

5. The second stage of the Roman trial: Jesus is questioned by Herod Antipas

Luke 23:6-12 is peculiar to Luke.

Luke 23

6 When Pilate heard it, he asked whether the man was a Galilean.

7 And when he learned that He belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod, who himself also was in Jerusalem at that time.

8 Now Herod was very glad when he saw Jesus; for he had wanted to see Him for a long time, because he had been hearing about Him and was hoping to see some sign performed by Him.

9 And he questioned Him at some length; but He answered him nothing.

10 And the chief priests and the scribes were standing there, accusing Him vehemently.

11 And Herod with his soldiers, after treating Him with contempt and mocking Him, dressed Him in a gorgeous robe and sent Him back to Pilate.

12 Now Herod and Pilate became friends with one another that very day; for before they had been enemies with each other.

A trial was usually conducted in the Roman province in which the crime was committed, although it could also take place where the accusations were made. Herod Antipas was appointed "tetrarch" of Galilee and Peraea and it would be a great compliment to have the matter referred to him. Herod had probably come to Jerusalem for the Passover (which was a tactic he believed would please his subjects) so he was available. Pilate sent Jesus to him, either to pass on the case and free himself of the predicament he was in, or get some advice on how to proceed with the Jews.

Herod was pleased, for news of Jesus' miracles had reached his palace and he wanted to see one himself. However, Herod had to be disappointed at how things turned out. He had asked Jesus numerous questions and received no answers; he is the only one to whom Jesus said nothing at all.

The chief priests and the scribes followed Jesus to Herod, accusing Jesus vehemently for they would take no chances on Jesus being released.

But Herod never met the wishes of Pilate or the Jews. "When he could not get his miracle he ceased to be interested" (Morris, Luke, 351). Instead of releasing Jesus, he joined the soldiers in mocking Him and sent Him back to Pilate. "That is the really frightening thing about the incident. With the Son of God before him, Herod could only jest" (Morris, Luke, 351).

The trial was once again put in Pilate's lap. Jesus' visitation benefited Herod in that it developed a friendship with Pilate that very day, for they had previously been enemies. From a Christian perspective it provided one more piece of evidence in favor of Jesus' innocence.

Pilate was in a position of authority; he filled the position of judge. After the interrogation of Jesus he concluded that Jesus was innocent. Yet within hours, the verdict of the Roman governor was overturned and Jesus was turned over to a mob to be killed. How could this have happened? In reading the turn of events that took place in John 19-20, one must understand a little of the background about Pilate.

Outside of the Bible, some of Pilate's interactions with the Jews, as well as his personality and character have been recorded by the Jewish historian, Josephus, and the Jewish theologian, Philo of Alexandria. In 26^{AD} Pilate was appointed to be governor over those in Palestine by the Emperor Tiberius. Being an appointed ruler over Israel was not a coveted position; in fact, it was one of the worst areas anyone could be assigned to, as the Jews were notorious for being hostile toward Roman rule. Pilate and the Jews had a hostile relationship from the start. Not long after Pilate arrived, he brought Roman standards with the image of the emperor into Jerusalem which violated all the sacred rules of the Jewish people. To have an image of the divine emperor set up in the holy city was outrageous to the populace. So Josephus tells us that the Jews responded by having a sit-down strike and surrounded Pilate's home for five days. Pilate called in troops with swords and announced that if the Jews did not leave, he would have their heads removed by the soldiers. The protestors subsequently responded by lying down and stretching out their necks to be killed. Finally, Pilate backed down and removed the images from the city. Not much later, Pilate put Roman shields in the Holy Place sending the Jews into another uproar and protest. In addition, word was sent to the emperor asking that the shields be removed. The emperor responded favorably to their request and commanded Pilate to remove the shields and allow the Jews to have their holy place. So Pilate was again frustrated by the Jews. A third major incident occurred when Pilate took money from the temple treasury to build a Roman aqueduct. Once again the Jews protested, but this time Pilate send soldiers with clubs who began bludgeoning them to death. Finally Pilate, as governor, was given the right to strike coins with whatever image he desired. Pilate chose to have an image of a pagan religion stamped on the copper coins which also offended the Jews. Every time Pilate acted, word got back to the emperor who was growing weary of the Jews and Pilate's management of them. All of this background is needed to understand why Pilate acted toward Jesus as he did. If we wonder why Pilate was so weak and pliable that he was willing to crucify a man even though he had previously declared Him to be innocent, we find our answer here. Pilate was under pressure; the Jews were adamant that Jesus be killed. When all of Jerusalem was calling for Jesus' blood, Pilate knew that if he didn't respond to their request, his rule would most likely come to an end.

