

Jesus Appears Before Pilate, Part 4

Scripture: John 19:1–15

Code: 43-106

For this morning it's John 19 and another riveting, compelling look at the trial of our Lord Jesus Christ before Pilate the Roman governor. As I was thinking about the person of the Lord Jesus Christ and all of His suffering I had the opportunity to do a little reading just because I wanted to expose myself again to those who have written about Christ and about His suffering, and in the process of that I read a book that's a reprint of an old Puritan book called "None But Christ." The writer is a pastor named John Wall who in 1650 wrote this book on the Lord Jesus Christ. And in it he said this, and I thought it was an interesting statement: "All His life was a crucifixion. From the cradle to the grave, from His birth to His burial, all His life was a crucifixion."

What he is saying is that the Lord Jesus was humbled in every aspect of His life. The one who is the infinite, eternal God made Himself the suffering, lowly slave of God in taking on full humanity. In a manner of speaking then, He was crucified by a kind of lifelong cross of humiliation, a lifelong cross of suffering. And if you break out the parts you can understand that. If I can be a little bit prosaic to begin with this morning, let me have you look at His life and some of the features of His life that demonstrate this kind of lifelong cross.

In His conception, for example, He was conceived of the seed of the virgin and lodged there in her narrow womb, the one whom heaven could not contain – no, not even the heaven of heavens. This one, the uncontainable one, was contained in a narrow womb to save us who are conceived in sin and born in iniquity.

In His birth, He was born from the woman. He who Himself was the Creator came from a creature to whom He had given life. He who made Mary was born of Mary who, by the way, was so poor that she could only offer doves for her purity, not able to bring a lamb. Yet she, unable to bring a lamb, brought into the world the Lamb of God who had been alive forever and chosen before time began to be born to her to save His people from their sins.

In His infancy, He was laid in a feed trough in a stable, the home of animal. He who was their Creator and Sustainer, the eternal Son of God was confined then not only to a stable, but to hours and days and years. The one who feeds all living things, all living creatures, needed to be fed with His mother's milk. The eternal Word who spoke everything into existence could not speak, could not form words, could only cry and nurse. He, the one who makes all the earth to tremble with His glory and majesty and power rested gently in His mother's arms.

In His circumcision, He was first wounded. In obedience to His own law and His own sign and symbol of the need for all men to be cleansed and purified from sin, though He Himself needed no such thing, as He was the eternally sinless Son.

In His temptation, in all of His temptations, He was assaulted by the very devil He had thrown out of heaven. The very devil that He had sentenced to eternal damnation in the lake of fire was allowed to

confront Him with solicitation to sin, the very sins His holy soul despised, and for which He had never eternally been solicited. That evil, doomed devil tried to doom the holy, sovereign Son by compelling Him to fall down and worship him, the unclean spirit, who himself was pure spiritual life.

Such senseless exposure to unholy temptations never eternally had occurred in all His existence. But in His lifelong crucifixion, He faced the ugliness of those things that couldn't have found their way into heaven. This is a kind of painful cross for one so holy. He endured it to triumph over it that He might be a merciful High Priest for those of us who are incessantly assaulted by temptation and fall victim to it. In His life He bore a kind of cross over three decades of His life in His humiliation and obscurity.

But especially in the three years of public ministry He lived without reputation, without honor, without admiration. He lived as an outcast rejected and despised. This is the one who was adored by the Father with perfect adoration and love, and the one whom all holy angels worshiped, and even demons feared. This one, the incarnate Creator of wood and stone and clay and all that existed used those things to fashion furnishing for folks who would one day want to stone Him to death in His own town.

In His arrest He was captured and He was bound. The boundless one, the limitless one was tied up by evil men. The very one who could have overpowered them and killed them in a split second rather allowed Himself to be their captive so they could lead Him to death. He was bound by the agents of Satan who will one day bind Satan and cast him forever into the lake of fire.

