



**Jesus and Pilate
Religious Professionals Breaking Bad
John 18:28-39**

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We are in the book of John. John wrote his gospel with the intent of showing us that Jesus Christ is God. Because of that, he does not go into what takes place with Caiaphas in his home.

By holding the trial in his own house, Caiaphas violated a...law. Sanhedrin trials could only be held in the Hall of Judgment of the Temple Compound and not in the privacy of one's home. In other words, the trial had to be public, not secret. (Fruchtenbaum 1983, 10)



John tells us Jesus was brought there, but nothing more than that. An examination of Matthew, Mark and Luke though show us that there is no formal sentence. When Jesus is taken to Pilate, it is not as a condemned prisoner. They do want Him dead though, but they do not want to be the ones doing the act and they know a religious charge will not fly with Rome. So, they will manufacture a charge of sedition.

Time for more political maneuvering on the part of the Sanhedrin. They tolerate Rome and their presence in Jerusalem, they do not welcome it and in fact take this as an opportunity to once again, denigrate Rome and those sent to rule on their behalf. Let the games begin.

The hatred that both sides have for each other is thinly disguised and shows up in some of the banter between them here.

John 18:28

“Then they brought Jesus from Caiaphas into the Praetorium, and it was early; and they themselves did not enter the Praetorium, so that they would not be defiled, but might eat the Passover.” (NASB 2020)

Why is it that the religious leadership must rely on Rome for what it is they want to do, kill Jesus? There is a bit of background behind this.

So, “they led Jesus to the Praetorium, it was not as a prisoner condemned to death of whom they asked the execution, but as one against whom they laid certain accusations worthy of death, while, when Pilate bade them judge Jesus according to Jewish Law, they replied, not: that they had done so already, but, that they had no competence to try capital causes.” (Edersheim 1896, 557)

Why would they act this way, as if unable to work through a capital case? It goes back to when Rome removed the capability legally from them.

In Genesis 49:10, there is a prophecy that is Messianic in content. In his blessing for the tribe of Judah, one of the things Jacob said is as follows:

Genesis 49:10

“The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs; the nations will obey him.” (NET 2nd ed.)

All of the ancient Jewish writers have said that this verse is a prophecy of the coming of Christ, by which God assured his people that the kingdom and civil government of Judah would continue until the Christ, the Messiah, came. (Fortner 2002, 330-331)

The legal power of the Sanhedrin is restricted twenty-three years before the trial of Christ. This restriction involved the loss of the power to pass the death sentence. (McDowell 2006, 233)

No wonder Annas is so into this entire event. He was the High Priest when Rome removed the authority of the death penalty from the Sanhedrin. It happened on his watch. He and his colleagues were among those mourning the alleged failure of the prophecy of Genesis 49:10 believing that Messiah had not yet come. They did not know that in Nazareth, a young man was growing up in the family of Joseph and Mary who met the qualifications and is Messiah.

Even though he has heavily invested in the desired complicity of Rome, there was still the matter of the optics of the situation for Pilate and convincing him to execute an innocent man.



John 18:28–32

“Then they brought Jesus from Caiaphas into the Praetorium, and it was early; and they themselves did not enter the Praetorium, so that they would not be defiled, but might eat the Passover. Therefore Pilate came out to them and said, “What accusation are you bringing against this Man?” They answered and said to him, “If this Man were not a criminal, we would not have handed Him over 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.” This happened so that the word of Jesus which He said, indicating what kind of death He was going to die, would be fulfilled.” (NASB 2020)

John does not cover the events before Caiaphas for us. There are actually two separate trials or hearings which take place. We know from Matthew 27 that the second one is at the time considered officially morning, somewhere around 4am.

All of that has taken place and now it is time to take Jesus, who they want dead for blasphemy, to Pilate to convince him that Jesus has committed a capital crime worthy of Rome executing Him.

How convenient that for the Passover, Pilate, who normally would be on the coast, was in Jerusalem. Yes, this had all been part of the plotting that took place. He was staying in the Praetorium near the Temple.

