

A Judge on Trial

(John 18:28-37)

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Introduction

Each year, there are 100 million cases filed in the state court system of the United States.

In addition, there are 400,000 cases files in the federal court system each year.

Needless to say, the court system in our country is always at work.

As a result, there is a constant need of court personnel, which would include lawyers and clerks and paralegals and legal secretaries.

There is a need for court security in the form of policemen and private security firms.

Such a massive number of court cases also requires an incredible number of judges..

In the US alone, there are 30,000 state judges and 1700 federal judges.

And these men sit and preside over case after case after case.

The expectation is that judges become judges as a result of their expertise and character and skill.

Yet, there have been times when judges fail.

Numerous cases over the years have involved judges that go on trial for various crimes while serving as a judge.

Today, we are going to begin looking at the most famous trial in history, and that is the trial of Jesus Christ.

The trial is unique because its takes place in a matter of hours before 4 different judges.

The trial is also unique because one judge finds him guilty but still calls for the death penalty.

But what makes this trial most unique is that the One standing trial is actually the greatest judge of all time.

And the reality is that everyone surrounded the trial are actually the defendants in the case..

Pilate is Roman judge but he is on trial by a higher Judge.

Annas a Jewish judge but he is on trial by a higher judge.

Caiaphas is a Jewish judge but he is on trial by a higher judge.

Herod is a Jewish judge but he is on trial by a higher judge.

The crowds that want Jesus dead are actually on trial by a higher judge.

The guards and the soldiers are all actually on trial by a higher judge.

The scene in Jerusalem looked like a trial for Jesus, but the reality is that Jesus is the judge and everyone around Him is on trial..

Now, the joy for us is that we get to look at this trial of Christ over the next two weeks, but the reality is that no trial is taking place.

This is a legal conspiracy to get Jesus to the cross and dead and soon as possible, and from a human perspective it was extremely successful..

But as we look at it, we will know that God is fully in control of the scene and it is playing out in the hands of evil men to fulfill his plan to perfection..

Today, we are going to look at the Roman portion of the trial.

As I said earlier, Jesus's trial has 6 parts.

3 Jewish parts and 3 Roman parts.

Last week, we looked at one fo the Jewish components as Jesus went to stand before Annas.

Annas was a former Jewish high priest, but he still held a lot of power in Israel..

In fact, his sons served as high priests after him and his son in law Caiaphas was the current high priest.

So Annas conducted trial #1 and he tired to get Jesus to incriminate Himself but was unsuccessful, so he sent him to Caiaphas.

And I told you last week that we would look at Jesus time before Caiaphas, but we won't find that in John's gospel.

The Holy Spirit inspired Matthew to write about Jesus' trial before Caiaphas, so He doesn't lead John to include it.

But I want us to take a brief look at what happened after Jesus was sent from Annas to Caiaphas..

It is a lot to put on the screen so let's turn to it in our Bibles..

Matthew 26:57

57 Those who had seized Jesus led Him away to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were gathered together. 58 But Peter was following Him at a distance as far as the courtyard of the high priest, and entered in, and sat down with the [p]officers to see the outcome.

*59 Now the chief priests and the whole [q]Council kept trying to obtain false testimony against Jesus, so that they might put Him to death. 60 They did not find any, even though many false witnesses came forward. But later on two came forward, 61 and said, "This man stated, 'I am able to destroy the [r]temple of God and to rebuild it [s]in three days.'" 62 The high priest stood up and said to Him, "Do You not answer? What is it that these men are testifying against You?" 63 But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest said to Him, "I [t]adjure You by the living God, that You tell us whether You are [u]the Christ, the Son of God." 64 Jesus *said to him, "You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, [v]hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven."*

65 Then the high priest tore his [w]robes and said, "He has blasphemed! What further need do we have of witnesses? Behold, you have now heard the blasphemy;

66 what do you think?” They answered, “He deserves death!”

67 Then they spat in His face and beat Him with their fists; and others [x]slapped Him, 68 and said, “Prophesy to us, You [y]Christ; who is the one who hit You?”

Now that scene before Caiaphas is right after he leaves Annas, but it contains the same nonsense that Jesus endured before Annas.

There were no charges.

There were no reliable witnesses.

Just a lot of trumped up charges to get Jesus to the Romans so they could crucify Him..

But there is one more component of the Jewish trial.

Luke tells us about it in Luke 23:66...

