

## **The King On Trial**

### **John 18:28-40**

#### **INTRO**

6 trials.

Three took place already, but John only mentions 1 of them.

Last week, we talked about Jesus' interaction with Annas. After Annas was done with him, Jesus was sent to Caiaphas. This could have been around 4 in the morning. After being with Caiaphas, when it was morning, Jesus was sent to his 3rd religious trial, that Luke mentions.

John doesn't mention this trial, and the other writers don't talk about what happened here, most likely because it wasn't very different than what had already taken place with Annas and Caiaphas.

Luke 15:1 And as soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council (*Sandhedrin*). And they bound Jesus and led him away and delivered him over to Pilate.

#### **1) The Delivery (v.28-32)**

##### **a) The Hypocrites (v.28)**

**28** Then they led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the governor's headquarters (Hall of judgement: *praitōrion*, where Pilate, the Roman governor, stayed.). It was early morning. They themselves did not enter the governor's headquarters, so that they would not be defiled, but could eat the Passover.

**29** So Pilate went outside to them and said, "What accusation (*charge*) do you bring against this man?"

#### **Matthew 17:1-10**

When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death. 2 And they bound him and led him away and delivered him over to Pilate the governor.

3 Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus[a] was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, 4 saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." They said, "What is that to us? See to it yourself." 5 And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself. 6 But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since it is blood money." 7 So they took counsel and bought with them the potter's field as a burial place for strangers. 8 Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. 9 Then was fulfilled what had been spoken by the prophet Jeremiah, saying, "And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him on whom a price had been set by some of the sons of Israel, 10 and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord directed me."

### **What do we know about Pilate?**

Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea from A.D. 26-36, serving under Emperor Tiberius.

**The trial of Jesus before Pilate occurred at a place called the *Praetorium***, while Jesus was standing on the Pavement and Pilate was situated at the *bema* or Judgment seat (John 19:8-13). All of the Gospel narratives state that the trial occurred in Jerusalem, but John recorded additional specifics. The *Praetorium* was the residence of the Roman governor, and in the case of Judaea, the Province there was a *Praetorium* in both Caesarea and Jerusalem due to the Roman capital at Caesarea and the importance of maintaining a Roman presence in Jerusalem due to its place as the center of worship for Judaism. The structure received its name from earlier Roman usage, referring to the place where a commander resided. This specific governor's residence in Jerusalem was probably the former palace of Herod the Great, which was located on the western side of the current Old City of Jerusalem at the walls (opposite the Mount of Olives)

**Jewish oral law** tells us that the a Jew who entered the dwelling place of a Gentile became ceremonially unclean.

Pilate was aware of why they would not come onto his grounds, so he walked off his grounds/outside of the building, to talk with them.

**Remember Peter**, in Acts, when he was asked to go to Cornilous' house? God had to first show him that nothing was unclean. If God hadn't done this, Peter would not have gone.

**Do you see the irony - the hypocrisy taking place?!**

They were willing to have an unjust trial to kill someone, but didn't want to be defiled/dirty by walking onto the grounds of a gentile.

In a season of celebrating the freedom that God gave them from bondage, they are holding in bondage the one who offers them true freedom!

**This is why the prayer from Psalm 139:23 is so important that we keep on our minds:**

**"Search me, oh God, and know my heart..."**

### **b) The Accusers (v.29-32)**

**29** So Pilate went outside to them and said, "What accusation (*charge*) do you bring against this man?" **30** They answered him, "If this man were not **doing evil**, we would not have delivered him over to you." **31** Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law." The Jews said to him, "It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death." **32** This was to fulfill the word that Jesus had spoken to show by what kind of death he was going to die.

**Jesus, an evildoer?** What a gross and horrible thing to ascribe to the Holy God of the universe! Jesus, who is the antithesis of all that is evil is called evil by the people he created!

**At first**, since it's early in the morning and Pilate most likely just woke up to the news of a crowd of Jewish leaders outside, he asks what the charges are against this man - "why is he here?" (this could be the formal start to the trial, since he should know about the arrest, since there were Roman soldiers who took part in the arrest - unless those soldiers were sent by Herod).

**They said that he's done evil**, so he said, in essence, you have the power to judge people - you do it yourself.

**Their reply answers the question as to why Jesus is there** - because they want him dead, not just judged.

**This escalates the situation, as this is not a common request of the Jews to the Romans, their enemy.**

**What are the accusations they are bringing about Jesus?**

**Luke 23:2, 5**

And they began to accuse him, saying, "We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king.

**5** But they were urgent, saying, "He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee even to this place."

**When Pilate hears that they are saying that Jesus calls himself a king, this would grab his attention more than any other accusations and yelling insults.** Why? Because a claim to a throne is something that would change the dynamics of this whole trial! The teaching of people, the stirring up of the people, and the claims about paying taxes to Caesar would matter to Pilate, but not as much as if this man were *really* a king!

