

Jesus Appears Before Pilate, Part 1

Scripture: John 18:28–38

Code: 43-103

We return this morning to the gospel of John after a bit of a break from that wonderful gospel. We find ourselves back in the 18th chapter of John's gospel. We are, as you will remember if you've been with us, we are at the end of Passion Week, the final week of our Lord's life before His crucifixion. And 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 most severe miscarriage of justice, and we are in Phase One now of the Gentile trial as we come to John 18, verse 28. Let me read that text to you, starting in verse 28, and we'll read down through verse 38.

"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. Therefore Pilate went out to them and said, 'What accusation do you bring against this Man?' They answered and said to him, 'If this Man were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him to you.' So Pilate said to them, 'Take Him yourselves, and judge Him according to your law.' The Jews said to him, 'We are not permitted to put anyone to death,' to fulfill the word of Jesus which He spoke, signifying by what kind of death He was about to die.

"Therefore Pilate entered again into the Praetorium, and summoned Jesus and said to Him, 'Are You the King of the Jews?' Jesus answered, 'Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about Me?' Pilate answered, 'I'm not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You to me; what have You done?' 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.' 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.' 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 guilt in Him.'" Fascinating part of the trial of Lord Jesus, this first phase of His Gentile trial before Pontius Pilate, the governor of Israel under the Roman authority.

As I said, there are six phases to the trial of Jesus leading up to His execution on the cross. John records the first phase of His Jewish trial when He was brought to Annas the high priest. There were two further phases in the presence of Caiaphas, also the high priest at the time, though Annas bore the title for life. Phase One before Annas; Phase Two before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, the Jewish supreme court; and then Phase Three of the Jewish trial, again with Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin.

Let me see if I can break that out a little bit. When Jesus was arrested in the garden, identified by Judas and taken away, He was taken to the house of Annas the high priest; and there He was railed against. There was an attempt to find Him guilty of a crime that was not possible. He had committed no crime, no sin. After enduring the insults in front of Annas the high priest He was then sent to

Caiaphas. We see that in chapter 18 in verse 24: “Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.”

When He got to Caiaphas He also got to the Sanhedrin, the Jewish supreme court. It is the middle of the night and they hold a mock trial of Jesus and sentence Him to death in the middle of the night. John does not record that as the other gospel writers do.

Matthew 26:66, Matthew looks at that second phase of the Jewish trial and says they sentenced Jesus to death in the middle of the night. Holding a trial in the middle of the night was illegal; it was against Jewish law; it was forbidden. That didn't stop them. But they now knew that they had to legitimize their miscarriage of justice. So early in the dawn at daybreak they quickly assemble together and held another mock trial very briefly, according to Matthew 27, verse 1. It lasted just long enough in the daylight to pronounce the death sentence on Jesus, which then legalized them – mock trial in the middle of the night. That covers the three phases of the Jewish trial: One before Annas, Two before Caiaphas, and the Jewish supreme court.

John then picks up the story as the trial moves into the Gentile world. There will be three phases of that trial: the first before Pilate, the second before Herod, and then back to Pilate finally. When we come to verse 28 we read that they led – that is the Jewish leaders, temple police no doubt – led Jesus from Caiaphas into the Praetorium. That's the Roman judgment hall. That's where John picks up the story – Phase One of His trial before the Gentile Roman powers.

Now this is a very dramatic event, as we all know and understand, and the drama that plays out here is tied to the persons, the characters, the people that play a role, the personalities. It is a clash and interplay of personalities, all of whom are wicked, all of whom are sinful, all of whom are in some way or another culpable for this miscarriage of justice. The one person who shines out as righteous and holy and pure and all-glorious is the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the one being accused of the crime. The self-righteous, the ones who are the purveyors of justice are all doing evil.

The one they are accusing is perfectly pure and righteous. He is the victim. He is mocked; He is despised; He is ridiculed. He is sentenced to death, and yet it is His purity and majesty that dominates 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.