Even His agony in the garden was a kind of crucifixion. He sweat drops of blood, even though it was cold. We know it was cold because there was a fire at the house of Herod that very night to keep people warm. But He was sweating drops of blood in the cold because of the trauma of His own soul. And all His beatings and thorns and nails unexperienced eternally up to that point were less traumatic than facing His Father's wrath, which made Him say that His soul was heavy unto death. He was about to fall into the hands of the living God, and His own word indicates, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." He was about to be punished by the one who had loved Him eternally, punished to death for sins He did not commit.

In His betrayal there was a kind of crucifixion. He was impaled by Judas on the cross of rejection. After three years of merciful privilege granted to that traitor, that disciple Judas chose Satan over the Son of God. In His trials before corrupt earthly judges who falsely condemned Him, the one true Judge who was sinless, who is the pure eternal Judge to whom all final judgment is assigned was found guilty of things He did not do. He is the Judge before whom all earthly judges and all earthly people will one day stand, including Annas, Herod, the Sanhedrin, and Pilate, and everyone else at that great white throne judgement, the final tribunal where they will be, if they have rejected Him, sentenced to hell forever, condemned by the very one they condemned, sentenced by the very one they sentenced.

Even in the hours of His captivity before the cross He suffered spit and slaps and punches and brutality as men mocked and mistreated the only one who could give them forgiveness and give it out of a heart of love, forgiveness for their lives of unbroken cosmic crimes against Himself and His God. In His scourging, which Jerome tells us took six men because it was so wearying and it went on so long that there had to be shifts in those who wielded the blows. In His scourging He suffered obvious pain, ripping and shredding of His flesh: shame, humiliation, pain, nakedness, mockery. He

was beaten bloody. This is the one who never had a body up until then, and when He did have a body that body is scarred for all eternity, scarred for the transgressions of sinners. The one who is holy, perfect, sinless majesty was treated like human trash. And then even in His sentencing, there was a kind of cross, because He was condemned. He was condemned by people whom He, it would turn out, would never condemn. There had to be people screaming, “Crucify, crucify,” who fell down in faith before Him as the risen Christ on the Day of Pentecost and after.

Yes, the one who possessed a crown of glory was given a crown of thorns. The one who possessed a sovereign scepter of absolute power and authority was given a reed and hit in the face with it. The one whose robe is the covering of perfect righteousness and light was given a faded soldier’s tunic in mockery. The one who has the right to call everyone to fall down and kneel before Him – and one day every knee will bow – was treated with contempt by soldiers who mockingly bowed down, knelt before Him and then punched Him in the face. The one who is King of Kings, the one who lifts up and puts down all rulers, who will vanquish all kings when He establishes His earthly kingdom and reigns as King of kings and Lord of lords, that one suffered rejection by rulers and people alike, humiliation, and even death. But then the first time He came it was for a cross. The first time He came it was for a crucifixion. His life was a lifelong cross.

We are in John 19 now at the very point of His actual crucifixion. In fact, in verse 16 of John 19 you will notice that this portion we’re going to look at ends with the words, speaking of Pilate, “So then he handed Him over to them – ” meaning the Roman executioners “ – to be crucified.” This leads us to His actual crucifixion. But as John Wall said, His whole life was a kind of crucifixion.

Let me read this very important text, starting in verse 1: “Pilate then took Jesus and scourged Him. And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and put a purple robe on Him; and they began to come up to Him and say, ‘Hail, King of the Jews!’ and to give Him slaps in the face. Pilate came out again and said to them, ‘Behold, I am bringing Him out to you so that you may know that I find no guilt in Him.’ Jesus then came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, ‘Behold, the Man!’ So when the chief priests and the officers saw Him, they cried out saying, ‘Crucify, crucify!’ Pilate said to them, ‘Take Him yourselves and crucify Him, for I find no guilt in Him.’ The Jews answered him, ‘We have a law, and by that law He ought to die because He made Himself out to be the Son of God.’

