

**Christ Before Pilate**  
**John 18:28-19:16**  
**Part One**

Jesus told His disciples in **Matthew 5:18** that not the smallest letter or stroke would pass away from the Law until all was accomplished. God's promises are not empty promises. Every single one of them will be fulfilled! And I am hopeful that God will use this morning's message to drive this point home.

In preparation for this message and our continuing study in the Gospel of John, let us quickly review **John 18:12-27**, the passage that we most recently examined, and what did it say?

In **John 18:12-27** we saw the Apostle John interweaving two different dramas: the religious trial of Christ and Peter's denials. This morning in preparation for our message I would like simply to review what John recorded for us about Christ's religious trial.

Christ, after having been arrested just outside of the Garden of Gethsemane, was brought to Annas, the legitimate though not official high priest of Israel. And why was He brought there? He was brought there so that Annas, in a preliminary hearing, might secure information from Christ that could be used against Him in the more formal trials that would shortly follow.

Was Annas successful? No! Not only was he not successful in securing sufficient information through His questioning to indict Christ or to bring official charges against Christ, but he, because of his questioning, was himself indicted by Christ for not seeking out witnesses and interrogating them as the law required. This indictment of Annas by Christ, in effect, ended the preliminary hearing.

So what happened next? We are told in **John 18:24** that Annas, the legitimate high priest of Israel, then sent Christ bound to Caiaphas, the official high priest of Israel. This is what we were told and this is where we left off in our study.

I am now going to be giving you some new information that we will not find in the Gospel of John but will help us better appreciate the next event that John records for us in his Gospel.

So let me ask you this question. What happened to Christ immediately after Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas? John does not tell us. But the other Gospels do. Matthew 26:59-27:2, Mark 14:55-15:1, and Luke 22:63-23:1 indicate that once Christ was sent from Annas to Caiaphas, He endured two different but related religious trials.

The first trial was conducted in the middle of the night and the second trial was conducted early in the morning.

During the first trial Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin sought to find witnesses that would testify against Christ about matters that would lead to His execution and they found some. The only problem was that these witnesses were not able to agree about what they thought they saw or heard.

So, like Annas, Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin resorted to the same tactic that Annas had used. They illegally questioned Christ in order to secure self-incriminating testimony. And the specific question that they asked Christ according to **Mark 14:61** was this: **“Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?”**

Now Christ could have answered Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin like He had answered Annas earlier in the preliminary hearing in effect indicting them for illegally interrogating Him. However He, at this point in time, chose to answer differently and this, according to **Mark 14:62**, is what He said, **“I AM.”** But He was not satisfied simply answering **“I AM** (or in other words, **“I AM the Christ the Son of the Blessed One”**) but went on to say, **“and you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.”**

And how did the high priest respond to this statement? This is what he said, **“What further need do we have of witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy; how does it seem to you?”** And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death.” At that point in time we are told that some of them began to spit at Him, others hit Him with their fists and others began to mock Him.

You might think after determining that Christ was guilty of blasphemy and worthy of death that this would have concluded the religious trial of Jesus but it didn't. Why? It didn't because they themselves knew that this trial was

thoroughly conducted in an illegal manner. They had illegally conducted this trial in the middle of the night. They had illegally interrogated Christ during the course of the trial, and based on His response to their illegal interrogation and without any attempt on their part to discern whether or not what He said was in fact true or not true, they condemned Him to death. And finally, they had illegally allowed Christ to be abused. This trial made a total mockery of their justice system and they knew it.

Therefore in an attempt to make sure, as best as they could, that their image among the general Jewish population would not be damaged or perhaps to salve their own conscience, they arranged for a more orderly trial in the morning to confirm their verdict, which is exactly what they did. So, what was the conclusion of these two different but related religious trials that Christ endured before Caiaphas and the rest of the Sanhedrin?

The two different but related religious trials that Christ endured before Caiaphas both concluded with Christ being found guilty of blasphemy and worthy of death.

So what would have most naturally happened next? You might have thought that the Jews would have immediately taken Jesus out and stoned Him since this is what Jewish Law, according to **Leviticus 24:16**, required and this certainly would have been exactly what they would have wanted to do, but that did not happen. Why? This morning we will find the answer to that question as we begin our examination of **John 18:28 – 19:16**.

John 18:28 – 19:16 is John's account of what took place after Christ was brought before Pilate. We of course will not try and examine each of these verses this morning. All that we will concern ourselves with this morning is: Pilate's initial meeting with Christ's accusers (John 18:28-32).

As we examine these few verses we will see clearly why the Jews, rather than stoning Christ for blasphemy, brought Him to Pilate, and my hope as we study these verses this morning is that our confidence in the trustworthiness of God's Word and all that it has promised will be strengthened. And certainly I believe that we all should be able to see the importance of this in terms of the ups and downs of life along with its many uncertainties.

So now let us take a look at **John 18:28** and see how it begins. And what does it say? **“Then they** [or in other words, the whole of the Sanhedrin, and certainly some if not most of the temple police] **led Jesus from Caiaphas into the Praetorium.”**

The “praetorium” denoted the headquarters of the commanding officer of a Roman military camp, or the headquarters of a Roman military governor.

And who was the Roman military governor in Israel at that particular time? Pontius Pilate was the Roman military governor. Now typically Pontius Pilate’s headquarters would have been in Caesarea, in the palace that Herod the Great had built for himself; but during the Passover season it had been the practice of various Roman military governors, which of course would include Pilate, to make sure that they along with a large detachment of Roman soldiers were in Jerusalem in order to quell any disturbance that might break out.