Jesus is again questioned by Pilate

18:39 "But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover; do you wish then that I release for you the King of the Jews?"

18:40 So they cried out again, saying, "Not this Man, but Barabbas." Now Barabbas was a robber.

Pilate had declared of Jesus, "I find no guilt in Him," which clearly indicated that He didn't see Jesus as a threat to the emperor. For the sake of justice, Jesus should be let go, but he also knew that the Jews would not accept his judgment. So Pilate came up with an idea whereby he could have the best of both

worlds. There was a custom at Passover which allowed a prisoner chosen by the people to be released as an act of goodwill on behalf of Rome. Pilate felt that if he could get the Jews to accept the release of Jesus under these circumstances, he would not be acquitting Jesus but would be releasing Jesus as a criminal. This may appease the Jews, for Jesus would be considered guilty of His crimes. At the same time, Jesus would not face crucifixion. Pilate saw this as a win / win situation.

But if that was Pilate's plan it backfired, for the Jews asked for Barabbas instead. Barabbas was a notorious criminal (Matt. 27:16) who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder (Lk. 23:19). Once again, the irony is apparent. Barabbas in Aramaic means "son of the father" (Bar = son; abba = father). The crowd preferred a criminal over the Son of God who was not yet even sentenced.

John 19

19:1 Pilate then took Jesus and scourged Him.

The Romans administered three forms of floggings. The least severe was painful, but not debilitating; it was imposed on people who committed minor crimes. The others were increasingly severe with the last not being given until the person was sentenced to execution. In the case of capital offenses, the scourge that was used had metal imbedded in it and the scourging was so brutal that it often exposed bone and entrails. The last scourging was known as the intermediate death, and was meant to hasten the person's death on the cross.

The flogging in 19:1 was done before Jesus was sentenced and so it was most likely the mildest of the three types.

Pilate had asked the Jews to judge Christ for themselves (John 18:31); he had pitted against Him a notable outlaw, Barabbas, and made them take their choice. That having failed, he now makes a last ditch effort to keep from condemning a man whom he had declared to be innocent. He was hoping that if he had Jesus beaten, the Jews who desired to see Jesus killed might have a change of heart when they looked upon Him. Luke 23:16 bears this out: "I will chastise him and release him." In other words, this scourging was not in order for Jesus to be crucified, but in order to let Him go (Morris, 790).

Jesus was flogged a second time before He was crucified (after Jn. 19:16), but this is not mentioned by John. That scourging would have been the most severe of the Roman floggings.

19:2 And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and put a purple robe on Him;

19:3 and they began to come up to Him and say, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and to give Him slaps in the face.

Many confidently state what plant was used to make the crown of thorns, but it is not named. A number of bushes have thorns, as does the date palm that has thorns 6 inches or longer. Whatever plant was

used, the thorns driven into the head would produce much pain and profuse bleeding. The crown was for the sport of the Romans to mock Jesus who had just been called the king of the Jews.

The purple robe, probably a military cloak, was used to imitate a royal garment. They mimicked the greeting used of Caesar; instead of yelling, "Hail Caesar!" they said, "Hail, King of the Jews!"

Slaps to the face denote sharp blows with an open hand (see 18:22). The imperfect tense stresses repeated action. Matthew and Mark record the soldiers hitting Jesus on the head with a staff used as a mock scepter (Matt. 27:30), kneeling before Him and spitting on Him (Matt. 27:29).

19:4 Pilate came out again and said to them, "Behold, I am bringing Him out to you so that you may know that I find no guilt in Him."

19:5 Jesus then came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Behold, the Man!"

