

The Gospel of John

Jesus Before Pilate (Part 1)

John 18:28-38

INTRODUCTION:

We are in 18th chapter of John's gospel. This is the final week of Christ's life before His crucifixion. Here in the 18th chapter of John we are in the middle of a series of trials that our Lord was put through: three of them with the Jewish leaders and three of them with the Gentile leaders. In all, there were six phases to this miscarriage of justice. We now enter into Phase One of the Gentile trial before Pilate.

Stand and Read Scripture

John 18:28-38 (NASB)

²⁸ Then they brought Jesus from Caiaphas to the praetorium. It was morning. And they themselves did not enter the praetorium, in order not to be defiled so that they could eat the Passover. ²⁹ So Pilate came out to them and said, "What charge do you bring [against] this man?" ³⁰ They answered and said to him, "If he were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you." ³¹ At this, Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves, and judge him according to your law." The Jews answered him, "We do not have the right to execute anyone," ³² in order that the word of Jesus might be fulfilled that he said indicating the kind of death he would die. ³³ So Pilate went back into the praetorium and summoned Jesus and said to him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" ³⁴ Jesus answered, "Do you say this on your own or have others told you about me?" ³⁵ Pilate answered, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests handed you over to me. What have you done?" ³⁶ Jesus answered, "My kingdom does not belong to this world. If my kingdom did belong to this world, my attendants [would] be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not here." ³⁷ So Pilate said to him, "Then you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say I am a king. For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." ³⁸ Pilate said to him, "What is truth?"

When he had said this, he again went out to the Jews and said to them, "I find no guilt in him."

Prayer

The one they are accusing is perfectly pure and righteous. They are making Jesus the victim. He will be mocked, despised, and ridiculed. And before the morning is over He will be sentenced to death. Just as we saw Christ's glory against the three denials of Peter, we once again see His His purity and majesty that dominate the scene against the backdrop of their sin. Shining out of this ugly darkness of an unjust series of trials is the bright glory of the Son of God.

In their sinful blindness, **the Jews were convinced that they were honoring God by killing His Son.** The Judge of all the earth was being arraigned by a fallen son of Adam. The holy One was being condemned as a blasphemer. Liars would give false witness against the living truth. And He who was the resurrection and the life was handed over to die. All of this detail has been given to us to demonstrate that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, so that we might believe in Him and have life in His name.

John picks up the story in verse 28 where he takes us into this civil trial at the judgment hall.

John 18:28 (NASB)

28 Then they *led Jesus from Caiaphas into the Praetorium, and it was early; and they themselves did not enter into the Praetorium so that they would not be defiled, but might eat the Passover.

The fourth watch of the night is the period from 3:00 to 6:00 in the morning. So at the end of the fourth watch of the night they arrive at the hall of judgment. Just like Jewish courts, early Roman courts began at daybreak and ended at sundown. The courts could get busy and fill up quickly so the Jews made their sentence of death technically valid at the very break of dawn by passing their final sentence, and then rushed their prisoner to the Praetorium in order to be the first ones at the Roman court at the break of dawn.

They do not go in. John tells us in verse 28 that "**they themselves did not enter into the Praetorium so that they would not be defiled, but might eat the Passover.**" The Passover is later that day. They do not want to be ceremonially unclean so they do not want to enter a Gentile habitation. According to their manmade law, if they entered a Gentile habitation they would be defiled and then they could not eat the Passover.

But this was not a law of God. What is in the law of God is that if you touch a dead body there is a ceremonial uncleanness. Numbers 19 forbids the touching of a dead body. One of the excuses the rabbis gave was that if you went into a Gentile home you would very possibly contact a dead body, because Gentiles were thought to throw their aborted babies into a drain. Thus if you entered their home it would defile you for seven days for touching a dead body. So they stayed outside.

This is an amazing level of hypocrisy. **The Jewish leaders do not want to be defiled, but they are about to kill the Son of God. They were happy to keep the letter of their own invented law while killing the one who wrote the real law in the first place and came to fulfill it.**

BODY:

I. THE ACCUSATION.

The trial formally begins in verse 29. Here we have the first phase of the trial, **the accusation, or if you will, the indictment.** You cannot have a trial until you have an accusation. Pilate went out and wanted to hear the accusation. He is the judge.