Since a Roman cohort complete with Centurion had been in action the night before, Pilate may have been expecting visitors early in the workday. John tells us it is indeed early, but for Roman governors, they tended to start early in the day knocking off late morning. But early does mean early, somewhere between 6 and 7am. We will find out that Pilate is not as much in the bag as the Jewish leadership may have thought he was.

Who is Pilate and how did the Roman government in Judea work at this time?

Pilate entered the office of Procurator, also called Prefect, four years prior to Jesus' trials. Emperor Tiberius had appointed him in AD 26 as the fifth governor of troublesome Judea. That in itself was a surprise, since Pilate was outspokenly anti-Semitic. Pilate was appointed to govern Jews, and like all Roman politicians his distrust of them has the appearance of hate. Avoidance of difficulties would be unlikely. (Gilmore 2001, 61)

He lasted in his role much longer than most, serving as the governor for 10 years or so until recalled to Rome.

There are several other things going on politically as well. Jews could now become Roman citizens and as we see elsewhere in the NT, some are indeed citizens of the Empire.

There was also the never-ending need for recruits to enter service in the legions of Rome. Sections of the empire, as they became more like Rome, would not be willing to sign up for an 18-to-20-year tour. So, frontier areas became hotbeds of recruiting. One of those areas was the middle east, Gaul was another. Legions began to reflect a distinctly non-Italian picture. This would be made more apparent around 70 AD with the fall of Jerusalem.

Pilate was the chief military officer in Judea for Rome. As procurator, he was also in charge of the finances of the province to include taxation. Solvency meant good management in Rome so that was an area of attention for him. There were three different taxes, property tax, a general tax on sales and imports, and then a per person head tax.



He had the habit, as did other Roman governors, that when money ran short on public projects, they would simply take money from the Temple treasury.

Pilate was also judge on behalf of the Empire and he did indeed have the power of life or death. His performance in the past is something that the Sanhedrin would have taken note of, and they were prepared to use it against him unless they got their way. He too was a consummate politician and manipulator.

In the battle of mob bosses, this was an even match. The difference being Pilate had more muscle to enforce his viewpoint.

He was accountable to his immediate boss, the governor in Syria, and then there was Caesar. The Sanhedrin was not above blackmailing him if they did not get their way. Pilate wasn't above it either.

Pilate had received his position through the efforts of Sejanus who was part of Caesar's Praetorian guard and heavily favored by Caesar at the time. Sejanus want the Jews to be destroyed and Pilate was all too willing to move that direction. But that was not what Caesar Tiberius wanted. There was this push / pull going on and that alone would account for the on again/off again brutality seen in the conduct of Pilate. When Sejanus was dealt with for trying to overthrow Caesar in 31 AD, Pilate would have been impacted and considered guilty though association. His actions may arise from this political background.

Here is the scene as John lays it out for us. Shortly after sunrise, around 6:30 or so, Jesus is taken by the Temple Police and some of the Roman soldiers to the temporary quarters of Pilate in the Praetorium, either located near the Antonia Fort near the Temple complex or in the Herodian palace on the Western Wall.

The Sanhedrin though refused to go into the Praetorium as it would supposedly make them ceremonially unclean. They are plotting the murder of an innocent man who they considered to be a threat to their position, and yet they feared ceremonial uncleanness for Passover. Talk about hypocrisy.

Pilate is suspicious. He has every right to be. This group in front of him had earlier wanted his head for showing up in Jerusalem with troops carrying shields with an image of Caesar. The Sanhedrin screamed idolatry. That caused some problems for him, and he was also more than concerned about Herod too. You see, Herod had gone to school in Rome with the children of Caesar Tiberius while Pilate was nothing more than a politically motivated former slave who had married well.

But now the Sanhedrin needs him.

We have a group of murderous self-righteous pretentious priests who wish to stay holy. That means separated unto YAHWEH. How do you do that while being involved in a murder conspiracy? Pilate though understands their angst and he comes out to meet them rather than force them onto his turf. This is a more neutral setting for now and Pilate would feel like he should get some credit from the Sanhedrin for observing their restrictions.

