

LESSONS ON PREDESTINATION #54
"The Battle of the Cross" (Part Eight)
(Scriptures from NKJV)

Luke 23:1-12:

Then the whole multitude of them arose and led Him to Pilate. And they began to accuse Him, saying, "We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, saying that He Himself is Christ, a King." Then Pilate asked Him, saying, "Are You the King of the Jews?" He answered him and said, "It is as you say." So Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowd, "I find no fault in this Man." But they were the more fierce, saying, "He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee to this place."

When Pilate heard of Galilee, he asked if the Man were a Galilean. And as soon as he knew that He belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time. Now when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceedingly glad; for he had desired for a long time to see Him, because he had heard many things about Him, and he hoped to see some miracle done by Him. Then he questioned Him with many words, but He answered him nothing. And the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused Him. Then Herod, with his men of war, treated Him with contempt and mocked Him, arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe, and sent Him back to Pilate. That very day Pilate and Herod became friends with each other, for previously they had been at enmity with each other.

INTRODUCTION: We have advanced well into the Passion week of our Lord. In so doing, we have covered the three stages of the Jewish ecclesiastical trial which were:

1. The preliminary hearing before Annas (John 18:12-14; 19-24);
2. The informal trial before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin which occurred before dawn;
3. The formal trial by the Sanhedrin occurring in the early morning hours.

Then we looked at events associated with Peter's denial and Judas' suicide, both which occurred before Jesus was taken to the civil trial. We are now ready to cover the Gentile or civil trial of Jesus which was also composed of three stages. They are:

1. Jesus is questioned by Pilate the first time;
2. Pilate then sends Jesus to Herod;
3. Herod then sends Jesus back to Pilate, who releases Barabbas and turns Jesus over to be crucified.

Those of you who have access to your map chart, can follow the steps of Jesus from the palace of Caiaphas, using the steps numbered (4), up to Pilate's Judgment Hall. From there, by following steps numbered (5), Jesus is taken to Herod's Judgment Hall. After a short hearing there, He is sent back to Pilate once again. This can be seen by following steps numbered (6). We are now ready to cover:

A. CHRIST'S CIVIL TRIALS BEFORE PILATE AND HEROD.

1. Textual References - Matthew 27:1-26; Mark 15:1-15; Luke 23:1-25; John 18:28-40.

2. Jesus before Pilate - Luke 23:1-5.

a. In leading Jesus to Pilate's court, John gives us an interesting detail which shows the hypocrisy of the Jewish leaders. In John 18:28 we read, ***"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."*** Here we are told that the Jewish leaders remained outside the Praetorium so that they would not be defiled and become unclean, disqualifying them from eating the Passover meal. The common Jewish belief was that all Gentile homes were unclean. NOTE: How twisted legalistic religion becomes. These religious leaders thought they could please God through their religious legalism expressed in physical separation from a Gentile building, while at the same time illegally acting to murder God's Son!

b. Pilate, the Roman judge.

(1) Pilate's life: In A.D. 26, He was appointed as governor of the province of Judea and ruled until A.D. 37 when he was removed from office. He is mentioned, not only in the Gospel records, but also by the Jewish writers like Josephus (A.D. 37-100), and Philo (20 B.C. - A.D. 50), and by the Roman historian Tacitus (A.D. 56 - 117). His name appears on several Roman coins. As a governor, He was responsible for the administration of the province of Judea, including judicial matters. Josephus states that Pilate had the authority to execute the death sentence. He was also responsible for collecting taxes and tribute, disbursing funds to the provinces, and sending revenues to Rome. Both Josephus and Philo give a very ugly picture of Pilate. Philo charges him with "corruptibility, violence, robberies, ill treatment of the people, grievances, continuous executions without even the form of a trial." He clashed with the Jews on several occasions. The Gospel of Luke gives one encounter recorded in Luke 13:1 where we read, ***"There were present at that season some who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices."***

(2) Pilate's court: John's account tells us that Pilate's court was held at the Praetorium. Tradition identifies this as being the "Tower of Antonia, which was the headquarters of the Roman soldiers that kept watch over the Temple court. In John 18:29

we are told that **"Pilate then went out to them."** The refusal of the Jewish leaders to enter the building, made it necessary for Pilate to shuttle back and forth from inside the building where Jesus was, to outside, where His accusers stood.

c. The accusations made against Jesus.

