

Exegesis

Vs. 28 – At this point, John leaves behind Peter and focuses our attention on Jesus’ interaction with Pilate. Compared to the Synoptics, John’s version of this exchange is the most detailed and does not conclude until 19:16. He tells us that “they [led] Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment.” The phrase “hall of judgment” refers to the praetorium in Herod’s palace on the Western Wall.¹ Roman officials usually lived seventy-five miles northwest of Jerusalem on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea in a town called Caesarea (cf. Ac. 9:30; 10:1; 12:23).² But during Jewish festivals, *especially Passover*, they’d make the trek to the city. This was a not-so-subtle reminder that Rome was still in charge. The hope was that being present during those celebrations would discourage any rebellious activity.

John tells us “it was early” when Jesus was hauled before Pilate (cf. Mar. 15:1). Roman officials made it a practice of beginning work early and finishing sometime before noon.³ And given that the last watch of the night was between the hours of 3AM and 6AM, it is not unreasonable to assume that the Lord was brought to Pilate *before* sunrise.⁴ But regardless of the precise timing, this early morning meeting demonstrates the Sanhedrin’s haste; they wanted Jesus’ trial to be the first business of the day. The *quicker* they could meet with Pilate, the *quicker* they’d be rid of this troublesome man from “Nazareth” (vs. 7).

John tells us that the religious leaders did “not [go] into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the Passover.” There are *two ways* in which the Jews might’ve been defiled. First, to observe the Passover, a Jew had to expel all forms of leaven from their midst (cf. Ex. 13:7). In fact, possessing yeast during Passover was such a *severe* offense that the offending party was supposed to be “cut off from the congregation of Israel” (cf. Ex. 12:15, 19).⁵ Pilate was a Roman, so he likely had leavened bread on the palace grounds. And so, the Jews steered clear to avoid becoming “defiled” by leaven.

¹ Köstenberger (2008), p. 523; Carson (1991), p. 588, explains that the other possible location would be “the Fortress of Antonia (named after Mark Antony) north-west of the temple complex and connected by steps to the temple’s outer court” (cf. Acts 21:35, 40).

² This is not to be confused with Caesarea Philippi, which was situated on the base of Mount Hermon fifteen miles north of the Sea of Galilee (cf. Matt. 16:18).

³ Keener (2012), 2:1098.

⁴ Köstenberger (2008), p. 524; compare Carson (1991), p. 588; Beasley-Murray (1991), p. 317; Morris (1995), p. 674-675, who all see this event occurring sometime *after* 6AM.

⁵ Köstenberger (2008), p. 524.

However, a more likely explanation is that the Jews believed Gentiles buried aborted babies in their homes and even “flushed them down the drains.”⁶ And, according to Mosaic law, a Jew would be contaminated if they touched a dead body or interacted with a grave in any way (cf. Num. 9:7-14; 31:19). Ceremonial uncleanness of this sort was significant, lasting no less than a week. And if a defilement of this nature took place during the Passover, a Jew would be forced to celebrate the feast a month later (cf. Num. 9:11).

Ultimately, the type of defilement is *irrelevant*. The irony in John's writing is so palpable at this point that it is hard to miss. Though Caiaphas was painstakingly meticulous about ceremonial uncleanness, he had no problem executing an innocent man (cf. 11:50). Though the Sanhedrin readily accepted Pilate's help in condemning Jesus, they would not risk being contaminated by his home. The religious leaders were indeed *proficient* multitaskers. Just as they could filter bugs from their drinks while swallowing a camel (cf. Mat. 23:24), they could avoid a grave while murdering a man.

Vs. 29-30 – Pontius Pilate had been governor of Judea for about seven years at this point. Ruling in this region for so long made the governor aware of Jewish sensibilities. So, rather than insist that the Jews enter the praetorium, John tells us, “Pilate then *went out* [emphasis added] unto them, and said, What accusation bring ye against this man?” Throughout this exchange, the narrative is marked by Pilate going *outside* (vs. 29, 38b; 19:4, 13) to talk with the Jews and then the Roman official going *inside* to talk with Jesus (vs. 33; 19:9). As Carson explains, “This simultaneously enhances the drama of the narrative, ensures that the Jews do not hear Jesus’ self-disclosing claims before Pilate, and ‘portrays the human predicament in which one must choose between Jesus and the world’ (Duke, p. 126).”⁷

To start the proceedings, Pilate wants to know the specific “accusation” that the Jews are charging Jesus with. The Sanhedrin responded, “If he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up unto thee.” Rather than give a *straightforward* answer, the Jews imply more than they say. Though the tactic is deeply flawed, *ad hominem* attacks are effective. Why appeal to the mind/reason when the heart/emotion is far easier to manipulate? By portraying Jesus as the *villain*, Caiaphas and his cronies cast themselves as Pilate’s *allies*. Doing so primes the pump, ensuring the conviction goes their way. Had they started with the facts, the Jews knew they'd likely lose the case. But they also knew that no one would care about the facts if they presented a compelling enough narrative. This Jesus was a “malefactor,” an evildoing

⁶ Carson (1991), p. 588.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 589.

menace to society; as such, Pilate had better act *swiftly* and *decisively* if he wanted to protect the Roman Republic.

