

The Gospel According To John

Shall I Crucify Your King?

John 18:39 – 19:16

Introduction

Pilate is in a pickle because of his bad relationship with the Jews. They held over his head this threat: "If you don't do what we want, we will revolt. And guess who will hear about it? You will get the axe."

Pilate was being blackmailed by the Jews into executing Christ. Pilate would either have to abandon all he had learned of Roman justice and judgment and execute an innocent man, or let Jesus go and face the potential loss of face and position due to the problem with Tiberius Caesar that the Jews could stir up for him.

Pilate's first solution (Luke 23:6-12)

Pilate thought of sending Him to Herod. Jesus was originally from Nazareth in Galilee, and Herod was the chief leader in Galilee. Now, Herod also happened to be in Jerusalem at this time. Pilate says, "I'll pass the buck to Herod." In Luke 23:4-12, Pilate sends Jesus to Herod. Herod questions Jesus for a short time, as his soldiers mock and beat Him a little, and then sends Him back to Pilate. So Pilate is stuck again.

It is as if God is forcing him to make a decision; such as He does with every man.

Pilate is presently under great stress. In his heart and mind he knows that Jesus is innocent. But even though he has a sense of justice, he still has lingering in the depths of his human heart the desire that says, "I want to stay alive at all costs." It is a very complicated decision, but it is his to make.

Pilate's second solution (18:39-40)

Evidently, there was a custom that Pilate had with the people. It may have begun before Pilate was the governor. Every year, at Passover, the governor would release a Jewish criminal from the Roman prison. I'm sure that Pilate expected the crowd to say, "Release Jesus." He even tries to put this thought in their minds. Barabbas was a bandit, murderer, and insurrectionist.

It is interesting that they brought Jesus to be condemned because they said He was an insurrectionist, and then wanted an insurrectionist released so they could have an insurrection. That reveals the dishonesty of the charges. They didn't care what they accused Him of, they only wanted Him dead.

It is difficult to read this and not view Barabbas as a picture of each and every one of us who believe. Jesus substitutes for Barabbas, and dies on his cross, that the guilty one might go free.

Pilate's third solution (19:1-6a)

Luke 23:16 reveals that Pilate before this had said, "I will, therefore, chastise Him, and release Him." His plan was to scourge Jesus to pacify the people. A Roman scourge was a thick stick, wrapped in leather. At the end were leather thongs of some length. In the ends of those leather thongs were bits of brass and lead and bone filed to sharp points. The victim was either stretched flat on the ground with his back facing up, tied hanging to a post, or strapped suspended above the ground. Then the man who was accustomed to performing the scourging would lash the back forty times with the scourge. From what we understand from historians, the back of the victim was torn and lacerated to such an extent that even the deep-seated veins and arteries, and sometimes the entrails and inner organs, were exposed. The scourging resulted in a total shredding of the back.

A scourging was such a horrible torture that no Roman citizen, no matter how great his crime, was ever allowed to undergo scourging. It was forbidden for a Roman citizen.

In verse 5, when Pilate presents the innocent beaten and bloody Jesus to the crowd, he says, "Behold the Man!" Pilate is attempting to gain sympathy in hopes the crowd will be satisfied now. However, Pilate speaks better than he knows. His words echo that of Zechariah 6:12 for those who have ears to hear! The crown of thorns brings the curse of Gen. 3 to mind. Behold the Man who bears the curse on our behalf (Gen. 3: 17-19 [including death]; Gal. 3:13-14; Rev. 22:3).

Pilate's plan didn't stop them. Hardly had Pilate's dramatic appeal ended when the most hardened individuals of all, seeing the bleeding object of their hate, started crying, "Crucify Him!" Over and over they screamed those words -- the whole mob surging in a great cry, screaming for His death. Pilate had failed again; his proposal didn't work. The only thing that would satisfy this maddened, frenzied, out-of-control mob was the blood of Jesus. Amazing truth – this was also the only thing that would satisfy our sovereign God – that we might be saved.

The Crucifixion Proposal (19:6b-7)

Pilate gives them the right of execution in the Roman fashion this time, rather than the Jewish fashion (Jn. 18:31). He desperately wants to get rid of Jesus. Five times Pilate states that he finds no fault in Jesus (Jn. 18:38; Lk. 23:14, 22; Jn. 19:4, 6). However, the people won't let him get off the hook.

Pilate knew from painful experience that the Jews didn't tolerate any false gods. The Romans weren't stupid. They knew that in order to subject the people, you give them enough freedom to make them content. Thus, you don't violate their religion.

Do you see how they have twisted their accusations? They accused Him, first of all, of threatening to destroy the Temple. Then they tried a new one, saying He was an evildoer. Following that they said that He was perverting the nation. Next they said He was forbidding tribute to Caesar. Then they said that He was stirring up the people. They said that He was a political revolutionary. They tried everything they could think of until they stuck with this one: "...He made Himself the Son of God" (v. 7b). In other words, "He is a false god. And you know what happens when you don't get rid of false gods for us."

Pilate's Fear (19:8-12)

We are told that this accusation put more fear and doubt into Pilate. He may have thought to himself, "If he is, then I'm in real trouble. I've just flogged the son of a god!" Added to this is the warning of his wife, who said, "...Have nothing to do with that just Man; for I have suffered many things today in a dream because of Him" (Mt. 27:19b).

In hopes of relieving his fear, Pilate asks Jesus where he is from. The silence must have added to Pilate's panic. Again we see Scripture fulfilled (Isa. 53:7). Pilate tries to conquer his fear by proclaiming his power and authority over Jesus in verse 10, however God alone is the ultimate authority. Caiaphas and the Jewish leaders had the greater sin, for they had rejected far greater light.

The irony of verse 12, is that, in order to execute Jesus, the Jewish authorities make themselves out to be more loyal subjects of Caesar than Pilate. However, as time unfolds, the Jews do revolt and their political kingdom, city and temple, is destroyed by Rome; while Jesus' kingdom spreads like leaven and His glorious temple is built up!

The Final Pronouncement (19:13-16)

This is the official act of sentencing. It is shocking to realize that Pilate will someday stand before the great white throne where Jesus will be seated to sentence him. The Jews, too, will be condemned out of their own mouths. God wasn't their King, and they weren't God's subjects. They said it themselves. Do not be deceived, there is coming a day when all will be judged according to their response to Jesus.