(1) The accusations or charges are recorded in Luke 23:1-2 which says, **'Then the whole multitude of them arose and led Him to Pilate. And they began to accuse Him, saying, "We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, saying that He Himself is Christ, a King."**

(2) The accusations are three in number, though none of them were made in the ecclesiastical trial. All of them were designed to show that Jesus was a danger to Rome and should be executed on those grounds. They knew that blasphemy would never be accepted in a Roman court, in that it was a religious issue and not a civil one.

(a) Perverting the nation. The word pervert means to turn away or twist the truth so as to mislead.

(b) Forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar.

(c) Claiming that He is a King.

(3) These were serious crimes, if true, would have compelled Pilate to take action to protect Rome's interest. All of them were false. Jesus never advocated rebellion against Rome. Nor did He teach people not to pay taxes to Rome. In fact, He taught just the opposite as seen in Luke 20:21-25. While Jesus was a King, His Kingdom was not an earthly one in opposition to Rome, which He would soon make clear to Pilate. Note that the Sanhedrin did not offer any evidence to support these allegations. They gave no specific instances of the Lord's alleged misconduct, neither did they call any witnesses.

(4) The account must now shift to John 18:28-38 to get the full scope of Pilate's interview with Jesus.

(a) When Pilate asked, **"What accusation do you bring against this Man,"** the Jews replied, **"If He were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him to you."** This not only insulted Pilate, but it dodged the issue. While the assertion that Jesus was an evildoer assaulted the character of Jesus, it was not an accusation involving a specific legal violation. Their inability to bring one legitimate charge against Jesus, but affirmed His innocence. But they still made it clear they expected Pilate to confirm their decision and put Jesus to death.

(b) Pilate, obviously offended by the disrespectful treatment, shot back at them in verse 31, **"You take Him and judge Him according to your law."** Pilate knew they wanted Jesus executed. This he had confirmed when the Jews were forced to acknowledge in verse 31, **"It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death."**

(c) In his *Commentary on John*, p. 591, D. A. Carson makes this observation:

If (the Jews) expected a capital sentence to be handed down, they were going to have to speak up and convince him (Pilate), since, as they themselves conceded, they could not legally proceed without him.

(d) But there is a deeper meaning regarding the exchange between Pilate and the Jews. This exchange merely served to show in verse 32 **"that the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled which He spoke, signifying by what death He would die."** Jesus had predicted that the Gentiles would be involved in His death. In Mark 10:33,34, He told His disciples, **"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; and they will mock Him, and scourge Him, and spit on Him, and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again."** John MacArthur pinpoints the significance of this exchange when he says:

The Lord had also predicted the form His execution would take. In 3:14; 8:28 and 12:32 He spoke of being "lifted up," which He said "to indicate the kind of death by which He was to die" (12:33; cf. Ps. 22:6-18). Had the Jews executed Him, they would have thrown Him down and stoned Him (as they did Stephen; Acts 7:58-60). But the Lord's prediction was about to be fulfilled, as He was "lifted up" on the cross, a distinctively Roman kind of execution. God providentially controlled the events of Jesus' trial to ensure that His prophetic words would come to pass. (MacArthur, *Commentary on John*, p. 328).

(e) Here we see again the sovereign God controlling the events of men and angels so as to bring to pass His preordained purpose in putting His Son to death in order to pay for the sin debt of those who would believe on Him. Note: If the Jews had killed Jesus by stoning, then Jesus' prophecy would have proven false. Jesus would then have been a false prophet, and God would be shown to be impotent in fulfilling His plans. If predestination is not true, then God cannot have any eternal purpose in mind, let alone being able to fulfill that purpose. The whole premise of Biblical revelation then collapses and falls to the ground as untrue!

d. Jesus interrogated by Pilate - John 18:33-38.

(1) In verse 33 we read, **"Then Pilate entered the Praetorium**

again, called Jesus, and said to Him, 'Are You the King of the Jews?'" The Jewish leaders' goal, in their three charges, was designed to portray Jesus as an insurrectionist, whose goal was to overthrow Roman rule and establish His own rule. Thus Pilate could not overlook anything which served as a threat to Roman authority. In essence, Pilate was asking Jesus whether or not He was pleading guilty or not guilty to the charge of insurrection. He is trying to determine whether or not Jesus posed a political threat to Roman authority. As Jesus stood before Pilate, He did not look like a king, for He dressed like a poor peasant. To the Romans, a king was proud and dressed in pomp and splendor. If Jesus was a king, where were His followers and His army? There was probably sarcasm in Pilate's question.

