

The Great Sayings in the Gospels
160 - The Roman Trial of Jesus
Text: Compilation From The Living Bible
John 18:28-19:16; Matt 27:2-26, with excerpts from
Mark and Luke

Our text for the morning is taken from a compilation of the four gospel accounts of the trial of Jesus before Pilate. We are reading this section from The Living Bible.

fore Caiaphas ended in the early morning; next He was taken in chains to the Roman governor. His accusers charged themselves for that would "defile" and they wouldn't be allowed to touch a lamb. So Pilate, the governor, went out and asked, "What is your charge against Him? What are you accusing Him of?"

"We wouldn't have brought Him to you if He weren't a criminal!"

"Take Him away and judge Him yourselves," Pilate told them.

"If we can't find anything against Him, let us crucify Him," they said, "and let us give Him a sign to carry."

Introduction:

Actually, there were three trials of Jesus, that is if anyone could actually call any of them a 'trial,' so far they were from any kind of real search or intent for justice. There were the Jewish, the Herodian, and the Roman trials but the Herodian was such an outright farce that we will give little attention to it.

However, these three trials can be seen as representative of the whole world when seen from the Jewish perspective. There was Israel, their immediate and historical challengers to the land - the Canaanites and the Edomites (Herod was an Edomite), and then the World, represented by the current world empire Rome. Each of these had their say and had a part in Jesus' condemnation and crucifixion.

By this convergence of authorities in Jesus' death we see the whole world revealed by be evil, corrupt, wicked, and in outright rebellion against God in the Person of His Son. These three authorities stand, as it were, in a similar place to Adam. They acted on behalf of all whom they represented, those from whom they had descended, and those who would have linkage to them in the future, that is all of humanity. They represent

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us all, we who have, at least at some point in our past, rejected the Son of God and His message.

At the same time they represent those for whom He was dying, for He had clearly stated that His Work was for men from places all over the world.

John 3:16 - For God so loved the world....

John 10:16 - And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold...

Matt 8:11 - ...many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.

Matt 13:38 - The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom...

And, many other references that we could give both from Old and New Testaments that the Work of Christ was a work with world-wide intent and impact.

So, there are some questions that we might ask ourselves concerning Pilate's involvement in the matter of Jesus' death since the Sanhedrin had already tried Him (in violation of their own principles) and condemned Him to be worthy of death.

Why was Pilate's authority sought?

1. The authority of the Jewish court to execute people had been taken from them by the Roman authorities.

There were certainly times when they ignored this and executed people on their own. Stephen would be stoned not long after Pentecost and Paul would be involved in the deaths of others. They were allowed to get away with this because the authorities really did not care. But Jesus was a 'high profile' individual. His death would possibly trigger an uprising, they thought, especially if they did not have the backing of Pilate in it.

1. Beyond all question Pilate would have been greatly displeased if the Sanhedrin had executed Jesus and riots had broken out.
1. Therefore, it was much safer for the Sanhedrin if Pilate placed his stamp of Roman approval on Jesus' execution. If trouble came, he would be blamed but he also had soldiers to enforce his will which the Sanhedrin did not.
1. The leaders of the Jewish political machine guessed correctly that Pilate could be pressured into doing what they wanted.
1. And even though neither the Jews nor Pilate had it in their minds to do the will of God, it was actually necessary for Jesus to be executed by the Romans in order for the prophecies of His death to be fulfilled.

Moses had unconsciously prophesied of His manner of death when he gave these words.

Deut 21:22-23

22 And if a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be to be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree:

23 His body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day; (for he that is hanged is accursed of God;) that thy land be not defiled, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance. KJV

David had also specifically reference the Roman crucifixion of Christ long before the Roman empire even came into being.

Ps 22:16-18

16 For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet.
17 I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me.
18 They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.

And, Jesus Himself had often spoken of His manner of death.

John 3:14

14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up:

And, He spoke continually of the cross. So, it was completely necessary for Pilate to be involved in His death so that He would actually be crucified instead of being stoned to executed in some other way.

1. Most of the historians agree that Rome reserved the exclusive right and sole authority to execute lawbreakers, so Pilate's official permission and pronouncement would be required for His execution.

A Jewish historian recorded this, "forty years before the destruction of the temple the judgment of capital cases was taken away from the Jews." Think about it, just shortly before Jesus was to be executed God had arranged for the Romans to decide that the Jews could no longer execute people, forcing, then, His execution to be Roman (the cross) and not Jewish. ***God was Sovereignly in control of the entire scenario.***

Why did Pilate insist on examining Jesus himself? Why did he not just 'sign off' on the verdict of the Sanhedrin court?

The Romans had a long and elaborate commitment to justice. Even though the Republic had now become an Empire and the famous Senate was little more than a figurehead, a shadow of its former self, and even though power was now concentrated in the hands of one man, Caesar, the system of legal prosecutions still bore many of the protections to the rights of the accused that it had in earlier times.

Therefore, the idea of simply doing what the Jews wanted, merely 'rubber stamp'ing the decision of the Sanhedrine was foreign and distasteful to Pilate. He felt compelled to examine the matter for himself and, after determining there was not cause for execution, to let Him go.

