

Pilate Before Jesus, Pt 2 – John 18:39-19:15

Main Idea: Every time you read Scripture you stand before Christ!

I. The Rejection | John 18:39-19:6

As John 18 comes to a close, Pilate has examined Jesus in light of the charges of the Jewish leaders and has acquitted Him of all guilt (v.38). Instead of releasing Him, however, Pilate turned to address the crowd saying, “You have a custom that I should release one man for you at the Passover” (v.39a). **It is clear that Pilate wanted to avoid making a decision over Jesus and yet was seeking to release Him.** Therefore, the decision was given back to the Jews, “So do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?” (v.39b). According to Mark’s Gospel, Pilate presented Jesus as “King of the Jews” to express his contempt for the chief priests’ petty opposition toward Jesus (Mar 15:10). Assuming that the crowd would call to have Jesus released, Pilate was given a staggering answer instead: “Not this man, but Barabbas!” (v.40). John explains that Barabbas was a robber, but Luke helps us understand that he was also an insurrectionist, “a man who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection started in the city and for murder” (Luke 23:19). **Barabbas was therefore likely the last person Pilate desired to release from prison.** However, The Jewish authorities preferred Barabbas (a political rebel) over Christ, salvation by the sword over salvation by the cross. In this way, J.C. Ryle observes, “They publicly declared that they liked a robber and a murderer better than Christ.” **The rejection of Jesus contrasts the will of sinful men (evil) with the will of God (perfectly good) for His sacrificial Lamb to bear the sins and transgressions of man** (Leviticus 16:21-22; Isaiah 53:12).

The Jews had every opportunity not to kill Jesus and spare the life of the spotless Lamb of God. One might think that a spotless person like Jesus would be well received by those to whom He came. At the beginning of John’s Gospel, however, John warned us to expect the opposite, “He came to His own, but His own did not receive Him” (John 1:11). **When given a chance to do good, the religious leaders of Israel chose to do evil because their will, though free, was bound to do evil.** As Martin Luther once recorded, “the will of man while free is still bound.” The end of Jesus’ final trial exposes the sad reality that, **when given multiple opportunities to release the only perfect human being to ever live on the face of the earth, the choice was to kill Him!** As governor of Judea, Pilate had full authority to set Jesus free. The fact that he did not do it reveals Pilate’s moral corruption and misuse of power. Hence, Pilate prepared another scheme trying to win the crowd, “Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged Him” (19:1). **The Roman practice of scourging was a horrific form of physical abuse.** The Romans practiced three types of flogging. The lightest form included mild whipping intended as a warning to petty criminals. The second included punching and beating the victim’s whole body and was used for moderately serious criminals. The worst and more severe one was a terrible and often fatal scourging that not only ripped the skin but dug into the victim’s tissue, exposing muscles and bones. **This savage scourging was employed as the last step before crucifixion with the intent to beat the criminal half to death.**

Added to the deep laceration, torn flesh, and excessive bleeding from the scourging, the Roman soldiers “twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on His head and arrayed Him in a purple robe saying, ‘Hail, King of the Jews!’” (v.2-3). **On the head destined to wear heaven’s crown of glory, mankind presses a torturous crown of unbelief and rejection.** Showing disdain for the Jewish messianic ideal, Pilate then presents Jesus to the Jews saying, “Behold the Man” (v.5). Clothed with a robe of shame and contempt, Jesus is greeted by His own people with a shout, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” (v.6).

To Ponder:

1. What does the suffering of Christ reveal about Him?
2. What does the suffering of Christ reveal about you?
3. What does the suffering of Christ reveal about the will of mankind?

