
Day 1

Learn: Prayerfully read John 18.28-38. Look at 18.24, 28. John omitted details of the trial in front of High Priest Caiaphas, but tells us more about when the Jewish religious leaders next brought Jesus to Pilate. [Throughout this passage, some translations refer to “Jews,” which was John’s way of referring to the Jewish religious leaders.] Pilate had been the Roman governor of Judea since AD26. Luke and external sources show that Pilate fiercely put down rebellions, and thus many Jews despised him. Pilate’s headquarters [“Praetorium”] was a palace in Caesarea, but during major festivals he came to Jerusalem, to be available to handle any social unrest. Some scholars believe he stayed in the Fortress of Antonia, attached to the Temple complex, while others think Herod’s palace in the upper city is more likely. The Greek word for “early morning” literally meant 3-6am. Roman officials liked to start early and finish work before noon.

To secure Roman troops to help arrest Jesus, the religious leaders must have made an accusation to Pilate that Jesus was a revolutionary who wanted to be king, based on his claim to be the Messiah [whom prophecy stated would be a king] and that the crowd welcomed him as king a few days earlier, on what we call Palm Sunday. Since Pilate allowed them to use Roman troops and was a busy man, the religious leaders expected him to quickly approve their condemnation of Jesus. Thus they reacted with surprise and sullenness when Pilate instead started his own inquiry. Pilate’s words also provided an insult: he knew their accusation and he knew they had held their own trial, so opening his own inquiry showed he put little value in their authority and procedures. Throughout this scene, there is political posturing by both sides. Pilate was willing to let the religious officials deal with their internal Jewish matters, but they involved him, so he wanted to know why. The issue for the religious officials was their desire to put Jesus to death. As was their custom, when the Romans took direct control over Judea in AD6 [appointing a Roman governor instead of relying on a local ruler], they took away the right of any local courts to pass death sentences; so the religious leaders needed Pilate’s cooperation. If the religious leaders had killed Jesus, they would have stoned him to death [Leviticus 24.16]; a Roman sentence of death would be by crucifixion; thus being killed by the Romans fulfilled Jesus’ own prophecy about being crucified [3.14; 8.28; 12.32].

Reflect: We admire people who bravely face death or bravely pursue life knowing death is approaching through an incurable disease. The Son of God knew when he chose to come that he would have to die on the cross. As a man, Jesus had to live his whole life with that knowledge. Take a moment to imagine how you would feel if you knew right now that soon the government would come to arrest you, torture you, and then nail you to a cross until you died... In Jesus’ case, he also knew that the physical suffering and death were the least of it! for in the process he would take on the burden of all our sin and our just punishment for sin. We cannot imagine that, for it is beyond human measure, only the divine Son of God could carry this off. Take a moment to express to Jesus in prayer your appreciation and admiration for the man he was, the God he is, and the gift he gave you.

Day 2

Learn: Prayerfully read John 18.28, 39; 19.14. Jesus and his apostles ate the Passover meal on Thursday evening [Luke 22.7-8; John 13.1], but on Friday morning the religious leaders were preparing to celebrate Passover, and on Friday afternoon Jesus served as the ultimate Passover sacrificial lamb. Many theories have been offered to reconcile these facts, but here is the best of them. We know from various Old Testament passages that there were two ways of counting a day among the Jews, sometimes sunrise to sunrise and sometimes sunset to sunset. We also know there were so many people in Jerusalem for the Passover that it would have been almost impossible to slaughter enough lambs within the Temple complex in one day for all of them. So we think the Judeans [including the chief priests of the Sadducees] counted sunset to sunset and thus began Passover Thursday after sunset and would have eaten the Passover feast for supper just before sunset on Friday, while the Galileans [including many Pharisees] counted sunrise to sunrise and thus began Passover Thursday at sunrise and would have eaten the Passover feast for supper just before sunset on Thursday. Thus half the lambs went to slaughter Thursday afternoon, Jesus and his followers celebrated Passover Thursday just before dusk, Judas left to betray Jesus while Jesus talked and prayed with his other apostles Thursday evening, Jesus was arrested later Thursday night and faced both Annas and Caiaphas that night, then Jesus went before Pilate Friday morning, at which time many of the

religious leaders were still waiting for the slaughter of their lambs that afternoon for the meal just before dusk that evening. When Jesus died Friday afternoon, it was as the second set of Passover lambs were slain, a symbol of his sacrifice which provided the ultimate atonement [forgiveness from God and reconciliation with God].