However (and the Jewish elites knew this) the current Caesar, Tiberius, was a very volatile personality and quite insecure about the loyalty of his subordinates. Sometimes just an accusation was sufficient to have a person removed from his position or even executed. So, when the Jews began to challenge Pilate's loyalty to Caesar, he caved to their wishes.

In doing so he both violated Roman Law, which forbade the execution of the innocent, and his own conscience which told him that Jesus was innocent and should be released. I can only imagine his relief when he remembered that this occasion called for the release of one prisoner. He chose the most wicked man in his custody to set as the other choice and I can imagine him saying to his counsel, "surely if I give them a choice between Barabbas and Jesus, they will not choose Barabbas." He, no doubt, thought that he had solved his problem, but, alas! The power of Annas and his hatred for Jesus prevailed.

Finally, Pilate had his back to the wall. He could either do what was right or offend the entire Jewish political/religious machine, which would almost certainly result in complaints to Rome and his recall, no doubt to be re-assigned to some unpleasant duty. So, he called for the basin of water and ceremonially 'washed his hands' of the matter.

The Jews gladly volunteered for the 'blood' of Jesus, the responsibility and guilt for His death, to rest upon them and their children. Little did they know that this Roman power they were leveraging to do their will on this day would descend upon them 35 years later and utterly destroy their temple, their city, their nation, their way of life and possibly even their identity. Their defiant request came back to them as a judgment that is considered to be one of the most horrific even to fall upon any nation or people.

So, what lessons do we draw from the irregular, unlawful, and immoral way that both the Jewish leadership and the Roman governor behaved concerning the Lord Jesus Christ?

1. Your Lord, to say the least, is not well liked.

Even people who profess to love Him....really don't.

John 14

15 If ye love me, keep my commandments.

John 15

10 If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.

There are not many people, and you know this to be true, in your life who are willing to submit themselves to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, to truly and thoroughly repent of all of their sins, to take up daily, consistent obedience to Him. And, no one who refuses truly love Him. His words, not mine.

We have this 'meme,' this thing we say and pretend is true but the reality is that our culture is falling apart and many of those who claim to 'love Jesus' are part of the problem and not the remedy.

1. The second thing you can learn from His trial is that the more faithful you are to Him and His Word the less you will be like by those who reject Him.

Just look at the hatred that is being spewed out in our country right now for people who are making reasonable decisions to conform their lives to God's Word and to lead in that direction. Matters are going downhill swiftly and you are soon going to be forced to choose between longtime friendships and your commitments to Christ.

The pressure that Peter felt when confronted with the question as to whether he was a follower of Christ there in the courtyard of the high priest is the same pressure that is being brought to bear upon all followers of Christ. This world hates Him and would crucify Him all over again if it could.

Are you going to be faithful?

1. Thirdly, we can learn that there are many people who, like Pilate, know that Jesus is Someone Special and not a criminal.....
 - Yet, push comes to shover, they will join the crowd of rebels who want to destroy Him,
 - Or at least, they will step out of the way and not oppose them.

I am convinced that there are many public officials, judges, and even preachers who know the truth but lack the courage to buck the tide and stand for what is right.

I do so appreciate Judge Roy Moore in Alabama who has stood on principle, been removed from office, and then run and regained his office simply on the basis of standing firm as a disciple of Jesus Christ. We must be willing to follow the example of such people regardless of the cost.

1. And, we can also learn that Jesus was disliked for one simple reason.

It was not because He lied, stole, falsely accused, bullied, or mistreated people.
His One Great Flaw, at least considered so by those who hated Him...was that He told the truth.

And... what is truth?

This was the question that Pilate asked in disdain and skepticism.

If he had lingered, asked earnestly, and been truly interested I am sure that Jesus would have told him. And, I am sure that it would have been the same truth that He told others such as Nicodemus.

Let us look for a few minutes at John 3 and let us begin at v.16. I notice that people often emphasize some of the world ***love, world, believeth, and everlasting life.*** But there is another word here, one without which the rest of the statement makes no sense.

Why did God send His Son?

Why does the message include the whole world?

Why are men in need of His love, what difference does it make?

Why do they need everlasting life?
Because they are perishing!

And, why are they perishing?

Because they are condemned, under the judgment and wrath of God!

And why are they in this condition?

Because they love darkness rather than light.

John 3

19 And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

20 For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd.

Their deeds are evil!

They hate the light!

And, why do they hate the light?

When they get near it their wickedness is revealed, criticized and reprov'd. ***Somebody judges them!*** If you can believe it!

This is what Jesus told everyone. This is the basis on which He preached repentance. ***And this is why He was so passionately hated.***

So, I have a few questions for you.

Do you love Jesus Christ?

Have you seen the reality that you perish without Him?

Have you given up your love for your evil deeds?

Have you come near the light so that your behavior can be criticized and reprov'd by Him?

Have you believed on Him, truly, with all your heart?

Or have you, like Pilate, turned away, washed your hands, and said, "Well, crucify Him then, I can't be bothered with His 'truth?'"