“Therefore when Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid; and he entered into the Praetorium again and said to Jesus, ‘Where are You from?’ But Jesus gave him no answer. So Pilate said to Him, ‘You do not speak to me? Do You not know that I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify You?’ Jesus answered, ‘You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above; for this reason he who delivered Me to you has the greater sin.’ As a result of this Pilate made efforts to release Him, but the Jews cried out saying, “If you release this Man, you are no friend of Caesar; everyone who makes himself out to be a king opposed Caesar.’

“Therefore when Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out, and sat Him on the judgment seat at a place called The Pavement, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha. Now it was the day of preparation for the Passover; it was about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, ‘Behold, your King!’ So they cried out, ‘Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him!’ Pilate said to them, ‘Shall I crucify your King?’ The chief priests answered, ‘We have no king but Caesar.’ So he then handed Him over to them to be crucified.” Obviously the drama is palpable in account.

And, again, it is a historic account. It is actual history, real people, real events. The Bible is not a mystical book, as I told you three weeks ago, it's a historical book, and all its theology is drawn out of actual history. What I just read you essentially is the final phase of the trial of Jesus.

The trial began when He was arrested in the middle of the night while he was in the garden of Gethsemane with His eleven apostles. Judas came leading an entourage of hundreds of Roman soldiers, temple police, and Jewish leaders. Judas identified Him by kissing Him repeatedly. Peter tried to defend Him by taking his sword and starting through the crowd, took the ear off the servant of the high priest named Malchus. Christ did a miracle, restored the ear and said, "Put your sword away or you'll die by it." He was then arrested, and a series of trials began.

He was taken in the darkness in the middle of the night to the house of Annas who as the sort of patriarchal high priest, the previous high priest. The actual high priest at this time was his son-in-law Caiaphas, but Annas wielded the power and ran all the bazaars that were being run in the temple. He was taken first to Annas, the real power. They tried to find a crime they could indict Him for; there was none. There were no true witnesses, but they wanted Him dead. They then passed Him off to Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin still in the middle of the night.

The Jewish supreme court came together, 71 members including the high priest Caiaphas. They decided they wanted Jesus dead. They passed the death sentence on Him without a legitimate crime. But it was against the law to have a trial in the middle of the night, so they had to make it look legitimate. So at the crack of dawn they met again at Caiaphas' house, the Sanhedrin, and they made a sentence on Jesus to die.

They didn't want to kill Him because they were afraid of the crowds. The crowds had hailed Him as Messiah earlier in the week. Everyone knew Him as a great miracle worker. They did not want a massive revolt against them by the Jewish population, so they determined that it was going to be the Romans that are going to execute Him. This fit into God's plan because way back in the Old Testament the picture of the serpent lifted up in the wilderness was a picture of Christ being lifted up. When the Jews killed somebody they threw him down and stoned him. Jesus would be lifted up. He even said, "I will be lifted up and draw all men to Myself." And actually in Matthew 10, specifically He said, "I will be crucified." So according to chapter 18, verse 32, they insisted on a Roman execution to fulfill the words of Jesus. God was directing even their vile criminal hearts.

So they took Him to Pilate. Pilate's got to execute Him. The Jews did not have the right of capital punishment. The Romans accepted that right only taking it away from their occupied culture. They go to Pilate. Phase One, they want Jesus killed, executed. They parade ridiculous crimes that didn't happen. They said He's a threat to destroy the temple; that wasn't true. They said He's an evildoer; that wasn't true. They said He perverts the nation; that wasn't true. They said He forbids the Jews to pay taxes to Caesar; that was a lie. They said He stirs up the people to rebel; that was a lie. They said He's declaring Himself to be a king and consequently a threat to Caesar; that was never true.

They handed Him off to Pilate and said, "Kill Him. Don't question us, just execute Him." But Pilate needed a crime. He needed a legitimate charge. He needed an indictment. He needed some evidence. He needed some witnesses. He was a Roman judge. He was a governor and a judge. He needed a reason to kill this man, but they kept pressing the issue.