(2) In verse 34 we read, **"Jesus answered him, 'Are you speaking for yourself about this, or did others tell you this concerning Me?'"** Jesus would not answer Pilate's question with a "yes" or "no" without first defining exactly what the meaning of the term "king" represented. The noted Puritan, John Owen, once said, "If you wish to converse with me, please define your terms." Jesus' counter question was designed to clarify the issue. If Pilate was asking for his own interest, he would be asking if Jesus was a king in the political sense and thus would be a threat to Rome. If that was the case, then Jesus' answer would be "no." He was not a King in the sense of a military political leader. Jesus' answer implied that Pilate should make it clear whether he had heard of any rebellion against the Roman government. If someone had made him aware of such information, then let that person come forth as a witness.

(3) In verse 35 we read, **"Pilate answered 'Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me. What have You done?'"** Pilate's sharp reply shows both his disdain for the Jewish people, along with his growing frustration with the puzzling case before him. The expression, **"your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me"** makes it clear that Pilate was merely repeating the charge made by the Jewish leaders, and that Jesus was not in any way being charged with a crime against Rome. Pilate had no information which would link Jesus with an insurrection against Rome. Pilate now wants to know what it is that has infuriated the Jewish leaders against one of their own people.

(4) In verse 36 we read that Jesus answered **"My kingdom is not of this world."** Since it was now clear that Pilate was merely repeating the charge of the Jewish leaders, then Jesus answered Pilate's question of **"what have you done?"** He explained that He was a King, but not like that of Rome, nor the kind of king which the Jews were expecting. The source of His kingdom was not like that of any world system. Jesus goes on to further define the nature of His kingdom by saying, **"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." Jesus explains that if His kingdom was political in nature, He would have His servants (army) fighting against the Jews to prevent Him from being captured. No earthly king would have allowed himself to have been captured so easily. Jesus is saying that His kingdom is of a spiritual or moral nature, and that His enemies were of Jewish origin, and not that of Rome.

(5) In verse 37 Pilate is confused by Jesus' description of His kingdom and asks, **"Are you a king then?"** He is asking for clarification.

(6) In verse 37 Jesus boldly confesses that He is a King, and that Pilate is correct in calling Him that. It is noteworthy that Paul refers to this statement in I Timothy 6:13 where he says, **"I urge you in the sight of God who gives life to all things, and before Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate."** Jesus then explains the mission in which He has been assigned to accomplish. **"For this cause, I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth."** When these two expressions are joined together, they have an undeniable reference to: First: the incarnation of Christ - **"I was born,"** and Second: His pre-existence before His birth - **"I have come into the world."** Thus, He is claiming to be both God and man, and this is what has infuriated His Jewish enemies, and why they have charged Him with blasphemy for claiming to be God when He was but a man.

The Jewish error was twofold. First, they rejected the claims of Jesus to be both Divine and human at the same time, and second, they rejected the nature of the kingdom which Jesus came to set up. They saw the kingdom as earthly and political. Jesus saw it as spiritual and moral. They saw Rome as their enemies. Jesus saw their sins as their enemies, and came to bear witness of this truth. Man needs to be delivered from the oppression of his sins, not from oppression in his environment. Jesus says in verse 37, **"Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."** So Jesus' kingdom is a Gospel Kingdom, and people enter this Kingdom by believing a message of truth about His person and the work He came to do for guilty sinners. This, He says, is what offended his self-righteous opponents. They refused to acknowledge their sins and the need of forgiveness through a substitutionary sacrifice. Pilate responds with a sneer, **"What is truth?"** He is now assured that Rome has nothing to fear from this Man.

(7) Two understandings of "king" and "Kingdom." I am now quoting from a footnote entitled "A Kingdom of Truth (John 18:36)" found in *The Chronological Study Bible*, p. 1234:

The concept of "kingdom" in Jesus' time was rooted in the Old Testament: "kingdom" most often referred to the reign or royal authority of a king. Jewish people prayed daily for the coming of God's reign. When they prayed for His kingdom, they did not doubt that God reigned over His creation in the present. Yet they longed for the day when God would rule unchallenged and all peoples would acknowledge Him. Most Jews associated this kingdom with the coming of a Jewish king who would lead his people to victory over their enemies.

