

191. The Gospel of John 18:28-35

Jesus on Trial-Part 3

A message by Pastor Phil Ballmaier
(9-11-22)

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This morning in our study in the Gospel of John we continue in Chapter 18. The focus of John Chapters 18 and 19—is the day Jesus was crucified.

Let me stop and say how incredible it is to me that our studies in God's Word will often 'intersect' with the events of life in such a dramatic and profound way.

Today is September 11th—a day that will live in infamy in our minds as Americans because September 11, 2001, was a day that changed the world.

In fact, if you google the phrase 'the day that changed the world'—the number one hit is 'September 11, 2001'—or '9/11' as we have come to refer to it.

But here is something we must understand—9/11 was a day that changed the world in a very profound way—for the bad.

The day that Jesus was crucified changed the world in a profound way—for the best—i.e., 'in the best way possible!'

As a teenager, I can still remember the day that Neil Armstrong became the first man to walk on the moon—the day was July 21st, 1969. Right after Neil Armstrong stepped onto the moon—Richard Nixon, the president of the United States, went on T.V. and said, "This is the greatest day in the history of the world, man has conquered space..."

The next day Billy Graham came out publicly and refuted that statement by saying,

"Yesterday was not the greatest day in the history of the world, there have been at least 3 others that have been greater—the birth, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ!"

So, in our study in the Gospel of John, we have entered into Chapter 18—a chapter that starts out with **Jesus and His disciples in the garden of Gethsemane** where Jesus is spending some time with His Father in prayer before His crucifixion.

During that time, **Judas shows up with over 600 Roman soldiers and Temple police** all carrying lanterns, torches, and weapons—

John 18:12 (NKJV)

¹² Then the detachment of troops and the captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound Him.

¹³ And they led Him away to Annas first, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas who was high priest that year.

This would be the first of two trials that Jesus would endure that morning before being crucified—the first would be a *religious* trial and the second a *civil* trial.

This first trial took place before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish high council—the second one before Pilate the Roman governor of the region.

If we combine the accounts from all four gospels, we learn that each trial had three phases.

I. The Religious Trial of Jesus—verses 13-24

- A. Jesus stands before **Annas**—(John 18:12-13)
- B. Jesus stands before **Caiaphas**—(John 18:23-24)
- C. Jesus stands before **the whole Jewish Council**—(Luke 22:66-70)

Luke 22:66–70 (NKJV)

⁶⁶ As soon as it was day [i.e., ‘the sun had risen’], the elders of the people, both chief priests and scribes, came together and led Him into their council, saying, ⁶⁷ “If You are the Christ, tell us.” But He said to them, “If I tell you, you will by no means believe. ⁶⁸ And if I also ask *you*, you will by no means answer Me or let *Me* go. ⁶⁹ Hereafter the Son of Man will sit on the right hand of the power of God.” ⁷⁰ Then they all said, “Are You then the Son of God?” So He said to them, “You *rightly* say that **I am**” [the name of God!]

Matthew 26:65–66 (NKJV)

⁶⁵ Then the high priest tore his clothes, saying, “He has spoken blasphemy! What further need do we have of witnesses? Look, now you have heard His blasphemy! ⁶⁶ What do you think?” They answered and said, “He is deserving of death.”

Mark tells us at this point— “...they bound Jesus, led *Him* away, and delivered *Him* to Pilate.” (Mark 15:1)

REFLECTION: The Temple Guards and the Roman Soldiers no doubt knew of who Jesus was – he had been in the area and preached at the synagogues for 3 years – why do you suppose they came in such large numbers and “bind” him up?

II. The Civil Trial of Jesus

A. Jesus stands before Pilate the first time

As we read the gospels, the day that Jesus was crucified started out like any other day—except this was Passover—the greatest of all the Jewish holidays! So, Jerusalem was waking up with a holiday spirit containing a mixture of excitement and anticipation.

Passover is one of the three major Jewish feasts of the year—so it was and still is a big deal for the Jewish people drawing Jewish pilgrims from all over the known world to celebrate the feast in Jerusalem.

REFLECTION: Why is it so important to recognize the arrest and trials of Jesus occurred during the Passover observance?

Pilate, while on his way to work that morning (no doubt with Starbucks in hand) probably thought— *“With every Jew in town pre-occupied with the Passover—maybe this will be an easy, uneventful day for me!”*

Little did Pilate realize that nothing could have been farther from the truth! You see, shortly after Pilate opened his courtroom to start his day, there came a group of Jewish leaders with a prisoner in tow—a **Prisoner that Pilate immediately recognized as Jesus who claimed to be a Jewish Prophet.**

John 18:28 (NKJV)

²⁸ Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas to the Praetorium, and it was early morning. But they themselves did not go into the Praetorium, lest they should be defiled, but that they might eat the Passover.