In all, six times it is recorded in the gospels that Pilate said, “Not guilty,” six separate times. He knew there was no legitimate accusation. He knew Jesus was not leading a revolt. He knew Jesus was no threat to Caesar. “He also knew – ” says Matthew 27:18 “ – that because of envy they had arrested Him.” I mean I don’t think they understood the issues of Jewish theology, messianic theology and what was going on, but they knew it was out of envy.

They brought Jesus to Pilate – you remember back in chapter 18 – Pilate confronted Jesus. Go back to chapter 18, verse 33. The Jews stayed outside the Praetorium. They wouldn’t defile themselves by going into a Gentile domicile. Pilate is on the inside with Jesus. “He summons Him and says, ‘Are You the King of the Jews?’ Jesus answered, ‘Are you saying this on your own initiative or did others tell you about Me?’” “Let’s just get this straight. This isn’t your issue, you’re doing this because of what you’ve been told.”

“Pilate responds – ” verse 35 ‘ – I am 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.’” This is confusing, and even a little bit disturbing. He does not know the Old Testament. He doesn’t understand messianic theology. He doesn’t understand the spiritual kingdom of God at all.

“So Pilate responds – ” in verse 37 “ – by saying, ‘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.’” Jesus is saying in essence, “I am a king of truth. This is not an earthly kingdom, it’s a transcendent kingdom, it’s a kingdom of truth.” Pilate is a cynic who has no clue what the truth is. He responds in verse 38, “What is truth?” “This is a philosopher – ” he concludes. “This is a strange philosopher who has some kind of mystical kingdom of truth – ” as he calls it. “This is no threat to Rome.”

So in verse 38 he went out again to the Jews and say to them, “I find no guilt in Him.” He did not want to be a puppet of the Jews that he hated. How did he come to hate them? He was placed there by Caesar, Tiberius Caesar, to rule. He was there about ten years. It had been trouble all the time. He had conducted himself in foolish ways. He had brought in shields with Caesar’s image on it, and the Jews were infuriated by that because they saw them as idols and they wanted them removed; he wouldn’t do it. The word went back to Caesar and he got a message from Caesar, “Put the idols away. Don’t irritate the people; don’t cause a riot.”

He did it again when he brought in flags, banners that had images of Caesar. He thought he was paying respect to Caesar; he was irritating the Jews. Again the word came to him when the riots started, “Don’t do that. Don’t continue to irritate those people.” He had done these foolish things and they had grown to hate him, he had grown to hate them. Now he has this prisoner from the Jews who desire him to ask no questions just execute the Man. He knows he’s trapped again. Another riot and he’s done. Another riot and he loses his job, his position.

Now Pilate had presided over hundreds of trials. He’d seen many accused criminals – innocent ones and guilty ones. All of them, innocent and guilty alike vigorously protest their arrest, argue for their innocence. But here is a man, he knows is innocent, who makes no case. In his mind he is wondering, “Why doesn’t Jesus answer back? Why doesn’t He argue back? Why doesn’t he defend Himself? Why doesn’t He make His case?” He practically begs Jesus to lash back at the false

accusations. But as Isaiah 53:7 says, “He was led as a sheep to slaughter and He was silent.”

Pilate is now trapped again by the previous blunders that led to Jewish rioting from which he was reported to Caesar a couple of times and had to be rebuked. He doesn't know what to do with Jesus. He has a sense of knowledge of the knowledge of the law of being what a judge should be. His conscience is bothering him. His wife tells him don't have anything to do with this man; she had some kind of a dream. He wants to hold onto some kind of justice. He doesn't want to give in to the people that made his life so miserable, so he passes Jesus off to Herod.

Herod's an Idumean king who has some petty authority granted him by Rome in the area. Luke 23 tells us a little account. Jesus is sent to Herod who is nearby, obviously there for the Passover as well. And it's a joke to Herod. This is a king. It's a mockery; it's a joke. Herod never met Jesus throughout His whole ministry. He sees Jesus and it's a laughing stock to think of Jesus as a threat.