66 When it was day, the [m]Council of elders of the people assembled, both chief priests and scribes, and they led Him away to their council chamber, saying, 67 “If You are the [n]Christ, tell us.” But He said to them, “If I tell you, you will not believe; 68 and if I ask a question, you will not answer. 69 But from now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God.” 70 And they all said, “Are You the Son

***of God, then?” And He said to them, “[o]Yes, I am.”
71 Then they said, “What further need do we have of
testimony? For we have heard it ourselves from His
own mouth.”***

Now at this point, it is early morning.

The majority of the Jewish portion of the trial happened in the middle of the night, which was clearly against Jewish law..

So to ease their guilty consciences, they waited for just a crack of daylight to gather the council of Jewish leaders and declare Jesus guilty of blasphemy.

Once that 3rd portion of the Jewish trial took place, they hurried Jesus to the Roman authorities.

Roman court began at 6 am, so the Jews are most likely first in line and waiting for the Roman judge to show.

Now that judge is going to be Pilate, which is a name that we are familiar as believers.

Most of us hear his name at Easter in association with the sentencing of Jesus.

But you need to know a little background about Pilate to understand why he does what he does over the few hours...

Pilate was a Roman governor, and Israel fell under his jurisdiction.

And he had been the Roman governor over the Jews for about 4 years now.

But it had been a rocky relationship.

The Jews had problems with him from the start.

He was an arrogant man who wants to impose his will on the people and enjoy the power that had been given to him.

But his met his match in the Jews who were equally as stubborn as HE was.

And one notable thing about the Romans is that they tried to keep the peace at all costs.

So if a group of people under their rule lodged complaints about a leader, the Romans would replace him with little or no investigation because a rebellion was to avoided at all costs.

Well, Pilate was well on his way to being replaced just 4 years into his term.

He had tried to make the Jews worship his idols on a couple of occasions, and the Jews had complained to Caesar.

He had robbed the temple at one point to finance the construction of one of his pet projects.

That was reported to Caesar as well, so when the Jews show up with Jesus, he is already on a short leash.

No that is important to know as we see the events of today and next week unfold..

So it is early morning.

Jesus has not slept all night being arrested and the drug from Annas to Caiaphas and then before the entire council.

But His day is just begging as he waits at the crack of dawn for Pilate to arrive and hear his case..

Now this scene before Pilate is going to stretch into chapter 19, but we will stop today at the end of chapter 18..

So let's divide up this portion of the trial into 3 sections that reflect the glory of Christ..

Because as I said earlier, this is not Jesus on trial, this is everyone else on trial around him..

So let's begin in verse 28-32, and we will call this..

I. Christ Keeping His Word (28-32)

It is early Friday and Jesus is still under arrest.

He has passed through the 3 portions of the Jewish trial, and now he heads to Pilate..

Verse 28..

28 Then they *led Jesus from Caiaphas into the [h]Praetorium, and it was early; and they themselves did not enter into the [i]Praetorium so that they would not be defiled, but might eat the Passover.

The Bible is filled with so much irony at times, and most of the irony centers around the religious leadership of Israel.

They have just found the Son of God guilty on false charges, but now as they take Jesus to the Romans, they stay outside the court in order not to defile themselves.

What irony.

The stay outside in an attempt to please God while handing over the son of God to be killed.

In case, you are wondering those who attempt to look religious on the outside are usually the most irreligious on the inside.

Can you imagine the conversation with the Roman guards?

Here's Jesus, the Son of God.

Well, want you come in?

Oh no thanks, we wouldn't want to offend God by hanging out with Gentiles.

Now, important note here.

Nowhere in the OT did it say it was an act of defilement to enter the home of a Gentile on Passover or any other day for that matter.

It was simply a law made up by the Jewish religious leaders..

And what hypocrites they were.

They don't want to be defiled by going into a Gentile home, but they have no problem with the defilement of killing an innocent man.

So Pilate comes out to them..

29 Therefore Pilate went out to them and *said, "What accusation do you bring against this Man?"

The Romans were wrong in many areas of life but they were very careful with issues of justice.

To find an innocent man guilty was a very high crime in Rome.

Even Pilate who wants to please the Jews and keep them on his good side is not going to skirt justice, so he asks for the charge against Jesus..

And notice how the Jews answer..

30 They answered and said to him, "If this Man were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him to you."

In case you didn't notice, they avoided the question.

They don't respond with a charge.

They are politicians who love their power, so they least they can say, the better.