The Romans, however, guarded the title "king." Anyone who, without the emperor's permission, claimed to be even a client king was committing the offense of high treason. Jewish leaders, like the high priest Caiaphas and the Jerusalem aristocracy who helped keep peace for the Romans, therefore wanted to stop any would-be kings who might stir up trouble with Rome (John 11:47-50).

The governor, by contrast, understood Jesus' kingdom in very different terms. As a Roman, he knew reports of Cynic philosophers who wandered around claiming to be kings while possessing nothing. Such philosophers lacked respect for rulers, yet were without political ambition for themselves. As thinkers, they spoke about truth and about reigning, but to a Roman pragmatist they were at worst insane but harmless. Pilate, therefore, did not see Jesus as a threat, as did the Jewish religious leaders. Although Pilate asked Jesus, "Are You a king then?" (John 18:37), he actually misapprehended the nature of the mission Jesus claimed to fulfill (18:36).

(8) Jesus' mission was to testify to the truth by proclaiming the Gospel of salvation by faith in Christ and His mission to save sinners. John MacArthur gives a good summary of Christ's mission and Pilate's rejection of the truth when he says,

Jesus' mission was not political but spiritual. It was **to testify to the truth** by "proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom" (Matt. 4:23). Christ proclaimed the truth about God, men, sin, judgment, holiness, love, eternal life, in short, "everything pertaining to life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3). What people do with the message of truth Jesus proclaimed determines their eternal destiny; as He went on to declare, "**Everyone who is of the truth hears** (the Greek word includes the concept of obedience; cf. Luke 9:35) **My voice.**" Jesus is "the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through [Him]" (14:6). In 10:27 He added, "My sheep hear My voice and I know them, and they follow Me." Only those who continue in His Word are truly His disciples; only those who are truly His disciples will know and be set free by the truth (8:31-32).

Jesus' words were an implied invitation to Pilate to hear and obey the truth about Him. But they were lost on the governor, who abruptly ended his interrogation of Christ with the cynical, pessimistic remark, "**What is truth?**" Like skeptics of all ages, including contemporary postmodernists, Pilate despaired of finding universal truth. This is the tragedy of fallen man's rejection of God. Without God, there cannot be any absolutes; without absolutes, there can be no objective, universal, normative truths. Truth

becomes subjective, relative, pragmatic; objectivity gives way to subjectivity; timeless universal principles become mere personal or cultural preferences. All fallen mankind has accomplished by forsaking God, "the fountain of living waters," is "to hew for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water" (Jer. 2:13). Pilate's flippant retort proved that he was not one of those given by the Father to the Son, who hear and obey Christ's voice.

B. SUMMARY AND APPLICATION.

1. What is truth?

Jesus said He was the way, the truth and the life. Truth is Jesus Christ who came as a revelation of God. To state it another way, "truth" is all that God has made known through Jesus Christ. To know Him, the Truth, man has eternal life (John 17:3). Humanistic pragmatism pervades the prevailing philosophies. Its assumption is that truth is "whatever works for you," and even that is always changing. Having rejected the Word of God, pragmatism has no objective standard with which to evaluate what is true.

2. Like Pilate, every human being will give an account to God for what he did with the truth. God's judgment is according to truth (Romans 2:2). Even the pagan who has not the gospel, does have a revelation of truth sufficient to cause him to seek after more knowledge of God. The creation reveals God's deity and power (Romans 1:18-32) and his conscience reveals his accountability to his Creator (Romans 2:15).

3. Question: How do I know if I am one of the elect who has been given to the Son by the Father? How do I know that Jesus died for me in a saving way? Jesus gives the answer in the way He answered Pilate, **"Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice."** That voice is the Gospel message. What is your attitude toward the Gospel? Is it foolish and unnecessary? Then you are not one of the elect and will perish in your sins. Or is the answer that the Gospel satisfies your soul and gives you peace with God? If so, you have manifested that the Father has given you to the Son, and the Son intercedes and prays for you. Rejoice and enjoy the salvation you have in Christ. You have just witnessed a good confession before God and His Son, to your Lord and Savior.