So after mocking Jesus, heaping scorn on Him, making the ridicule of the people around Herod, he sends Him back to Pilate. So when we come to verse 39 in chapter 18 Pilate's got Him back, and this is the last of the phases of the trial. Three before the Jews; this is the third before the Gentiles. That's when we come to our little outline that I gave you.

Number One: Pilate's failing proposals. His first proposal is verse 39: “There's a custom to release someone at the Passover; do you wish then that I release for you the King of the Jews?” “Maybe you should choose Him to be released?”

Pilate had established good will, a good will gesture. Every Passover he would release a criminal. Well, you know the story; they did not want Jesus released, they wanted Barabbas. He offered them Barabbas or Jesus.

Barabbas was an insurrectionist, was a rebel, was a murderer; was a thief, a robber, a brigand. You don't want that kind of person running around as opposed to a healer, a miracle worker, and a teacher of truth. But they chose Barabbas. Remember I told you Barabbas means “Bar Abba, son of the father.” So they chose that son of the father over the true Son of the Father. They chose Barabbas. So Pilate's first proposal failed.

The second proposal is picked up in chapter 19. He took Jesus and scourged Him. He thought if He beat Him enough, bloodied Him enough, ripped and shredded His flesh – they had crushed a crown of thorns on His head. And in that bloody and battered and beaten condition – and by the way, there were no limits put to Roman scourging. Thirty-nine lashes was all the Jews could do, because they wanted to stop short of forty, which was the Old Testament requirement as a maximum. The Romans had no such maximum.

And as I said, it took six people to beat Him, so who knows how many lashes lacerated His body and bloodied it. Now He has this mock robe, a faded Roman tunic, and He's got a crown of thorns on His head. And Pilate drags Him out of the Praetorium to the crowd that's on the outside wearing the crown of thorns, verse 5, and says, “*Ecce homo*, behold, the Man!” “Is this enough? Is this enough; take a look.”

“So when the chief priests and the officers saw Him they cried out saying, ‘Crucify, crucify!’ Pilate

said to them with disgust, 'Take Him yourselves and crucify Him, for I find no guilt in Him.'" This is the second time he said, "I give you permission to kill Him yourselves. Crucify Him yourselves." They're not about to do that. They don't want the responsibility before the crowd. So he had a couple of failing proposals; none of them worked. That gets us to verse 8.

In verse 8 we find Pilate's fatal panic. Pilate who is already in some kind of trauma, deeply disturbed. His wife has warned him. He knows that he's on the brink of a riot. His conscience is berating him for the thought of executing a just man. He's worried about his future career. But that's not the worst of it; it really gets serious here.

Verse 7, "The Jews said, 'We have a law, and that is the law of Leviticus 24:16, that a blasphemer must be executed. We have a law, and by that law He ought to die because He made Himself out to be the Son of God, He made Himself out to be the Son of God.'" They finally arrive on that accusation: "Kill Him for blasphemy. Kill Him for blasphemy." That is the final full rejection of Israel's leadership of the Messiah, that's it, and there is no excuse.

You might say, "Well, they really didn't understand." Oh, I understand that; they really were ignorant. Yes, that's true. But they killed Him for saying who He really was. There was no mystery in what his claim was. They actually killed Him for claiming to be who He was. They knew He claimed to be God's Son, which is to bear the same nature as God; He claimed deity. He did it many times through the gospel of John, and we've seen that, and they reacted in the same fury. So mark it down.

While, of course, they did it in ignorance; of course, they did it in the darkness of their own hearts; they rejected the Lord Jesus Christ fully and completely, having heard unmistakably that He claimed to be the Son of God. They wanted Him dead, knowing what He claimed and viewing it as blasphemy. "And according to our law, He has to die, and you've got to carry it out."