Who are these personalities? Well, there's Annas, the patriarchal high priest. There is Caiaphas, the reigning high priest. There is the Sanhedrin, the elite of Jewish law who upheld the law of the rabbis and of Moses. There is Pilate, Pontius Pilate, Roman procurator, a governor. There is Herod Antipas, an Idumean king who ruled in the area. There are false witnesses. There are screaming crowds crying for the blood of Jesus. There are Roman soldiers and there are Roman executioners. All of those evil people are amassed against Jesus in one way or another, set against Him to do deadly harm to the Son of God.

In the midst of it all, all we see in Him is beauty, and glory, and majesty, and purity, and righteousness. We're not surprised, He is the blameless Son of God. He is called the holy Child in the New Testament. He is called the innocent one. The New Testament says, the testimony of Luke 23, “He has done nothing wrong.”

Again in Luke 23, testimony is given regarding Christ, “Certainly this man was innocent.” Paul says, “He knew no sin.” The writer of Hebrews says, “He was without sin – holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners.” Peter says, 1 Peter, “He committed no sin.”

That is testimony to His holy perfection from the beginning of His incarnate life unto the very end of it. And you see His perfection on display all through His trial. And the harder they work to accuse Him of being a blasphemer and a rebel and an insurrectionist, a threat both to Jews and Gentiles, to the Roman power, and to God Himself, the more accusations they trump up and heap on Him, the more majestic He appears. The glory of Christ is seen in contrast to the other characters.

Now just thinking first of all about the Jews, which essentially refers to the chief priests and the Jewish leaders, the Sanhedrin, those who were the rulers in Israel. Israel, as you know at this time, is under Roman occupation. The Romans have basically conquered the Mediterranean world. They are everywhere, and they have final power. They have subjected the land of Israel, along with a lot of other nations, to their authority. The nation is under Caesar, under Roman law, and occupied by Roman troops. Roman taxes are being collected from the people. The Jews obviously hate this, they resent this. The Romans are pagans. They are outside the pale of God’s concern, at least in the rather racist view of the ancient Jews. The Romans were gracious to a degree. They did allow their nations that had been conquered a certain amount of self-government, and they had allowed that in Israel. But they did not allow the Jews to exercise the death penalty.

Old Testament law had established the death penalty. Genesis, chapter 9, establishes the death penalty; and the Bible in the early years, mosaic writings begins to expand the death penalty for crimes even beyond murder. This was given not only to Israel, this was given to the world before Israel. But Israel was a covenant people and had the law of God, and they had the right to exercise capital punishment for certain crimes. The death penalty was designed by God to be a deterrent, and when it was used with swiftness it was a deterrent. But under Roman rule, that right to the death penalty had been rescinded from the Jews. It was called the *ius gladii*, the right of the sword in Latin, and it belonged only to Rome.

Now in all honesty, though that is true, it didn’t seem to bother the Jews when they stoned Stephen. They took Stephen because of what he had preached. As you know in the 7th chapter of Acts, they crushed out his life by throwing stones on him. They stoned him. There was no discussion about, “We can’t do this.”

There was no discussion about the fact that the Romans might bring about some repercussions. And, in fact, there’s no record in the New Testament that the Romans did anything about it. So why all of a sudden are they so concerned to get the Romans to execute Jesus? It didn’t bother them when a rabble mob literally ran at Stephen and crushed out his life. Why make an issue out of the death of Jesus and have Rome involved?

Somebody might say, “Well, they didn’t want to do it because it was Passover and there were hundreds of thousands of Jewish people there, many of whom knew about the miracles and teaching of Jesus and they just couldn’t do this in a public way. This might be a very dangerous thing and might cause some kind of revolt.” There is that possibility. But that’s not in itself the real reason. I’ll show you the real reason in a few moments.

Nonetheless, the Jews wanted Jesus dead. They'd wanted Him dead for a long time. We can say they'd wanted Him dead for years. We could say they wanted Him dead, at least some of them, from the time He began His ministry three years earlier when He came into the temple and did such destructive damage to the temple, and then repeated it again at the end of His ministry. They had chased Him around Galilee through the duration of His ministry. On a number of occasions they had tried to kill Him. They tried to kill Him in Nazareth; they weren't looking for the Romans then. They would have thrown Him off a cliff and stoned Him there, but He escaped. Why now all of a sudden do they need Rome?