I love when political debates come on and the moderator asks a question, and the politician answers the question with a question.

Kinda like what you see here?

What is the charge against Jesus?

Well, do you think we would have brought him here unless it was bad?

Now the hope is to simply intimidate Pilate into letting them have their way with Jesus..

And guess what?

Pilate falls for their trap and tries to let them do as they please...

Look at verse 31..

31 So Pilate said to them, "Take Him yourselves, and judge Him according to your law."

This should be music to the Jews ears.

This is what they want.

The Romans are simply letting them do what they want to with Jesus.

The next part of verse 31 should say that they took Jesus away, but it doesn't.

Look at what it says..

The Jews said to him, "We are not permitted to put anyone to death,"

Though their law commanded them to stone blasphemers and other other criminals convicted of serious crimes, the Romans passed a law that prohibited capital punishment in their empire.

Though the Romans practiced capital punishment, they would not allow people under their rule to carry it out.

And get this.

From what we can piece together from Roman history, that was a recent law of the empire.

Needless to say, that law was adopted for this very situation.

Now why is this important?

Why couldn't the Jews just listen to Pilate and take Jesus out back and stone him to death for blasphemy as they would anyone else?

Simple.

Jesus has told his disciples that he would die on a cross.

John 12:31-33.

31 Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. 32 And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself.” 33 But He was saying this to indicate the kind of death by which He was to die.

In other words, Jesus told his disciples that He would die by the capital punishment methods of the Gentiles.

He would die by being lifted up from the earth.

He would die on the Roman Cross.

The Jews will find him guilty by their law, but the Gentiles will execute Him their method.

And the point here is simple.

As Jesus is arrested and bound....

As Jesus appears to be under the authority of the Jews and the Romans...

He is still very much in charge and in control of all the details.

He said that he would die on cross, and His word will stand.

Even while in chains, Christ is still running the show.

The people around him are on trial.

Christ is simply having his way.

A second reflection of Christ's glory is seen in verses 33-36..

Let's call this..

II. Christ Keeping His Focus (33-36)

Once Pilate saw that the Jews were determined to have Jesus killed and once he saw that they weren't coming into the Praetorium, he called Jesus inside..

Verse 33..

33 Therefore Pilate entered again into the Praetorium, and summoned Jesus and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" 34 Jesus answered, "Are you saying this [j]on your own initiative, or did others tell you about Me?" 35 Pilate answered, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You to me; what have You done?"

Now one thing that Rome wouldn't allow is any rival to Caesar.

Anyone who appeared to challenge his leadership was immediately dealt with..

So maybe if Jesus appears to be threat to Caesar, Pilate can find some guilt in Him..

But that isn't the case at all.

Jesus has no kingly appearance.

In fact, he is probably bleeding at this point having been struck by the guard of the high priest.

But even if He wasn't bleeding, Jesus looked like no king and posed no threat.

In fact, the original Greek puts the you in the first portion in the sentence..

Pilate wasn't asking an honest question, he was making a sarcastic comment.

YOU are the king of the Jews?

And though the question was meant to ridicule Jesus, He maintains his composure and focus by asking if Pilate had been told to say this by the Jews..

In other words, were the Jews saying telling Pilate that Jesus was a threat to Caesar?

But Pilate denies that accusation by saying that he wasn't a Jew.

The point is simple.

Pilate did his own thinking and acting.

He was not Jew and they weren't going to tell him how to run his job..

Pilate would reach his own conclusions and so far, it seems clear that Jesus isn't guilty of anything..

And then Jesus says this..

36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom [k]is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not [l]of this realm."

Jesus did not deny being a King.

In fact, He is the King of the Jews but He is also the King of the Gentiles as well.

But He is not in Jerusalem on this occasion to set up His earthly kingdom.

He is in Jerusalem to die so that others can be part of His Kingdom.

HE will return to Jerusalem one day and set up that kingdom, but as He stands before Pilate in 30 AD, it is not time to fight, it is time to die.

The great reality of the gospel is that our King died for us.

Christ could have taken Pilate and the entire Roman army and Caesar and cast them off their thrones and set up His kingdom in 30 AD.

But that was not the plan of God for Christ's first coming.

Though Christ had the power to overthrow every government as He stood before Pilate, His focus was on the cross and not the throne.

This was not the time for rebellion but for sacrifice, and Jesus had to maintain his focus..

One final note to make here is found in verses 37-40..

Christ keeps His Word.

