

The Word Became Flesh
(Week 57)
John 18:28-40
“Choices”

Introduction

“I believe in God The Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, His Only Son, our LORD, Who was conceived by The Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; He descended to the dead. On the third day He rose again; He ascended into heaven, He is seated at the right hand of The Father, and He will come to judge the living and the dead.”
(excerpt from the Apostles Creed circa 341 AD)

As John continues his narrative concerning the trials of Jesus, he omits certain portions of them. In total there were six separate hearings used to determine the so called “guilt” of the Son of God. The first was at the home of Annas the former High Priest. From there Jesus was led to the trial of the Sanhedrin (Jewish ruling council) which was under the leadership of Caiaphas, (the son-in-law of Annas) who was at the time serving as the High Priest. John says nothing of this particular trial but the other gospels confirm that it was held during the night, which was illegal under Jewish Law to do so in a capital case. To get around this particular infraction, the Sanhedrin reconvened early the next morning in order to render their guilty verdict. Heaven forbid that these pious hypocrites should transgress against the sacred law!

It is after these three sham trials that John continues his telling of the events. The Jewish leaders assembled early in the morning on Friday to deliver Jesus to the procurator Pontius Pilate. Pilate, like most Roman officials, had secured his position in the government by means of a bribe. He had a reputation of being both ruthless, as well as, indecisive. It seems that his primary concern was to hold on to his position of power at all costs. The problem was that The Jews were a difficult group to control. They despised their Roman overlords with a passion. And the Roman officials often found themselves caught between diplomacy and the use of military force in order to quell one uprising after another.

Pilate had been warned that the powers that be in Rome were growing increasingly tired of the Jewish resistance. It was imperative for him to effectively maintain the peace in Judea if he desired to remain in power for any measurable length of time. So as a matter of course, he was headquartered in Jerusalem at the time of The Passover, just in case a round of religious fervor were to become the catalyst for rebellion.

Pilate didn't like Jerusalem, and he despised its inhabitants. He preferred to spend his days in Caesarea, for he preferred the beaches there, as well as, the peace and quiet. To be forced to spend his time in Jerusalem enduring a religion which he did not subscribe, along with a people he did not like was to him an insufferable hardship. But it came with the job, and the job was lucrative. Little did he know that this particular year would test his mettle to the uttermost. As a result Pontius Pilate would be weighed in the balances of eternity and found wanting.

The Sanhedrin wanted to get Jesus off their hands and into those of the Roman procurator as soon as possible. The word that John uses to describe their “early” arrival at the headquarters of Pilate is “*proia*” in the Greek, which literally means “*at the break of day*”. In other words, these self-righteous leaders and malcontents were standing at Pilate's doorstep at six a.m.! “What a great way to start the day!” Pilate must have thought as he went to the door to meet them. For you see, they were far too morally pure to enter the domicile of a lowly Gentile!

And so begins the first in a series of three “civil trials” for The Son of God. As Pilate began to try the case, he immediately saw what a sham it was. So he attempted to get it off his docket by transferring it over to Herod Antipas, who was sadly even less of a man than Pilate. Herod would eventually end up sending Jesus back to Pilate for His third and final hearing. But it is a difficult thing to prove the guilt of one who is perfectly innocent. So let us examine the first of these unjust trials of The LORD, and observe *The Sanctimonious, The Scared and Seeking, and The Substitutionary Sacrifice.*

The Sanctimonious (vs. 28-32)

Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas to the governor's headquarters. It was early morning. They did not enter the headquarters themselves; otherwise they would be defiled and unable to eat the Passover.

So Pilate came out to them and said, "What charge do you bring against this Man?" They answered him, "If this Man weren't a criminal, we wouldn't have handed Him over to you." Pilate told them, "You take Him and judge Him according to your law."

"It's not legal for us to put anyone to death," the Jews declared. They said this so that Jesus' words might be fulfilled indicating what kind of death He was going to die. **John 18:28-32**

Romans began their work activities at dawn, so it was perfectly feasible that the delegates from the Sanhedrin would have been able to have Jesus at Pilate's doorstep by six a.m. Make no mistake. Their presence there would not have been a welcome sight for the Roman governor, for he could rest assured that they were not there on a social call to welcome him to Jerusalem. Their presence meant that trouble was brewing, and he could ill afford any more of these infamous Jewish uprisings, if he desired to keep his job.

During the time of Passover, the Jews would ceremoniously rid their homes of all leaven. Leaven is metaphorically used in The Scriptures to represent sin. Therefore, by a ritual removal of all leaven from one's home, it was symbolic of the renunciation and purging of sin from one's life as well. The Pharisees had gone to great lengths to "purify" themselves in order to observe The Passover, so they refused to defile themselves by entering the domicile of this pagan Gentile.

