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# Confrontation In The Praetorium

**JOHN 18:28-40**

## Introduction

1. Tonight, as we move through the last hours of Jesus' life before His crucifixion, I would like for us to look at His time before Pilate.
2. Though Pilate knew the Jews brought Jesus before him out of envy (Matthew 27:18; Mark 15:10), we find him playing a part he did not relish.
3. However, being the man he was, Pilate failed to do the right thing.
4. As we listen to His words and watch His actions, let us ask ourselves a most important question, "Where do I stand when it comes to Jesus?"

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## I. Pilate Questions The Jews

### A. JESUS IS BROUGHT BEFORE PILATE

1. As you may remember from our previous studies here in John's gospel, the leading priests in Jerusalem want Jesus dead.
2. John even records for us back in 11:50 that it was the high priest who had said it was "expedient . . . that one man die for the people."
3. However, a death sentence could only be issued and carried out by the Romans who at present were ruling over Judea.
4. The man who had the final say was one who had been appointed about 4 years earlier (AD 26) by the Roman Emperor Tiberius, as the Roman military governor of Judea.
5. His name was Pilate.

6. The Jews brought Jesus before him at his headquarters, known as the Praetorium, in the early morning hours that Friday.
7. However, they refused to enter because they did not want to ritually defile themselves and thus be unable to eat the Passover.
8. Their refusal to enter, forced Pilate to have his judgment seat moved outside to them.
9. There is an important bit of irony which John reveals to us in these first two verses:
  - a. The Jews took elaborate precautions in order to avoid ritual contamination and being prevented by the law from eating the Passover.
  - b. However, at the same time, they were busy manipulating the judicial system in order to secure the death of the One who was the true Passover Lamb.
10. Their scruples require Pilate to keep going back and forth between them and Jesus, inside and out.

**Slide 3****B. "WHAT ACCUSATION DO YOU BRING AGAINST THIS MAN?"**

1. This question formally opened the judicial proceedings.
2. The fact that Pilate had sent Roman troops along with the Jewish authorities to arrest Jesus meant that he knew something of the case in advance.
3. No doubt, the chief priests who brought Jesus before Pilate expected him to confirm their judgment and sentence Jesus to death by crucifixion.
4. Instead, he orders a fresh hearing in his presence.
5. Their terse reply, "If this Man were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him to you" (v. 30), indicates they were frustrated with Pilate.
6. In essence, they were saying to Pilate, "we would not have wasted our time bringing Him to you if He were not someone truly guilty."

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**C. "TAKE HIM YOURSELVES, AND JUDGE HIM ACCORDING TO YOUR LAW"**

1. Pilate knew the Jewish authorities wanted Jesus sentenced to death.
2. However, if they were going to waste his time talking in vague generalities about law-breaking, they could take care of the matter in their own courts.
3. On the other hand, if they expected him to hand down a capital sentence, they were going to have to convince him of the need to do so.
4. They readily acknowledged that they were "not permitted to put anyone to death" (v. 31).
5. John tells us in verse 32 that this statement served to guarantee that when Jesus was finally sentenced, He would be executed by crucifixion, not by stoning.
6. The Romans were the ones who had to sanction capital punishment.
7. When John tells us that this was "to fulfill the word of Jesus which He spoke, signifying by what kind of death He was about to die" (v. 32), **he was** referencing a statement made by Jesus earlier in the week, "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself" (John 12:32).
8. As John recalled that statement on the earlier occasion, he added, "But He was saying this to indicate the kind of death by which He was to die" (John 12:33).

**Slide 5****II. Pilate Questions Jesus (vv. 33-38a)****A. "ARE YOU THE KING OF THE JEWS?"**

1. This question is found in all four Gospels.
2. Jesus had claimed to be the Messiah, the Son of God.
3. The Jewish authorities had to reframe this claim in a manner that would cause Pilate to see how dangerous Jesus was, and thus result in the death

penalty.

4. Many Jews expected the Messiah to be the promised king of Israel (cf. 1:49)

“Nathanael answered Him, “Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel.”” (John 1:49, NASB95)

5. Jesus cannot answer with a simple ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ unless he knows what is meant by the question.
6. John records Jesus response to Pilate as a question, “Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about Me?” (v. 34).
7. So it is that He asks Pilate if his question . . .
  - a. Arises out of his own understanding and curiosity.
  - b. Or, is he simply repeating the Sanhedrin’s charge.