John 18:29 (NASB)

29 Therefore Pilate went out to them and *said, "What accusation do you bring against this Man?"

“Pilate went out to them.” Pilate had to go out to them because they would not go in to him. And he said, “What accusation do you bring against this man?”

This is the first thing that happens when you start a trial. Right? “What accusation do you bring against this man?” This formally opened court proceedings at the break of dawn Friday morning.

Pilate assumes there has to be some crime that has been committed. But, of course, this presents a problem to the Jews because there has been no crime committed. They do not want Pilate to be a judge, they want Pilate to be an executioner. They do not want justice for Jesus, they want death. They do not want a retrial, but they are going to get one.

The answer they gave in verse 30 is very interesting:

John 18:30 (NASB)

³⁰ They answered and said to him, “If this Man were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him to you.”

He asked for an accusation. They rebuked him for questioning their integrity. “Are you insulting us like we would bring a man to you to be executed who had not committed a crime?” But this, of course, is exactly what they did!

They are rebuking Pilate by accusing him of challenging their motives. But there **was** no accusation that they could make. This **sinless** Son of God had **never** done nothing wrong! They could not find one single crime, and believe me, they had tried very hard to find one. If there was one to be found they would have found it.

They are in a tough spot. They need Jesus executed; they cannot come up with a reason. All they can do is defend themselves, “If this Man were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him to you.” Here we see again, as we see all through the trial of Jesus, His innocence. They cannot come up with anything, absolutely nothing.

And again you ask the question, “Why in the world are they pressing this issue with Pilate? If they do not want a trial, why did they come? Why are they doing this?”

Verse 31 begins to tell us:

John 18:31a (NASB)

³¹ So Pilate said to them, “Take Him yourselves, and judge Him according to your law.” Do you understand what he just said to them? What does your law say? If He has committed some crime against your law then do what you need to do according to your law.” “Kill him yourself according to your law!” The Jews said to him, “We are not permitted to put anyone to death,”

According to Roman law, yes. That is true. But **their** law was the law of Moses. The law of Moses gave them the right of capital punishment, particularly with a blasphemer. In fact, in the book of Leviticus it was basically required.

Leviticus 24:16 (NASB)

¹⁶ Moreover, the one who blasphemes the name of the Lord shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall certainly stone him. The alien as well as the native, when he blasphemes the Name, shall be put to death.

So Pilate is saying, "Go kill Him yourself. Pilate is giving them an exemption from his Roman law. Take care of it yourself. There is no offense to Roman law here."

You would think that they would run with that. But, no! The Jews said to him, verse 31, "**We are not permitted to put anyone to death,**" So now they are quoting Roman law. "We cannot do it, it would be a violation of **Roman law.**" They had just been told by the representative of Roman law to go do whatever they wanted to do.

Why in the world don't they just go do what he told them to do? Why are they going to force this issue through Pilate, through Herod, and then back to Pilate? Why all this? Verse 32 gives you the answer:

John 18:32 (NASB)

³² to fulfill the word of Jesus which He spoke, signifying by what kind of death He was about to die.

I cannot tell you what an incredibly powerful statement that is! Do you realize that if they had walked away with Jesus and stoned Him, then Jesus could not have been the Son of God? The Bible would not be true and all of Christianity would go up in flames.

Why? Because you need to listen to what Jesus said back in John 12:32.

John 12:32-33 (NASB)

³² And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself." ³³ But He was saying this to indicate the kind of death by which He was to die.

Jesus foretold that He was going to die by being lifted up. That is how the Romans executed criminals, they lifted them up on a cross. The Jews executed people by throwing them down and stoning them.

Jesus said, "I will die by being lifted up, not thrown down." He prophesied His own crucifixion. So you see, if the Jews had taken Him and stoned Him, then Jesus was wrong. And if Jesus was wrong, He is not the truth and He is not of God. All Christianity collapses. Jesus is a fraud. The Bible is full of lies. Jesus had to die on the cross and that is a **Roman** means of execution. He was not to die by being thrown down and crushed by stones.

