

The Mind of Christ

The Trials of Jesus – Part 3

INTRODUCTION:

- I. In our series entitled “The Mind of Christ,” we have been looking at the trials of Jesus.
 - A. As we mentioned in our last lesson, the Jewish nation in the days of Jesus did not have the authority to execute a man accused of a capital crime.
 1. For the most part, the Roman Empire allowed conquered peoples to govern themselves as long as peace and order were maintained.
 2. However, there were areas where Rome clearly RETAINED absolute control and power – one such area pertained to passing and carrying out a death sentence.
 - a. It was for this reason that the Sanhedrin needed to bring Jesus before Pilate, the Roman procurator (governor).
 - B. We can certainly understand why Jesus did not receive a fair and impartial trial in a Jewish court.

1. The Jewish court of the Sanhedrin was filled with the enemies of Jesus, and was presided over by His greatest enemy of all, the High Priest Caiaphas – the son-in-law of Annas.
 - a. The hearts of these men were filled with bitterness and a sense of revenge against this man from Galilee.
 2. But, even if Jesus couldn't receive a fair trial in a Jewish court, surely He would receive one under the Roman justice system.
 - a. Unfortunately, that would not happen either.
- C. So, let's now turn our attention to the Roman trial of Jesus by first trying to understand what SHOULD have happened.

BODY:

- I. The Roman trial of Jesus began when representatives of the Sanhedrin brought formal charges against Jesus before Pontius Pilate, the governor or procurator of Judea.
 - A. If you remember, the Sanhedrin reached an official verdict regarding Jesus.
 1. When Jesus clearly declared Himself to be the Christ, the Son of the Living God, He was immediately charged with blasphemy – a crime punishable by death under Jewish law.

- a. **Mark 14:61-64** – *Again the high priest asked Him, saying to Him, "Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" 62 Jesus said, "I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven." 63 Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "What further need do we have of witnesses? 64 You have heard the blasphemy! What do you think?" And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death.*
 - b. While blasphemy is chargeable by death according to the Old Testament Law of Moses, it's certainly not something that would bring a death sentence in a Roman court.
2. Therefore, the Jewish authorities knew if they brought Jesus before Pilate on the charge of blasphemy, Pilate would have refused to even hear the case.
 3. And so, these men knew they would have to come up with some OTHER charge that would COMPEL Pilate to hear the case.
 - a. **Luke 23:1-5** – *Then the whole multitude of them arose and led Him to Pilate. 2 And they began to accuse Him, saying, "We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, saying that He Himself is Christ, a King." 3 Then Pilate asked Him, saying, "Are You the King of the*

Jews?" He answered him and said, "It is as you say." 4 So Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowd, "I find no fault in this Man." 5 But they were the more fierce, saying, "He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee to this place."

4. The charge brought against Jesus was actually four-fold in nature.
 - a. First, Jesus was charged with perverting the nation. **(v. 2)**
 - b. Second, He was charged with forbidding the people to pay taxes to Rome. **(v. 2)**
 - c. Third, Jesus was charged with setting Himself up as a king. **(v. 2)**
 - d. And finally, He was charged with being a political agitator – stirring up the people and threatening Roman peace. **(v. 5)**
 5. Although Pilate would have no interest in judging a case of a man accused of blasphemy, He was most CERTAINLY obligated to hear a case against a man accused of creating civil disorder and possibly even revolution.
- B. In many cases, those who were chosen to serve as Roman procurators, or governors, were experienced in handling political affairs and diplomacy. But this was apparently **not** the case with Pilate.

1. The Roman Senate had long held the view that the Jewish nation, and Judea in particular, was a special case.
 - a. Political upheaval and unrest were commonplace in Israel.
 - b. And diplomacy had to be frequently backed up by the very real threat of Roman military intervention.
 - c. In many respects, Pilate was the perfect man for the job. He had earned respect in the Roman Senate as a capable military leader, and since he was apparently from a well-established Roman family, his appointment as governor of Judea seemed a good choice.
 - d. Since Judea was part of the larger Syrian province, and was under the direct control of the Emperor, Pilate would be answerable to the legate of Syria who was, in turn, answerable directly to Caesar.

- C. As a military leader, Pilate certainly knew a revolutionary when he saw one, and he immediately knew Jesus was no political insurrectionist. We know this from the way Pilate questioned Jesus.
 1. The first question Pilate asked was if Jesus was the king of the Jews.
 - a. Jesus responded by acknowledging that He WAS, although not in the worldly or political sense.