John 18:29–30

“Therefore Pilate came out to them and said, “What accusation are you bringing against this Man?” They answered and said to him, “If this Man were not a criminal, we would not have handed Him over to you.”” (NASB 2020)

Well, so much for a fair trial here. I recall being involved in a jury selection once and during voire dire we were asked questions, and this is for a drunk driving trial, the question was whether any of us have either been arrested for DUI, or ever arrested anyone for DUI. I raised my hand since I had made numerous DUI



stops in the Air Force. The defense attorney wanted to know if I could be fair, and I said yes. Then came the question about the device used to determine the blood alcohol level, up went my hand again as I had to tell them I was currently certified to use that machine. But sure, I could be fair. Then came the question about the officer involved and yes, I knew him, had worked with him, and recently provided a defense for him.

The defense attorney concluded, and probably correctly, that there was no way his client would ever get a fair trial if I were on the jury, so I was dismissed. He was right by the way, knowing the machine and its reliability and the officer, the defendant was as guilty as could be.

To use the reasoning of the Jewish leadership, he wouldn't be here unless he was a criminal and had done the deed. In other words, the Jewish leadership didn't answer the question and instead they relied on their supposed reputation of only bringing criminals to the Romans. I mean we are Religious Professionals you know, and we would never bring an innocent person before Pilate.

Besides it early, why we would bother you this early unless the accused was truly guilty of something. But Pilate comes out and asks, what are you accusing this man of having done, and they respond by saying to him, you know we only bring bad people to you. They also knew his reputation, Pilate was brutal. Philo provides some additional background into this man.

From this we find out why he would even entertain putting Jesus to death. He had a reputation and that could be played to and used to the advantage of the conspirators. Pilate was a man in fear since some of his actions had caused imperial interest before.

Pilate's fear was simple, those who he was dealing with "might impeach him with respect to other particulars of his government, in respect of his corruption, and his acts of insolence, and his rapine, and his habit of insulting people, and his cruelty, and his continual murders of people untried and uncondemned, and his never ending, and gratuitous, and most grievous inhumanity." (Philo of Alexandria and Yonge 1995, 784)

His request for a charge is Pilate now turning to simple standard procedure. Something he didn't always follow.

But as the law in Judea, he could always decide to follow the letter of it at any time and now might be that time. Even though Jews could be citizens, there was no move towards assimilation in Judea and most of the people wanted to remain aloof and independent. Pilate knew this and he would use it. Rome could care less of religious issues and the Sanhedrin knew that. Pilate knew though, because of the Cohort being used last night, this is someone the Jewish leadership wants dead.

They have not stopped by for lox and bagels this morning. This is not a social call or an invite for dinner tonight.

Notice this, Pilate "did not ask them what was the object of their visit, but simply inquired what charge they preferred against their prisoner. This was in accord with the Roman law which required three things: the making of a specific indictment, the bringing of the accusers before the accused, and the liberty granted to the latter to answer for himself (Acts 25:16). Pilate therefore acted honorably in demanding to know the nature of the crime charged against the Lord Jesus. God saw to it that out of their own mouths they should be condemned." (Pink 1923-1945, 1008)

The answer reflects, clearly, they have nothing. Pilate, hearing the response, knows this means the reasons must be religious, and he really does not care, Rome wouldn't either. Because of that, he takes



the opportunity to jab the Jewish leadership who, as far as he is concerned for now, were acting self-righteous about a man they wanted dead.

He knows they no longer have the legal authority to kill anyone. They haven't had that in almost 30 years and Annas and his family know that since Annas was the High Priest when it happened.

He also wants them on the record.

John 18:31–32

“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.” This happened so that the word of Jesus which He said, indicating what kind of death He was going to die, would be fulfilled.” (NASB 2020)

This makes sense. No charge means no offense against Roman law, and he did indeed have the prerogative of allowing the Sanhedrin the ability to do what they wanted to in this case since he possessed the imperium or supreme power of the state.