Christ keeps His focus.

But we also see Christ keeping his purpose...

III. Christ Keeping His Purpose (37)

Verse 37..

***37 Therefore Pilate said to Him, “So You are a king?”
Jesus answered, “You say correctly that I am a king.
For this I have been born, and for this I have come into
the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the
truth hears My voice.”***

Our minds immediately go to the cross when we think of Jesus’ purpose in coming to earth.

In fact, Jesus even says in Luke 19..

***10 For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save
that which was lost.”***

And clearly that is a purpose of Christ in coming to earth.

Christ came to earth for the cross.

We just highlighted that in the previous verse, but there is another purpose in Christ’s coming to earth..

He came to testify to the truth.

This is the nature of God.

This is the nature of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.

God is a God of truth.

Jesus brought truth.

Jesus lived truth.

Jesus proclaimed truth.

As He stands before Pilate, he is disclosing the greatest truths of all time.

He is innocent.

The Jews want him dead.

He is a King.

He has a kingdom.

And everyone who puts their faith in Christ will be able to hear his truth..

If you are a believer in here this morning, you love the truth.

Christians are people of truth.

That means that we are honest people, but it also means that we love the truth by exposing lies and injustice and unfairness.

This is our new nature.

We were liars and lovers of deception and now we are lovers and proclaimers of truth.

As Jesus stands before Pilate, He speaks and lives truth.

And the greatest truth is that He must die to set His people free from their sin.

He is truth.

He speaks truth.

But he will die to provide truth to those who believe in Him.

Now, we are going to stop there and leave Pilate's response for next week because it is such an important response to consider..

For now, let's grab a few truths to take with us to the house and into the world..

Conclusion

#1 - Evil is not in control.

This world is crumbling before our eyes.

It always has been and it always will be.

The world is simply fallen due to the nature of sin.

Our own culture has been spared some of the horrors of fallenness in the past but no more.

Our own way of life is being attacked, and we see the devastation of sin more and more in own lives every day.

For unbelievers, there is rising anxiety and worry, and many simply soothe their minds in sinful ways.

But even believers find greater temptations to worry and be anxious in this climate of evil..

So what do we do?

WE constantly remind ourselves that the Lord is fully sovereign.

He is fully in control.

He is completely aware and at work in all situations to bring glory to Himself and good to His people.

As Jesus was marched to his death, he determined how he would die.

The Jews would never be able to stone him.

The Romans would not be able to beat him to death.

Jesus was orchestrating all the details to put Himself on a cross because that is what He has said and that is what was going to happen.

Even in the chaos of life, there is rest for those who affirm the sovereignty of God.

God has never relinquished control to evil, and He never will.

Sleep well Christian.

Your God has it all under control.

#2 - The kingdom is not of this world.

I could preach this to the cows come home because many in the church have lost sight of the fact that God's kingdom is not of this world.

Sadly, many Christians dedicate their lives to changing to world in various political ways.

Look, it is good to vote if your government allows it.

It is fine to run for office and even stand for truth.

But in the end, our mission is not bring the kingdom to the current world.

Jesus had the power to bring the kingdom in 30 AD, but he told Pilate that His kingdom was not of this world.

We are Christians fighting to bring God's kingdom to this world.

We are Christians fighting to bring people into God's kingdom.

Jesus is going to bring the kingdom at the 2nd coming.

We are simply preaching the gospel as the way into that kingdom.

Make sure that your political priority and every other priority in your life is to make disciples of Christ.

And then finally..

#3 - *God is not on trial.*

As you go into the world, don't put God on trial in your evangelism.

A lot of people look at evangelism as trying to convince others that God exists.

Let me assure you of something church.

God does exist, and when you tell others it is up to them, you remove some of God's glory.

God exists regardless of what they believe.

As you sit here this morning, I can assure you that God is real and Christ is the only way regardless of how you feel about it.

Your opinion of this issue is irrelevant to God's existence.

God says that you have already been given enough information to know that He is real.

So He is not on trial.

You are.

As Jesus stood before Caiaphas and Pilate, they appeared to sit in judgment on Jesus.

But the reality is that he was judging them, and both were guilty.

You may sit in a seat this morning, but it is not a seat of judgment.

It is the seat where the defendant sits in a trial.

And you are completely guilty and God is completely real.

Stop acting like you are a judge of Him, and realize that you are headed to death row without Christ.

Repent and turn to Christ alone and He will show you mercy.

Let us pray.