Well it is true, the Talmud, the Jewish Talmud says, "Forty years before the destruction of the temple – " which is 70 A.D. " – judgment in matters of life and death was taken away from Israel." That would mean at about 30 A.D., and that's right at the time this is happening. So the Romans made a very convenient law – the Talmud says – at this very time period, which comes into play in the death of Christ.

The first Roman governor that was ever assigned to the land of Israel was named Coponius, and Jewish historian Josephus tells us that he was appointed in 6 A.D. "He had the power of life and death put into his hands by Caesar," says Josephus. So the governor from 6 A.D. had the power of life and death, and in 30 A.D. it seems that it was removed from the Jews. Very important timing. Very important timing.

If Jesus is to die and it's to be carried out according to the now Roman law, then the Romans had to be the executioners. But, again, I remind you that it didn't seem to bother them after this when they stoned Stephen, and it didn't seem to be an issue when they wanted to stone Jesus in Nazareth. But they seek an execution from the governor.

By the time they get through these three phases of Gentile trials, the crowd has become insane, blood-thirsty, mad, shrieking, howling like wolves, twisted in bitter hate, screaming at the top of their voices, "Crucify Him. Crucify Him." It's as if in the end they reach such a level of insanity that they lose all reason, certainly all mercy and most of their humanity. Hatred can do that. So the Jews play a prominent role in this drama. They drive this entire episode. They drive Jesus to the cross. They cannot be, they cannot be taken off the hook for the death of their Messiah; they drove the entire execution, through the Jewish trial, through the Gentile trial.

Now if they're going to get the Romans to execute Jesus they've got to take Him to Pilate, so that's what they do. The sentence has already been passed by them. They know what they want to do; they want Him dead. Caiaphas said, back in chapter 18, verse 14, that "it was expedient for one man to die on behalf of the people. This man Jesus needs to die before the Romans come and start killing all of us."

In their sinful, stupid blindness, they were convinced that they were honoring God by killing His Son. The friend of sinners was shackled by the hate of sinners. The Judge of all the earth was arraigned before a fallen son of Adam. The Lord of glory was treated like a vile criminal. The holy One was condemned as a blasphemer. Liars gave false witness against the living truth, and He who was the resurrection and the life was to die.

John takes us into this civil trial. He takes us to the judgment hall. That's what Praetorium means. It

comes from praetor, it's a Latin term. Praetor is the same as governor, procurator. It was the place where he held court. He was the leader of the Roman troops and the judge that Rome had set. John details the civil trial before this man Pilate. That's the first and third phase, and Herod in the middle.

And, again, just to remind you that as we go through this – and we won't finish it this morning, it continues on into chapter 19. The person that dominates in majestic perfection is the Lord Jesus Christ, and that's why John gives us the detail he gives us, as always to demonstrate that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, so that we might believe in Him and have life in His name. From 3:00 in the darkness of the morning on this Friday until daybreak, Jesus has been held captive. The midnight of His life has arrived and He has passed through that night and had a mock trial, and the Jews need to make it legal in the morning. So at the break of dawn about 6:00 AM, the Sanhedrin hurries together, Caiaphas their leader, and they pronounce a death sentence on Jesus.

And then John picks up the story in verse 28: "Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas in 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." Early Roman courts began at daybreak and ended at sundown, just like Jewish courts; and courts could get busy and they could get full. And so the Jews made their sentence technically viable at the very break of dawn by passing the final sentence, and then rushed their prisoner to be the first ones at the Roman court at the break of dawn. This is also called the period from 3:00 to 6:00 the fourth watch of the night.

So at the end of the fourth watch of the night they arrive at the hall of judgment. The hall of judgement is where Pilate set up his operation when he was in Jerusalem. Most of the time he was in Caesarea. That was a Roman headquarters out on the coast. When he came to Jerusalem he could go to Fort Antonius, the Roman fort there. Or, he would go into Herod's palace – which seems to be the most likely place; it was a very ancient palace – and that's where he would set up his headquarters. The Jews then approach Pilate's headquarters, the hall of judgment. At the break of dawn they want to be the first ones in line in the court that opens that day.