19:6 So when the chief priests and the officers saw Him, they cried out saying, "Crucify, crucify!" Pilate said to them, "Take Him yourselves and crucify Him, for I find no guilt in Him."

Pilate announced, "I find no guilt in Him" (cf. also 18:38, 19:6). He then brought Jesus out; His hair was matted with blood, His face swollen from the soldiers' blows, and He was dressed like a fool. Pilate assumed that upon seeing Jesus, the Jews would realize the absurdity of their accusation that Jesus was a king.

Pilate said to the people, "Behold the man!" It is impossible to know what Pilate meant. It could be that Pilate was saying to those who were observing this spectacle, "Look at Him! He is humiliated; He is dressed like a clown; He is someone to be pitied. How can He be perceived as a threat?"

Regardless, in Pilate's words we see the invisible providence of God at work. The irony of Pilate's comment is that the man who was standing in the costume of the fool was nothing less than the incarnation, not only of God, but also of perfect humanity. Jesus was what man was created to be; He was the second Adam standing in front of the crowd. He was man as God designed and intended man to be, who truly had no fault.

As seen, Pilate's actions had little impact on the mercy of the crowd. Pilate said, "Behold the man!" and John tells us, "they saw (beheld) Him," but instead of having pity, the officers and chief priests cried out, "Crucify Him!"

"Pilate was disgusted at their lawless clamor, indignant at their challenging his decision, angry at their insistence" (Pink). This is Pilate's final abortive attempt to release Jesus; he replied, "You take Him and crucify Him!" Of course, Pilate knew they had no authority to crucify anyone, but he saw no fault in Jesus deserving of death and wanted no part of this travesty of justice. The Jews also knew that they could not execute Him and for this reason they persisted.

19:7 The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and by that law He ought to die because He made Himself out to be the Son of God."

"Their words here show plainly that they discerned the satire in Pilate's offer: had he really given them permission to crucify Christ, they would have acted promptly. They knew that he had not spoken seriously; they felt his biting irony, and stung by his sarcasm they now attempted some defense of their outrageous conduct" (Pink).

The Jews knew that they would never get any consideration from a Roman magistrate if they brought a theological issue before him, so they had originally trumped up a political charge against Jesus stating that He claimed to be a king and was a threat to Caesar. But now the true reason why they wanted Him crucified comes out; they wanted Him killed, not for political reasons, but for theological ones; He claimed to be the Son of God and anyone who claimed to be equal with God deserved to die according to Jewish law.

**19:8 Therefore when Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid;
19:9 and he entered into the Praetorium again and said to Jesus, "Where are You from?" But Jesus gave him no answer.**

Pilate had just met with Jesus privately for interrogation and He was unlike anyone that he had ever met before. Earlier, Pilate's wife had told him, "Have nothing to do with that righteous Man; for last night I suffered greatly in a dream because of Him" (Matt. 27:19). He knew the accusations against Jesus were false, and now he hears that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God. Now he is fearful. The first thing he asks Jesus is, "where are You from?" Previously, Jesus had told him, "My kingdom is not of this world" and "I have come into the world" (Jn. 18:36-37). If He came into the world, it implies that He existed before His birth. He had offered Pilate the opportunity to hear the truth once (Jn. 18:37), but Pilate was not receptive (18:38). This time Jesus is silent. If Nicodemus and others could not understand where Jesus had come from, how was a Roman governor to understand?

19:10 So Pilate said to Him, "You do not speak to me? Do You not know that I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify You?"

Pilate reminds Jesus of his authority. He claims to have the control over Jesus' life so Jesus had better respond to him.

19:11 Jesus answered, "You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above; for this reason he who delivered Me to you has the greater sin."

19:12a As a result of this Pilate made efforts to release Him,

God had ordained Pilate to be the actor in this drama and Jesus knew it. Pilate had no authority over the circumstances. This was especially apparent in the number of failed attempts he had made to release Jesus. All of his power was given to him by God. As Pink says, "Pilate had boasted of an arbitrary

discretion, of a sovereign choice of his own, of a lawless right to do as he pleased. Christ referred him to a power which came from above, delegated to men, limited according to the pleasure of the One who bestowed it" (Pink).

