

# Exalting Jesus Christ

## "The Trials of Jesus – Part 3"

### INTRODUCTION:

- I. During the first century AD, Rome ruled most of the known world.
  - A. The borders of the Roman Empire reached from England and Spain in the west to Egypt in the south, and as far east as modern day Iran and Iraq.
    1. For the most part, Rome allowed conquered people to govern themselves as long as they maintained peace and order.
    2. However, Palestine was a well-known trouble-spot. Rome was constantly putting down one uprising after another.
    3. Since the religious and political leaders in Jerusalem often contributed to the problem, Rome gradually tightened its control over the entire region.
      - a. The power of Jewish leaders became increasingly limited.
      - b. For example, during the days of Jesus, Rome denied the Jews the right to conduct executions.
      - c. To execute a criminal, the accused had to be judged and found guilty under Roman law, not Jewish law.

- B. Therefore, since the Jewish authorities could not put Jesus to death under their own law, they had no choice but to bring Him before Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea.
  - 1. However, there was another problem.
    - a. Jesus was charged with blasphemy for saying He was the Son of God.
    - b. While blasphemy is punishable by death under Jewish law, it's not a crime under Roman law.
    - c. In fact, Rome had a policy of tolerating all religious beliefs – as long as those beliefs did not threaten Roman peace.
    - d. So, Pilate would not allow himself to become embroiled in a dispute over religious law.
  - 2. Therefore, the Jewish religious and political leaders had to find some other way of getting Pilate to hear the case.
    - a. They not only needed to charge Jesus with doing or saying something that would threaten Roman peace, the charge had to be serious enough for Pilate to condemn Jesus to death by crucifixion.
- C. We can certainly understand why Jesus didn't receive a fair and impartial trial in a Jewish court.
  - 1. The Sanhedrin was filled with the enemies of Jesus.

2. But, even if Jesus couldn't receive a fair trial under Jewish law, surely He would receive one under the Roman judicial system.
  - a. Unfortunately, that would not happen either.
- D. However, before we condemn the Jewish religious and political leaders and the Roman governor Pilate with such injustice, consider that all this is being done in keeping with the providence of God.
  1. If Rome had not taken away the right of the Jewish leaders to execute a man under Jewish law, Jesus would not have been crucified in keeping with prophecy.
    - a. Instead, He would have been executed by hanging, burning, strangulation, or stoning.
    - b. Jewish forms of execution would have either broken His bones (as in stoning), or would have killed Jesus without the shedding of His blood (such as death by hanging, burning or strangulation).
  2. And, if Pilate had refused to condemn Jesus, there would have been no crucifixion – there would have been no death, no burial and no resurrection in keeping with Old Testament prophecy.
  3. So clearly, the hand of God was at work every step of the way – even in the manner in which Jesus will die.

4. So, let's return to our series "Exalting Jesus Christ" and turn our attention to the "The Trials of Jesus – Part Three" - the Roman trial.

## **BODY:**

- I. The Roman trial of Jesus began when members of the Sanhedrin brought formal charges against Jesus before Pontius Pilate.
  - A. Rather than accuse Jesus of blasphemy, they charged Him with crimes that would compel Pilate to hear the case.
    1. **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."*
      2. Notice that there are actually four crimes Jesus allegedly committed.
        - a. First, Jesus was accused with perverting the nation. **(v. 2)**

- b. Second, He was charged with forbidding the people to pay taxes to Rome. **(v. 2)**
  - c. Third, they claimed Jesus was setting Himself up as a king. **(v. 2)**
  - d. And finally, He was accused with being a political agitator – stirring up the people and threatening the peace of Rome. **(v. 5)**
3. On the surface these were serious charges.
- a. Jesus was not only being accused of creating civil disorder, His accusers portrayed Him as a radical revolutionary who might lead another uprising against Rome.
  - b. There had been many false Messiah's in previous years, who raised up a following, revolted against Rome, and who were forcibly put down by the Roman army.
  - c. To these Jewish leaders, Jesus of Nazareth was just another false Messiah.
- B. For the most part, Roman governors like Pontius Pilate were experienced in political affairs and diplomacy.
- 1. But since upheaval and unrest was common in Palestine, Rome frequently backed up diplomacy with the very real threat of military intervention.

