

73. Jesus Was Condemned to Death by Pilate

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that Pilate gives us an example of how people will react when they are controlled by the fear of people instead of being led by the Lord. In this topic, we will see that this fear so controlled Pilate that he was willing to condemn Jesus to death in order to please the Jews.

Pilate was very concerned to win the favor of the Jewish religious leaders because of his fear that they would complain to the Roman government. He had done several things that had stirred up the anger of the Jews and so he knew that his job was in danger. John 19:13-15 says, “When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus out and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called *The Pavement*, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha. Now it was the Preparation Day of the Passover, and about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, ‘Behold your King!’ But 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!’” Here, we see that Pilate now made the choice to please the Jews.

The place where Pilate gave his official judgments was at the judgment seat. As a result, he now brought Jesus out to the place where the judgment seat was set. The judgment seat was in a place called *The Pavement* because it was paved with stones. John used Roman time in this passage and Roman time began at midnight. As a result, the sixth hour is about six o’clock in the morning. One of the very important things that John mentioned was that it was the Preparation Day for the Passover. That meant that this was about the very time that many of the people were getting ready to kill the Passover Lamb. In 1 Corinthians 5:7 we read, “Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.” Here, we see that God chose the very time that the Passover lamb was normally killed as the time when Jesus would be condemned to become our Passover, which made it possible for the Father to pass over the sins of all who repent.

Pilate also told the Jews, “Behold your King!” Although this may have been said by Pilate to mock the Jews, this forced the Jewish religious leaders to clearly show the condition of their hearts. Jesus had earlier said in Matthew 15:18-20, “But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are *the things* which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man.” As a result of this statement, the religious leaders showed how defiled their hearts were. They cried out, “Away with *Him*, away with *Him*! Crucify Him!” The statement of Pilate showed that their hearts were filled with evil thoughts and murder. Their whole goal was to destroy Jesus.

Then, Pilate answered, “Shall I crucify your King?” This question forced the religious leaders to reveal something else about their hearts. They answered, “We have no king but Caesar!” The Jews hated Caesar. However, they hated Jesus even more. These men had made their choice. They said that they would choose Caesar instead of Jesus. Pilate then showed his own heart by granting the choice of the Jews to them. John 19:16-19 says, “Then he delivered Him to them to

be crucified. Then they took Jesus and led *Him* away. And He, bearing His cross, went out to a place called *the Place* of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha, where they crucified Him, and two others with Him, one on either side, and Jesus in the center. Now Pilate wrote a title and put *it* on the cross. And the writing was: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS.” The word translated “delivered” is the same word that is translated “betrayed”. It is the word that Jesus had used the previous evening when He said in John 13:21, “When Jesus had said these things, He was troubled in spirit, and testified and said, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me.’” The same word is translated “have delivered Him” up in John 18:30 where we read, “They answered and said to him, ‘If He were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him up to you.’” This was the word that these religious leaders used of their own actions when they delivered Jesus to Pilate. By the very word that both Pilate and the Jewish religious leaders used, they showed that they were just as guilty as Judas had been when he betrayed Jesus.

As they left the place of the trial Jesus was forced to carry His own cross. As they were on their way to the place where Jesus would be crucified, Mark 15:21-22 says, “Then they compelled a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, the father of Alexander and Rufus, as he was coming out of the country and passing by, to bear His cross. And they brought Him to the place Golgotha, which is translated, Place of a Skull.” Matthew, Mark and Luke all mention the fact that Simon of Cyrene, a city located in North Africa, was commanded to carry the cross of Jesus. Mark mentioned this happened as Simon was coming from the country so he probably met them near the city gate. The fact that Mark also mentioned the two sons of Simon would indicate that many of the Christians became acquainted with this family. This would indicate that God used this event to draw that entire family to Christ for salvation. This may even be the Rufus mentioned in Romans 16:13 where we read, “Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine.”

The place where Jesus was crucified was called the Place of the Skull or Golgotha in the Hebrew language. We see that two other men were also crucified with Jesus and Jesus was placed in the center between the two other men. Luke tells us that later that day these men both made a choice. Luke 23:39-43 says, “Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, ‘If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us.’ But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, ‘Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong.’ Then he said to Jesus, ‘Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.’” We see that the first criminal chose to blaspheme Jesus and receive eternal judgment just as the religious leaders did. The second criminal made the choice to believe and he received eternal life. I will never forget the day a young three-year-old boy saw a picture of this event and turned to his grandfather and asked him, “Grandpa, on which side of the cross are you?”

Pilate also used this time to try and remind the Jews that he was still in charge as he put a sign on the cross which said, “JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS.” We see the response of the religious leaders in John 19:20-22 where we read, “Then many of the Jews read this title, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, Greek, *and* Latin. Therefore the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate ‘Do not write, “The King

of the Jews, ’” but, ‘He said, “I am the King of the Jews.”’ Pilate answered, ‘What I have written, I have written.’” The Jewish religious leaders got what they wanted because Jesus was crucified. In contrast, all Pilate could do was to try to remind the religious leaders that he was still in charge.

The place where Jesus was crucified was very close to the city of Jerusalem. As a result, we see that many Jews came to see Jesus as He hung on the cross. This provided all who came to the place an opportunity to read what Pilate had written. The common practice of the Romans was to put a sign over the head of each person crucified to tell all who came to the place of the crucifixion the crime or crimes for which a person was guilty. Pilate caused the sign to be written in Hebrew so that the Jews could read it. The sign was also in Greek because that was the common second language throughout most of the Roman Empire. Then, the sign was also written in Latin, which was the official language of the Romans.

In John 18:33-35, we read, “Then Pilate entered the Praetorium again, called Jesus, and said to Him, ‘Are You the King of the Jews?’ Jesus answered him, ‘Are you speaking for yourself about this, or did others tell you this concerning Me?’ Pilate answered, ‘Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me. What have You done?’” Jesus had explained to Pilate that His kingdom was not of this world. Pilate had then said at least three times that he found no fault in Jesus. There was no crime that he could write to place over the head of Jesus. As a result, he chose to write the original charge that the Jews had made against Jesus.

However, the Jewish religious leaders were still unhappy at the sign that Pilate had placed over the head of Jesus as He hung on the cross. They wanted Pilate to change the sign to say, “He said, ‘I am the King of the Jews.’” Here, we see again the total rejection of the Jewish religious leaders of the fact that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. They wanted to make it very clear that they refused to recognize Him as their King. At the same time, Pilate saw this as an opportunity to get even with the religious leaders for forcing him to crucify Jesus even though he had said at least three times that he did not find any fault in Jesus.

In actual fact, God was the One who was in control. It was His desire to give all who read the sign that day an opportunity to make a personal choice about whether they would personally accept or reject Jesus as their King. In the same way, we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to give each person an opportunity to make that same choice. This is why we want to help our children learn to clearly explain to others that Jesus is the Christ and also the Eternal King. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to explain this truth to others.