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The Lord Jesus Himself and the nature of His kingdom occupy center stage. Who's really on trial? First it was Annas, then Caīaphas, then the whole Sanhēdrin. Now it's Pilate. **Read Mt. 27:1**. The Jews had been plotting to kill Jesus for a long time (**5:18, 7:1, 11:53**). However, the Romans did not permit them to execute anyone. The right to execute someone was taken away from the Jews in A.D. 6 and given to the Roman governor. So the Jewish religious leadership had to bring Jesus to Pilate, the Roman governor. We'll examine **18:28-19:16a** for these civil trials.

Pontius Pilate had been appointed the fifth governor of Judea by Emperor Tiberius in A.D. 26, and he held that position for about 10 years. History portrays him as proud, arrogant, insensitive, brutal, and cynical (**18:38**), but as we'll also see he's weak and indecisive. He was a Gentile who was directly responsible to the emperor. Jesus had predicted that the Gentiles would be involved in His death (**Mk. 10:33-34**). In **:28-32**, we have the Accusation, in **:33-35** the Interrogation, in **:36-38a** the Defense, and in **:38b** the Verdict.

**Read :28-32. :28 Then they led Jesus from Caīaphas into the Praetorium** [the Roman governor's official residence], **and it was early** [in the morning]; **and they themselves did not enter into the Praetorium so that they would not be defiled** [wouldn't be allowed to celebrate the Passover], **but might eat the Passover**. The religious leaders led the beaten and mocked and wrongly accused Jesus into the headquarters of the Roman military governor. Pilate's normal headquarters was in Caesarea, but he would take up residence in Jerusalem during the feasts in order to quell any riots (with so many Jews present). The writer John has in mind the fortress of Antonia, situated at the

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The Jewish leadership wouldn't enter into the Praetorium (the Praetorium had been the palace of Herod the Great), most likely because they feared the presence of Gentiles, which would render them unclean for 7 days (**Num. 19:11,14,16**). The Mishnah declared all Gentile homes to be unclean. Passover had been eaten the night before, but this is referring to the Feast of Unleavened Bread which accompanied the Passover. Here's an example of 'godly legalism' while at the same time murdering God's Son! We need to understand the reluctance of the Jews to bring Jesus before Pilate. They knew their charge against Jesus of blasphemy would not stand up in a Roman court, yet they had to bring Jesus before Pilate, a despised Gentile, to get Jesus executed.

**:29-32 Therefore Pilate went out to them and said** [asked], **"What accusation do you bring against this Man** [What is your charge?]" **:30 They answered and said to him, "If this Man were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him to you."** **:31 So Pilate said** [retorted] **to them, "[Then] Take Him yourselves and judge Him according to your law."** **The Jews said to him, "We are not permitted to put anyone to death,"** **:32 to fulfill the word (logos) of Jesus which He spoke, signifying by what kind of death He was about to die.**

The Jewish leadership could not bring one legitimate (Roman) charge against Jesus. (They had twice attempted to put Jesus to death by stoning **8:59, 10:31**). The reply of the Jews alerted Pilate to their real intention. Pilate understood that envy was the cause of their accusation against Jesus (**Mt. 27:18**). Jesus knew He would die not by stoning but by being lifted up (**3:14, 8:28, 12:32-33**) for all to see. His death would not be just for the Jews but for everyone, for both Jews and Gentiles. Pilate knew by their answer that they didn't have a legitimate charge deserving of death so he did everything in his power to get rid of this case. No Roman charge, no Roman trial.

**Read :33-38. :33 Therefore Pilate entered again into the Praetorium** [his Jerusalem headquarters], **& summoned Jesus & said to** [asked] **Him, "Are You[!] the King of the Jews?"** The Jews didn't hear Jesus' interaction with Pilate.

**Lk. 23:2** (read) provides the background to Pilate's question, "Are You the King of the Jews?" "We found this man (1) misleading our nation, (2) forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, and (3) saying that He Himself is Christ, a king." Jesus had actually said the opposite: (read **Mt. 22:21**). The Jews presented Jesus as a rival/threat to Rome. In all 4 Gospel accounts this is the first question Pilate asks Jesus, and in all 4 the pronoun 'You' is emphatic! **"Are YOU! the King of the Jews?"** In Jewish expectation, the Davidic Messiah was necessarily the promised King of Israel. It is as king that Jesus was condemned and that He died. In their own private examination, the charge they had formulated was one of blasphemy (**Mt. 26:65**). But with Pilate, they changed their charges. How would Jesus answer Pilate's question?

Once an accusation was made, the defendant was interrogated. **:34 Jesus answered, “Are you saying this on your own initiative (lit. from yourself) [Is this your own question], or did others tell you about Me?”** Once again we see that when anyone faces Him, it is not Jesus who’s on trial; it’s that person. Jesus was not a king in the sense of a military or political leader, but neither could He deny that He was Israel’s true king.