The Pharisees were concerned with the ten commandments, namely the ones about honoring the Sabbath and keeping it holy. But apparently they had not considered the 9th commandment which clearly states that it is unlawful to bear false witness. For they had leveled not one, but three, false charges against Jesus upon Pilate's doorstep that day. They knew that any religious charges leveled against Jesus would have been summarily dismissed by the Roman governor, who could not have cared less with regard to Jewish law. No, they had thought of this, and therefore, they had brought Jesus before Pilate to accuse him of sedition. They presented Him as an enemy of Rome.

What sanctimonious hypocrites these men were, and Pilate saw right through them. Although these men owed their lucrative positions to the Romans, they would not have been the least bit concerned if someone had risen up against the government. They hated the Romans as much or more than the Romans despised them. Pilate must have realized that they were bringing this man to him with an ulterior motive. He wasn't a brilliant man, but he wasn't a fool either.

When Pilate asked them what charges they had against Jesus, they responded sarcastically by saying, **"If this man weren't a criminal, then we wouldn't have handed Him over to you (vs. 30)."** It was early, and Pilate had no appetite for this discourse whatsoever, so he advised them to judge the malefactor according to their own laws. The Jewish leaders responded by reminding Pilate that Roman law forbid them to execute a person who was guilty of a capital case.

Now, this was, as a matter of law, a true statement. But the Jews had no problem executing Stephen in the book of *Acts*, after he preached a sermon that condemned them (**Acts 7**). So they were wont to do as they pleased in regards to capital punishment when it suited them. And it seemed that the Romans were fairly lax in enforcing this particular law. So why was it that these Pharisees wanted Pilate to crucify Jesus, rather than just stoning Him in accordance with their own means of capital punishment? I believe that there are two reasons for this. First, God had foreordained that Jesus be crucified. Remember the Savior's own words.

Then He took the Twelve aside and told them, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem. Everything that is written through the prophets about the Son of Man will be accomplished. For He will be handed over to the Gentiles, and He will be mocked, insulted, spit on; and after they flog Him, they will kill Him, and He will rise on the third day." **Luke 18:31-33**

The crucifixion of The LORD Jesus Christ was foreordained before the beginning of time, my friends. You can count on that.

The second reason that the Pharisees wanted Rome to take Jesus off their hands was undoubtedly because they were terrified of the people who might turn against them, if they handled the matter personally. After all, just a few days prior, a mob had gathered shouting hosanna as Jesus entered into Jerusalem. Needless to say, it would have been expedient for the Pharisees, if they could simply persuade the Romans to do their dirty work for them.

The hypocrisy of the sanctimonious Pharisees is extremely striking in this passage. They wouldn't go into Pilate's headquarters for fear of defiling themselves. But to falsely accuse an innocent man in order to have him murdered was not a problem for them at all. You see, I know a lot of so-called "religious people". And they all have a set of rules by which they live. But so many of them have not an ounce of love within them. Jesus said that all men would know His disciples by their love. There is no such thing as a "loveless Christian". A person can be a religious zealot and still hate, but you cannot be a Christian *without* love. Holiness matters. For without holiness, no one will see The LORD (**Hebrews 12:14**), but as for Love... **"love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8)**.

These Pharisees made a fatal decision when they chose religious zealotry over compassion. Rather than embrace the truth that Christ offered them, they chose to murder Him in order to preserve their traditions. How blind were these self-righteous men, who believed that they were pleasing God by murdering His One and Only Son? There are many religions in this world. Mankind, the world over, has attempted to please God by doing extraordinary things. But this simple truth remains: the only way to avoid the wrath of God is to embrace the grace that is freely offered in Jesus Christ, His Son. **Whoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16)**. In the end, it always comes down to the choices that we make. To choose Jesus is to choose life.

The Scared and Seeking (vs. 33-38a)

Then Pilate went back into the headquarters, summoned Jesus, and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Are you asking this on your own, or have others told you about Me?"

"I'm not a Jew, am I?" Pilate replied. "Your own nation and the chief priests handed You over to me. What have You done?"

"My kingdom is not of this world," said Jesus. "If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I wouldn't be handed over to the Jews. But as it is, My kingdom is not from here." "You are a king then?" Pilate asked.

"You say that I'm a king," Jesus replied. "I was born for this, and I have come into the world for this: to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to My voice." "What is truth?" said Pilate. **John 18:33-38a**

It became increasingly obvious the more that Pilate questioned Jesus, the more he became afraid of Him. After all, his own wife had warned him of a dream she had about this man from Galilee, and that Pilate should avoid this trial at all costs (**Matthew 27:19**). The Jews had accused Jesus of sedition against the Roman Empire, but after a series of questions, Pilate could see for himself that this man was no such threat. While Jesus did confirm that He was indeed a King, He followed up by saying that His Kingdom was not of this world.