- b. **John 18:33-37** – *Then Pilate entered the Praetorium again, called Jesus, and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" 34 Jesus answered him, "Are you speaking for yourself about this, or did others tell you this concerning Me?" 35 Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me. What have You done?" 36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here." 37 Pilate therefore said to Him, "Are You a king then?" Jesus answered, "You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."*
2. The fact that Pilate made no further attempt to question Jesus on this issue, or even press the issue further, reveals some very important things.
- a. First, Pilate understood that Jesus was claiming to be king of the Jews in some figurative sense, and would therefore not be a threat to Rome by leading some revolt.

- b. Furthermore, Pilate could obviously see that the charges brought against Jesus were founded on lies and misrepresentations.
3. But perhaps most important, Pilate apparently knew he was NOT in the presence of just an ordinary man – there was something unearthly about this man called Jesus.
 - a. **Mark 15:3-5** – *And the chief priests accused Him of many things, but He answered nothing. 4 Then Pilate asked Him again, saying, "Do You answer nothing? See how many things they testify against You!" 5 But Jesus still answered nothing, so that Pilate marveled.*
 - b. Pilate was astonished at the silence of Jesus when facing the shouts of His enemies – no ordinary man would silently stand there and say nothing back.
4. But perhaps the one thing that troubled Pilate the most was charge that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God.
 - a. **John 19:7-9** – *The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and according to our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God." 8 Therefore, when Pilate heard that saying, he was the more afraid, 9 and went again into*

the Praetorium, and said to Jesus, "Where are You from?"

But Jesus gave him no answer.

- C. The Roman governor could clearly see the truth.
 - 1. Jesus had NOT been brought before his court out of a desire by JEWISH authorities to seek JUSTICE.
 - 2. Pilate could see Jesus had been brought into this Roman court out of the bitterness and hatred these Jewish religious leaders had for this humble man from Galilee.
 - a. **Mark 15:10** – *For he knew that the chief priests had handed Him over because of envy.*
 - 3. Over and over, Pilate demanded to know what Jesus had done – saying he could not find Jesus guilty of any crime worthy of death.
 - 4. Even Pilate's wife attempted to persuade her husband to release Jesus.
 - a. She told him she had been warned in a dream that her husband should have nothing to do with condemning this righteous man. **(cf. Matthew 27:19)**

II. It is at this point that Pilate began to look for some way out of this dilemma.

- A. Since Jesus was from Galilee, and since Galilee was not part of Pilate's jurisdiction, he decided to send Jesus to Herod Antipas – the same man who had earlier beheaded John the Baptist.
1. Herod Antipas was one of the three sons of the notorious Herod the Great, who had ordered the slaughter of the male Hebrew babies following the birth of Jesus.
 2. Although Rome officially ruled Palestine, the Emperor allowed local rulers to continue exercising a limited amount of power – just to keep the peace, and to give the people no reason to wage a political uprising to regain their lost powers.
 - a. The man Rome had chosen to rule the people of Israel was most commonly known as Herod the Great.
 - b. Although he was not Jewish, but Idumean, he ruled the people of Israel with an iron hand. (Idumean: Edomite, and descendant of Esau, Jacob's brother and a son of Isaac),
 - c. Since Herod was unpopular among the people of Israel, he sought to win their favor by enlarging and beautifying the Temple of Solomon – eventually it came to be known as "Herod's Temple."

- d. But following Herod's death, Jewish authorities in Jerusalem petitioned Rome to REFUSE to allow Herod's eldest son, Herod Archelaus, to assume the throne.
 - e. And so, Rome decided to divide the kingdom between the three sons of Herod, and the region that included Galilee was given to Herod Antipas.
3. Herod Antipas was visiting in Jerusalem during Passover, and so it was easy for Jesus to be taken to him.
- a. If Herod could find Jesus guilty of some crime and order His execution, then Pilate could avoid the responsibility of doing it himself.
 - b. But Jesus remained silent the entire time.
 - c. **Luke 23:8-12** – *Now when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceedingly glad; for he had desired for a long time to see Him, because he had heard many things about Him, and he hoped to see some miracle done by Him. 9 Then he questioned Him with many words, but He answered him nothing. 10 And the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused Him. 11 Then Herod, with his men of war, treated Him with contempt and mocked Him, arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe, and sent Him back to Pilate. 12 That*

very day Pilate and Herod became friends with each other, for previously they had been at enmity with each other.

III. Now that Jesus had been returned to Pilate with no verdict from Herod, what was he going to do with someone who was obviously being framed with false charges?

