

### Our Lord's Civil Trial before Pilate

#### John 18:28-40

John 18:28-40: *"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."*

#### Background Notes

Our Lord's civil trial before Pilate was necessary because, under the Roman Empire, the Jewish leaders didn't have the authority to carry out the death penalty. Sometimes the Roman authorities would "look the other way," as when Stephen was martyred (Acts 7), but officially Rome had to authorize and carry out the death penalty.

Pilate was a Roman procurator, and his jurisdiction included Samaria and Judea. For many years skeptics of the Bible questioned the historical existence of Pilate, but in 1961 a stone slab with an inscription containing Pilate's name was uncovered in the ruins of Caesarea. This discovery confirmed the existence of Pilate - and confirmed the accuracy of the Bible!

Pilate's headquarters were in Caesarea, on the Mediterranean coast. Normally Pilate stayed in Caesarea, but during the Jewish feasts he would come up to Jerusalem. A great number of Jews came from all over the Empire for the biblical festivals, such as Passover, and whenever a multitude of Jews gathered in Jerusalem, there was a chance for a popular uprising against Rome. After all, the Jews didn't like Rome being in power over Israel.

We don't know where Pilate stayed in Jerusalem. Verses 28 and 33 refer to the "Praetorium." This word can mean either a temporary palace or a military headquarters. So here it may refer to the Antonia Fortress, located at the northwest corner of the Temple Mount complex, or it may refer to Herod's palace, located on the west side of the city.

Our Lord's civil trial before Pilate took place at the Praetorium. The Jewish leaders wouldn't go into the Praetorium because they didn't want to be ceremonially defiled, especially at the time of an important religious festival. They wanted to remain ceremonially clean so they could celebrate the Passover feast.

Can you believe it? These "religious" leaders were plotting to **murder the Lord**, and yet they didn't want to *defile* themselves by entering a "Gentile" place! How blind could they be? It's similar to "religious" people today who never fail to say their ritual prayer over their food, but at the same time (maybe even at the same meal) they're plotting to harm some other person because of jealousy or the desire for revenge.

## Doctrinal/Teaching Points

### 1. The Lord's death by crucifixion was predetermined.

*"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," that the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled which He spoke, signifying by what death He would die" (v31-32).*

The Jewish leaders brought Jesus to Pilate because the Sanhedrin, the governing body of the Jews, didn't have the authority to put a person to death. If the Jews had had that authority, they would have pronounced the death sentence based on the false charge of blasphemy, and they would have executed the Lord by stoning. Stoning to death was the method of execution under the Jewish Law.

However, it was pre-determined that the Lord would die by crucifixion, *"that the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled which He spoke, signifying by what death He would die" (v32).* When did the Lord indicate that He would die by crucifixion? He had already predicted this death three times in the Gospel of John:

John 3:14 - *"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up..."*

John 8:28 - *"When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things."*

John 12:32-33 - *"And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself." "This He said, signifying by what death He would die."*

We know from other Scriptures that the Lord's death by crucifixion was predetermined - from eternity past!

The Holy Spirit inspired David to write Psalm 22, that great Messianic Psalm, speaking of the suffering of the coming Messiah. Psalm 22:16 - *"They pierced My hands and My feet..."* Psalm 22:16 predicted the Lord's death by crucifixion.

In Peter's sermon at Pentecost, we read this amazing statement: *"Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know— Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death..."* (Acts 2:22-23).

The Lord's death by crucifixion was predetermined, but this fact **in no way** excuses the evil that was plotted and perpetrated by the Jewish leaders. They knew that they couldn't get Rome to enact the death penalty for blasphemy. Blasphemy was a Jewish matter. So they trumped up the false charge of "treason against Rome." They tried to imply

that the Lord's Messianic claims were a threat to Rome. That's why Pilate questioned the Lord about being a king. I'm sure the Jewish leaders used the Lord's "triumphal entry" into Jerusalem as part of their case. Pilate certainly would have known about the crowds that acclaimed the Lord as He entered Jerusalem.

