

John 18:28-40

Jesus' Trial, Part II - Before Pilate

Opening

I love history and am fascinated with facts, details and motives. I could easily get bogged down in the many facets of Pilate, the Jewish leaders and Jesus. I will bring out some of these as a foundation for understanding of the scripture passage that was just read – John 18:28-40. But the reason we gather to hear the Word of God preached is at least threefold; first to hear the inspired divine Words of God for they have power and by God's power we will "... not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." (Romans 1:2) We are to live in relationship with God and be His servants.

Second, to evaluate what these teachings mean to us as individuals, as families and as the body of Canyon Bible Church. One cannot live in fulfillment of the scriptures in isolation and this is why Jesus gave us the church and instructed we are to be a part of and in church. So, we should ask ourselves how will the Scriptures change the way we think, act and live? How will they change the priorities in our lives? Knowing that as we grow in unity with Christ we will experience the truth of what Christ said nearly 2000 years ago, "...the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." (John 14:26-27) I believe through

the power of the Holy Spirit that dwells within a believer, it is possible to live holy by living in accordance with Jesus instruction of being part of a church while living in a corrupt and fallen world.

Third, preaching is “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, **13** until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ...” (Ephesians 4:12-13) As we live holy lives it is not just for our sake, but to witness to the world there is a better way, a true way and a saving way. As believers, we are to fulfill His command to be all believers and Christ’s ambassadors to the lost. Jesus said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19-20)

My job then is to bring out the key points of this event recorded here in John’s gospel account that not only verifies the historical truth of what happened to Jesus, but its purpose and meaning then and now. This is the task before us this morning. Lets pause and pray that God will guide our time this morning for this purpose and it will bring God glory. PRAY.

Setting the Stage

The facts had to be clear and the witnesses accurate for the court of God’s law to convict a person to be executed. God had given the Jewish nation a respect for human life that was unequalled in other nations. The trial process was well developed and yet, it was circumvented in every way in the trial of Jesus. Judea is

the foundation of both the Jewish and Christian religions found throughout the world today and much of God's law remains, even if it is not respected. By the beginning of the first century A.D. the Jewish nation had lost the power to condemn a person to death. Caiaphas was determined to have Jesus executed in his attempt to maintain his power and to hide his sin and the sin of the Sanhedrin. They had falsely convicted Jesus of blasphemy. So, Caiaphas had to go to the Romans to get a second verdict allowing for Jesus' death.

Since Jesus had committed no crime against the Roman Empire to convict Him and in order to sentence Him to death would require a charge of treason. Verse 28 reads, "Then they led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the governor's headquarters. It was early morning. They themselves did not enter the governor's headquarters, so that they would not be defiled, but could eat the Passover." These men were more concerned with partaking in the ritual of Passover than they were with a person's life. They truly were men of religion and ritual, and were no longer people with a relationship with God or who served God. In truth, they served their own self-interests. Today, it is the same there are many who are religious, but there is only a remnant that lives in relationship with God through Christ.

Pilate

If we understand who Pilate is by briefly exploring his background and career path we can become confused by his attitude towards Jesus. However, I will show his motives as we consider whom Pilate was. What do we know of Pilate's character? From historical sources we know he fought in Germania and then returned to Rome to make his fortune. There he met Claudia the granddaughter

of the emperor Augustus, and married her. Pilate used this connection to obtain the position of procurator of Judea in 26 A.D. This was considered a somewhat unimportant position in an unimportant, but unique province. Had Augustus not disliked his daughter, the mother of Pilate's wife Claudia, so greatly for her completely immoral lifestyle, Pilate may have obtained a better position. Augustus said of his daughter, "Would I were wifeless or had the child died." His daughter was widely known for her debauchery.

Prior procurators of Judea gave respect to the religious beliefs of the Jews. One example is they chose to not display emblems, flags or standards that bore images of the emperor for this was offensive to the Jews who worshipped one God only. Pilate was brash and did away with the policies of his predecessors. When Pilate arrived in Jerusalem he sent his troops into the city at night carrying ensigns and flags bearing the image of Tiberius. He entered at night knowing this would be a problem and everything would be in position by morning and too late for the Jews to stop him. The Jews felt their city had been defiled and people began leaving the city in droves. Pilate ordered the gates closed and people protested but Pilate refused to remove the ensigns. After a stalemate of five days, Pilate ordered hundreds and hundreds of Jews to be herded into the stadium. There the people were surrounded by soldiers and Pilate told the people he would have them all killed if they did not quit their protests and go to their homes. To Pilate's surprise the people laid down on the ground bared their necks and declared they would rather die than have the image of Tiberius in Jerusalem. Pilate had only two choices to slaughter hundreds or take down the ensigns. Pilate had to remove the ensigns and this embittered him toward the Jews. The Jewish leaders reported Pilate's harsh actions to Rome and this also

embittered him toward the Jewish people.