A. Pilate made attempt after attempt to release Jesus.

1. He first proposed to have Jesus scourged and then released – even though Jesus had done nothing to deserve scourging.

a. **Luke 23:13-17** – *Then Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests, the rulers, and the people, 14 said to them, "You have brought this Man to me, as one who misleads the people. And indeed, having examined Him in your presence, I have found no fault in this Man concerning those things of which you accuse Him; 15 no, neither did Herod, for I sent you back to him; and indeed nothing deserving of death has been done by Him. 16 I will therefore chastise Him and release Him" 17(for it was necessary for him to release one to them at the feast).*

b. But the crowds, prompted by the religious leaders, cried out for Jesus to be crucified.

2. Pilate even attempted to pardon Jesus.
 - a. As a way of showing he was a just and merciful leader, Pilate had initiated a policy of releasing a Jewish prisoner during Passover. This is why Pilate offered to scourge Jesus and then release Him as having been justly punished for His crimes.
 - b. At that time there was a violent man in Roman custody – a man called Barabbas. The name Barabbas is Aramaic for “Bar-Abba,” which means “son of the father,” or “son of the teacher.”
 - c. Tradition says his name was Bar-rabban, which means, “son of the Rabbi.”
 - (1). It’s believed that Barabbas was the son of a well-known and respected rabbi, but had become involved with the Zealots, and was now a popular nationalistic leader who had been arrested for murder (political assassinations).
 - d. And so, Pilate gave the Jews a choice of releasing Jesus or Barabbas.
 - (1). However, the crowd immediately began shouting for the release of Barabbas and the crucifixion of Jesus. **(cf.**

**Matthew 27:15-18, 23f; Mark 15:6-15; Luke 23:18-25;
John 18:40; 19:6, 15)**

- e. There is one interesting thing to know about Barabbas.
 - (1). Some of the earliest manuscripts of the Scriptures call Barabbas by the name “Jesus Barabbas.”
 - (2). “Jesus” was a very common name during that day, and is the Greek form of the name “Joshua.”
 - (3). The irony of this is when Pilate asked the crowd which of the two they wanted released.
 - (4). In essence, Pilate would have been asking, “Who do you want me to release to you, JESUS the son of the RABBI, or JESUS who is called the CHRIST – the Son of GOD?”
3. As the hostility toward Jesus grew, Pilate tried a different approach.
 - a. **John 19:15** – *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!"*
 - b. This shows just how far the chief priests and other religious leaders were willing to go to send Jesus to the cross.

- c. For centuries the Jews had suffered and died for the fact that they would have NO KING BUT JEHOVAH!
 - d. And yet, to see Jesus die, these men were willing to surrender their most cherished beliefs – complete sovereign and loyalty to Jehovah!
- B. In the end, Pilate could do nothing more.
- 1. In a symbolic act of disclaiming all personal responsibility – Pilate called for water, and washed his hands.
 - 2. Even though he knew Jesus was an innocent man, and that no charge of wrongdoing could be sustained against Him, Pilate gave in to their demands.
 - a. **Matthew 27:24b** – Pilate said, *"I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it."*
- IV. But this raises a serious question. If Pilate knew the truth, why did he yield to the demands of the Jewish religious leaders?
- A. Like the Jewish members of the Sanhedrin, who threw aside all respect for their own laws, Pilate also threw aside Roman law to condemn an innocent man. WHY?
- 1. The accounts of Matthew, Mark and Luke give us some understanding.

a. Matthew says Pilate was trying to avoid a RIOT.

(1). **Matthew 27:24** – *When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather that a tumult was rising, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude...*

b. Mark says he was trying to appease the CROWD.

(1). **Mark 15:15** – *So Pilate, wanting to gratify the crowd, released Barabbas to them; and he delivered Jesus, after he had scourged Him, to be crucified.*

c. And Luke says Pilate delivered Jesus to their WILL.

(1). **Luke 23:24-25** – *So Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they requested. 25 And he released to them the one they requested, who for rebellion and murder had been thrown into prison; but he delivered Jesus to their will.*

2. In fact, Pilate handed Jesus over to His accusers for ALL THREE of these reasons. But John's account tells us what lay BEHIND all these reasons – the REAL motive for Pilate setting aside Roman law and justice, and bowing to the demands of these wicked men.

a. **John 19:12** – *From then on Pilate sought to release Him, but the Jews cried out, saying, "If you let this Man go, you are not*

Caesar's friend. Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar."