One of the most telling statements of Christ came when He told Pilate that He was **born** to be a King, but He had **"come to this world to testify to the truth"**. To a nonbeliever's ear this probably has little significance, but to the Believer, we know that it was Christ's way of confirming to the governor that even though He had indeed been born in this world, He was not from this world. Here we see that Jesus

had not only been born as a man in a specific place at a specific time, but He also had always existed as God. He came to this earth AND was born.

Pilate could find no crimes of which this One from Nazareth was guilty. Once more proving the nature of the spotless lamb of God sent to take away the sins of the world. The governor found himself in a precarious position however. To refuse the Jews request was to possibly insight an uprising, and he had already been warned against allowing such things to happen. So as a typical unscrupulous politician, he didn't take a stand for what was right, but rather, he chose to find a way to compromise. But there can be no compromise, when it comes to taking the side of truth. Jesus said plainly to him:

"I was born for this, and I have come into the world for this: to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to My voice." **John 18:37b**

Pilate's response was telling. "What is truth?" he asked. Just this week I was having a conversation over lunch with a friend of mine. He is a Believer, and he told me that he had been trying to witness to a young man at the counter of a local fast-food restaurant. When he invited the young man to church, the response he received was simple and direct, "Why?" the young man asked. My friend told me in that moment he could hear the voice of Pilate somewhere in the distance saying, "What is truth?" For you see, this world doesn't even understand Who Jesus was or why He came. He came so that we could know the Truth. In fact Jesus IS the Truth!!

... "I am the way, the TRUTH and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." **John 14:6b (emphasis added)**

My friends, it is the great commission of The Church to go out into this world and share the truth with any and all who will listen. I find Pilate's question that day to be one of the saddest verses in all of Scripture. And there are so many other "Pilates" out there today. They are frightened, demoralized, and conflicted. They know in their souls that something is amiss, and yet they have no real discernment in regards to the truth that would comfort and save them. They need to hear the gospel message, ***"For God so love the world that He gave His One and Only Son...."*** You know the rest, but they sadly do not. This is why we must tell them.

Pilate chose that day to do what was best for his career and not for his eternal soul. He exchanged the heavenly and eternal for the temporal and temporary. He wanted to keep his position in this world, so he chose compromise over truth. But sadly you cannot stay where you are and go with God.

The Substitute (vs. 38b-40)

After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, "I find no grounds for charging Him. You have a custom that I release one prisoner to you at the Passover. So, do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?"

They shouted back, "Not this man, but Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a revolutionary. **John 18:38b-40**

Pilate offered up an exchange for the worst malefactor he could think of. In accordance with a good will gesture that was apparently customary during the Jewish holiday, one prisoner of the nation's choosing could be granted amnesty in celebration of the festivities. Yet another example of Rome's attempt to pacify its volatile subjects. Pilate must have thought he was being clever by giving the Jews a choice between Jesus of Nazareth and Barabbas. Barabbas had undoubtedly been sentenced to death by the Romans for crimes including sedition, robbery, and murder. Surely even the Jews would not desire

such a one put back on the streets to resume his evil and destructive ways! But sadly, Pilate was mistaken. The look upon his face must have conveyed the shock that he felt inside, when the mob cried out in unison that they desired Barabbas released and Christ crucified. They chose terror over truth; the despicable over the divine. And this is what this world chooses time and again. The sinner prefers to wallow in his own filth, rather than be washed clean by the Blood of The Lamb. Is it any wonder that the Scriptures teach that the heart of man is deceitful and desperately wicked (**Jeremiah 17:9**)?

But there is another side to this story. A side that speaks of the sovereign will and grace of Almighty God. For you see, Barabbas' name literally means "*son of the father*"; "*Bar*" meaning "*son*" and "*Abba*" meaning "*father*". Barabbas had been sentenced to death for the crimes that he had done. But instead, Jesus took his place on that fateful day. None can deny that Barabbas deserved the death penalty for all that he had done, but Jesus, the sinless Lamb of God, died in his stead. This is more of the truth that He spoke of to Pilate. It is the truth of Who He is and why He came. He came to die so that we could be called "sons of The Father". It was a death that we deserved, but He became our substitute. And what a wondrous truth this is for all of us.

For when I look upon Barabbas, the one whom the crowd chose over The Son of God, I see myself. That cross, that should have been mine, was instead taken up by The One Who knew no sin. He became sin for me, so that I may be called a son of The Father. You too can have this wonderful privilege, if you make the right choice. Choose Christ. Choose to become a son or daughter of The Father. For this my friends is why He came. **For God so loved... the world.**

And let the sons and daughters of God all say... TRUTH!!!