

# Jesus Before Pilate (John 18:28-19:16)

Expository Lessons from the Gospel of John

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## I. Background and Recap of Preceding Events from Gospel of John

- a. As we resume in the text, it is the Thursday night, the night before Jesus is to be crucified.
- b. After going to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray, He was betrayed by Judas, who is leading an armed band, representing the high priests, Pharisees and other religious leaders.
- c. He was taken first to the Jewish religious authorities: to Annas, to Caiaphas (the high priest).
  - i. Caiaphas was one of the leaders of the conspiracy to set up Jesus to be killed.
  - ii. From the other gospel accounts, we know that Caiaphas asked if Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God.
  - iii. Jesus answered, "I am", at which point Caiaphas, the high priest, tore his robes and declared that Jesus should be put to death for blasphemy.
- d. Now He is to be taken to Pilate, the Roman governor.
- e. As we proceed in the story let us first take a look at two prophecies made nearly a thousand years earlier, which describe Jesus' suffering before the Jewish and Roman leaders.
  - i. Read **Psalm 2:1-7**
    1. The nations rage and the kings gather against the Christ (the Anointed One), who also is referred to as the Son of God.
  - ii. Read **Psalm 22:12-14, 17** (designated **Psalm 21** in the LXX)
    1. A picture of someone who is alone, afflicted and surrounded by powerful enemies.

## II. Jesus Brought Next to Pilate, for Questioning (Read **John 18:28-40**)

- a. Summary of the events, from the text:

- i. Jews bring Jesus to the Praetorium, the palace of the Roman governor, early in the morning. However, they refuse to enter.
  - 1. Note the tremendous hypocrisy here. The Jews do not want to defile themselves by going into the pagan Roman governor's house (since they want to eat the Passover later that day). However, they are willing to falsely accuse Jesus, and have an innocent man put him to death.
  - 2. Pilate has to go outside to meet them.
- ii. Pilate considers this to be a Jewish problem, a matter of their own law. He does not want to have to deal with it, and repeatedly tries to push the matter back onto the Jewish authorities.
  - 1. The Jews are seeking the death penalty, and apparently they cannot execute someone like this without Roman authorization.
- b. How the Jews manipulate Pilate
  - i. They claim that Jesus is telling people not to pay taxes to Caesar.
    - 1. This is a false accusation. Jesus had taught that people should "render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." (**Matthew 22:21**, NKJV)
  - ii. They assert that Jesus claims to be *a king*; thereby posing a threat to the authority of Caesar.
    - 1. Jesus does, in fact, claim to be a king. (See **Luke 23:3**)
    - 2. However, His kingdom is not of this world. It is a real kingdom, but a *spiritual* kingdom. Although Jesus could call upon His servants to defeat the Romans, He does not. (**Matthew 26:53**)

### III. Why Was Jesus Killed?

- a. It seemed that almost everyone wanted to kill this innocent man, who spent his life living the highest standards of morality, teaching people to love one another, healing the sick and taking care of those in need. So *why did people hate Jesus so much and want to kill him?*
- b. **Question:** What were reasons the *Jewish religious leaders* wanted Him killed?
  - i. *Stated reason* (justification) that the *Jewish high priest and Pharisees*, etc. wanted Him killed: for the sin of blasphemy. Jesus claimed to be the Christ, the Son of God.

1. When Jesus answers “I am” to the big question asked by Caiaphas (“Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?”), Caiaphas rips his clothes, says He is guilty of blasphemy and states that they need no further evidence.
  2. However, Caiaphas and the others had previously decided that they wanted Him dead; and had conspired to have Him killed. During the questioning, they are looking for a justification, and end the questioning when they find one.
- ii. So what were the *real reasons* for the Jewish leaders wanting Him killed?
1. Fear of losing power base. (Read **John 11:45-48**)
    - a. “Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, ‘What shall we do? For this Man works many signs. If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation.’” (**John 11:47-48**, NKJV)
    - b. They are not claiming Jesus is not performing miracles, but instead that he is a threat to their power structure!
  2. Jesus was bold and exposed their sin.
    - a. “And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.” (**John 3:19-21**, NKJV)
      - i. People with bad hearts do not want to come into the light, because they do not want their evil deeds to be exposed.
      - ii. People with good hearts will come into the light (so that their evil deeds can be forgiven and God can be glorified in their lives).
    - b. Read **Luke 11:37-53**
      - i. Jesus is very bold! As a dinner guest, Jesus addressed their sins of the heart, on the inside:

greed, wickedness, no concern for the poor and no love of God. (They love money and are living for pleasure, rather than living to please God.)