They don't go in. John tells us in verse 28 that they wouldn't enter the Praetorium so that they would not be defiled, but might eat the Passover. The Passover is later that day. They don't want ceremonial uncleanness, and so they don't want to enter a Gentile habitation. They didn't want to be defiled by that, because entering a Gentile habitation would defile you, and then you would be defiled and couldn't eat the Passover.

And, oh, by the way, there is no such Old Testament ceremonial law. There is no such Old Testament regulation. The rabbis had invented these kinds of things as they pushed the Gentiles further and further away. They had invented things like this to isolate themselves from Gentiles. According to the Mishnah, the codification of Jewish law, we read, "The dwelling place of Gentiles are unclean."

That is not in the 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. And 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. It was thus a defilement that would defile you for seven days for touching a dead body. Concocting these kinds of ideas isolated the Jews as you would imagine in a kind of perceived racism. So they were careful not to go in; they stayed on the outside.

This is an amazing level of hypocrisy; they don't want to be defiled, and they're about to kill the Son of God. They would have done far more to defile the Gentile habitation that it would have done to defile them. They were happy to keep the letter of their own invented law while killing the one who came to fulfill it and the one who wrote it in the first place.

John Calvin wrote about this. He said, "These hypocrites, though they are so full of malice, ambition, fraud, cruelty, and greed, that they almost infect heaven and earth with their abominable smell are only afraid of external pollution." So it is that this intolerable distain and revulsion for God and the Son of God makes them act hypocritically as it always has.

Now the trial begins formally in verse 29. Pilate went out to them, they wouldn't come in. He went out to them. Here we have the first phase of the trial, the accusation, or if you will, the indictment. Can't have a trial until you have an accusation. Pilate went out, he wanted an accusation. He's the judge. "What accusation do you bring against this man? You brought Him here, He's bound. Who is He? What has He done?"

Now as you know, if you know the story, Pilate finds out that Jesus has done absolutely nothing wrong, He is completely innocent, and that the charges of the Jews were nothing but lies. And Pilate is a judge, and he has a sense of justice, and Roman justice was clearly defined. And whatever kind of man he was, as a judge, he had the responsibility to uphold the Roman law, and he did not want to condemn Jesus to death, that was not just. But he did. He knew He was innocent, he repeatedly says He is innocent, and he has Him executed anyway. He tried several times to get out of it, his wife tried to get him out of it; he never could. Why did Pilate, this Roman judge who had to have proven something to have been appointed to this position which he held for ten years, why does he cave into these Jews and execute a man that he knew committed no crime? I'll give you a little background.

In 4 B.C., going back, Herod the Great died. He was the king of Israel. In his will—and he was an Idumean, not a Jew, but he was nonetheless the king of that area—he divided up his kingdom between three of his sons. One son was Herod Antipas and he received Galilee and Perea, and we read a lot about him in Galilee in the New Testament in the ministry of Jesus. He was there. So Antipas was given Perea and Galilee. Philip, another son, received Batanea, Auranitis, and Trachonitis, and that's north and east from the land of Israel in a more unpopulated area. And then the third son, Herod Archelaus was given Idumea, Judea, and Samaria. So he ruled over Jerusalem.

The Romans okayed the whole deal. They were okay with Herod, this son of a petty king passing out the territories to his son. Antipas, Herod Antipas and Philip ruled rather quietly and fairly well. Archelaus, who was over Judea and Samaria, ruled as a tyrant by extortion. The Jews actually went to the Romans and said, "We cannot tolerate this man Archelaus. Please get him out of here and replace him with a governor. Give us a Roman." And they did. They gave them a series of procurators, praetors, governors, to rule in Judea and Samaria. And with them came the Roman legions and Roman control.