Please don't let that last statement throw you in that—12 hours earlier Jesus and His disciples had already celebrated Passover in the upper room where the Lord instituted Communion for the first time.

So, what is going on here when it says that the Jewish religious leaders that brought Jesus to Pilate that morning didn't want to go into the Praetorium (Pilate's judgment hall or court room) lest they be defiled and not be able to eat the Passover meal?

Again, as we've already studied, **Jesus ate the Passover meal with His disciples the night before**—so how could Jesus observe the Passover the night before and still be crucified on Passover the next day as Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 5:7?

Part of the 'mystery' is solved by understanding that the Jewish people were on a *lunar* calendar and not a *solar* calendar. In other words, the Jewish day began at sunset and lasted until sunset the following day.

- Therefore, they could eat the Passover meal after sundown on the 13th of Nissan which would then be the beginning of a new day—the 14th, the day God mandated in the Law of Moses (Leviticus 23:5) that the Passover was to be celebrated on.
- The whole next day until sundown was still the 14th of Nissan (Passover)—the day Jesus was crucified.
- But also, you need to understand that two of the 7-Feasts of Moses were celebrated 'back-to-back.'

- Passover was celebrated on the 14th of Nissan and the Feast of Unleavened Bread started on the 15th and ran for 7 consecutive days.
- Because of it, these 2 feasts were often lumped together and spoken of by the Jewish people as if they were a single feast—for example:

Sometimes when the Jewish people in Jesus' day spoke of 'Passover', they often meant only the day (14th of Nissan)—but sometimes they were talking about both the Feast of Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread—lumping them together and referring to both as “the Passover” (as in the ‘Passover Season’ or ‘Passover Time’).

But also, in the gospels it will talk about the Feast of Unleavened Bread as referring to the entire 8-day period of the Passover and Unleavened Bread lumped together—as is the case in John 18:28.

John 18:28 (NKJV)

28 Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas to the Praetorium, and it was early morning. But they themselves did not go into the Praetorium, lest they should be defiled, but that they might eat the Passover [technically, ‘the first meal of the Feast of Unleavened Bread’].

One commentator gives us some background into this—

“Jewish oral law gives evidence that a Jew who entered the dwelling places of Gentiles became ceremonially unclean. Their remaining outside in the colonnade avoided that pollution. John loads this statement with great irony by noting the chief priests’ scrupulousness in the matter of ceremonial cleansing, when all the time they were incurring incomparably greater moral defilement by their proceedings against Jesus. Here they are, about to kill the Son of God, yet worrying about defiling themselves by stepping on Gentile territory.”

The Praetorium was where Pilate’s headquarter was located whenever he was in Jerusalem—probably either at the Fortress of Antonia (located on the Temple Mount) or Herod’s palace (located at the northwestern wall of the Upper City of Jerusalem).

- **This is where Pilate stayed when he visited Jerusalem** (Pilate’s permanent or official headquarters was in Caesarea—53.5 miles south of Jerusalem on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea).
- **These Jewish leaders wanted to get to Pilate’s court early that morning** (his court opened at sunrise) because they wanted to make sure that theirs was the first case, he adjudicated that day.
- That was partly because **they wanted Jesus executed as soon as possible so they could get on with their holiday celebrations.**
- But also, because Pilate’s court closed for the day by late morning (around 11:00am) and **they wanted to make sure that Pilate would hear their case before his court closed for the day.**

John 18:29 (NKJV)

29 Pilate then went out to them and said, “What accusation do you bring against this Man?”

At this point **Pilate didn’t realize that Jesus had already been put through a religious trial** at the house of Caiaphas the high priest, where the leaders of Israel had met and determined that Jesus was a blasphemer who was worthy of death.

**The problem was they didn't have the authority to carry out this death sentence—
for that they would need Pilate.**

You see, according to the first-century Jewish historian Josephus, the right of capital punishment had been taken away from the nation of Israel by the Romans in 6 A.D. when Judea became a Roman province.

When that happened, the rabbis tore their clothes, put ashes on their heads, and went through the streets of Jerusalem weeping and wailing—why?

Well, it goes back to a prophecy that Jacob made on his deathbed as recorded in Genesis 49:10—

Genesis 49:10 (NKJV)

¹⁰ The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor a lawgiver from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes; And to Him *shall be* the obedience of the people.

The word **'Shiloh'** is a Messianic term and means, "Until He comes to whom it belongs."

It refers ultimately to the Jewish Messiah's right to reign over the whole earth during the Millennial Kingdom—a right that was established by Jesus at His first coming when He redeemed the world back from Satan on Calvary's Cross.