Then in verse 8: "When Pilate heard this statement – " what statement? " – that He made Himself out to be the Son of God, he was even more afraid." More afraid than of Caesar? More afraid than of the Jews? More afraid than of his wife? More afraid than of his guilty conscience? What else was there to be afraid of?

The word "afraid" there, end of verse 8, is the Greek verb *phobe* from which we get "phobic" or "phobia." It means "terrified, to terrify." It actually sometimes is translated "to put to flight, to cause somebody to flee in sheer panic."

Now why does he panic over this statement about Jesus being the Son of God, claiming to be the Son of God? Because every Roman believed in a panoply of gods. Greek gods, Roman gods dominated the Mediterranean world, and they all knew all the stories of the gods who came down into the life of men. They all knew that the gods had offspring and that the offspring of the gods came down as men in human form, and that's how he would understand Son of God. He would understand it with his pagan mythology as the background. What he's realizing is that this man who is very hard for me to define, "I know He's from Galilee. I know He's not a military king. The word out is that He's a miracle worker. Now He's called the Son of God. Maybe He is one of the gods or a child of the gods who's come down to earth to confront me." You say, "Do they really believe that?" Absolutely, they believe that.

In Iconium in the 14th chapter of Acts, in Iconium Paul heals a man, and in verse 11 of Acts 14, “The crowd saw what Paul had done, they raised their voice, saying in the Lycaonian language, ‘The gods have become like men and have come down to us.’ And they began calling Barnabas, Zeus, and Paul, Hermes.” The gods supposedly – it’s all mythology, but they believed it as if it were true – the gods had come down in the past. There are many stories in Roman mythology about the gods coming down. Some of them are on the background of other parts of the book of Acts as well.

Remember in Acts 28 when Paul was bitten by the snake when he landed on Malta, he shook the snake off. Verse 6 of Acts 28, “They were expecting that he was about to swell up or suddenly fall down dead from the bite. But after they had waited a long time and seen nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and these Maltese people began to say that he was a god.”

So in the pagan perspective, Pilate is thinking, “This could be worse than just the Jews, worse than just Caesar. The gods may have come down and come after me.” He is frenzied. He is panicky. He has a racy heartbeat. And to add to that, the warning from his wife came because his wife had some kind of a weird dream mentioned in the 27th chapter of Matthew.

What did it all mean? He was a superstitious man who believed in the gods of his own heritage. In his panic, verse 9, “He goes back into the Praetorium. He says to Jesus, ‘Where are You from – he knew He was from Galilee; that’s not what he’s asking, not geography ‘ – did You come down from above? Did You come down from the gods?’ Jesus gave him no answer.”

That’s sad; Jesus gave him no answer. Pulled the switch, the light’s out, the light is out. Pilate has past the point of no return you might say. He had heard Jesus say, “I’m a king, I have a spiritual kingdom.” It didn’t register.

Why was He silent? I don’t know; it doesn’t say that. But I know He was silent, and when Jesus goes silent, that’s trouble. When Jesus has nothing more to say to someone, that’s a fulfillment of Genesis 6, “My Spirit will not always strive with man.” God says, “My Spirit will not always strive with man.” And guess what; He drowned the entire world. Grace has its limits.

Jesus knew Pilate’s heart; he was like Pharaoh. Pharaoh hardened his heart to a point that God hardened His heart. Pilate hardened his heart to a point that God hardened His heart, gave him no answer. In that moment Pilate passed into eternal night. It was still morning in Jerusalem, but it was eternal night in his soul. It was hell. Jesus said nothing to him.

“So Pilate said to Him, ‘You do not speak to me? Do You not know that I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify You?’” This is braggadocio. The truth of the matter is he didn’t have that authority and he knew it. Oh, not because he knew God had that authority alone, but because he couldn’t get past the Jews. They were the ones that were going to decide whether Jesus lived or died, not him. It really wasn’t his decision to make, it was taken out of his hands completely, completely out of his hands, so that when we get to the end of the section, he doesn’t even render the verdict, the Jews do.

