

EXEGESIS

I. JESUS BEFORE PILATE – vv.1-7A. The Setting – v.1

- The whole multitude, which at this point probably means the Sanhedrin, arise from their judgment, having decided that Jesus is worthy of death due to His claim to be the Son of God, now proceed to take Him to the one who, under Roman Law had the right to exercise the death penalty by way of crucifixion. While under Jewish law there was the right to stone, they are probably motivated by wanting Jesus to be condemned by the government, so that the blame would not be directed just toward them. This would help in case there was an uprising due to the popularity of Jesus' teaching.
- They take Jesus to Pontius Pilate. Pilate was the 5th procurator governing over Judea, the area surrounding the city of Jerusalem. He had possessed authority in civil, military, and criminal jurisdiction. The Jews, as subjected to Rome, were accountable to him and only had self-governing authority under him.
- The place where they would deliver Jesus was called the Praetorium. This was the governor's official residence, and the place he would hold court. There was an outer court which would be used for public trials and declaration, as well as an inner court for questioning which would also include witnesses. It is to this outer court or porch that Jesus was brought bound by the leaders.

B. The Three-Fold Accusation – v.2

- When their opportunity comes, they begin bringing charges against Him, claiming that they "found" him doing three things. This is a technical legal term, indicating that He already stood trial and had been condemned as guilty. The term "this fellow" has the sense of derision or despising. Their language is charged with a tone of scorn.
- The first charge is that Jesus was "perverting the nation." The nation refers to the Jewish people. They are pictured as going down a road or path of peace and blessing. The accusation is that Jesus is disrupting this, twisting their way by His teaching in a way that will bring war and trouble. This is an accusation charged with rebellion, and any Roman governor whose goal appointed to him of *Pax Romana* or the peace of Rome, would be very considered about any subjected nation that was being influenced by the teaching of a Rabbi that would disturb that peace by rebellion against the powers of Rome.
- The second charge is that Jesus taught that people should not pay taxes to Caesar. One of the ways that Rome funded its exercise of power, as well as the building of roads to link together that part of the world, as well as the employ her armies was taxation. For someone to teach that one should not pay taxes to Caesar was equal to rebellion against the government, and outright treason.
- The third charge is that He claims to be a Christ-King. The charge is phrased in such a way that Jesus is accused to being a rival ruler to Caesar. The word Christ meant, in the Greek language, "anointed." A claim of being a Jewish Messiah would itself not be much of a threat, but linked together with the idea that the anointed King of Israel would be the one who would lead Israel to victory over the nations that oppressed her would again be a threat against the authority of Rome.
- The first two charges were blatantly false. He was the teacher of peace, who taught that instead of a zealot rebellion against the government, there should be a righteous submission. He had also taught that it was lawful to render to Caesar the taxes due to him. The third accusation was basically true, though it did not carry the socio-political meaning that the Jews anticipated.
- One of the problems with these accusations is that these aren't the things which Jesus had already been "tried" on. Their focus earlier were on religious claims, especially of His being the Son of God. However, they knew that this wouldn't mean much to Pilate as a worshipper in Paganism. They believed in many gods, and that there were the lesser sons of gods, so that that claim alone would not have led to the death penalty. But the leaders are concerned only to see Jesus killed.
- We learn from that Matthew 27:4 that Judas, sometime in those morning hours, showed up before the leaders and proclaimed Jesus' innocence.

C. The Questioning – v.3

- With as popular as Jesus was in the land, Pilate would not be unaware of His reputation and claims. He would have likely heard of some of his teaching.
- Remember what Jesus would look like at this time. Bound, beaten, bruised, pathetic. Compared to the pomp and splendor that Pilate was familiar with in regards to kings, there is probably a bit of scorn in the question.
- Jesus responds with a somewhat enigmatic response, somewhere between an affirmation of its truth and merely a statement of what Pilate was saying. I suggest it is more a quiet affirmation than the latter, because it isn't actually Pilate's statement, but a question.
- There isn't much recorded beyond this, but Pilate is unconvinced, after examining Jesus, that He is a threat.

D. Pilate's Judgment – v.4

- After the questioning, Pilate emerges from the inner court and makes a public declaration that the charges brought against Jesus are not worthy of their plea for a death penalty. This is the first time that there is a judicial proclamation of Jesus' innocence.

E. The Leaders' Response – v.5

- The Jewish leaders were not concerned with justice, and they did not argue from reason but passion. This claim is an attempt to show the seriousness of Jesus' influence, that His flame of rebellion had been ignited from the Northern region of Galilee all the way to this place (the capital city).
 - The "stirring up" was an accusation of political rebellion, which was by His teaching easily refutable.
- F. The Shift to Herod – vv.6-7**
- When Pilate hears of Galilee, and that Jesus' residence was primarily there, he quickly tries to rid himself of responsibility and "pass the buck." Herod, who was governor of that region, was in Jerusalem, probably for the Passover (though himself a nominal Jew, it was important for him to participate).
 - There is probably here also a political move to show to Herod some "respect" for his authority (later).

II. JESUS BEFORE HEROD – vv.8-12

A. Herod's Motivation – v.8

- As Jesus appears with the guard before Herod, and the case is presented and he is told who this man is, Herod is excited. His interest isn't stirred because of Jesus' teaching, but because of the miracles Herod had heard that he had done. Herod was a kind of thrill seeker, and wanted to be entertained by this kind of magician.