**:35 Pilate answered, “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You to me; what have You done?”** Pilate responds: Literally “Am I a Jew?” (expecting a strong negative answer). “It’s the Jewish nation and leadership that have accused You.” Poor Pilate, he only wants to know whether this Jesus, ‘King of the Jews’, is a real political danger, a threat to the rule of Rome. Kings of earth are founded upon power. The kingdom of heaven is founded upon truth. “The Romans, in their minds, ‘History is written by the victors and truth is whatever the powerful say it is.’” Sounds a lot like today, doesn’t it? The battle between truth and power. Which will we choose?

**:36 Jesus answered, “My[!] kingdom is not of (or, is not derived from) this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants (hupēretēs) would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm (lit. from here).”** With the emphasis on ‘My!’, Jesus shows what His kingdom is, a kingdom in the hearts and lives of all those who listen to the truth (**:37**). Yes, one day Jesus will return to physically reign on the earth in millennial glory, but until then His kingdom exists in the hearts and lives of believers. As is clear to Pilate, Jesus was no threat to the political and military identity of Rome. A spiritual kingdom doesn’t need to be supported by physical force. Jesus had passed up an opportunity to proclaim Himself as king at the feeding of the 5000+ and also at the Triumphal Entry. Jesus’ reign doesn’t have its source or origin in this world. Obviously, it would not need to be defended by the world’s methods.

Jesus presented Pilate with a choice—the same choice He offers us.

**:37 Therefore Pilate said to Him, “So You are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say *correctly* that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.”** “So You are a king, aren’t You?” “Yes, but in the spiritual realm.” Jesus was none other than “the self-disclosure of God, who is the Truth (**1:14, 14:6**).” He was born a king. He had come into the world from another realm. He was the Truth. Jesus proclaimed the truth about “God, mankind, sin, judgment, holiness, love, eternal life, in short everything pertaining to life and godliness (**2 Pet. 1:3**).” He was also Truth embodied whose ministry was to testify to the truth. He in Himself and His words were witnesses to the reality which is otherwise hidden from this world. Teaching (and being!) the truth was not a criminal offense. Jesus was not guilty of any sin or crime.

**:38a Pilate said to Him, “What is truth?”** You can tell Pilate was convinced that no answer existed to his question. What he didn’t realize was that the answer to his question was standing in front of him! Or, perhaps he did. He suddenly turned away from the One who is and spoke the Truth (**14:6**) without

waiting for an answer. This is such a tragedy, rejecting the only One who was and spoke truth. Jesus was the answer to his question! Without God’s Truth, truth becomes subjective; with no absolutes, “timeless universal principles become merely personal or cultural preferences.” Rejecting Jesus and His Word, this is what we see in our country and world today.

**:38 And when he said this, he went out again to the Jews and said to them, “I find no guilt in Him.”** “Not guilty! Pilate made it clear that Jesus was innocent of the charges. He realized Jesus posed no threat to Roman rule. This was a verdict of acquittal. “But, unfortunately, he was also a politician!” When the Jews soon accused Jesus of continuous treason, which, they claimed, had had its beginning in Galilee and had continued right into Jerusalem, Pilate entertained their thinking. The 5<sup>th</sup> ‘trial’ is not recorded by John. We read in **Lk. 23:5-12** that when Pilate heard that Jesus was a Galilean that he sent Him to Herod Antipas. Upon Herod the Great’s death, Herod Antipas had received the areas of Galilee and Perea. “Maybe Herod over Galilee can solve my dilemma!” But before Herod, Jesus was silent. As a result of His silence and not performing any ‘sign’, Jesus was mistreated, mocked, and returned to Pilate without any decision being made. Interesting, Herod and Pilate became friends with one another that day.

Who will kill Jesus? “Some blame the Romans. Others argue that the Jews were responsible. Humanly speaking the Romans played a part while the Jews were the instigators who bear the greatest blame for Jesus’ death. But the real responsibility does not rest solely with either of them; what put Him on the cross was the Father’s own determination to punish His Son for the sins of all (**1:29, Heb. 9:26, 1 Jn. 2:2, 3:5**).” We are all guilty of killing Him! We as sinners and our sins put Him on the cross (**Rom. 5:6-10**). Neither the Romans nor the Jews had the power to take His life (**10:18, 19:11**). But it was the will of His Father (**Acts 2:23, 3:18, 4:27-28, 13:27, Is. 53:10**) that Jesus die for our sins, and, He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf (**2 Cor. 5:21**).