- ii. Outwardly looking good; but inside full of all kinds of uncleanness and hypocrisy (dead men's bones).
  - iii. They are spiritual descendants of those who killed the prophets. They will kill and persecute the prophets and apostles Jesus will send them.
  - iv. They are taking away the key of knowledge and preventing others from entering.
3. He spoke the truth to people.
- a. Read **John 8:31-32**
    - i. Jesus taught that His followers must hold to His teachings. Intellectual belief (not accompanied by obedience) is inadequate.
    - ii. Those who did obey His teachings would know the truth and would be set free.
  - b. Read **John 8:43-45**
    - i. Satan is a liar. Satan does not tell the truth, whereas Jesus and His Father always tell the truth.
    - ii. Most people want to be polite and diplomatic. However, Jesus could be forceful and direct when confronting sin! We, like Jesus, need to be telling each other the truth: about God, and also pointing out things in each other's lives.
    - iii. When someone tells you the truth, it tests your heart. You have two options:
      - 1. Accept it and repent if needed; OR
      - 2. Lash out and attack the truth-teller.
  - c. Read **Romans 1:18-32**

- i. The downward slide of the human race into depravity began with exchanging the truth for a lie, and suppressing truth in unrighteousness.
    - d. “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.’ Pilate said to Him, ‘What is truth?’ And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, ‘I find no fault in Him at all.’” (**John 18:37–38**, NKJV)
      - i. Jesus always told the truth.
      - ii. Jesus’ followers hear His voice.
- iii. Why did Judas go along with this plan, and participate in the conspiracy to have Jesus killed?
  - 1. He loved money, was corrupt and sold his services for silver.
- iv. Why did the Roman government (Pilate) want Him killed?
  - 1. (Note: The Romans did not care about a religious dispute regarding Hebrew prophecies about the Christ, the Messiah. Also, they did not believe in one God, so would not be upset about the “Son of God” claim.)
  - 2. The Jewish leaders claimed that Jesus told people not to pay their taxes.
    - a. “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.’” (**Luke 23:2**, NKJV)
    - b. However, this charge was false. Jesus did not undermine Roman government authority.
      - i. “Then Pilate said to Him, ‘Are You not speaking to me? Do You not know that I have power to crucify You, and power to release You?’ Jesus answered, ‘You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore, the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin.’” (**John 19:10–11**, NKJV)

- ii. “Then the Pharisees went and plotted how they might entangle Him in His talk. And they sent to Him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, ‘Teacher, we know that You are true, and teach the way of God in truth; nor do You care about anyone, for You do not regard the person of men. Tell us, therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?’ But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, ‘Why do you test Me, you hypocrites? Show Me the tax money.’ So they brought Him a denarius. And He said to them, “Whose image and inscription is this?” They said to Him, ‘Caesar’s.’ And He said to them, ‘Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” (Matthew 22:15–21, NKJV)

### 3. Fear of losing control of the angry Jews.

- a. “Pilate said to them, “What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?” They all said to him, ‘Let Him be crucified!’ Then the governor said, ‘Why, what evil has He done?’ But they cried out all the more, saying, ‘Let Him be crucified!’ When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather that a tumult was rising, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, ‘I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it.” (Matthew 27:22–24, NKJV)

### 4. Jesus’ claim to be king of the Jews.

- a. “From then on Pilate sought to release Him, but the Jews cried out, saying, ‘If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar’s friend. Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar.’” (John 19:12, NKJV)

## IV. Witness to the Truth

- a. Jesus brings truth and light into the world.
  - i. “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.” Pilate said to Him, “What is truth?” And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, “I find no fault in Him at all.”” (John 18:37–38, NKJV)