2. This made Pilate the perfect man for the job.
    - a. He had earned respect in the Roman Senate as a capable, no-nonsense military leader.
    - b. And since he came from a well-respected Roman family, his appointment as governor of Judea seemed like a good choice.
- C. As a military leader, Pilate certainly knew a rebel when he saw one.
1. However, it seems clear from his questions that he didn't see Jesus as this kind of a threat.
    - a. **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 reveals some very important things.
  - a. First, Pilate apparently understood Jesus was claiming to be king of the Jews in some spiritual sense – fortunately for Jesus, that would pose no threat to Rome.
  - b. Furthermore, it seems that Pilate also realized the charges against Jesus were based on half-truths and outright lies.
3. But what's even more important, Pilate could see that Jesus was no ordinary man – there was something unearthly about this man from Galilee.
  - 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 – no ordinary man would respond this way in the face of such serious accusations.

4. But one thing that seemed to trouble Pilate most was Jesus claiming 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.*
5. Despite all the accusations against Jesus, Pilate could clearly see the truth.
  - a. The Jewish religious and political leaders were not seeking justice.
  - b. **Mark 15:10** – *For he knew that the chief priests had handed Him over because of envy.*
- D. Over and over, Pilate demanded to know what Jesus had done – saying he could find no evidence of a crime worthy of death.
  1. Even Pilate's wife, who overheard all this, tried to persuade her husband to release Jesus.
  2. She said she had been warned in a dream that her husband should have nothing to do with condemning this righteous man. **(cf. Matthew 27:19)**



3. Pilate was in a real predicament – he needed some way out of this dilemma.
- II. Since Jesus was from Galilee, and since Galilee was not actually under his jurisdiction, Pilate took the only escape he could find.
- A. Galilee was under the jurisdiction of Herod Antipas – the same man who had beheaded John the Baptist.
    1. Therefore, since Herod had come to Jerusalem for the Jewish Passover, Pilate decided to send Jesus to him.
    2. 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.
    3. Although Rome officially ruled all of Palestine, the Emperor allowed local rulers to exercise a limited amount of power – just to keep the peace.
      - a. The man Rome initially chose to rule the people of Israel was Herod the Great.
      - b. But when Herod died, Rome refused to allow Herod's eldest son to take the throne.

- c. So, the control of Palestine was divided between the three sons of Herod; and the region that included Galilee was given to Herod Antipas.
- 4. By sending Jesus to Herod Antipas, Pilate wouldn't have to deal with this matter any longer.
  - a. If Herod found Jesus guilty of some crime deserving of death, then Herod could give the order of execution.
- 5. But things didn't work out as Pilate had planned.
  - a. **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 Pilate's dilemma only deepened.

- A. What was he to do to with a man who was obviously being framed with false charges?
1. Pilate made numerous attempts to release Jesus – even offering to have Jesus scourged and then released.
    - 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 religious leaders stirred up the crowd, who shouted 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.

- b. At that time there was a man by the name of Barabbas in custody – a violent man accused of murder.
  - c. But when Pilate offered to release either Jesus or Barabbas, 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)**
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 persecution from their enemies because they refused to have no King but Jehovah!
  - d. And yet, to see Jesus die, these men were willing to surrender their most cherished belief – complete sovereignty and loyalty to Jehovah, the God of Israel!
  - e. Instead, they were willing to actually claim Caesar as their king!

- B. In the end, Pilate could do nothing more.
  - 1. In a symbolic gesture of disavowing all personal responsibility – Pilate called for water, and washed his hands.
  - 2. Even though he knew Jesus was innocent man, 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 these Jewish religious and political leaders?

