

Review: in a previous lesson the Jews completely confirmed their rejection Jesus Christ. This had been long in coming for they had rejected Jesus based primarily on their hatred of the Father.<sup>1</sup> The tragedy of this rejection was that Jesus had offered so much to the Jews - of all people the Jews had been given every bit of information that could have been given.

- They had seen the revival under the ministry of John the Baptizer.
- They had seen the signs (miracles) of Jesus, thus confirming the truthfulness of His claims of messiahship.
- They had heard the message of the coming kingdom of God - a message that should have resonated with Jewish thinking.
- They had seen the fulfillment of Old Testament messianic prophecy.

But that blessing was gone except for those who did believe on Jesus Christ - and there were not a few of these people. Later on at the birth of the church thousands would flock to conversion and join in identifying with Jesus as the Messiah.

### The Missed Opportunity and Bungling of Pilate.

Most Bible students refer to this section as the Roman trial and indeed, it was. I wish to put a different emphasis on this section in line with the whole theme of I have been emphasizing on the Gospel of John: how Jesus touched the lives of those whom He met. Different way to put it. Jesus was taken to Pilate being cuffed (bound) apparently against His will - but such was not the case as I hope to point out. Let's get started.

**<sup>28</sup>Then the Jews led Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor. By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness the Jews did not enter the palace; they wanted to be able to eat the Passover. <sup>29</sup>So Pilate came out to them and asked, "What charges are you bringing against this man?" John 18:28, 29. NIV.<sup>2</sup>**

Some detail is deliberately overlooked by John - namely the second phase of the abortive trial by the Jews under Caiaphas' jurisdiction. Herod is going to be left out. I offer the synoptic detail from my last lesson ([part 3](#)) as found on page 2. The Jewish "trial" was dominated with infractions against their own law, lies and outright abuse of the "Prisoner." The Roman trial is to be noted for the blunder of Pilate in his underestimation of the Jewish rationale and deception. He did not appreciate their complete hatred for Jesus and thought he could manipulate the situation by defusing it. Wrong!

Note the utter hypocrisy of the of the Jews. They wouldn't enter the Roman palace because they didn't want to become ceremonially unclean. Lenski points out that Old Testament law does not make this imposition – only rabbinical traditions. He further points out that this whole scene is nonsense – they are bent on no less than a crime of murder and yet they strain at the gnat of ceremonial uncleanness not imposed by the

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<sup>1</sup> [John 15:18 - 25](#).

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Law and yet the swallow the camel of first degree murder of Jesus Christ.<sup>3</sup> Pilate assumes his judicial role as governor and asks what the charges are.

<sup>30</sup>**“If he were not a criminal,” they replied, “we would not have handed him over to you.”**

A straightforward question that deserved a straight answer – the fact was that they did not have a well-founded answer. They were still getting their conspiracy together and so they evaded the question with this ridiculous answer. No judge would have seriously responded to the answer – no just judge, that is. His answer was to be expected:

<sup>31</sup>**Pilate said, “Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law.” “But we have no right to execute anyone,” the Jews objected. <sup>32</sup>This happened so that the words Jesus had spoken indicating the kind of death he was going to die would be fulfilled.**

First, please note the sovereignty of Jesus in this whole situation. Jesus had predicted that He would be “lifted up.” Everyone that day knew that meant the Roman crucifixion. Had Jesus been executed he would have no doubt been stoned – certainly not a death in accord with scriptural prophecy. No. The whole mob was carried along inexorably in accordance with the will of the Father – Jesus was going to be lifted up – he was going to die on a Roman cross. Second, note that the mob in their hatred for Jesus (because they hated the Father) bluntly stated that they wanted Jesus executed. This is so bizarre. The Old Testament already had imposed against circumstantial evidence. The Law required two or three *witnesses*. Meaning that eye witnessed evidence. The Mob could not accomplish this – the Jewish trial was abortive because of this. All they could muster up was an accusation that Jesus made Himself to be God which was certainly not within the Roman law for they were polytheistic and allowed for such a claim.

So here we come upon the slippery slope of pitting the Roman cynical mind against the Jewish rationalistic mind. Pilate *thought* he could outwit the Jewish mob – who wrong he was.

#### **Pilate is Confronted by the Sovereignty of Jesus.**

<sup>33</sup>**Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?” <sup>34</sup>“Is that your own idea,” Jesus asked, “or did others talk to you about me?”**

This question comes from the charges as reported in the synoptics - specifically in Luke 23:3. The accusation presented was so that crucifixion would be justified. It was a capital offence to compete for Caesar’s throne – a calculated charge that Pilate followed up in his questioning. What followed was the dialogue between Jesus and Pilate:

<sup>35</sup>**“Am I a Jew?” Pilate replied. “It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me. What is it you have done?” <sup>36</sup>Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place.” <sup>37</sup>“You are a king, then!” said**

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<sup>3</sup> See THE INTERPRETATION OF JOHN. Lenski, page 1212, 1213.