**The decision to kill Jesus had been made**, and they were unwilling to wait to put him in jail until after the passover. Rather, they needed him dead now, so they took him to the Romans, the only ones who had the power to put someone to death. (The Romans had taken this authority away from the Jews in ~6 A.D. when they incorporated Judea as one of their provinces).

**v.32: Jesus had prophesied** that he would be handed over to be crucified - this is now coming true.

He didn't say this directly, but rather, by saying that he would be 'lifted up,' John notes that this is said to speak to the kind of death he would die (crucifixion): John 3:14.

If the Jews were to kill him, they would most likely do this by stoning (throwing him down).

## **2) The Trial (v.33-38a)**

### **a) The King (v.33-37a)**

**33** So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" **34** Jesus answered, "Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?" **35** Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over 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 have been fighting, that I might not be

delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world." **37** Then Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king.

**The accusation has been made** - Jesus claims to be the king of the people, the people say. Pilate, being a good judge, asks Jesus a direct question. **This is the most important question right now. If the answer to this question is in the affirmative, the implications are significant!**

**We don't know what tone Pilate asks this in:**

- 1 - honest tone (acting as a judge)
- 2 - sarcastic tone (looking at Jesus' appearance)
- 3 - fearful tone (he's heard a lot about Jesus and Jesus' power).

(v.34) Jesus, being really good at being Jesus, replies to a question with another question.

(v.35) **Pilate** says, "It's your own people that have turned you over to me, so your crime clearly bad to them! What did you do that was so bad that it deserves death?"

(v.36) **Jesus**, now speaking to the question Pilate had asked earlier, answers with a powerful statement about his identity and thus, his power. Because he is a king, he has a kingdom. But, even though he is a king with a kingdom, this kingdom is elsewhere. This is shown to be the case because if his kingdom were of this world, his servants would protect their king from being taken captive. This is not just a spiritual picture, but one that would have been true in a very practical sense.

(v.37) **Pilate**, picking up what Jesus is saying but not saying very directly, asks a clarifying question: "So, you are a king?"

(v.37a) **Jesus'** reply, again, isn't as direct as it could be: "*You* say that I am a king."

**To clarify**, he asks the first question again - so you are a king? Jesus' reply is to affirm the words that Pilate spoke, and says that they are Pilate's words.

**The question Pilate is most likely wondering**

**"But, is this true? Does Jesus speak truth? Is he really a king? Because, if he is, what should I do now?!"** If it were true, we should treat this man very differently! If Jesus is lying, then this is *some* lie!

The question of truth is spinning through Pilate's mind, and Jesus then speaks to this question.

**This question will not sit on the minds of people forever. In the end, all will know without a shadow of a doubt the answer to this question!**

Revelation 17:14

They will wage war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will triumph over them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers

Rev. 19:16

On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

## **b) The Truth (v.37b-38a)**

For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice." **38a**  
Pilate said to him, "What is truth?"

**There are two incredibly powerful points here that we can't overlook.**

*1 - Jesus' statement about his purpose*

*2 - Pilate's question.*

Let's take them in order:

### **Jesus' statement:**

In two sentences, Jesus packs in more theological truth than we get in many sermons!

1. He says he was born for a purpose - this speaks to a fore-ordained direction for his life.
2. He says he came into the world - this speaks to his preincarnate state; his deity.
3. He says he can bear witness to truth - this speaks to his ability to be objectively moral and right.
4. He says that if people are people of truth, or care about truth, they will listen to him - this is both a statement about his pure character and wisdom **and** an invitation to Pilate to properly respond to Jesus' innocence, as the author of truth can't lie or be worthy of death.

**Pilate's question:**

There has been a lot said about this dismissive question of Pilate.

1. Does he not care about the truth?
2. Did he actually mean this question, or was it born out of the frustration of the situation?
3. Did he mean that about theological concepts (like what Jesus was proposing) or about all things in life (that truth isn't knowable)?
4. Was he expressing his frustration as a judge, someone who is supposed to figure out the truth, and how hard it often is to nail it down?

- a. The question that plagues many judges is this question "What is truth?"

If you have sat in judgment or counsel over lots of people, you realize that figuring out the truth amid conflict can be very hard at times. Sometimes, it's draining to figure out what the truth is in the midst of different people making opposite statements, both claiming they are telling the truth.

Being a judge is no easy task!

**We don't know.** We don't know his tone. We don't know his attitude. We don't know his thoughts.

**What we do know is this** - He later does come to believe (and post) that Jesus is the King of the Jews. When asked to change this posted objective truth statement into a subjective truth statement, "*He said he was the King of the Jews,*" Pilate declines.

**We also find (in another gospel) that Pilate is warned by his wife about Jesus**, and on top of that, he washes his hands of his unjust killing of Jesus.