- A. The gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark and Luke give us some insight.
  - 1. Matthew says Pilate was trying to avoid a riot.
    - a. **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...*
  - 2. Mark says he was trying to appease the crowd.
    - a. **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.*

3. And Luke says Pilate delivered Jesus to their will.
  - a. **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.*
- B. It's clear that Pilate had indeed handed Jesus over to His accusers for all of those reasons.
  1. But only John's account tells us the real motive for Pilate finally 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."*
  2. Pilate was clearly being blackmailed.
    - a. And the threats they made were very real.
    - b. The leaders of any Roman province could bring charges of wrongdoing before Caesar against their governor.
  3. Unfortunately for Pilate, the Jews had already brought charges against him for misconduct and malfeasance.
- B. Four years earlier, when Pilate became governor, he did several things that showed he clearly regarded the Jews with complete contempt.

1. Josephus tells us that Roman commanders who marched into Jerusalem would not allow their men to carry the regimental standards.
  - a. Those standards displayed an image of the Emperor – a man who considered himself a god.
  - b. Displaying the engraved image of a god in the holy city of Jerusalem would be the highest insult to the Jews.
  - c. So, all Roman commanders would remove the image from their standards before entering the city.
  
2. However, Pilate had no intentions of bowing to these ridiculous superstitions.
  - a. He marched his troops into the city of Jerusalem with the image of the Emperor was still attached. Pilate did, however, enter the city under the cover of darkness and immediately went to Fort Antonia where the Roman garrison stayed.
  - b. However, when the Jews entered the temple courtyards the following morning what they saw prompted a near riot.
  - c. The Roman standards that bore the image of the Emperor Tiberius were proudly displayed from the towers of the Fortress, and all along the walls – including the towers and walls that overlooked the temple courtyards.

3. When the Jewish leaders demanded that the standards be removed, Pilate finally conceded.
- C. On another occasion Pilate raided the Temple treasury to help pay for the construction of a water aqueduct for Jerusalem.
1. When crowds began to form in protest, Pilate ordered his soldiers to dress in civilian clothing, and at a given signal, to begin beating the protestors with clubs.
  2. Unfortunately, Pilate's men went too far, and many protesters were killed, along with several innocent bystanders.
- D. If Pilate hated the Jews, they hated him even more.
1. The Jewish leaders had already written once to the Emperor Tiberius charging Pilate with being corrupt, insolent, and that he displayed utter contempt for the Jewish people.
  2. Pilate was severely reprimanded by Tiberius who ordered that he stop doing anything to purposely antagonize the Jewish people.
  3. For Pilate to remain a Roman governor he simply couldn't afford another confrontation with the Jews.
- E. And so, the fate of Jesus all came down to one simple decision.
1. Pilate was 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.
  - a. He couldn't afford to be accused of disloyalty to Rome by allowing a Jewish rebel to go free – a Jewish rebel who might eventually lead an insurrection against Rome.
  - b. Pilate couldn't afford to simply release a man who claimed to be king – a man who said He was the Christ, the Son of the Living God.
3. And so, Pilate did what he needed to do to keep his position – even though it meant condemning an innocent man to be crucified.

## **CONCLUSION:**

- I. Throughout the trials of Jesus, we've been taking notice of certain things that seem to stand out about the Lord's character.
  - 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 Jesus remains in complete control of every situation.
  1. Jesus never acts like someone who is on trial for their life.
    - a. The members of the Sanhedrin were filled with a half-crazed hatred toward Him.
    - b. And even the crowds were stirred up to an out-of-control frenzy.
    - c. And even Pilate, a proud, decorated Roman military commander and governor 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, it's important to notice that Jesus never saw Himself as a victim.
  1. Throughout His ministry, Jesus knew this moment would come – but it would come only when He was ready to voluntarily lay down His own life.

- a. **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 freely laid down His life 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. Now, Jesus asks something from you.

1. He asks you to voluntarily give your life to Him.
  - a. He asks you to die to sin, and to 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.
  - b. He also asks you to begin walking in a newness of life – letting the whole world see Christ in you every day.
  - c. And finally, He asks you to remain faithful till death so that in the end you can have eternal life with Him in heaven.
2. If you're ready to commit your life to Christ, or if you've done that in the past but slipped along the way, then know that the same Jesus who endured all this injustice and suffering stands ready to welcome you with open arms.