- b. Pilate was clearly being blackmailed with a VERY REAL THREAT – especially since the leaders of ANY Roman province could come before Caesar and bring any charges of wrongdoing against their governor.
 - c. And, unfortunately for Pilate, his own conduct had laid him open for that very charge.
- B. When Pilate became governor four years earlier, Judea and Galilee were perhaps the most unstable and potentially explosive territories under Roman rule.
1. From the very beginning, Pilate made a number of mistakes that clearly demonstrated he neither understood the Jews, nor tried to understand them, and regarded them with complete contempt.
 2. Josephus tells us that before Pilate became governor, every Roman commander who marched into Jerusalem would NOT allow his men to carry the regimental standards that had a tiny bust of the Emperor on them.
 - a. Allowing the graven image of a man who considered himself to be a god to be brought into the holy city of Jerusalem was considered by the Jews as nothing short of blasphemous.

- e. But these religious leaders bared their necks and stood their ground, challenging the soldiers to kill them – since they would rather die for what they held sacred.
 - f. When Pilate saw their determination, he backed down and ordered the standards to be removed.
4. But there was still more trouble for Pilate. On another occasion Pilate attempted to force the Jews to help pay for a water aqueduct for Jerusalem by raiding the Temple treasury.
- a. When Jews began forming crowds in protest, Pilate ordered his soldiers to dress in civilian clothing, and at a given signal, begin beating the protestors with clubs.
 - b. Unfortunately, Pilate's men went too far, and many protesters, along with innocent bystanders, were killed.
5. If Pilate hated the Jews, they hated him even more. Leaders from Jerusalem had already threatened Pilate, saying they were prepared to go before the Emperor Tiberius with charges that Pilate was corrupt, insolent, that he continually insulted the people, was cruel and unjust (allegedly sentencing people to be crucified without a fair trial).
- a. When Pilate's treatment of the Jewish leaders didn't improve, these leaders carried out their threat and wrote Tiberius.

- b. Pilate was severely reprimanded by Tiberius, and ordered to cease doing things that purposely antagonized the Jewish people.
 6. Twice Pilate had gotten into a contest of wills with the Jewish leaders, and twice he had been forced to back down – the last occasion, at the demands of the Emperor himself.
- C. And so, for Pilate, the fate of Jesus all came down to one simple decision.
 1. Pilate had been told anyone who refused to condemn Jesus was not a friend of Caesar.
 2. Pilate simply couldn't allow those kinds of charges to reach Tiberius – charges that he had been disloyal to Rome by allowing a Jewish rebel go free and eventually lead an insurrection against Rome – especially THIS Jewish rebel, who was claiming to be king of the Jews, and the promised Messiah.
 3. And so, Pilate would do whatever needed to be done to keep his position – even if it meant condemning an INNOCENT man to be crucified.

CONCLUSION:

- I. Throughout the trials of Jesus, there are certain things that seem to stand out about the character of the Savior.
 - A. Perhaps the most amazing thing is Jesus was never bitter or resentful.
 1. Jesus had been the victim of the worst form of injustice in both the Jewish and Roman trials.
 - a. The laws of Israel and the laws of Rome were deliberately set aside to send Jesus to the cross.
 - b. There wasn't even the SLIGHTEST pretense of justice in EITHER court.
 2. Almost anyone would have deeply resented such a terrible miscarriage of justice – but not Jesus.
 - a. Throughout the entire episode, Jesus displays a complete sense of acceptance.
 - B. Add to this the fact that nowhere does it appear as if JESUS is actually on trial.
 1. He remains in complete control of the situation.
 - a. The members of the Sanhedrin were filled with a half-crazed hatred toward Him.
 - b. The crowd was clearly out of control.

- c. And even Pilate became frustrated, indecisive and fearful –
like an animal caught in a trap
 - d. But not Jesus – he is the very picture of calm serenity.
 - C. And finally, Jesus never saw Himself as a victim.
 - 1. Throughout His ministry, He knew this moment would come – but it would come voluntarily, when Jesus would lay down His OWN life.
 - 2. **John 10:17-18** – *"Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. 18 No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again..."*
- II. Jesus voluntarily laid down His life for you so you could be redeemed by His blood, and He took it up again so you could have the assurance of a resurrection from the dead when you die.
 - A. What Jesus now asks you, is to voluntarily give YOUR life to Him.
 - 1. He's asking you to die to SIN, and be buried with Him in baptism for the remission of your sins – a remission of sins that is made possible by His death on the cross.

2. And He's asking you to rise up from that baptism to begin walking a newness of life, so that in the end, you can have ETERNAL life with Him in heaven through the resurrection of the dead.
3. If you want to be with Jesus THEN, you need to make Him the Lord of your life NOW.
4. And if you've done that, but need to repent of sins in your life, then let us pray with you and for you – as we all stand and sing, won't you come.