



TALKS FOR GROWING CHRISTIANS TRANSCRIPT

John 18: 28-40: Our Lord's Civil Trial before Pilate

"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. 29 Pilate then went out to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this Man?" 30 They answered and said to him, "If He were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him up to you."

31 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," 32 that the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled which He spoke, signifying by what death He would die. 33 Then Pilate entered the Praetorium again, called Jesus, and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" 34 Jesus answered him, "Are you speaking for yourself about this, or did others tell you this concerning Me?"

35 Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have 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, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here."

37 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." 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 fault in Him at all."

39 "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?"

40 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 Rome, the Jews didn't have the right to carry out the death penalty. Sometimes the Roman authorities would "look the other way," as in the martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 7), but officially Rome had to carry out the death penalty.

Pilate was a Roman procurator, and his jurisdiction included Samaria and Judea. His headquarters were in Caesarea along the Mediterranean coast. In 1961, a stone slab with an inscription containing Pilate's name was uncovered at Caesarea, thus confirming the Bible's accuracy. Normally Pilate stayed in Caesarea, but during the Jewish feast days he would come up to Jerusalem, primarily because of the great number of Jews who came from all over the Empire for the feasts (such as Passover). Whenever there was a great crowd of Jews in Jerusalem, there was always a chance for an uprising. After all, the Jews didn't like Rome being in power over Israel.

We can't be sure exactly 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 refers either to the Fortress of Antonia, which was at the northwest corner of the Temple complex, or it refers to Herod's palace, which was on the west side of the city.

In any case, it was at the Praetorium where our Lord's civil trial before Pilate took place. Notice that the Jewish leaders would not go into the Praetorium, because they didn't want to be ceremonially defiled. They wanted to remain ceremonially clean so they could celebrate the Passover feast. Think of it! These "religious" leaders were plotting to **murder the Lord**, and yet they didn't want to get themselves defiled 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 -- plotting to hurt some other person because of jealousy or 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," 32 that the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled which He spoke, signifying by what death He would die." The reason the Jewish leaders brought Jesus to Pilate was that 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 executed the Lord by stoning, which was the method of execution under the Jewish Law. The death sentence would have been based on the false charge of blasphemy.

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? A number of times -- we have seen this three times already 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." 33 "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. In verse 16 we read, *"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 plotted and perpetrated by the Jewish leaders! They knew that they couldn't get Rome to enact the death penalty for blasphemy -- that was a Jewish matter. That's why they trumped up the charge of "treason against Rome." They tried to imply that the Lord's Messianic claims were a threat to Rome. That is why Pilate questioned the Lord about being a king. I'm sure the Jewish leaders used the Lord's "triumphal entry" into Jerusalem,

which Pilate certainly would have known about, as part of their case. The Jewish leaders bear the responsibility for this wickedness, but it does work into the predetermined plan that the Lord's death would be by crucifixion. The Lord's death by crucifixion was predetermined.

2. Although Christ's 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."* By this statement, the Lord was not denying His future millennial kingdom here on earth -- He was not preaching amillennialism! The Lord was informing Pilate about the character of His kingdom. It was not a worldly or earthly kingdom that would threaten Rome's power, as the Jewish leaders were trying to make it appear. The Bible certainly teaches that Christ will reign on this earth -- He **will** have an earthly kingdom. (Read Revelation 20 in this connection.) The Lord was not denying that truth. Although Christ's kingdom is not of this world, Christ will have an earthly kingdom.

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

In response to the Lord's statement in verse 37, *"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."* 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 fault in Him at all.*

Now what did Pilate mean when he said, "What is truth?" Was he being philosophical? Was he being sarcastic? Was he really interested in the truth? Well, we can't be dogmatic on the point, but most likely he was thinking that the bottom line was not truth, but power. In view of the power and authority of Rome, what difference did the 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 determined not by how much power, or prestige, or popularity, or pull (or whatever) they have, but by what that person believes! The bottom line is, "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 can't believe that there is a hell. I can't believe that a good God would have eternal punishment in Hell." That settles the issue, right -- what that person believes? **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? 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 that appeal to Pilate? In fact, if you go back to verse 34, I think that the Lord was making an appeal to Pilate there as well: *"Jesus answered him, "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? But Pilate showed no interest either before or after his comment about "what is truth?" The bottom line for Pilate

was not what is true. He was wrong! The Bible teaches that the bottom line is, "What is true?"

Practical Application

Do we make decisions like Pilate?

In verse 38 Pilate concluded, "*I find no fault in Him at all.*" So what did Pilate do? Did he release the Lord Jesus, who was innocent? No! He released Barabbas, a convicted thief! We know from Luke 23:19 that Barabbas was not only a convicted thief, but he was a convicted insurrectionist and a convicted murderer -- and yet Pilate released him!

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

Do we make decisions like Pilate? We sometime accuse unscrupulous lawyers of not caring about justice, only about what they can get out of it. Well, what about us? Do we make decisions like Pilate? Are you hiding the truth or manipulating the truth in some situation to suit your own purposes? For your reputation? Your career? What's in it for me?

Are you making your decision like Pilate? Oh, you may not be rejecting Christ as Pilate did, but if you make decisions on the basis of "what's best for me" you're certainly hurting the cause of Christ. Let's all ask ourselves that question? Do we make decisions like Pilate?