Vs. 31 – But Pilate was no simpleton; this is why he said, “Take ye him, and judge him according to your law.” The governor was not the sort that could be so easily manipulated. But neither were the Jews the sort that could be so easily dismissed. So, they raise the stakes by explaining that it was “not lawful” for them “to put any man to death.” In *most* judicial affairs, the Romans allowed the Jews some autonomy with one exception: *capital punishment*.⁸ Executions, particularly those of the crucifixion variety, were the exclusive purview of Rome. So, again, without bringing any official charge against Jesus, the Jews imply that the Lord has done something so reprehensible as to be executed. But make no mistake, they didn't just want him to die, the Jews wanted Jesus *crucified*.

Twice, the Sanhedrin had tried and failed to stone Jesus (8:59; 10:31; cf. Ac. 7:54-60). It was time to switch tactics. Where stoning had failed, perhaps crucifixion would succeed. But to crucify Jesus, the Jews *needed* Rome. Pilate would be convinced to go along with this plan if Jesus were categorized as a traitor to Rome.⁹ And given Pilate's question in Vs. 33, the Jews not only accused Jesus of treason, but they also pegged him as a rival king to Caesar, who had been rallying his troops for a *coup d'état*.

Vs. 32 – At this point, John interrupts the narrative flow to make sure we do not miss an important fact: “That the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled, which he spake, signifying what death he should die.” This is a callback to 12:32, where the Lord hinted at his crucifixion, a mode of execution that was unique to the Romans. John does not want us to think that the Jews or Romans were ultimately responsible for why Christ died. When Jesus laid down his life, he knew *exactly* what sort of death he was surrendering to; he knew he was headed for a cross.

Admittedly, Christ's foreknowledge is quite significant. But in a context where crucifixion is also in view, it is even more noteworthy. Deut. 21:23 states, “He that is hanged is accursed of God.” A person being fastened to a tree—whether hung by a noose, fastened by nails, or impaled on a pike—added another level of shame to a criminal. However, this sort of capital punishment was still cursed by God. In other words, though such a practice was allowed, particularly in cases where a message needed to be sent to a community (cf. Num. 25:4), it was a *terrible* way to die, even in the eyes of God. So much so that if a criminal was left to hang on a tree for more than a day, the land would become “defiled.” So, in a Jewish mind, there was no more reprehensible

⁸ Köstenberger (2008), p. 526, “...capital punishment was the most jealously guarded of all governmental powers (Sherwin-White 1963: 24-47, esp. 36).”

⁹ Keener (2012), 2:1109.

way to die than being hung on a tree, however that is accomplished. And yet, what does John remind us? Jesus allowed himself to be crucified; he took the curse so that the accursed might be cured. Or, as Paul put it in Gal. 3:13, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree."

*Though that thorny crown I should've bore,
Yet Yours was the brow that tore.
Though that deadly mob should've hated me,
Yet You won their hostility.
Though that lonely skull I should've confronted,
Yet Yours were the feet that crested.
Though that ruddy cross should've been mine,
Yet You went and made it thine.*

*Cursed I was born, dwelling in death's bane,
Yet accursed You became, ushering life's refrain.
Oh the Love that made You to be sin,
Yet deigned to bring me in!*

VIDEO DESCRIPTION

Deep Dive: The Gospel of John | Week 82 | John 18:28-32

SPEAKER: Ben Hyrne, Pastor

In today's passage, Pontius Pilate finally rears his ugly head. Though he does not bear as much blame for Jesus' death as the Sanhedrin, he still is owed his fair share. From the context, it is clear that the governor is not fooled by Caiaphas and his cronies. Their case against Jesus is about as watertight as a cullender. Yet, despite this, Pilate will become an accomplice. Though he will emphatically declare no less than three times that he "finds no fault" Jesus, he will nevertheless try and condemn the Lord to one of the most brutal forms of execution known to man. Yes, there's plenty of blame to go around. Pilate might not be first on the list, but he's close to the front of the line.

Pastor's manuscript can be found here:

Grace Pointe Baptist Church

12029 Eastern Ave.

Baltimore, MD 21220

Contact: info@GracePointeLife.com

Website: <https://www.gracepointelife.com>

Give: <https://www.gracepointelife.com/give/>

Podcast Details:

Season 1 | 80