**Pilate.**

What Pilate is trying to do is make this a local disagreement between the Jewish religious leadership and a local rabbi. What Pilate is facing is the chilling realization that Jesus is no ordinary rabbi. The fact was that Jesus had done nothing to deserve any punishment. Jesus answer must have put up alarm bells in Pilate's mind because of Jesus' admission that His kingdom was of "another place" – as in other-worldly. Note this comment for it will come into play later on. Pilate's response to this was his attempt to remove any challenge Jesus had to Caesar's kingship and make it a local issue which, of course would have marginalized the whole idea of Jesus sovereignty in the Roman empire. Rome was fairly tolerant of the fringes of local lore and Pilate was justified in his comment that Jesus was a king of another place – not of Rome or for that matter of any earthly place.

<sup>37</sup> **Jesus answered, "You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."** <sup>38</sup> **"What is truth? Pilate asked..."**

Lenski points out the majesty of "ego" "I am" then He offers to Pilate His hand of grace – *"He lays hold of Pilate's heart. The hour of grace has come for Pilate, the blessed hour when the King of grace draws his heart, yet a fatal hour if that King's grace is spumed..."*<sup>4</sup> Lenski is so eloquent at this point. What we do not experience is the power of Jesus' spoken word. He is offering to Pilate a stepping stone from his pagan view of spiritual matters – Pilate refuses the offer by a cynical remark thus refusing this spark of the call of the gospel. He leaves this moment of grace to face the unconstrained hate of the Jewish mob. And so Pilate loses out on his chance to become the citizen of the Kingdom of God.

**Pilate Is Confronted by the Hatred of the Jews.**

<sup>38</sup> **With this he went out again to the Jews and said, "I find no basis for a charge against him. <sup>39</sup>But it is your custom for me to release to you one prisoner at the time of the Passover. Do you want me to release 'the king of the Jews'?"** <sup>40</sup> **They shouted back, "No, not him! Give us Barabbas!" Now Barabbas had taken part in a rebellion.**

We must remember that Pilate *wanted* to have nothing to do with this righteous man, Jesus. He makes an offer that the Jews should have accepted. He offers a choice between a man who was arrested as one leading a rebellion – an offence that should not be overlooked in light of Caiaphas' concern that Rome would destroy because of this very offence. Yet Pilate underestimated the hatred of the Jews for Jesus – the rejected the offer and demanded that Jesus be crucified.

**Pilate is Confronted by the Divinity of Jesus.**

<sup>7</sup> **The Jews insisted, "We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God."** <sup>8</sup> **When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid, <sup>9</sup>and he went back inside the palace. "Where do you come from?" he asked Jesus, but Jesus gave him no answer. <sup>10</sup>"Do you refuse to speak to me?" Pilate said. "Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?"** NIV, John 19:7 - 10.

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<sup>4</sup> THE INTERPRETATION OF JOHN. Lenski, page 1234.

I anticipated the charge of Jesus claiming to be the Son of God – whereas this was abhorrent to the Jewish mind it was something that invoked a certain degree of fear to the pagan, Roman mind. Immediately Pilate started to investigate the possibility that Jesus was a god – one of Roman definition thus the question where did you come from – not at what province but “where did you come from as in from an other worldly place. Please note a certain degree of judicial protocol on Pilate’s part. He tried to establish the “facts” as it were. But Jesus was not helping him at all.

**<sup>11</sup>Jesus answered, “You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.” <sup>12</sup>From then on, Pilate tried to set Jesus free,...** NIV, John 19:11, 12a.

The fear ( in verse 8) also came from a warning from his wife who by tradition was thought to be inclined to the Jewish religion.<sup>5</sup> We have already commented on the sovereignty of Jesus in this whole circumstance. Jesus final answer literally put fuel on the fire that was already burning. The fear (*ingressive, passive aorist of phobeo*) was that of terror. The LXX used this word in conjunction of terror in the presence of God. I will try to build a case of Pilate going from this pagan fear to actually being called by his Prisoner to believe the Truth – which he ultimately rejected in his cynicism. It was because of this pagan terror – convinced that Pilate was *maybe* in the presence of a god that brings us to 12a where from that point on Pilate’s one motivation was to rid him self of this supposed god and to be free to return to his normal life – that of governing this province of Rome. But that was not going to happen as we shall see.

#### **Pilate Faces the Consuming Hatred of the Jews Again – and Is Defeated.**

**“...but the Jews kept shouting, “If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar.” <sup>13</sup>When Pilate heard this, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge's seat at a place known as the Stone Pavement (which in Aramaic is Gabbatha). <sup>14</sup>It was the day of Preparation of Passover Week, about the sixth hour. “Here is your king,” Pilate said to the Jews. <sup>15</sup>But they shouted, “Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!” “Shall I crucify your king?” Pilate asked. “We have no king but Caesar,” the chief priests answered. <sup>16</sup>Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified.**

Pilate had bungled the whole affair. The synoptics have more detail and I suggest a review of that for the sake of historical narrative but my final point here is that even in Jesus’ apparent helplessness Pilate sensed that he was face to face with Someone greater than he but he both underestimated the hatred of the Jews for Jesus and squandered the offer of grace Jesus offered.

Throughout the Gospel of John an underlying tone is that when Jesus meets someone they are changed forever. Many received Jesus as Savior and so received eternal life. Many of the Jews were offered their Messiah whom they spurned – they were eventually destroyed as a nation and scattered throughout the world. Others tried to marginalize Jesus as did Pilate and lost out on the grace of God.

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<sup>5</sup> THE INTERPRETATION OF MATTHEW’S GOSPEL. Lenski, page 1091.