Small provinces like Israel would often have procurators or governors who were in full charge of the Roman military power that was there also had judicial responsibility as well as administrative duties in the area. These procurators, these governors were not to accept bribes. They were not to raise taxes, that was Rome's call. And they could be removed if the people reported them to the emperor

and they were determined to be unfit. The first such procurator, as I mentioned, was Coponius in 6 A.D. We're not at Pilate's time from 26 A.D. to 35. Pilate was a disaster, a disaster.

There were three famous incidents that history records that made his rule so difficult. When he first came into Jerusalem and the Roman occupation basically was headquartered in Caesarea out on the coast, not far from Modern Tel Aviv. But he needed to make a statement about who he was and about his power to the city of Jerusalem, and so he came into Jerusalem with soldiers. He came with an entourage. The soldiers had banners on poles that they were carrying as they rode in – a flag or a banner at the top, and then above the flag was a bust of Caesar, a metal carving or a metal mold of the emperor; and he was a god. Caesar was a god and he was worshiped as a god. To the Jews, this was a graven image. This was a violation of the commandments, and all previous Roman governors had removed any such offensive idols before entering Jerusalem.

Pilate refused to do so. He wanted to declare himself impervious to the Jewish wishes. The Jews begged and he was adamant. He would not take those idols off those banners. He went back to Caesarea after he had gone through Jerusalem. He went back to his headquarters, the Jews followed him, and they hounded him, historians tell us, for five straight days. They just kept after him, and kept after him, and kept after him to remove those idols.

Finally he told them, "Meet me in the amphitheater. I've been in that amphitheater a number of times in Caesarea. "Meet me in the amphitheater."

They all showed up at the amphitheater, those Jews who were dogging his steps. He said to them, "Stop the request and go away or you'll all be killed." They were surrounded by Roman soldiers. The Jews bared their necks. They said, "Go ahead, chop our heads off." They called his bluff, and not even Pilate could bring himself to massacre defenseless men. He was humiliated; he was beaten; he gave in; he removed the images. That's how it began.

It didn't get any better, it's a bad start. The Jerusalem water supply was inadequate. Pilate determined he needed to build a new aqueduct. There's some amazing ruins of aqueducts that are still over in the land of Israel. There's one by Caesarea.

But they wanted an aqueduct. Pilate determined to build an aqueduct, but where was the money going to come from? Pilate robbed the temple in Jerusalem. Took a fortune out of the temple treasury which was intended for the service of God to build his aqueduct. The people resented this and they rioted, so Pilate sent soldiers into the rioting crowd, and clubbed some of them to death, and stabbed others to death.

Once again, Pilate was doing a masterful job of securing his own popularity, and word was beginning to trickle back to Caesar that this guy wasn't doing this very well. But the worst one was when in Jerusalem, he was staying in the ancient palace of the Herods and he had shields made out of metal and inscribed the name of Tiberias the emperor. He was trying to butter up the emperor. He had these shields made and they were devoted to the honor of the emperor as a god, Tiberias.

And again the Jews protested. They didn't want those in Jerusalem. Pilate refused to remove them, so the Jews sent an emissary to Tiberias and complained about Pilate; and Tiberias sent an emissary back and told Pilate, "Remove the shields." So Pilate was under constant threat of the Jews

reporting him to Caesar.

In chapter 19 we'll see a little later, verse 12, the Jews said to Pilate, "If you release this man you're no friend of Caesar. We're going to tell him again." Why does Pilate even release Jesus when he knows He's innocent? Blackmail, blackmail. His previous mistakes and misjudgments made it impossible for him to defy the Jews and keep his job. He lost it anyway in 35 A.D., and historians tell us not long after that he killed himself. I guess he wanted to do the right thing as a judge in one sense, but he had no courage because he killed Jesus to keep his job. That was Pilate.

So verse 29 picks up the story: "Pilate went out to them." And you know he hates them because of all that's happened. All the things I told you about had already happened. And he said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?"

Now that's how you start a trial: "What's the accusation?" right? That's the first legal thing that's happened. "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, but what crime? And, of course, this starts to become a problem to the Jews because they don't have a crime. They don't want Pilate to be a judge, they want Pilate to be an executioner. They don't want justice for Jesus, they want death. They don't want a retrial, but they're going to get one.