- The **'scepter'** is a reference to the **scepter of a king**—in this context, the scepter belonging to Messiah as King of the earth when He finally came and established His Kingdom.
- But also, **the scepter was the symbol of a sovereign nation** and its right to impose capital punishment on those whose crimes warranted it—as any sovereign nation has the right to do.

The Jewish leaders interpreted Jacob's prophecy to mean that the nation of Israel and its sovereign right of capital punishment would not be taken from them until Messiah had come.

That when He did finally come, at that time **the nation would become part of the global Kingdom of the Messiah** who would reign from Jerusalem over the whole earth as King.

But now Rome had removed the right of capital punishment from the nation of Israel—the **scepter had departed from Judah and Shiloh, the Messiah, had not yet come.**

And that was why they put on sackcloth and ashes on their heads and walked thru the streets of Jerusalem weeping and wailing—**in their minds the Word of God had failed!**

REFLECTION: In your own words explain the significance of the "Shiloh" and the "scepter":

But listen to me dear saints of God and lovers of His Word—the Word of God has never failed and will never fail—as Peter proclaims:

*“All flesh is as grass,
And all the glory of man as the flower of the grass.
The grass withers,
And its flower falls away,
But the word of the Lord endures forever!”*
1 Peter 1:24-25

You see what they didn’t know as they were weeping and wailing that God’s Word had failed was that—85 miles to the north, in the town of Nazareth, there lived with His mother and stepfather a young Boy named Jesus!

The Word of God had not failed! Shiloh had come before the scepter had departed from Judah!

But getting back to the narrative, the Jewish leaders who wanted Pilate to have Jesus executed knew that the charge they had found Him guilty of and therefore worthy of death was *blasphemy*—but they knew that was never going to fly in a Roman court of law.

You see, these Jewish religious leaders knew that Pilate would never convict Jesus of a capital crime based on religious grounds (on matters of Jewish law). So, they manufactured three political charges against Him that they knew the Roman Government would take very seriously:

1. He was a revolutionary who posed a threat to the empire.
2. He urged people not to pay taxes, therefore undermining the prosperity of the empire.
3. He claimed to be a King, therefore threatening the power and position of the emperor.

Pilate chose to focus on the third charge (“that Jesus claimed to be a king”)—because this was the most serious of the three charges leveled against Jesus.

Anyone who has studied this civil trial knows it was a joke—almost as big a joke as the religious trial which had taken place earlier at Caiaphas’ house.

In that trial, practically every Jewish law regarding the legal way to conduct a trial had been violated (the trial wasn’t to be conducted at night; the witnesses had to agree; the defendant couldn’t testify against himself; the entire Sanhedrin was to be present—and on and on it went).

The trial at Caiaphas’ house was illegal in every way—a total ‘kangaroo court.’ At least Pilate knew Jesus was being ‘railroaded’ and tried to let Him go free—even pronouncing Him innocent at one point—“I find no fault in Him at all.” (John 18:38) But by this time the Jewish leadership, in their lust for Jesus’ blood, would have no talk of Jesus’ innocence or Pilate’s desire to set Him free.

At this point, they were like sharks that smelled blood in the water—there was absolutely no reasoning with them on this matter.

John 18:28-30 (NKJV)

28 Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas to the Praetorium, and it was early morning. But they themselves did not

go into the Praetorium, lest they should be defiled, but that they might eat the Passover. ²⁹ Pilate then went out to them and said, “What accusation do you bring against this Man?” ³⁰ They answered and said to him, “If He were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him up to you.”

One author gives some background into this scene—

*“Pilate’s question, **“What accusation do you bring against this Man?”** formally opened the legal proceedings. The Jewish leaders had undoubtedly already communicated with him about this case, since Roman troops took part in Jesus’ arrest. They evidently expected him to rubber-stamp their judgment and sentence Jesus to death. Instead, exercising his prerogative as governor, he ordered a fresh hearing over which he would preside. But the last thing the Jewish leaders wanted was a trial (which they could potentially lose). They wanted a death sentence; they wanted Pilate to be an executioner, not a judge. They knew that their charge against Jesus, that He was guilty of blasphemy because He claimed to be God incarnate, would not stand up in a Roman court.”*

John 18:31-32 (NKJV)

³¹ Then Pilate said to them, “You take Him and judge Him according to your law.” Therefore the Jews said to him, “It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death,” ³² that the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled which He spoke, signifying by what death He would die.

Jesus had predicted His own death—

Mark 10:33–34 (NKJV)

³³ “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him to the Gentiles; ³⁴ and they will mock Him, and scourge Him, and spit on Him, and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again.”

But not only that, He had also predicted the manner in which He would be put to death—thru crucifixion—one example being:

John 12:32-33 (NKJV)

³² And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all *peoples* to Myself.” ³³ This He said, signifying by what death He would die.