- ii. Those who are on the side of truth listen to Him.
- iii. Many today are similar to Pilate, in that do not even believe *there is* such a thing as objective truth. Instead, many believe that truth is subjective and relative; as in the oft-heard discussions these days about “your truth” versus “my truth.”
- iv. Jesus told us that very few people will love the truth and follow Him. **(Matthew 17:13-14)**
- v. The truth can have unpleasant consequences. It is what it is. Any love we have for truth will be tested.
- vi. Tatian (Syrian Christian writer, c. 120-173 AD) recounted that his desire for the truth in the midst of a depraved world started the spiritual journey that led to his becoming a Christian. He explained the reasoning and reflection that led to his own conversion:
  1. “The Greeks consider intercourse with a mother as unlawful, but this practice is esteemed most becoming by the Persian Magi; pederasty [sex between men and young boys – CP] is condemned by the Barbarians, but by the Romans, who endeavor to collect herds of boys like grazing horses, it is honored with certain privileges.
  2. “Wherefore, having seen these things, and moreover also having been admitted to the mysteries, and having everywhere examined the religious rites performed by the effeminate and the pathic, and having found among the Romans their Latiarian Jupiter delighting in human gore and the blood of slaughtered men, and Artemis not far from the great city sanctioning acts of the same kind, and one demon here and another there instigating to the perpetration of evil,—retiring by myself, I sought how I might be able to discover the truth.
  3. “And, while I was giving my most earnest attention to the matter, I happened to meet with certain barbaric writings, too old to be compared with the opinions of the Greeks, and too divine to be compared with their errors; and I was led to put faith in these by the unpretending cast of the language, the inartificial character of the writers, the foreknowledge displayed of future events, the excellent quality of the precepts, and the declaration of the government of the universe as centered in one Being.
  4. “And, my soul being taught of God, I discern that the former class of writings (*Greek philosophy -CP*) lead to condemnation,

but that these put an end to the slavery that is in the world, and rescue us from a multiplicity of rulers and ten thousand tyrants, while they give us, not indeed what we had not before received, but what we had received but were prevented by error from retaining.

5. "Therefore, being initiated and instructed in these things, I wish to put away my former errors as the follies of childhood."
6. (Source: Tatian, Address of Tatian to the Greeks, chapters 28-29; found in ANF vol. 2, p. 77).
  - a. Tatian said that he rediscovered the original truth available to man when he stumbled upon the Jewish Scriptures and became a follower of Christ.
- vii. Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-215 AD), Christian teacher in Alexandria, Egypt wrote regarding truth-seeking:
  1. "...he who is fond of hunting captures the game after seeking, tracking, scenting, hunting it down with dogs; so truth, when sought and got with toil, appears a delicious thing.
    - a. (Source: Clement of Alexandria. (1885). *The Stromata, or Miscellanies*. In Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 2, p. 304).
    - b. Everyone is seeking or hunting something in life (money, pleasure, knowledge, security, etc.) But how many are *hunting after truth*?
    - c. Clement urges us to hunt after truth very deliberately, for it will set us free.

## V. Committing a *Greater Sin*?

- a. Read **John 19:10-11**.
  - i. Jesus is not trying to undermine the Roman government's authority. He acknowledges that God has placed them in authority, including Pilate.
    1. Jesus submits to a foreign, occupying army, out of submission to God. He acknowledges that the authority Pilate had was given "from above" (by God).
    2. Likewise, we are also to submit to the governing authorities God has placed over us (whether we like them or not, and regardless of whether they are righteous).