Pilate decided to build an aqueduct to bring water from the Pools of Solomon into Jerusalem. This was a good idea, but in order to finance the aqueduct he sent his soldiers into temple courtyard to steal gold from the sacred treasury. This was money collected and set aside for the work of God and was considered holy. When the people gathered to protest, Pilate sent his soldiers dressed in common clothes and armed with clubs into the growing crowd. The disguised soldiers began beating people and started a riot. Pilate then sent in his uniformed soldiers in to suppress the riot and brutally beat, kill and arrest the demonstrators. This intensified the hatred of Pilate towards the Jews and the Jews towards Pilate. There are a number of other confrontations that clearly demonstrate that Pilate was not a skilled politician, he had no love for Judea or its people and his tendency was to deal with issues with a strong hand or violence.

However, here with Jesus things are remarkable different. Reading beginning in verse 29, “So Pilate went outside to them and said, ‘What accusation do you bring against this man?’ **30** They answered him, ‘If this man were not doing evil, we would not have delivered him over to you.’ **31** Pilate said to them, ‘Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law.’ ” What can account for this unusual approach by Pilate towards Jesus? Why did Pilate desire to release Jesus?

I believe we find the answer not in John’s writing but in Matthew’s account of the trial. The first thing I observe is Pilate “knew that it was out of envy that they (Caiaphas and the chief priests) had delivered him (Jesus) up.” (Matthew 27:18) Releasing Jesus would pay back Caiaphas for the trouble Pilate had been given by the religious leaders and people of Jerusalem. But even more important is what

Matthew records in the next verse, “Besides, while he (Pilate) was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, ‘Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much because of him today in a dream.’ ” (Matthew 27:19) Romans were very superstitious concerning dreams. Romans did not begin any important undertaking or enterprise without seeking wisdom from the gods and until they felt they had received favor, direction and discernment from the gods. Favor, direction and wisdom often came in the form of dreams. So, Pilate’s wife’s warning would have been taken quite seriously. Claudia would have known of the early arrival of Caiaphas and his band. She and Pilate may have even discussed her dream prior to his coming out to speak to the Jews. There is a good chance Claudia would have known that the reason for the Jews coming was to present Jesus to her husband for judgment. Once Pilate had gone out to meet the Jews and hear their case against Jesus, Claudia was moved to write a note of warning to her husband. The crux of her note, “Have nothing to do with that righteous man” would have created great concern in Pilate’s mind. It was Claudia that brought the idea of Roman justice to the forefront for her husband. So, Pilate had the opportunity to find some level of revenge against Caiaphas and the belief of his wife’s dream brought forth the reminder of Roman justice. While these influenced Pilate, he sought to deal with Jesus fairly and knew He was innocent. How long would these good influences hold?

Unfortunately, the answer is, not long.

Reading from John 18 beginning in verse 33, “So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus (*Pilate separates Jesus from Caiaphas and the other religious Jews knowing that they would not enter into his residence*) and (*Pilate*) said to him (*Jesus*), “Are you the King of the Jews?” (*Caiaphas was presenting a*

case that Jesus was claiming to be the king of the Jews and this was an act of treason against the emperor and Rome. The Roman emperor was seen as a god and to be worshipped.) **34** “Jesus answered, ‘Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?’ (Jesus was well aware that this was the charge of Caiaphas levied against him.) **35** Pilate answered, ‘Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?’ **36** Jesus answered, ‘My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.’ ” Pilate knows, at this point, the charges of treason are baseless and he must decide how he will proceed. Today and at the time of Jesus, among those who claim to be followers of Jesus we find true, fake, false and radical people. This opens the door for persecution from within what is referred to as “Christianity” and from the outside. At the time of Christ and today, to separate the wheat from the tares or the sheep from the goats is seen as condemnation of the remnant against the majority and the majority does not like this. This is one way Satan works to hamstring the true church of Jesus Christ. For the remnant church, those who are not religious but live in relationship with the living God, persecution is normal and expected.

Jesus was persecuted and hated for His adherence to living the scriptures. Why should we not expect the same? Jesus paid the cost for all people God has and will call. If He is our Lord and Savior should we not live as He lived?

Now we return to the examination of Jesus by Pilate. Is Jesus king and what type of king? This is what is before Pilate.

Christ the King

Reading from John 18 beginning in verse 33, “So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, ‘Are you the King of the Jews?’ (*Notice Pilate does not say king of the universe or of the world or of Rome, but of the Jews only.*) **34** Jesus answered, ‘Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?’ **35** Pilate answered, ‘Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?’ **36** Jesus answered, ‘My kingdom is not of this world. (*Jesus’ kingdom was not a direct threat to Rome. Although history shows its influence on the corrupt Roman society and Rome’s reaction.*) Jesus continues, *If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.*” **37** Then Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.” Pilate had to evaluate Jesus’ response for Pilate has proven himself a stranger to the truth. Standing before him is a man who claims to have a kingdom. Jesus did not look like a king; He was bond and beaten. He had no earthy army or palace. I say, “earthly” because Jesus does command a great army. We know this from Revelation but we also see this in the Old Testament and will see this army again when history comes to a close. In the Old Testament the prophet Elisha (*el·ee·shaw*) asks God to open the mind of his servant to see the spiritual world that exists along with our physical world. The town, they are staying in, has been surrounded by the king of Syria’s troops. Reading from 2 Kings, “When the servant of the man of God rose early in the morning and went out, behold, an army with horses and

chariots was all around the city. And the servant said, 'Alas, my master! What shall we do?' **16** He Elisha (el-ee-shaw) said, 'Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.' **17** Then Elisha prayed and said, 'O LORD, please open his eyes that he may see.' So the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha." (2 Kings 6:15-17) The King of Syria was defeated. Today the world believes in the spirits of vampires, ghosts and zombies, but not of the spiritual world of God for they are blind to the spiritual because they are unsaved. The remnant church knows of and at times sees the spiritual world of God and understands there is so much more happening than what our five senses perceive.