II. The Jurisdiction | John 19:7-11

As the Jews saw that accusing Jesus of being an insurrectionist would not work with Pilate, they dropped the charge of sedition. Finally, they presented the charge of blasphemy to Pilate, “We have a law, and according to that law He ought to die because He has made Himself the Son of God” (v.7). **To Pilate’s consternation, the plan to have Jesus released after flogging Him was not well received by the Jews.** They Jews began to press even harder

for His crucifixion! **To a typically superstitious Roman, the claim that Jesus was some sort of divine man was not so implausible as it was to the Jews.** Alarmed by the possibility of truth on either side, “Pilate was even more afraid” (v.8) and asked Jesus, “Where are you from?” (v.9). Jesus refused to answer Pilate’s question because there was no answer that could help Pilate fit Jesus into all the pagan religious categories present in the world. All four Gospels emphasize Jesus’ silence before Pilate, seeing a fulfillment of Isaiah 53:7, “He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth.” In a last attempt to get Jesus to speak, Pilate goes on and says, “Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?” (v.10) This statement raises questions regarding the authority of human rulers such as Pilate. Christians often wonder about their obligation to accept civil authority, especially when civil power is wicked and incompetent. Jesus answered that Pilate, as the official representative of the Roman Empire, did have authority over his temporal affairs, but He also emphasized that any authority possessed by people on earth is temporary and delegated by God (v.11). Paul stated the matter quite clearly in Romans 13:1, “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities” for there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. **There are limits, however, to worldly authority and our obligation to obey it.** These limits are just implicit in Jesus’ answer to Pilate, “You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above” (v.11a). Since God is a higher authority than Pilate or any over human governing body, believers must refuse to obey civil rulers every time their obedience to God’s Word is at stake! **Pilate sentenced Jesus to death only because His death was a part of God’s sovereign plan!**

Jesus concluded His reply to Pilate with one additional note: “Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin” (v.11b). Pilate’s actions were sinful toward God, but not as sinful as those of the Jews who, knowing God’s law, still delivered the Messiah into Pilate’s hands. **The greatest sin a person can commit is to be taught the truth, hear the truth, attach oneself to the truth, and yet reject the truth.** Jesus is pointing out the sin of Caiaphas and all that he represented (the religious elite of Israel–Sanhedrin). **Since ultimate authority resides with God, and since the Jews possessed God’s Word, their guilt in handing the Messiah over for death was more severe than Pilate’s.** Similarly, pastors and other church leaders who use their offices to deny or violate God’s Word likewise commit sins that are particularly grievous and offensive to God, as do parents who use the Bible to harm their children or husbands who use biblical authority to abuse their wives!

To Ponder:

1. In what situations should believers refuse to obey civil authorities? How does the Bible support your claims?
2. How does knowing that Jesus holds all authority to judge change the way you view those who have hurt you?

III. The Decision | John 19:12-15

From Jesus’ answer in verse 11, it was clear that He was not an insurrectionist or a threat to Caesar, which caused Pilate to intensify his effort to release Christ. However, the trap set by the Jews would not let him go without sentencing Christ to death. Pilate feared the Jews who, after his final attempt to release Christ, cried out: “If you release this man, you are not Caesar’s friend. Everyone who makes himself king opposes Caesar.” (12). Pilate also feared Caesar. The emperor was especially suspicious of disloyalty in his governors, and Pilate knew that word would be sent to the emperor that he was defending a seditious rebel who set himself as king in opposition to Rome. **Pilate wanted to be a “friend of Caesar,” just as many today want so much to have the approval of others.** However, in a few years, Caesar would turn against Pilate and send him into permanent exile, where he committed suicide. Caesar was no savior to Pilate, despite the power that Pilate derived from Caesar’s approval. **Yet a different King stood before Pilate!** In the end, God’s sovereignty and Christ’s willing submission were the key features of Jesus’ trial before Pilate (Pilate before Jesus). Pilate had done everything he could to have Jesus released. The Jews, however, were adamant about Jesus’ crucifixion. When they threatened to accuse Pilate before Caesar, the governor gave in, “he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Stone Pavement, and in Aramaic Gabbatha. Now, it was the day of Preparation of the Passover. It was about the sixth hour. He said to the Jews: ‘Behold your King!’” (v.13-14). If this were not enough madness, the Jews responded, “Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him!” (v.15). So intent were the false and self-serving religious leaders on having the Messiah killed for their own boasting that they rejected what man was initially created to be. **The Jews hated Caesar, Rome, and Pilate but hated Jesus more!** In the end, the only king they were able to recognize was Caesar (a politician).

To Ponder:

1. What excuses do people usually make to avoid facing the reality of the Gospel?
2. As you live out your Christian life, what does it mean to stand with Christ living in a society like ours?