- b. Jesus says, “the one who delivered Me to you has *the greater sin*.”
  - i. Who is Jesus referring to? Who delivered Jesus to Pilate?
    - 1. Perhaps this refers to Judas; however, it seems more likely to me that He is referring to Caiaphas, the High Priest (who had just handed Jesus over to Pilate).
  - ii. What does Jesus mean when He says that the one who delivered Him to Pilate is guilty of a *greater sin* than Pilate was guilty of?
    - 1. Yet, aren't all sins the same? I have often heard that asserted, generally based on what Paul says in **Romans 3**.
      - a. Read **Romans 3:22-23**
        - i. This passage is *about two groups of people*: the Jews and the Gentiles. Both are guilty of sin: the Jews (who had the Law and violated it) and the Gentiles (who violated their consciences).
        - ii. This passage is often interpreted to mean that *all sins* are the same.
          - 1. An example (and logic with it) that I've heard in the past, goes something like this:
            - a. Imagine that you make a pile of Adolf Hitler's sins.
            - b. Then make a pile of Mother Theresa's sins.
            - c. Certainly, Mother Theresa's pile is a much smaller one!
            - d. However, both people are separated by God as a result of their sins. In that respect, it is asserted that there is “no difference” between the two different piles.
        - iii. **HOWEVER**, while it is true that *all sin* separates man from God, do the Scriptures actually teach that *all sins are the same*?
  - b. Let us consider **1 John 5:16-17**.

- i. John tells us that some sins *lead to death*; however, there are other sins that *do not lead to death*.
    - ii. That suggests that not all sins are the same; some have worse consequences than others do!
  - c. Compare **1 Corinthians 6:18-19** (the man who commits sexual immorality sins against his body, the temple of the Holy Spirit) with **Matthew 5:27-28** (lusting after a woman is immorality of the heart).
    - i. Which is worse, committing sexual immorality in the flesh or committing adultery in the heart by looking at a woman lustfully?
    - ii. Certainly, both are bad; as Christians we don't want to do either!
    - iii. However, actually having physical sexual relations (adultery or fornication) with someone outside of marriage is much worse sin than lusting; and will have *much more serious consequences*.
    - iv. If someone came to you and confessed that they had just been involved in (physical act of) sexual immorality, wouldn't you respond much differently than if they confessed that they had been involved in pornography?
- 2. Quotes from early Christian writers that show they saw that some sins have more serious consequences than others (Quotes below are taken from article on "Sin / Classes of Sin" in *Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, ed. David Bercot, pp. 616-617. Original references in Ante-Nicene Fathers are cited below):
  - a. From Origen, a teacher in the church of Alexandria, Egypt, writing around the year 245 AD:
    - i. "I think that, just as a man can commit adultery in his heart - not actually proceeding with the physical act - so he can likewise commit in his heart the rest of the things that are forbidden.
    - ii. "...He who has done in his heart any of the things forbidden will not be punished the same as will

the person who has actually sinned in deed.  
Take, for example, the case of someone who has stolen only in his heart.

- iii. "...Adultery that takes place in the heart is a lesser sin than if one were to add to it the act itself."
  - iv. (Source: Origen, *Commentary on Matthew*, book 12, chapter 7; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 9, p. 454.)
- b. From Cyprian, bishop of the church in Carthage, North Africa, writing c. 250 AD:
- i. "The principle of the philosophers and Stoics is different, dearest brother. For they say that all sins are equal.... However, there is a wide difference between Christians and philosophers."
  - ii. (Source: Cyprian, *Epistle No. 51*; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 5, p. 331.)
- c. Yes; as Jesus taught (and the early Christians understood), all sins *are not* of the same severity. There are greater and lesser sins.
- i. The term 'mortal sin' which I remember hearing, growing up in the Roman Catholic church, is a term that refers to a sin that will lead to spiritual death for a Christian.
  - ii. There was some debate among early Christians whether one who committed very serious sin after baptism could be forgiven if they later repented. However, it seems to me from the Scriptures that if a Christian who commits a serious sin repents, they can be forgiven.
    - 1. Consider the account of the woman referred to as 'Jezebel' in **Revelation 2**. She was in the church in Thyatira; yet had gotten involved in very serious sin. Jesus said *was given time to repent*.
      - a. "Nevertheless, I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. *And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent.*" (**Revelation 2:20-21**, NKJV)

2. Consider also the account of Simon Magus in **Acts 8:9-24**. After Simon became a Christian (was baptized) he tried to bribe the apostle Peter and fell out of God's grace. Peter told him to repent and pray, that God might forgive him.
3. Consider also the case of the man in the Corinthian church Paul wrote about, in **1 Corinthians 1:1-5**. Paul tells them to put him out of the church for sexual immorality, in the hope that "his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (it appears there is still hope for him, if he heeds the discipline of the church and repents).