More than a century ago this is what Charles Spurgeon had to say about Jesus as king and about the remnant church. "To this day, pure Christianity, in its outward appearances, is an equally unattractive object, and wear upon its surface few royal tokens. It is without form or comeliness, and when men see it, there is no beauty that they should desire it. True, there is a nominal Christianity which is accepted and approved of men, but the pure gospel is still despised and rejected. The real Christ of today, among men, is unknown and unrecognized as much as he was among his own nation eighteen hundred years ago." The world we live in has two kingdoms; that of Christ and that of the prince of the world. One belongs to one or the other. You cannot be in both, for if you try, in truth then, you belong to the world and the world does not know truth.

Truth

The apostle John records in verse 37, "Then Pilate said to him, 'So you are a king?'

Jesus answered, 'You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.' **38** Pilate said to him, 'What is truth?' " We could not expect Pilate to know the truth as a Roman. But, the Sanhedrin surely should have known the truth by the fulfillment of the scriptures, the signs, wonders and teachings of Jesus. God brought Pilate the truth in a different way. By God giving Pilate's wife the dream and changing the way Pilate approached Jesus and defending Him, up to a certain point, made it obvious to all observing that it was the Jews who desired to put Jesus to death not the Romans. This fulfilled the scriptures as recorded in Mark chapter 10 where Jesus tells the disciples and His followers, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. **34** And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise." (Mark 10:33-34) These events played out just as Jesus knew they would and as He forewarned those whom He taught.

The problem at the time of Caiaphas and Pilate is the same problem we experience today. People want God to be everything and then He is therefore nothing. This is the problem the church faces. To be everything to everyone then the church stands firm on nothing. God's church is to be as He directs and revealed, and we have no right to change any of God's revelations and commandments.

Jesus' kingdom was not a direct threat to Rome. Therefore, Pilate had nothing to worry about. After Pilate had interviewed Jesus the scripture tells us, "After he

(Pilate) had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, 'I find no guilt in him (Jesus). **39** But you have a custom that I should release one man for you at the Passover. So do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?' **40** They cried out again, 'Not this man (speaking of Jesus), but Barabbas!' Now Barabbas was a robber." We know from the other gospel accounts that, "So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, 'I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves.' **25** And all the people answered, 'His blood be on us and on our children!' (What a chilling statement and curse.) **26** Then he released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, delivered him to be crucified. (Matthew 27:24-26) So it is evident that it is the Jewish leaders and those they incited that bear the responsibility of Jesus' murder in they also cursed their offspring. Pilate has asked, "What is truth?" The quick answer truth is not found here in the actions of anyone other than Jesus.

"Relative truth" grew out of the relativism movement started by Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel at the turn of the ninetieth century. It has taken over our families, our society, business and our government. It echo's Pilate approach of what is true for Jews is not necessarily true for Romans. Truth is determined by what is right for me or by my feelings and it is these that determine what is right. The political debate last week was filled with relative truths or as some would call them half-truths or as God calls them lies. What works at the moment is what is for their advantage.

Pilate acted exactly this way. He was motivated to let Jesus go even though He had been falsely accused, because if he let Jesus go it would hurt Caiaphas. Still,

when backed into a corner, truth was set aside for what was expedient.

What is it we learn of Jesus' position "For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice." (v.37) My beloved where can truth be found? There is only one source of eternal truth, the Bible, the Word of God – not man. Are we children of God who listen to truth? Then we are separated from the world and set apart for God.

Closing

We started this morning with observation that we gather for at least three reasons.

- First, to hear the inspired divine Words of God for they have power and by God's power we will "... not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." (Romans 1:2)
- Second, to evaluate what these teachings mean to us as individuals, as families and as the body of Canyon Bible Church. How will the Scriptures change the way we think, act and live? How will they change the priorities in our lives? Knowing that as we grow in unity with Christ we will experience the truth of what Christ said nearly 2000 years ago, "...the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be

afraid.” (John 14:26-27)

- Third, preaching is “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, **13** until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ...” (Ephesians 4:12-13)

Well, we are at the end of our time. Did we accomplish these goals? Do you see how the Word of God and the life example of Jesus apply to our lives today? If we did, then the question is, “What are you going to change in your life in order to comply with the Word of God?” How are you going to set the example to the world of what it means to live in the truth of Christ? I am hoping that people will come to me next Sunday and tell me how this coming week was different for them and how Jesus was glorified through them. I can hardly wait!

My beloved let us go from here and live with passion for God’s Word and for Christ our Lord and Savior. Amen!