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8. When Pilate says to Jesus, “I am not a Jew, am I?” (v. 35), he is in effect telling Jesus . . .
  - a. Any royal pretensions which you or anyone else may have mean nothing to me personally.
  - b. There is no way I can seriously consider such claims.
9. Pilate also points out, “Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You to me” (v. 35).
10. Pilate is not satisfied with the charges which the Sanhedrin has brought against Jesus.
  - a. There must be something more behind their animosity toward Him.
  - b. He knows the Jewish authorities would not take such pains with someone intent on bringing harm to Rome — unless their own interests were at risk.
11. This prompts the question, “What have You done?” (v. 35b)
12. With His answer, Jesus not only confirms that he is a king, but defines the

nature of His 'kingdom'.

“My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants 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.” (John 18:36, NASB95)

13. Jesus pointed out that if He were seeking to be a king in any sense which concerned Rome, He would have already marshalled His followers to fight and protect Him from arrest.
14. Instead, He told His followers to put away their swords, thus proving His kingship is of a different order — It “is not of this world,” it is not from here.
  - a. Jesus’ kingdom finds its origin elsewhere — it is not defended by this world’s means — by force or by fighting.
  - b. The fact that Jesus’ kingdom is not of this world does not mean that ...
    - 1) It *is not active* in this world.
    - 2) Has *nothing to do with* this world.
15. Christ’s kingdom is to affect this world in a way that cannot be opposed by armed might (1 John 5:4).

“For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.” (1 John 5:4, NASB95)

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#### **B. “SO YOU ARE A KING?”**

1. Jesus responds to Pilate’s question in the affirmative, which is brought out in the NKJV, NASB & NIV84 versions:
  - a. “You say correctly that I am a king” (NASB95).
  - b. “You say rightly that I am a king” (NKJV).
  - c. “You are right in saying I am a king” (NIV84).
2. In His previous response, Jesus described His kingdom negatively.

3. He now defines His kingly mission positively.
  - a. “For this (to be a king) I have been born, and for this I have come into the world” (v. 37b).
  - b. As a king, He came “to testify to the truth” (v. 37c).
  - c. Thus, His kingdom is the kingdom of truth, truth which reveals God in His Son, who is the truth (John 14:6).
4. So it is that Jesus can say, “Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice” (v. 37d).

**Slide 8****C. “WHAT IS TRUTH?”**

1. This last statement forces Pilate to recognize that Jesus is a victim of a plot devised by the Jewish authorities.
2. Through His words, Jesus invites Pilate to align himself with those who are ‘of the truth.’
3. Pilate is uncomfortable with these words and quickly ends the interrogation with a cynical question: “What is truth?”
4. He no sooner gets the words out of his mouth than He goes out again to speak to the Jews.

**Slide 9****III. Pilate Offers A Substitute****A. PILATE’S VERDICT**

1. Back outside, Pilate renders his verdict, “I find no guilt (fault) in Him” (v. 38b).
2. His words indicate that Pilate understood enough concerning the nature of Jesus’ kingdom to realize He was no threat to Rome.
3. If he had been a man of integrity, the trial would have been over and the

matter ended.

4. Jesus would have been released and the Jewish authorities dismissed.
5. For whatever reason, Pilate appealed to the annual custom that he release someone at Passover.
6. The way he framed the question — “do you wish then that I release for you the King of the Jews” (v. 39b) — seems to indicate he was still trying to antagonize the authorities.

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## **B. THE CROWD’S CHOICE OF BARABBAS**

1. All four of the gospel writers mention Barabbas:
  - a. Matthew calls him “a notorious prisoner” (Matthew 27:16).
  - b. Mark and Luke both identify Barabbas as someone who had taken part in an insurrection there in Jerusalem and killed someone in the process (Mark 15:7; Luke 23:19).
  - c. John tells us he was “a robber” (John 18:40).
2. The chief priests would normally have had nothing to do with such an individual who took part in armed rebellion.
3. However, on this occasion, they shout, “Not this Man, but Barabbas” (v. 40).
  - a. They called out for the release of a man who committed murder in a rebellion against Rome.
  - b. At the same time, they condemned a man falsely accused of being a danger to Rome.
4. No doubt, he could see their inconsistency.

## **Conclusion**

1. Next week, we will see where Pilot goes from here.

2. For tonight, I would like for you to reflect on Jesus' words to Pilate in verse 37, concerning the nature of His kingship:

“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.” (John 18:37, NASB95)

3. Before turning to walk away, Pilate asked the question, “What is truth?”
4. On another question when many of His disciples turned and walked away, Jesus asked the twelve, “You do not want to go away also, do you?” (John 6:67).

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5. Peter responded with these words, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God” (John 6:68-69).
6. What will we do with Jesus?
  - a. Will we, like the Jewish authorities, reject Him because He threatens our self-righteousness?
  - b. Will we, like Pilate, walk away from Him because He makes us uncomfortable?
  - c. Will we, like Peter, come bowing before Him because we know there is no one else to whom we may go for eternal life?
7. Tonight, will you choose to come to Christ? If so, it is a choice you will never regret.