“Don’t You know who You’re talking to?” he says. “Don’t You understand that I have authority to release You and authority to crucify You?” Well, technically he did, but that had all been forfeited. He was being blackmailed by the Jews and terrified by this man that might be a god in his presence.

That would be a reason why He had the power to do so many miracles.

Jesus responds to him in verse 11 and says, “You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above. For this reason he who delivered Me to you has the greater sin.” This just deepens his fear: “You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given to you from above.”

He doesn't know about the true God. Again, in his pagan mythology something's going on here that is terrifying. First of all, all pagan gods terrified people. There were no gods of grace. In the Roman pantheon or in the Greek pantheon, there are no gods of grace, there are no gods of mercy, they're all vengeful.

“Jesus says, ‘You have no authority, unless it's given to you from above. For this reason he who delivered Me to you has the greater sin.’ Pilate wasn't off the hook; this was sin to reject Christ for anybody. But someone had the greater sin. There's a lot of discussion about who this is: ‘He who delivered Me to you has the greater sin.’ It's pretty obvious, it's not Judas. Judas did not deliver Jesus to Pilate, Caiaphas did – Caiaphas the high priest and the Sanhedrin, the Jewish supreme court. They had the greater guilt.

Does Pilate have guilt? Yes. Do the Roman executioners have guilt? Yes. But the greater guilt is to the leaders of Israel. Mark it down: there is guilt and there is greater guilt. There is guilt and there is greater guilt. Eternally there is punishment, and greater punishment, and greater punishment, and greater punishment. Not all crimes are the same.

Pilate is guilty, but his guilt doesn't ascend to the level of those who handed Him over to Pilate. Jesus is talking strange language. He's from above, the authority is from above. He's the Son of God. He has a kingdom that's not of this world. Pilate is terrified.

“As a result of this – ” verse 12 says “ – Pilate made efforts to release Him.” We don't know what those efforts were, but he made some efforts, intensified efforts. It's too late. It's too late. The Jews have him by the throat. All the efforts went to nothing because the Jews in verse 12 cried out saying, “If you release this Man, you are no friend of Caesar; everyone who makes himself out to be a king opposes Caesar.”

Do you notice the shift? It was blasphemy that they said was the crime saying He's the Son of God. That had no bearing on Pilate. So they had to shift back to, “This is a man who claims to be a king. He's a rival to Caesar. He threatens Caesar.” Just manipulation. “If you release this Man, you are no friend of Caesar.”

You know what Pilate heard at that time? “If I let this Man go, there's going to be a riot. That riot is going to be so big they're going to send word back to Caesar; I'm finished.” And in an act of pagan self-protection, he's going to have to give in. That was the last straw: “You're no friend of Caesar. We are going to tell Caesar that you have aligned yourself with another king, you have aligned yourself with another king, a rival king. You'll lose your life, Pilate.”

Well, Pilate has to make a decision, so we go from his failing proposals, his fatal panic, to the last point, his final pronouncement. Verse 13: “Pilate, when he heard these words – ” he was done, that

was it, verdict about to be delivered “ – he brought Jesus out, sat Him on the judgment seat – ” the *bma*, the raised platform: he set up court, he set up the bench, took his seat as a judge “ – the place is called The Pavement – ” I’ve been to that place. It is traditionally identified as The Pavement over in Jerusalem “ – in Hebrew, Gabbatha.” He sets up court, takes his place as the judge.

To start the final proceedings we read that it’s the day of preparation for the Passover. It’s Friday early; Passover doesn’t start until Friday night at sundown. So it’s the day of preparation for the Passover for the Judean Jews – the Galilean Jews had it the night before – and it’s about the sixth hour. It’s still around 6:00 in the morning by Roman calculation, 12:00 to 12:00. It’s still early morning. All this has happened. All this has been crammed and jammed into a brief time in the early morning.