The answer they gave in verse 30 is very interesting: "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 accuse him of questioning their integrity, impugning them, "Are you insulting us like we would bring a man to you to be executed who hadn't committed a crime?" which, of course, is exactly what they did.

There was no accusation. They are impugning Pilate by accusing Pilate of impugning them. This spotless, sinless, perfect Son of God had done nothing wrong ever. They couldn't find one single crime, and they had worked at it. Believe me, if there was one they could have found it.

They're in a tough spot. They need Jesus executed; they can't come up with a reason. All they can do is defend themselves, "If this man were not a malefactor – " the old word is "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 can't 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 don't want a trial, why did they come? Why are they doing this?"

Verse 31 begins to tell us: "So Pilate said to them, 'Take Him yourselves, and judge Him according to your law.'" Do you understand what he just said to them? "Kill them yourself. What does your law say? You've got some crime? Do what you need to do according to your law."

Well their law was the law of Moses, and 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, that a blasphemer be stoned. So Pilate is saying, "Go kill Him yourself. I give you an

exemption from the law. Take care of it yourself. There's no offense to Roman law here."

The Romans did respect the laws of conquered peoples and gave them some latitude in the administration of their own laws and justice. Pilate knew they wanted to kill Jesus. He didn't want to do it. He had some sense of justice. There was no crime against Rome. "Do what you need to do according to your law. Kill Him yourself."

And an amazing response. The Jews said to him, verse 31, "We're not permitted to put anyone to death." So now they're quoting Roman law. "Can't do it. We can't 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. "Oh, no, we're not permitted, because we are bound by law, Roman law."

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, back to Pilate? Why all this? Verse 32 gives you the answer: "To fulfill the word of Jesus which He spoke, signifying by what kind of death he was about to die."

I can't tell you what an incredibly powerful statement that is. If they had walked away with Jesus and stone Him, Jesus is not the Son of God, the Bible's not true, Christianity goes up in flames, the whole of Christianity.

Why? Because Jesus said this back in John 12:32, "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself." But he was saying this to indicate the kind of death by which He was to die. He was going to die by being lifted up. That's 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's not the truth, He's not God, all Christianity collapses; Jesus is a fraud, the Bible is full of lies. Jesus had to die being lifted up; that is a Roman means of execution. He was not to die by being thrown down, crushed, mutilated by stones. They tried to stone Him many times during His life; never successfully. Nazareth they tried to throw Him off a cliff and then stone Him, crush Him.

Isn't it amazing? This frenzied madness is all under the control of a sovereign God to fulfill specific words that Jesus said. You say, "It seems like a very small detail." It's not. If ever He spoke a lie or if ever He said something that was not true, He is not who He claimed to be. So the accusation; fall short. There is no accusation.

We come to the second part of the trial before Pilate Phase One: The interrogation, the interrogation. So Pilate entered again into the Praetorium after he'd been outside talking to the Jews. He came back in, he summoned Jesus and said to Him, "Are You the king of the Jews? Are You the king of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about Me?"

Now the Jews had said He perverts the nation, He forbids tribute to Caesar, He says He's a king, but there's nothing that rose to the level of any kind of problem for Rome. This is not a dangerous man. This is not some man who's starting a revolution. This is not somebody who's guilty of high treason. He's not perverting the nation; there's no evidence of that. He's not forbidding tribute or taxes to

Caesar, He paid His taxes; He had the disciples pay their taxes. The only thing Pilate could ask Him was, “Are you a king? Are you a king? Are you the kind of the Jews?”

In fact, in the original language it's like this: “You? Are You the King of the Jews, as if – this is absurd, this is ridicule, this is ridiculous. You're the one everybody's so worked up about?” He probably remembered back to the original day when He came into the city with all the hail hosannas. “You're the one? It's You? You're no threat.” This is ridicule.