Reflect: Jewish writings [like the Mishnah] say that Jews going into Gentile [non-Jewish] dwellings became ceremonially unclean, and thus could not participate in religious activities. Cleansing procedures took time, and the religious leaders with Jesus did not want to miss out on the Passover meal. The irony is that they were avoiding ritual contamination so as to eat the Passover feast, while they were manipulating the justice system to secure the death of the one who was the true Passover sacrifice. Do you ever think you are good enough based on what you do? While we are supposed to do good things, our goodness and our righteousness comes as a gift from our Passover lamb, Christ. Take time today to pray to him, accepting his sacrifice on your behalf, recognizing its power and its effect on your standing before God the Father, and thanking him for taking your sin and punishment.

Day 3

Learn: Prayerfully read John 18.28-36. From the start, Pilate did not seem to think Jesus was a threat. His attitude seems to have been dismissive. First he asked, “*You* are the king of the Jews?” When Jesus asked whether Pilate really wanted to know or was just repeating the charges of the religious leaders, Pilate dismissively replied, “I am not Jewish, am I?” He seems to believe this is all internal Jewish politics, which has little bearing on Roman concerns. Still, he wanted to understand why the Jewish religious officials were going to all this trouble to secure Roman troops for the arrest, rush their own procedures, and then seek Pilate’s cooperation for a death sentence, all during the festival, all for a supposed threat to the foreign power occupying their land. Obviously there was *something* going on, and it would be best that he understood what. Pilate would have received a report from the commander of the soldiers that Jesus had turned himself in peacefully, even quelling the start of violent resistance when Peter pulled his sword. Jesus pointed out that if his kingdom was sourced in this world and of the worldly type, then his people would be fighting to defend him. Since they were not, it would appear Jesus was not a threat to Rome.

Reflect: Think about what it means that Jesus’ kingdom is not sourced in creation, but in Heaven. Think about what it means that Jesus’ kingdom is not of the fallen and rebellious world, but of God. If already we are citizens of Jesus’ kingdom, how should we affect the world even more than any worldly kingdom ever has? Pray for help.

Day 4

Learn: Prayerfully read John 18.28-38 again. Jesus will return one day as God the Father’s chosen king, and he will rule over the entire Earth from Israel. But this first time he came, Jesus had a different mission. He came into the world to share the gospel truth. He said everyone who is of the truth listens to [or hears] his voice, meaning responds to his truth with faith and obedience. Pilate scoffs and turns away, somewhat proving he is not one of those given by the Father to the Son. Like Judas Iscariot, Pilate has an evil role to play; though at this point he told the religious leaders that regarding Jesus, “I find no basis in him for legal action”!

Reflect: Besides believing in who Jesus is and what he did for you on the cross, in what ways do you respond to his truth? List ways you live as a subject of this king instead of in rebellion. Pray about ways you could respond better.

Day 5

Learn: It is significant that both the Jewish religious leaders and the Roman government conspire to send Jesus to his death. We have a fallen world, filled with sinful rebellion against God and his king. When Jesus comes back, it will be to conquer and judge those in rebellion and establish his righteous kingdom. In one sense, the religious leaders represent the world in this scene – trying to put to death the Messiah from God – and Pilate has to choose between Jesus and the world. In another sense, the Romans represent the pagan world, and the Jewish religious leaders make the same mistake as their ancestors, depending on and aligning with the world instead of God.

Reflect: All are guilty of sin, so we all helped send Jesus to the cross. You did this. Confess to Jesus and repent of every sin that comes to mind. If you ever get tempted to think you are more deserving than someone else or to condemn someone else, remember how you helped send Jesus to the cross.