Before Pilate can say anything about a verdict, he said to the Jews, “Behold, your King!” First he said, “Behold, the Man!” Now he says, “Behold, your King!” “This is your King.” Mockery, scorn, ridicule, sarcasm.

He renders no verdict, the people do that; they’re in charge. He has set up his tribunal, set up the platform, the *béma*, the judgment seat. But they pronounce the verdict. “They cried out, ‘Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him!’ Pilate now full of scorn, sarcasm, said to them, ‘Shall I crucify your King?’ and the chief priests answered in a shocking statement, ‘We have no king but Caesar.’” What amazing blasphemy that is.

That was the true blasphemy. When Jesus said He was the Son of God, that was true. When they said, “We have no king but Caesar,” that was a lie. They would be blasphemers to kill the Son of God. They knew who their king was.

Listen to Isaiah 33:22, “For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our king.” They knew that. That’s repeated many places in the Old Testament, that’s just Isaiah 33:22. They literally will blaspheme God to kill Christ.

The guilt is massive. Pilate doesn’t pronounce the sentence, they do: “Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him!” They said, “We have no king but Caesar.” What liars; what blasphemers. They also said, “Let His blood be on us and on our children. We’ll take full responsibility.”

“So – ” verse 16 “ – he handed Him over to them – ” that is the executioners “ – to be crucified.” That was the end for Pilate, except he writes an inscription which we’ll look at next time. He came on the scene in the most dramatic fashion; he goes off the scene, I think, as next to Judas, the greatest tragedy in the New Testament. And I’ve said this each time we’ve looked at this text.

You might say, “Well, that’s a horrible thing that Pilate did. That’s a horrible thing that Judas did.” It is, of course. But do you understand that the Bible says, “If you reject Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you crucify Him afresh and put Him to open shame.” You either acknowledge Him as Lord or you scream with the crucifiers, “Crucify Him, crucify Him! We have no king but – ” fill in the blank “ – but it’s not Him.”

Pilate asked the question, What do I do then with Jesus who’s called the Christ?” That’s the question every soul must answer, and the answer will determine your eternal destiny. You can’t

escape the question; you cannot escape the answer. If you confess Jesus as Lord you will be saved from your sin, from death and judgment and hell forever, and ushered into the glories of God's heaven. If you do not confess Jesus as Lord, you may be like the indifferent people, or you may be the screaming people who shouted, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" or anything in-between.

Doesn't matter which category of unbelief you're in, all those categories end up in the same place, it's either heaven or hell. You cannot shed your responsibility to answer the question, "What shall I do then with Jesus who is called the Christ?" Your eternal destiny will be determined by how you answer that question. Confess Him as Lord. Choose life; choose forgiveness; choose heaven; choose joy; choose blessing. Why would you choose anything else forever?

Lord, we thank You again for opening Your truth to us on the pages of Scripture. We are just caught up in the incredible drama of this. And even though Christ is the one who's being abused, His glory shines through as always, and the terrible rejection of the people is manifest against the glory of Christ. They will not have this man to reign over them. They have no king but Caesar: "His blood be on us and our children. Crucify Him, crucify Him!" What enormous guilt belong to them, far greater than the guilt that Pilate bears.

And, yes, Lord, we know there are degrees of guilt and degrees of eternal punishment, but it's all punishment for those who reject Christ. We ask, Lord, that You would awaken hearts to faith in Christ; make Him attractive, wondrous, glorious. May people see His grace and love, mercy; and may people begin to understand, maybe in a way they have not understood previously, that His whole life, all of this whole sort of crucified life that He lived, all a life of humiliation and confinement, a life of rejection culminating in the cross, was an act of love, to provide a sacrifice for sin, to take the place of sinners who believe in Him. God, we know You're holy and we know You will punish sin either in the sinner forever or in Your Son that the sinner might be forever free from condemnation. We pray, Lord, that You will awaken hearts even now to the truth of that glorious gospel for Your glory. 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>).