The Jewish leaders bear the responsibility for this wicked plot, but as Acts 2:23 says, this plot does work into God's predetermined plan that the Lord would be crucified. The Lord's death by crucifixion was predetermined.

## 2. Although His kingdom is not of this world, Christ will have an earthly kingdom.

Look at verse 36: "*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."*

In this statement, the Lord was not denying that His future millennial kingdom would be here on earth. (He was not preaching amillennialism!) The Lord was informing Pilate about the *character* of His kingdom. His kingdom was not a worldly or earthly kingdom that would threaten Rome's power, as the Jewish leaders were trying to make it appear.

However, the Bible certainly teaches that Jesus Christ will reign on this earth. He **will** have an earthly kingdom, as we read in Revelation 20. The Lord was not denying that truth. Although His kingdom is not of this world, Jesus Christ will have an earthly kingdom!

## 3. The bottom line is, "What is true?"

In response to the Lord's statement, "*Pilate 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."* 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*" (v37-38).

What did Pilate mean when he asked, "What is truth?" Was he being philosophical? Was he being sarcastic? Was he really interested in the truth? Although we can't be dogmatic on the point, most likely he was thinking that for him the bottom line was not truth, but power. In view of the power and authority of Rome, what difference did truth make? Who cares?

But Pilate was wrong. The bottom line is not "power"! **The bottom line is what is true!** A person's ultimate destiny is not determined by how much power, or popularity, or money, or prestige, or pull (or whatever) they have, but by what that person believes! The bottom line for a person's ultimate destiny is, "Do you believe what is true?" Your destiny is determined on that basis. Do you believe what is true?

Not too long ago someone said to me, "I just can't believe that there is a hell. I can't believe that a good God would have eternal punishment in hell." But does what a person chooses to believe settle the issue of their final destiny? NO! The bottom line is **not** what **you** think should be, or how **you** think things should be. The bottom line is **what is true**.

Is it possible that you're relying on **what you think** is the right way to get to Heaven? The bottom line is **not** what you **think**, but what is **true**! Have you accepted the **truth** that Jesus is the only way of salvation?

The Lord was reaching out to Pilate, to see if Pilate would respond to the **truth**. *"I have come into the world that I should bear witness of the truth; everyone who is of the truth, hears My voice"* (v37). Do you see how He reached out to Pilate?

In fact, I think the Lord was making an appeal to Pilate in verse 34 as well: *"Are you speaking for yourself about this, or did others tell you this concerning Me?"* In other words, Pilate, are you really, personally, interested here? Sadly, Pilate showed no true interest in Jesus, either before or after his "What is truth?" comment.

The bottom line for Pilate was not what was true – so he came to the wrong conclusion about Jesus! The Bible teaches that the bottom line is, "What is true?"

## **Practical Application**

### **Do we make decisions like Pilate?**

Pilate concluded, *"I find no fault in Him at all"* (v38). So what did Pilate do? Did he release the Lord Jesus, who was completely innocent? No! He released Barabbas, a convicted thief! Luke 23:19 tells us that Barabbas was not only a convicted thief, but he was a convicted insurrectionist and a convicted murderer. And yet Pilate released Barabbas!

Why did Pilate make a decision like that? Because he was self-serving! From Pilate's viewpoint, Jesus' death was better for Pilate's career. It would make him more popular with the Jews. It would make his Roman superiors happy, because he was keeping peace in Jerusalem. For Pilate, justice didn't matter as much as his own personal status and his own personal well being.

We sometime accuse unscrupulous lawyers of not caring about justice, of only caring about what they can get out of it. Well, what about us? Do we make decisions like Pilate? Do we ever consider "What's in it for me?" Do we ever hide part of the truth? Do we ever manipulate the truth to suit our own purposes, or career, or reputation?

Are you making your decisions like Pilate? Oh, you may not be rejecting Christ as Pilate did, but you're certainly hurting the cause of Christ if you make decisions on the basis of "What's best for me?"

Let's all ask ourselves that question: "Do we make decisions like Pilate?"