They don't want Jesus stoned; they want him crucified. Jesus had already prophesied of that coming event. “Jesus' prophecy was that he would be crucified, and John now records its fulfillment. Caiaphas's determination to secure a crucifixion fulfills the divine purpose.” (Morris 1995, 677)

Caiaphas wanted Jesus cursed per Deuteronomy 21:22-23. He wanted there to be an end to the discussion of this man being the Messiah. This would, he thought, achieve that end.

Out it comes, when told to do the trial yourself, they admit they want Jesus dead. They have been unable to state what the charge should be, yet they want Him dead and now they have clearly articulated that to Pilate. Pilate had executed people before without a trial, why the change? Pilate had also heard the stories.

But now that the Sanhedrin has gone on the books with death, Pilate decides to question Jesus personally to find out the truth of what is going on.

John 18:33–38

“Therefore Pilate entered the Praetorium again, and summoned Jesus and said to Him, “You are the King of the Jews?” Jesus answered, “Are you saying this on your own, or did others tell you about Me?” Pilate answered, “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests handed You over to me; what have You done?” Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, 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 purpose I have been born, and for this I have come into the world: to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to My voice.” Pilate said to Him, “What is truth?” And after saying this, he came out again to the Jews and said to them, “I find no grounds at all for charges in His case.” (NASB 2020)

Pilate is now engaging in his judicial examination of Jesus. He is now in the judgement hall, some of the “witnesses” are there as well as the Temple police. Is Pilate following Roman law? No.

A Roman trial consisted of four elements: indictment, examination, defense, and verdict. An indictment was brought when someone was in violation of a Roman law. The indictment was usually presented by a prosecutor and signed by witnesses on a document called the inscriptio. The written charges were presented and a trial date set, affording ample time for both sides to gather evidence, which was called the *nominus receptio*. The first appearance of the accused in court was the *citatio*. The trial itself was



always held in daylight. The prosecutor would read the charges and then question witnesses. The accused could be questioned by either prosecutor or judge. Then the accused could call witnesses on his behalf. At the close of evidence each side could argue and present illustrations to prove their case. (Foreman 1990, 134)

Here in John, nothing has been written, everything is verbal. Charges were spoken and not presented in writing. The Jewish leadership does not want a trial, they want a crucifixion.

Pilate asks a question based on his knowledge of the case as well as his knowledge of what he has heard about Jesus. Not exactly formal evidence under any reasonable explanation of why these questions.

Remember, John is showing us that Jesus is God.

Pilate asks Jesus if He is the King of the Jews? Is He the nationalistic Messiah those rumors having been flying around about? Is Jesus the one who is to overthrow Rome? Is He a competitor of Caesar? Jesus responds to the question. Is this your conclusion or have you heard this from others?

I think when Jesus says that, based on what we see here in John, He has actually drilled down to Pilate as a man who is, at this point, seeking to find out what the truth is. He had heard the same rumors others had and was no dummy when it came to Judea. He knew about the Messiah stories and that this man in front of Him could be the one who would lead the Jews into victory over Rome. This is something he had heard from the Jews, but he put a Roman twist to it. Jesus actually nailed him with His response. So, Pilate tries to change the conversation.

John 18:35

“Pilate answered, “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests handed You over to me; what have You done?”” (NASB 2020)

Pilate does not answer the questions from Jesus. He is indeed saying and asking this on his own. For a couple of unguarded seconds, he was genuine, but when Jesus responded, the politician answered.

You were handed over to me as judge, what have you done that they would want to do that? He tells the truth; it is the Jewish leadership and by extension, the nation, that wants Him dead.

What have you done? A question that Jesus answers.

John 18:36

“Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, 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.”” (NASB 2020)

Earlier, Pilate asked if Jesus was King of the Jews, reflecting his knowledge of the rumors and stories going around about Jesus and this idea of a conquering Messiah. Jesus now responds to him and confirms but corrects what it is he thought his understanding was of the story.

