

Jesus Stands Trial Before Pilate John 18:28-19:16

by David Servant

David Servant's sermon explores the trial of Jesus before Pilate, highlighting themes of innocence, authority, and the significance of Jesus' sacrifice for humanity.

Scripture: Matthew 27:24, Mark 15:10, Luke 23:2, John 19:6, John 19:11

Topics: "Jesus' Trial", "God's Sovereignty"

Description

David Servant delves into the events leading to Jesus' crucifixion, highlighting Pilate's struggle to find Jesus guilty of a crime punishable by death, despite knowing the chief priests' envy and Jesus' innocence. Pilate attempts to spare Jesus' life multiple times, facing pressure from the crowd and his wife's warning, but ultimately succumbs to the demands for crucifixion. Jesus' response to Pilate's authority reveals the ultimate sovereignty of God over earthly rulers and decisions, emphasizing that all authority comes from God.

Transcript

During Jesus' time, Israel was under the domination of the Roman Empire, and although the Jews were permitted to conduct judicial proceedings and punish criminals, they were forbidden to punish anyone by death. Consequently, the chief priests and elders needed the agreement of Pilate, the Roman governor, if Jesus was to be executed as they hoped. So early in the morning, they brought Jesus to him.

Knowing that Pilate would not consider the crime of blasphemy to be worthy of death, they accused Jesus of opposing the payment of taxes to Caesar and claiming to be a king (see Luke 23:2). Such crimes were capital offences against the Roman government.

Pilate knew that it was out of envy that the chief priests wanted Jesus dead, because they were threatened by His growing popularity (see Mark 15:10). So he ordered Jesus to be brought to him inside his palace where he could privately question Him. Jesus made it clear to Pilate that He was indeed a king, but that His kingdom was not an earthly one. His kingdom was in heaven because it was only there that everyone gave Him allegiance. The reason He had left His heavenly kingdom was to bring truth to the world, but it was only those who loved the truth who recognized the truthfulness of His words.

Pilate realized that Jesus was not a dangerous threat to the stability of his kingdom, and to his credit, he did practically everything he could to spare Jesus' life. First, he boldly announced to the chief priests and the crowd outside his palace that Jesus was not guilty of any punishable crime. They responded by telling him that Jesus had been stirring up crowds all over Judea, having already done the same in Galilee (see Luke 23:5). Seeing an opportunity to pass the decision of Jesus' destiny to someone else, Pilate had Jesus sent to be examined by Herod, who happened to be visiting Jerusalem, because Jesus was under Herod's Galilean jurisdiction. So Jesus was taken to Herod, and was again accused by the chief priests of crimes worthy of death.

According to Luke's Gospel, Herod had wanted to see Jesus for a long time, hoping to see Him perform a miracle. But even though Herod questioned Him extensively, Jesus did not respond to any of his questions. After mocking Him, Herod sent Jesus back to Pilate dressed in a royal robe (see Luke 23:8-11).

Once again Pilate was faced with the crowd of Jewish leaders who were demanding Jesus' death. Apparently there were other Jews at his doorstep who wanted him to release one prisoner, as was the custom every Passover. Seeing another opportunity to obtain Jesus' release, Pilate offered them a choice: Did they want him to release a murderer named Barabbas or Jesus? Surely, given the choice, the crowd that now consisted of others besides the chief priests and elders would pick Jesus. But the chief priests and elders were able to persuade the crowd to request Barabbas's release and cry out for Jesus to be crucified.

Pilate's second attempt to release Jesus had failed, and pressure was mounting on both sides. Not only was the growing crowd becoming more boisterous, but also according to Matthew's Gospel, Pilate's wife sent him a message, saying, "Leave that innocent man alone, because I had a terrible nightmare about him last night" (Matthew 27:19).

Wanting even more to release Jesus but facing the pressure of a large crowd that included many Jewish leaders, Pilate offered a compromise: he would punish Jesus and then release Him. He ordered that Jesus be flogged with a lead-tipped whip, a brutal punishment that ripped a person's back to shreds and often resulted in death. The soldiers who performed the flogging also mocked Jesus, placing a crown of thorns on His head and hitting Him. Before presenting Him to the crowd, Pilate again declared Jesus' innocence, and then brought Him out, beaten and bloody, to be seen by all, hoping the sight of His suffering would compel them to have some compassion. But the crowd continued to call for His crucifixion.

In desperation, Pilate cried out, "You crucify him...I find him not guilty" (John 19:6). The Jewish leaders, realizing that Pilate would not be persuaded that Jesus was guilty of breaking Roman law, appealed by revealing their true charges against Him. Jesus had broken Jewish law by claiming to be God's Son. Now Pilate knew more of the truth, and it frightened him. He took Jesus back inside his palace to further question Him, but Jesus did not answer.

It had been a long morning, and it was almost noon. Having exhausted his resources, Pilate finally caved in to the crowd. In one final, symbolic act, he washed his hands in front of them and declared, "I am innocent of the blood of this man. The responsibility is yours!" (Matthew 27:24). Then he turned Jesus over to his soldiers to be crucified.

Q. Although Pilate declared his own innocence before the crowd, was he completely innocent before God?

A. No, because he could have stood his ground against the crowd, regardless of what it cost him. Jesus told him that he was guilty of sin (see John 19:11). People often claim their innocence by putting the blame on others. For example, people who write and produce sinful TV programs and movies often justify what they do by saying that they are only giving people what they want. But that is not an acceptable excuse before God. Some people justify their lying by saying that their boss requires it. But they could quit their job. The most important question we could ask is, "What does God think about what I'm doing?" He is the one to whom we must ultimately answer to.

Q. When Pilate said to Jesus, "Don't you realize that I have the power to release you or to crucify you?" Jesus responded, "You would have no power over me at all unless it were given to you from above" (John 19:10-11). What did Jesus mean?

A. He meant that Pilate would not have any authority to decide Jesus' fate unless God had allowed him to have such authority. God is the source of all authority, and no one possesses any authority without His permission. Pilate could not have been a Roman governor unless God had allowed it.

Application: We're all like Barabbas in today's reading. We deserved to die, but Jesus took our place. I wonder what Barabbas was thinking when he was saved from his fate and released, and then watching Jesus, an innocent man, being led away to be crucified?

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