Though Pilate is responsible for every decision he makes, his evil acts are not outside of the parameters of God's sovereignty. Yet Pilate did not initiate the trial or bring about the betrayal – those acts will be judged with greater severity, for the sin behind them is more actively involved in bringing about Jesus' death.

From that moment on Pilate had one goal; he desired to release Jesus.

Matthew 27:24-25 records what comes between John 19:15 and 16:

Matthew 27

24 When Pilate saw that he was accomplishing nothing, but rather that a riot was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this Man's blood; see to that yourselves."

25 And all the people said, "His blood shall be on us and on our children!"

Seeing that the Jews would not be turned from their purpose and afraid to defy them, he took water and washed his hands before them (cf. Deuteronomy 21:1-6; Psalm 26:6) saying, "I am innocent of this Man's blood; see to that yourselves." He did this "to acquit himself before the people, from so much as contracting any guilt in this matter; as if he had said, 'If it be done, bear witness that it is none of my doing'" (Henry).

Their terrible response was, "His blood be on us, and on our children." "See what enemies wicked men are to their own children and families; those that damn their own souls, care not how many they take to hell with them" (Henry). Thus, the Lord's execution was now in Jewish hands (Acts 2:23), the soldiers merely carrying out the decision of the chief priests.

19:12b but the Jews cried out saying, "If you release this Man, you are no friend of Caesar; everyone who makes himself out to be a king opposes Caesar."

In a later period of history, "friend of Caesar" was used almost as an official title of those who were honored by the emperor for their loyalty (Kostenberger, 536, n. 77). It at least meant to be a loyal supporter of Rome (Morris, 798).

Pilate had gained his status with Caesar by the recommendation of his mentor, Sejanus who was a member of a very elite circle of Caesar's friends. But Sejanus had fallen from Caesar's grace and had been executed (October, 31 AD), putting Pilate in a dangerous political position; he could just as easily be removed.

19:13 Therefore when Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out, and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Pavement, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha.

Pilate could no longer avoid the Jews. Humanly speaking, the mention of Caesar sealed Jesus' fate, so he sat down on the judgment seat to render his verdict. If he released Jesus he would face the accusation that he was disloyal to Caesar.

The judgment seat was normally elevated so the judge could see the people, and was located in the front court of the governor's residence.

19:14 Now it was the day of preparation for the Passover; it was about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, "Behold, your King!"

19:15 So they cried out, "Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar."

The day of preparation for the Passover was most likely the day before the Sabbath that occurred during the Passover week (that is, it was Friday– the Sabbath was from dusk on Friday night to dusk on Saturday night; Carson, 603-604). Thus, Jesus had eaten the Passover meal on Thursday night (by Jewish reckoning the onset of Friday). John says that it was the sixth hour (noon), Mark 15:25 says it was the third hour (9 a.m.). However, if the crucifixion occurred between 9:00 a.m. and noon, it would be easy to round the time either up or down.

The Jews reach new levels of hypocrisy. It was no secret that the Jews despised Rome who imposed its rule over them, and hated Caesar who declared himself to be a god. The OT states numerous times that God alone is king. The trial takes place during Passover when God's supreme role in life is celebrated. Pilate presents Jesus to the Jews as their king. In 19:15 they respond by saying, "We have no king but Caesar." Their hatred for Christ is so strong that they proclaim to forsake their national heritage and messianic hopes given by God. The chief priest's response was the ultimate betrayal of the kingdom of God.

19:16 So he then handed Him over to them to be crucified.

The Savior said to those who came to arrest Him in the Garden, "this hour and the power of darkness are yours." (Luke 22:53). On the day when sin entered the world, God announced that He would put enmity between the serpent and the woman, and between *his seed and her seed* (Gen. 3:15). That enmity was manifested when Christ became incarnate, for we are told, "the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she gave birth he might devour her child" (Rev. 12:4), and he it was who moved Herod to slay all the young children in Bethlehem. But God interposed and the dragon was foiled. Now God hindered no longer. The hour had arrived when the serpent was to bruise the Savior's heel, and fully did he now avail himself of his opportunity. Jews and Gentiles alike were "of their father, the devil." and his desires they now carried out with a will. (Pink).