Jesus is a King, but not from anywhere around here.

Jesus makes it clear, there will be no rebellion because of Him. There is no conquering Messiah, this time around. Pilate knew about the ear removal and healing from the prior evening and how Jesus ended it all peacefully. There has been no uprising from his followers.



He makes it clear; His kingdom is not of this world meaning His kingship is God's kingship. If His kingdom were of this world, He would never have been given to the Jews. He is not a competitor to Caesar; He is not here to overthrow Rome.

Pilate has now come to that conclusion. Jesus is not here to foment revolution. He is not here to compete with Rome.

John 18:37–38

"Therefore Pilate said to Him, "So You are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say correctly that I am a king. For this purpose I have been born, and for this I have come into the world: to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to My voice." Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?" And after saying this, he came out again to the Jews and said to them, "I find no grounds at all for charges in His case." (NASB 2020)

Jesus responds to the acknowledgement of His kingship that He is here to testify to truth. A kingdom that is situated on truth is not a kingdom that is a danger to Rome.

A "kingdom" that consists of truth is certainly not a political kingdom and clearly not a threat to Rome. A king whose mission is to testify to the truth is not a seditious insurrectionist but, from Pilate's perspective, a sage—one of the philosophers who claimed that they were better suited than anybody else to rule—who might criticize the state but who did not incite to sedition. (Schnabel 2018, 285)

Jesus is inviting Pilate to become a follower. Pilate is beginning to put some of the pieces together, but he can end the conversation, and does.

The problem many have with Jesus, is they too ask the right questions based on what they have heard about Him. As they begin to learn who He is and what that may mean to them and the way they live, there is a choice that must be made. Continue the conversation or end it. Accept the truth being told by the one telling it or walk away. Agree with the moral truth being presented or continue life as is.

Pilate chose to end the conversation and does so with a cynical comment on truth.

Jesus is not a threat to Rome, but He is a threat to me and my spiritual well being, and it is time for the conversation to end.

Many take that view today. They come to Jesus wanting to know more about Him. They ask questions. Good ones which we then take the time to answer.

We like what we hear but there is something else He talks about, and that is truth. Truth means a realization that He is the creator and as such there is accountability to how I live. Learning that there is one who made me, means there are expectations about how I should live, and I am not ready to change that just now.

Pilate is in the process of making that decision about Jesus.

His decision about Jesus would haunt him and his wife. Depending on what sources and traditions you follow, Pilate either committed suicide upon Imperial order within 5 years, or he wound becoming a follower of Jesus Christ and was martyred for it. We have no details either way.

His wife to whom tradition gives the name of Claudia Procula, or Procla, is said to have been a Jewish proselyte at the time of the death of Jesus, and afterward to have become a Christian. Her name is honored along with Pilate's in the Coptic church, and in the calendar of saints honored by the Greek church her name is found against the date October 27. (Wilson 1915, 2397)



Pilate had the opportunity to speak with Jesus and have his questions answered, but he delayed making a decision about who Jesus is.

As we close, this is an opportunity for you to take into consideration, what it is we know about Jesus. Perhaps you have been following from afar and asking questions and getting an answer every now and then, but there is the matter of accountability.

Why not resolve that once and for all right now and join us as a follower of Jesus Christ. No one that I know has ever regretted the decision to do so, but they have regretted not doing it sooner.

Romans 3:21–24

“But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law, as was promised in the writings of Moses and the prophets long ago. We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are. For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard. Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins.” (NLT)

Romans 10:9–13

“If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by openly declaring your faith that you are saved. As the Scriptures tell us, “Anyone who trusts in him will never be disgraced.” Jew and Gentile are the same in this respect. They have the same Lord, who gives generously to all who call on him. For “Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved.”” (NLT)

ABC’s of Salvation

- A. Acknowledge that you are a sinner, tell Him that.
- B. Believe that Jesus died on the cross for our sin and that He rose from the dead.
- C. Confess that Jesus is Lord. Tell someone about what you have done.



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