B. Herod's Questioning – v.9

- Because of the motivation behind Herod's desire to see Jesus, these many questions probably surround those interests. It isn't Herod trying to ascertain whether Jesus is guilty of the claims of being a kind, but rather of His abilities as a miracle worker. "What have you done...what can you do...how do you do it...will you do it for me?" To these questions Jesus responds only by silence.

C. The Continued Attack – v.10

- Some of the leaders were present, and they continued to bear witness and accuse him passionately.

D. Herod's Contempt – v.11

- Seeing that Jesus wouldn't do a miracle (and so continues refuse today), both Herod and his men began to ridicule and mock Jesus. There is no record here of physical abuse, only the patronizing act of putting a robe on him in fake honor of this so-called king and miracle worker.
- Then, also probably in a political move, Herod sends him back to Pilate as a display of respect.

E. A Friendship Formed – v.12

- The effect of this mutual "respect" for authority brings together these two ungodly men, and a friendship of sorts is forged. Before this time they had been enemies, and now in their mutual rejection of Christ they are brought together.
- Jesus continues to have this kind of "unifying" effect on people. There are some who, with nothing else much in common with one another than the rejection of Christ, find a kind of unholy friendship.

III. JESUS' RETURN TO PILATE

A. Pilate's 2nd Judgment – v.13

- After Jesus returns with the guard, Pilate finds out that Herod did not condemn Him of the charges. He again publicly assembles the leaders and the people, repeats the charges, says that he in that original hearing did not find fault. He has now had that opinion confirmed by Herod. He now, for a 2nd time, proclaims Jesus' innocence. He seeks to appease the crowd by a promise to chastise Jesus and let Him go. This is a very wicked concession.
- He is admitting Jesus' innocence, but to appease the people and avoid problems with his public opinion, He will have Jesus scourged. This would include flogging which itself could lead to death.
- Pilate connects this release with the custom of releasing one prisoner during the Passover feast as a demonstration of good will by the government of Rome toward the Jewish people in their time of celebration.

B. The People's Demand – vv.18-19

- The response of both the leaders and the crowd (who the leaders had probably been coaching and preparing for this moment) is the cry for Barabbas to be released. Together with the other Gospels (though not as clear here) it appears that Pilate was the one who initially suggested Barabbas. This was probably a ploy to try to contrast the popularity of Jesus (and thus win the popular crowd) with a man who had been convicted as a rebel and murderer.
- Pilate repeats the offer, "calling out to them." Things are reaching a fevered pitch. Pilate, rather than acting as the judge, is the pawn of the people. In v.20 we are told it is wish to release Jesus. This is motivated not only by a "sense" of justice, but also, as Matthew 27:19 records, his wife who comes to her husband and advises him to have nothing to do with Him. She had a dream, and is warned by it to have nothing to do with this man.
- The crowd now with one voice cries out "crucify, crucify!" The same people who had, less than a week before cried out "Hosanna, blessed is He who comes in the Name of the LORD" now cries out for His horrible, bloody, and excruciating death.

C. Pilate's 3rd Judgment – v.22

22 Then he said to them the third time, "Why, what evil has He done? I have found no reason for death in Him. I will therefore chastise Him and let Him go."

- A third time Pilate calls out regarding Jesus' innocence. "What has He done? I have found no reason for death in Him." He again offers to beat Him and release Him.

D. The Repeated Demand – v.23

- The fervor continues to raise, and they demand for Him to be crucified. And their voices prevailed.

E. Pilate's Final Judgment – v.24

- Pilate, manipulated as a puppet in the hand of the wicked, finally gives in. The sentence had been declared three times, each time Pilate giving in too much, and now because of lobbyist group, gives into their cries. Pilate lacks the moral bearing and fortitude to do the right thing, and lets the people define justice rather than something above and beyond him.
- From what we learn in John 18:38 this is no surprise. Pilate questions the reality of truth itself (as something above and beyond us), and gives into popular opinion and pressure. We are living with many in position of authority in our own nation who are doing the same, and ultimately there is either a standard from above us or the standard which we make by popular decision.
- Matthew 27:24 tells us that Pilate washes his hands (of invisible blood), a symbolic declaration that he is innocent and cleared of responsibility. But it is an empty symbol, and he stands before God even today for the blood shedding of God's Son.
- He releases Barabbas (the charge is repeated for emphasis), and delivers Jesus to "their will." Truly this is "their hour, and the power of darkness."

APPLICATION

- What a testimony of injustice. But this was, in His will, the path to salvation. Here is the "problem of evil" in its highest and most raw form. Never has there been such injustice in the history of the human race. Never has there been such wickedness done to One so innocent. Yet, Jesus submits to the will of His Father without complaint and without retaliation.
- Notice the contrast between the Lord Jesus and the most highly exalted officials that He met with. Jesus was willing to stand for the truth and against popular opinion, even if it meant His being "dethroned" and killed.
- The Jewish leaders have at least a three-fold witness: Judas, Pilate, and Herod. Most importantly, they have the witness of Jesus Himself. Yet, none of this would stop them from pursuing His death.
- There are many who, regardless of the amount of witness as to the innocence and beauty of Christ, continue to reject Him, mock Him, and would again call for Him to be crucified. The rejection of biblical Christianity is itself a call for the death of Christ.