Jesus answered, “Are you saying this on your own initiative or did others tell you about Me? Is this your charge, Pilate? I'm in your court. Are you actually charging Me with something? Is this your idea that I'm an insurrectionist, that I'm a threat to Caesar, that I'm a revolutionary, that I'm leading an attempt to overthrow Rome? Is this your idea or are you just an errand boy for those Jews?”

And Pilate's answer is, “I'm not a Jew, am I?” verse 35. “Are You kidding? I don't carry their agenda. Your own nation and the chief priests to me; what have You done?”

Again, the culpability of the leaders of Israel for the execution of Jesus Christ is patently obvious: “I have nothing to do with You; You have nothing to do with me. Rome has nothing to do with You; You have nothing to do with Rome. You're no threat. This isn't an issue with Rome. You, You are some kind of a king? I don't know anything about that, it's Your own nation and Your own chief priests who delivered You to me. And once again, what have You done?”

There is no crime; he can't find any; he can't identify any. This is some kind of Jewish issue that has nothing to do with the military or politics. Pilate knew this for sure, 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 for envy, jealousy, so he says, “What have You done? There's no accusation at all.”

Jesus answers regarding His being a king, verse 36: “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. Yes, I'm a king, but not in the sense that you know a king. Yes, I'm a king, but My kingdom is not from this world, it's not part of this world, it's not out of this world, it doesn't originate in this world. It has nothing to do with this world.”

He is not a king because subjects made Him a king; He is not a king because it ran in the family; He is a king by nature, and He is a king over a spiritual dominion. That's why I read Colossians 1 earlier, that we have been transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son. It's a spiritual kingdom. Three times He says, “My kingdom, My kingdom, My kingdom is not of this world.”

He rules a kingdom where He creates and then regenerates His own subjects. The kingship of Jesus is in a realm all by itself; it is not of this world. Man's world produces many kings, many rulers. King Jesus is heavenly, eternal, supernatural. There was nothing about Jesus that resembled an earthly king.

Pilate was right about that, but he was dead wrong in thinking Jesus was not a king. He is King of Kings. Revelation 11 points to a day when the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of

our Lord and of His Christ, and He will crush all the petty monarchs, all the Pilates in the world will feel the power of His reign with He returns to establish His kingdom in the world. Jesus said, “Look, if I was a king in an earthly sense, My servants would be fighting.”

Some historians say that Pilate probably had about 3,000 Roman troops available in Caesarea and Jerusalem. It wouldn't have been very difficult to get a greater crowd than that. In fact, if Jesus had just wrapped His arms around the massive tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands of Jews hailing Him as Messiah earlier in the week He probably could have overthrown the 3,000 Romans.

He had no intention of doing that. “My kingdom is not of this world, or My servants would be fighting.” One of them cried in the garden when they arrested Jesus. Peter grabbed a sword and started after people and took the ear off the servant of the high priest, and Jesus said, “Stop, put your sword away,” and gave him back his ear.

“So You are a king?” verse 37. Jesus answered, “You say correctly; I am a king. For this I have been born and for this I have come into the world.”

Do you see what – there are two things there: “For this I have been born,” that's His humanity. “For this I come into the world,” that's His deity. He existed before He was born. He existed in heaven; He came into the world. You have His humanity: “For this I was born.” You have His deity: “For this I have come into the world.”

He came from glory into the world; that's the incarnation. “I was born,” that's the humanity. “I came into the world,” that His deity. And why? “To testify to the truth. To testify to the truth.” He's the king of truth; His kingdom is truth; He is the truth. He says, “Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.”

“I am a king. For this I came into the world.” Preexistent, He comes into the world in human form. “Before Abraham was, I am,” back in John 8. He came to testify to the truth. What truth? The truth of His kingdom, the truth of His nature, the truth of God, the truth of man, the truth of sin, the truth of salvation, the truth of heaven and hell; gospel truth, saving truth, to tell men the truth about God, about themselves, about life, about death, about eternity, about forgiveness.

The days of groping are over in the kingdom of darkness. The days of guessing are over. The days of half truths and lies, over. He said, “I am the truth.” John says, “If you obey Him, you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.” Free from what? Free from the search for the truth.