- If Rome had not taken away Israel’s right to impose capital punishment, they would have executed Jesus by **stoning**—the Jewish method of execution.
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- That would have **violated the predictions of Jesus** concerning the way He would be executed.
- But it would have also rendered the prophecies in the Old Testament false where **God had said that Messiah would be executed by crucifixion** (Numbers 21:4-9; Psalm 22).

Now when Pilate had initially asked the Jewish leaders **“What accusation do you bring against this Man?” (verse 29)**—Luke records:

Luke 23:2–3 (NKJV)

² And they began to accuse Him, saying, “We found this *fellow* perverting the nation, and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, saying that He Himself is Christ, a King.”

John 18:33 (NKJV)

³³ Then Pilate entered the Praetorium again, called Jesus, and said to Him, “Are You the King of the Jews?”

Again, of the three charges the Jewish leaders brought against Jesus—Pilate chose to focus on the third one, “that Jesus claimed to be the King of the Jews.”

Rome would have taken this very seriously because the land of Israel and the Jewish population within it had been subjugated by Rome—in other words, they had been brought under the dominion and control of the Roman government as subjects of the Roman Empire.

Therefore, if Jesus was declaring Himself the ‘King of the Jews’—He would be an insurrectionist and guilty of treason against the Roman government. So, you can see why Pilate zeroed in on this charge above the others—it was definitely the most serious of the three.

So serious in fact that in all 4 Gospels, this is the first question Pilate asks Jesus—and all 4 times the word “You” in the Greek is *emphatic*. As such, this statement literally reads, “You, are You the King of the Jews!?”

One author says—

“In the Greek text Pilate was incredulous—from a human perspective, Jesus did not look like a king. And if He was a king, where were His followers and His army? And how was He a threat to Rome?”

Pilate’s question “Are You the King of the Jews?” was in effect asking Jesus whether He was pleading guilty or not guilty to the charge of insurrection.

John 18:34 (NKJV)

³⁴ Jesus answered him, “Are you speaking for yourself about this, or did others tell you this concerning Me?”

REFLECTION: Why is the identification of Jesus as: “King of the Jews” so critical in the trials before Pilate?

In other words, Jesus asked Pilate—

➤ “Are you asking Me this question in a political sense or in a personal sense—as My judge or as My potential subject?”—WOW!!

If Pilate was asking the question in a political sense (as a judge listening to accusations of others that Jesus proclaimed to be the King of the Jews and therefore was a threat to Rome)—Jesus’ answer in that case would be ‘No’.

As He said clearly in verse 36: “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.”

He was not a king in the sense of a military or political leader—He had earlier rejected the crowd’s attempt to make Him such a king (John 6:15). But if Pilate was asking Jesus this question in a personal sense (“Are you asking Me this question because you believe I am the Messiah, the King of the Jews and you want Me to be your King as well?”)—then the answer is “Yes”!

“Yes” in the sense that Jesus at His first coming would be King of an inner Kingdom—the Kingdom of the human heart (at His second coming He would be King of an outward Empire—King of the whole world!).

John 18:35 (NKJV)

³⁵ Pilate answered, “Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me. What have You done?”

So, it’s obvious from Pilate’s irritated comeback that He was only interested in Jesus in the political sense and not in any personal way—too bad for Pilate!

One pastor commented—

*“Pilate’s sharp retort, “I am not a Jew, am I?” reflects both his disdain for the Jewish people, and his growing exasperation with the frustrating, puzzling ethnic case set before him. His further elaboration, “Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You to me”, makes it clear that the governor was merely repeating the charge leveled against Jesus by the Jewish leaders; the accusation was theirs, not Rome’s. Exactly why they had done so, still eluded Pilate. He knew perfectly well that the Jews would not have handed over to him someone hostile to Rome unless they stood to gain from doing so. Attempting once again to get to the bottom of things, Pilate asked the question that he should have asked at the outset: **what have You done?**... Pilate understood that the Jewish leaders had handed Jesus over to him because of envy (Matt. 27:18). What he still did not understand was what Jesus had done to provoke such vehement hostility from them and what, if any, crime He had committed.”*

John 18:36–38 (NKJV)

³⁶ Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.” ³⁷ Pilate therefore said to Him, “Are You a king then?” Jesus answered, “You say *rightly* that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.” ³⁸ Pilate said to Him, “What is truth?”...[and walked away!]

Hold on to these verses—I’d like to ‘unpack’ them next time as we continue to study the **civil trial of Jesus**.

Using Pilate’s sarcastic retort to Jesus, “**What is truth?!**” to launch us into a study on what truth is and why it’s so important for life.

REFLECTION: When asking Jesus if he was the King of the Jews – why does it matter if it was asked from a religions, political or personal tense?

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower— please, reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

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