Isn't it amazing? This frenzied madness is all under the full control of God to fulfill the specific words that Jesus spoke.

We now come to the **second part** of the trial before Pilate. Phase One: **The interrogation.**

II. THE INTERROGATION.

So Pilate entered again into the Praetorium after he had been outside talking to the Jews and questioned Jesus.

John 18:33 (NASB)

³³ Therefore Pilate entered again into the Praetorium, and summoned Jesus and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?"

Now the Jews had said He perverts the nation. He forbids tribute to Caesar. He says He is a king. But, despite their claims, Jesus did not appear to be a threat to Rome or Caesar. This is not a dangerous man. This is not some man who is starting a revolution. This is not somebody who is guilty of high treason. He is not forbidding tribute or taxes to Caesar. He paid His taxes and He also had the disciples pay their taxes. The only thing Pilate could ask Him was, "Are **you** the king of the Jews?"

In fact, in the original language it is like this: "**You?** You are the one they are calling the King of the Jews, as if this is **absurd!** He probably remembered back to the triumphal entry when He rode into the city on a young donkey and received hosannas. "This is You? You are no threat. This is ridiculous!"

John 18:34 (NASB)

³⁴ Jesus answered, "Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about Me?"

Are you actually charging Me with something? Do I appear to be a threat to Caesar? Do you believe that I am attempting to overthrow Rome? Is this your idea or are you just an errand boy for those Jews?"

John 18:35 (NASB)

³⁵ Pilate answered, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You to me; what have You done?"

Again, the wrongdoing of the leaders of Israel for the execution of Jesus Christ is very obvious. Jesus had not broken any Roman law. He was not a threat. Rome does not have an issue with Him. It was Your own nation and Your own chief priests who delivered You to me. What have You done to cause them to pass on a death sentence to you?"

Pilate knew that the Jews would welcome a real king who could gather an army to overthrow Rome. They would welcome that. He also knew that they wanted Jesus dead. The two did not add up.

Jesus answers regarding His being a king, verse 36:

John 18:36 (NASB)

³⁶ Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm."

The kingship of Jesus is in a realm all by itself; it is not of this world. Man's world produces many kings and many rulers. King Jesus is heavenly, eternal, and supernatural. There was nothing about Jesus that resembled an earthly king.

Colossians 1:13-14 (NASB)

¹³ For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Pilate was right that Jesus was not an earthly king, but he was dead wrong in thinking Jesus was not a king. He is the King of Kings!

Jesus said, "Look, if I was a king in an earthly sense, My servants would be fighting." But I have no intention of being an earthly king. "My kingdom is not of this world."

John 18:37

³⁷ Therefore Pilate said to Him, "So You are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say *correctly* that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."

Do you understand that there are two sides to Jesus? "For this I have been born," that is His **humanity**. And "For this I come into the world," that is His **deity**. Jesus was fully God and fully Man.

Why did He come? "To testify to the truth." His kingdom is truth. He is the truth. He says, "Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."

He is the truth, and the statement at the end of verse 37 is so important. "Everyone, everyone –" this is an inclusive statement. "Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."

John 18:38a (NASB)

³⁸ Pilate *said to Him, "What is truth?"

There is not a person on the planet, and never has been, who knows the truth who rejects Christ. If you reject Christ you do not know the truth. He is truth.

If you are not hearing the voice of Christ revealed on the pages of Holy Scripture you do not know the truth. You may know the truth about certain temporal things, but you do not know the truth that matters, and that is the truth about eternal things. When you begin to hear His voice, you understand the purpose of your life. You have been set free from the search.

III. THE VERDICT.

John 18:38b (NASB)

And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews and *said to them, "I find no guilt in Him."

The verdict of Pilate: "I find no guilt in Him."

CONCLUSION:

You will never know the truth about spiritual reality, about eternity, or about salvation, unless you hear His voice. God has spoken His Word to us through His Son.

John 8:31-32 (NASB)

³¹ So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, *then* you are truly disciples of Mine; ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."

He is Lord!