He is the truth, and that statement at the end of verse 37 is so important. “Everyone, everyone – ” this is an exclusive statement. “Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.” There isn't 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 the truth.

Sometimes I get in meetings with other universities in my connections with the now Master's University, and I can be asked, “Are your faculty free to search for the truth?” and I love to say, “Well, with all due respect, we're not looking, we're not looking.” “What?” “No, we're not looking for the truth; we found it. We have found the truth. All we want to do is understand it, apply it, love it, proclaim it.”

You can take every university – I think there are 303 in California alone – and you can put a big X over every one of them that are still looking for the truth. They're never going to find it. They're never going to find the truth. They're going to be groping in the darkness. I'm not saying they can't add 2 and 2; what I'm talking about is eternal truth, salvation truth, gospel truth. It's wonderful to say, and it's frightening to people who are in academia to say, "I'm not looking for the truth, I know it." And here we meet, of course, Pilate, the first post-modern cynic.

Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?" There's post-modernism. "What is truth?" Cynicism. "There's no truth. What is truth?" He gave up. Post-modernism has given up: "There's no truth. There's no absolute truth." Jesus said this, "Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."

If you're not hearing the voice of Christ revealed on the pages of Holy Scripture you do not know the truth. I don't know what you know, but you don't know the truth. You may know the truth about certain temporal things, but you don't know the truth that matters, and that's the truth about eternal things. "Everyone, everyone, everyone who is of the truth hears My voice," and when you begin to hear His voice, that's the end of the search, you've been set free from the search.

It's really wonderful to live in a cynical post-modern world where people have decided there is no truth, and to step up and say, "Yeah, there is, and we know the truth, we know the truth." The truth is the Son of God living in incarnate, the Word of God inspired and inerrant, that's the truth.

So we have the initial effort at an indictment, the accusation. Then we have the interrogation. What's the final decision? We have the adjudication in verse 38. When Jesus had said what He said and Pilate had responded, "What is truth?" that was his word in this phase, cynicism: "He went out again to the Jews who were still outside and said to them, 'Not guilty. I find no guilt in Him. There's no guilt.'"

In chapter 19 we're going to see he had Him scourged. Then again he came to the Jews in verse 4, he said, "I'm bringing Him out to you so that you may know that I find no guilt in Him."

Then in verse 6, "The chief priests and the officers saw Him and they cried out saying, 'Crucify, crucify!' Pilate said to them, 'Take Him yourselves and crucify Him, I find no guilt in Him.'" He just keeps saying, "Not guilty, not guilty, not guilty, not guilty, not guilty, not guilty."

He is flawless; He is faultless; He is righteous. He's a lamb without spot, a lamb without blemish. He's the king of truth, maligned, accused, hated, mistreated, executed; and what you see in the whole thing is His glorious perfection. I hope you see that in Him.

We talked the last couple of weeks about loving Him and not losing that first love or leaving that first love. This is a glimpse of Christ that should elicit that love in your heart. And for those of you who have not come to Christ, know this, that you will never know the truth about spiritual reality, about eternity, about salvation, unless you hear His voice, and He has spoken in His Word.

The Old Testament, God spoke in diverse ways through the prophets. In the New Testament, He's spoken to us by His Son. What will you do with the truth? What will you do with the truth?

Father, we are so grateful for the rich, rich texts of Scripture that take us to these unparalleled,

unequaled, monumental events in the life of our precious Lord, that help us to see His glory. We thank You for the Holy Spirit guidance of the mind and the pen of John to record all of this so that we will know the majesty of our Savior, another glimpse of His glory.

Lord, we ask that You would speak to every heart here. For those of us who know Christ, may we love Him more. For those who have not yet embraced Him, may they know that they are apart from the truth, lost and groping and guessing in a world of darkness that can only end in death and eternal punishment. Bring the truth to their hearts. Deliver them from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of Your dear Son. Do that work in hearts, Lord. Bring people to the Savior to put their trust in Him as the way, the truth, and the life. These things we ask for His sake. Amen.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2018 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<https://www.gty.org/about#copyright>).