There’s a 2<sup>nd</sup> ‘trial’ before Pilate (**Mt. 27:15-26; Mk. 15:6-15; Lk. 23:18-25; Jn. 18:39-19:16**). This is where we’ll pick up in our next study.

Pilate ended up doing something his conscience clearly told him was wrong. When Pilate rendered his final decision to crucify Jesus, he had no excuse for being deceived. He deliberately chose to reject the King of all, even when he had been confronted face to face with Him. What is your choice?

“The choice is between power and truth, riches on earth or treasure in heaven, earthly success or spiritual purity, short-term comfort or eternal reward. God’s rewards are often intangible and almost always delayed, which makes faith and obedience a matter of truth. Power, earthly riches and success, short-term comfort OR treasure in heaven, spiritual purity, eternal reward?” Your choice?

As someone remarked, “The road we travel forks more than once.” Our initial decision to trust in Jesus is the most crucial choice we will make, but it is the first of many. Each and every day, we must choose which kingdom we will serve. Will you and I submit to truth or “capitulate to power?” Joel

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**Read :38b-40.**

**:38b And when he said this, he went out again to the Jews and said to them, “I find no guilt in Him.**

**:39 But you have a custom that I release someone for you** (or, to you) **at the Passover; do you wish then that I release for you the King of the Jews?”**

**:40 So they cried out** [shouted] **again, saying, “Not this Man, but Barabbas.”** **Now Barabbas was a robber** [revolutionary, bandit, a thief who also plunders and pillages, not hesitating to use violence].

NLT 28 Jesus' trial before Caiaphas ended in the early hours of the morning. Then he was taken to the headquarters of the Roman governor. His accusers didn't go inside because it would defile them, and they wouldn't be allowed to celebrate the Passover. 29 So Pilate, the governor, went out to them and asked, "What is your charge against this man?" 30 "We wouldn't have handed him over to you if he weren't a criminal!" they retorted. 31 "Then take him away and judge him by your own law," Pilate told them. "Only the Romans are permitted to execute someone," the Jewish leaders replied. 32 (This fulfilled Jesus' prediction about the way he would die.) 33 Then Pilate went back into his headquarters and called for Jesus to be brought to him. "Are you the king of the Jews?" he asked him. 34 Jesus replied, "Is this your own question, or did others tell you about me?" 35 "Am I a Jew?" Pilate retorted. "Your own people and their leading priests brought you to me for trial. Why? What have you done?" 36 Jesus answered, "My Kingdom is not an earthly kingdom. If it were, my followers would fight to keep me from being handed over to the Jewish leaders. But my Kingdom is not of this world." 37 Pilate said, "So you are a king?" Jesus responded, "You say I am a king. Actually, I was born and came into the world to testify to the truth. All who love the truth recognize that what I say is true." 38 "What is truth?" Pilate asked. Then he went out again to the people and told them, "He is not guilty of any crime. 39 But you have a custom of asking me to release one prisoner each year at Passover. Would you like me to release this 'King of the Jews'?" 40 But they shouted back, "No! Not this man. We want Barabbas!" (Barabbas was a revolutionary.)

JBP <sup>28</sup> Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas' presence into the palace. It was now early morning and the Jews themselves did not go into the palace, for fear that they would be contaminated and would not be able to eat the Passover. <sup>29</sup> So Pilate walked out to them and said, "What is the charge that you are bringing against this man?" <sup>30</sup> "If he were not an evil-doer, we should not have handed him over to you," they replied. <sup>31-32</sup> To which Pilate retorted, "Then take him yourselves and judge him according to your law." "We are not allowed to put a man to death," replied the Jews (thus fulfilling Christ's prophecy of the method of his own death). <sup>33</sup> So Pilate went back into the Palace and called Jesus to him. "Are you the king of the Jews?" he asked. <sup>34</sup> "Are you asking this of your own accord," replied Jesus, "or have other people spoken to you about me?" <sup>35</sup> "Do you think I am a Jew?" replied Pilate. "It's your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me. What have you done, anyway?" <sup>36</sup> "My kingdom is not founded in this world—if it were, my servants would have fought to prevent my being handed over to the Jews. But in fact my kingdom is not founded on all this!" <sup>37</sup> "So you are a king, are you?" returned Pilate. "Indeed I am a king," Jesus replied; "the reason for my birth and the reason for my coming into the world is to witness to the truth. Every man who loves truth recognizes my voice." <sup>38-39</sup> To which Pilate retorted, "What is 'truth'?" and went straight out again to the Jews and said: "I find nothing criminal about him at all. But I have an arrangement with you to set one prisoner free at Passover time. Do you wish me then to set free for you the 'king of the Jews'?" <sup>40</sup> At this, they shouted out again, "No, not this man, but Barabbas!" Barabbas was a bandit.