**To speak to the subject of truth, you and I are both aware that the concept of something being objectively true, that is, true regardless of how someone feels about it, is a concept that is under attack.** To those who hold to this kind of truth, truth that is not dependent on feelings, they are often considered hateful, mean, cruel, and close-minded.

**The war on truth should not surprise us.** The war on truth started in the Garden and won't stop until Jesus makes all things new. The war on truth manifests itself in different ways at different times, but know this: the war is real!

What kind of battles make up this global war? Battles like:

- *Who defines marriage?*
- *Who defines gender?*
- *Who defines happiness?*
- *Who defines murder?*
- *Who defines love?*
- *Who defines morality?*

- *Who defines appropriate sexual relationships?*
- *Who defines adultery?*
- *Who defines healthy parenting?*
- *Who defines love?*

**When a culture has rejected Jesus Christ**, the compass pointing towards truth, we are fools to think the culture will continually walk a straight line, or any line at all.

When one doesn't have a compass, stars, or landscape to give perspective, why would we assume that anyone would know what true north is? When we live in a culture that rejects Jesus, the Bible, and biological design, why would we assume that Kingdom principles would win out?

**We don't know what Pilate meant by this question**, "What is truth?", but we do know that so many people around us have already answered this question. To many, here is their answer: *The truth is what I say it is.*

When you interact with people who believe this, getting angry, yelling, or cutting them out of your life isn't going to change them.

1. **Pray for them.**
2. Ask them if they'll trust you, even though they don't understand.
3. If they'll consider evidence, show them that.
4. If they are hurting, hear them out.

Pray that God would open their eyes to see Him as the North Star and God's Word as their compass.

"I am the way the truth and the life" John 14:6

This man believed the truth about Jesus, but he also feared losing his position more. Again, we find the fear of man winning out over justice.

John is missing the trip to Herod. The above trial actually took place in two conversations, but John puts it into one.

### **3) The Verdict (v.38b-40)**

**38b** After he had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, "I find no guilt (cause for punishment, crime) in him."

### **Between verses 38 & 39:**

There's a gap in the story that we can fill in by reading through Luke's account of this trial:

#### **Luke 23:13-16**

**13** Pilate then called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, **14** and said to them, "You brought me this man as one who was misleading the people. And after examining him before you, behold, I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him. **15** Neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Look, nothing deserving death has been done by him. **16** I will therefore punish and release him."<sup>[a]</sup>

**This should have been the end of it!** The judge has spoken! Nothing else should have taken place! The trial is done!

But...it wasn't!

Pilate gave the verdict, and then he offered a choice!

Why?!

***Because of His fear of the crowd.***

If he was the reason for unrest in the city with millions of people visiting for the Passover, he could have gotten in big trouble with his superiors, likely ending his job!

**His fear is rooted in his the possibility of losing his job.**

### **a) The Choice (v.39)**

**39** But you have a custom that I should release one man for you at the Passover.

So do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?"

**Pilate** stuck with a tradition at this time, hoping that it would work. He would normally let someone off the hook (from death) each year to appease the Jews on this annual big celebration of theirs. He's hoping that will work this time.

**Matthew** tells us that Pilate saw through the screaming and yelling to the real reason that Jesus was there - "*he knew it was out of envy that they had delivered him up.*"

**Matthew** also tells us that Pilate's wife told him, "Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much because of him today in a dream" (Mat.27:19).

Pilate still gave the crowd the choice: "Who do you want released?"

Why did Pilate say "the king of the Jews" when speaking of Jesus? We know they don't like that name for Jesus?

Who did the crowd pick?

## b) The Cry (v.40)

**40** They cried out again, "Not this man, but Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a robber.[9]

**Matt. 27** speaks about the option to release a notorious prisoner (who was an insurrectionist, robber, and murderer - Luke 23)

### Luke 23:20-25

**20** Pilate addressed them once more, desiring to release Jesus, **21** but they kept shouting, "Crucify, crucify him!" **22** A third time he said to them, "Why? What evil has he done? I have found in him no guilt deserving death. I will therefore punish and release him." **23** But they were urgent, demanding with loud cries that he should be crucified. And their voices prevailed. **24** So Pilate decided that their demand should be granted. **25** He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, for whom they asked, but he delivered Jesus over to their will (to be crucified - Mark 15:15)

## Conclusion:

1. The Delivery:
  - a. Pray - search me oh God and see if there is any grievous way in me.
2. The Trial

- a. Are there places in your life that your emotions dictate what you believe, rather than the truth? Are you letting your emotions about God, Christianity dictate what you believe? Ask God to reveal that to you.
3. The Verdict:
- a. There were already three crosses set to hang people on Golgotha that morning. Barabbas was likely to be there. The cry of the people was for Jesus to take the place of a criminal - an unjust cry. And yet, it was also the desire of Jesus, our holy and perfect God, to take our place, a criminal.
  - b. He would be a sub for Barabbas as He is for Us. Is He for you?



