave of "Ah! What's the use?"

I don't have TIME to think about bigger issues like "TRUTH" – too abstract...It doesn't pay the bills. I don't get paid to philosophize ...I LIVE IN THE REAL WORLD WHERE THINGS HAVE TO GET DONE! And they don't get done by themselves!"

It's expressed in the Bible...in the Book of Ecclesiastes... "A time to give birth and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to uproot what is planted. A time to kill and a time to heal; a time to tear down and a time to build up... A time to throw stones and a time to gather stones; (3.2-5) "

Everything we DO in this fallen world...eventually comes undone. We do laundry and it gets dirty again. We make our bed...and then...what's the use?! We may as well sleep in a messy bed! That's the system... WHAT IS TRUTH?

And YET...as Pilate feels himself trapped in the system of this fallen world...with all its expediencies and pressures to produce/performance and just get it done and take care of business; "I KNOW how things work in this world...got no time for T-R-U-T-H !"

There stands before Him...a King...the embodiment of TRUTH. Truth, it turns out, is not an impractical, pie-in-the-sky theory or concept... TRUTH is a Person, a King. In the end HE (not Pilate) is the Interrogator.

His Kingship...His authority...the power of Jesus Christ is not dependent on Rome ...or the polls ...or the interest rates...or the market...or the ratings... His authority IS from outside the system...He IS the TRUTH...and He IS the hand of God reaching into our despair...crashing through the closed system of this fallen world. "My Kingdom is NOT of this realm!"

And He will...now be engulfed in COSMIC DESPAIR. He will experience the complete absence of hope... be depleted, be wrung out, be abandoned, be disconnected from earth and Heaven...suspended and unattached. THAT'S what DESPAIR IS...it's loss and separation...it's COSMIC ALONE-NESS.

You see it in Pilate...but you see it supremely in the King from outside this system, who writhes in pain, alone under the weight of our despair and under the Father's justice for what I deserve... and says, "My God, My God...why have You forsaken Me?"

He expresses OUR despair. And if we SEE it...and RECEIVE it as a gift...WE ARE NOT ALONE.

HELP AND HOPE have come from outside... outside our abilities to make it or fake it... AND if we see it TOGETHER...we...have a basis for communion. We can move toward one another in empathy, listening, supporting one another. We are NO LONGER alone without hope; our King has come to face our despair.

We have Him and we have one another. Despair and loneliness no longer make sense. Truth is a Person and He has come for all who trust Him.