So at this time Pilate’s praetorium was not in Caesarea, but rather his praetorium was in Jerusalem most likely located in Fort Antonia northwest of the temple complex and connected by steps to the temple’s outer court. This is therefore most likely where the Sanhedrin, plus a large contingent of temple police, took Jesus following the conclusion of Christ’s religious trial.

And what might have been the approximate time when they would have done this? Let us continue to read the verse. **“Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas into the Praetorium and it was early.”** When it says that they took Jesus into the praetorium when it was “early,” we would have to conclude that they took Him into the praetorium just after sunrise or immediately after the religious trial of Christ had been concluded.

But at this point we need to be careful not to become confused. Even though it says that this particular contingent of Jews led Jesus from Caiaphas into the Praetorium, this does not mean that they themselves went into the praetorium with Christ. They did not.

Let us continue to read the **verse 28**. **“And they themselves did not enter into the Praetorium so that they would not be defiled, but might eat the Passover.”** This verse makes it very clear, not only that these Jews did not enter the Praetorium the residence of Pilate while in Jerusalem, it even

explains why. And what was John's explanation for why they did not enter the praetorium?

The Jews who led Jesus to Pilate's praetorium did not enter because they believed they would have been defiled and unable to celebrate the Passover (John 18:28). And why would they have thought this? Let me make one thing perfectly clear to you. It had nothing to do with the Jewish Law, since nowhere in the Jewish Law are Jews not permitted to enter Gentile homes, but rather it was because of Jewish traditions. And how do we know this?

The Mishnah (Oholith 18:7), which is a collection of Jewish traditions, makes it very clear that, from the Jewish perspective, entering a Gentile residence would result in religious defilement.

But how did this belief become a part of their tradition? This tradition became a part of their belief because of a widespread rumor that abortions and premature babies were buried in Roman homes or flushed through their sewers. And it was on this basis of "corpse impurity" that they established this Jewish tradition and enforced it as if it was, in fact, divine law.

Truly this is an amazing picture that John is painting for us here. Here we have men who see no problem in being involved in the crime of judicial murder but who see all kinds of problems with becoming defiled on the basis of human traditions. Truly this group of individuals is a perfect illustration of straining at gnats and swallowing camels.

So what happened next? Let us now read **John 18:29**. **"Therefore Pilate went out to them and said, 'What accusation do you bring against this Man?'"**

I believe that this question took them by surprise. The Jews, in light of the fact that Pilate had most likely approved the use of Roman troops to secure the arrest of Jesus, had expected that he would immediately confirm their judgment, but he didn't (John 18:29). Having been caught off guard and not having a charge that would actually lead to an execution in a Roman civil trial, they responded to Pilate's question, not deferentially, but rather quite defiantly in **John 18:30**.

So let me read this verse for you. **“They answered and said to him, ‘If this Man were not an evil-doer, we would not have delivered Him to you.’”** The Jews, by their response to Pilate in John 18:30, were making it very clear to Pilate that, if he wanted to have their support in maintaining peace in Israel, he had better do their bidding.

And did he know what their bidding was? Of course he did. Pilate certainly knew the Jews had already judged Jesus and had condemned Him. How could he not have know this in light of the fact that he had permitted a whole cohort of Roman soldiers to assist in the arrest of Jesus the night before. He knew what these Jews wanted from him. But he was not cooperating with them. And he also did not like being strong-armed.

So how does Pilate respond? Let us read the first part of **John 18:31**. **“So Pilate said to them, ‘Take Him yourselves, and judge Him according to your law.’”** What was Pilate doing by responding to these very defiant Jews in this way?

Pilate’s response to the Jews in John 18:31 was meant to remind these Jews of their limitations in respect to Roman law.

And did it have its desired effect? Absolutely! Let us continue to read **John 18:31** but this time we will complete the entire verse. **“So Pilate said to them, ‘Take Him yourselves, and judge Him according to your law.’ The Jews said to him, ‘We are not permitted to put anyone to death.’”**

Was that true? Yes, it was true. Though Rome allowed a certain degree of self-government, they alone possessed the right to execute those charged with capital crimes. So, although the people of Israel were autonomous, in the sense they could operate in their own courts, they could not execute people, and so because of this, in a legal sense, these Jews were at the mercy of Pilate.

So now we have answered our original question, haven’t we? And what was the original question? Why was Jesus, after being arrested with the help of Pilate and being found guilty of blasphemy by the Sanhedrin in a religious trial, not immediately stoned?

On a very superficial level, the reason why Jesus was not stoned after His religious trial was because under Roman rule they would not have been permitted to do this (John 18:31).

But if this is all that we see then we are not seeing the bigger picture. And what is the bigger picture? Let us once again read **John 18:31** but this time we will add **John 18:32**. **“So Pilate said to them, ‘Take Him yourselves, and judge Him according to your law.’ The Jews said to him, ‘We are not permitted to put anyone to death,’ [and then John says in verse 32] to fulfill the word of Jesus which He spoke, signifying by what kind of death He was about to die.”** This comment by John gives us the real reason why Jesus was not stoned but rather crucified.

Based on John 18:32, the true reason why Jesus was not stoned was not because Rome did not permit it, but rather it was not consistent with the death Christ prophesied (John 3:14; 8:28; 12:32-33). What did Jesus say to His disciples in **John 3:14**? **“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up.”** What did Jesus say in **John 8:28** to His enemies? **“When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me.”** And what did Jesus say to multitude in **John 12:32-33**? **“And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself.”** Certainly Christ was referring to His crucifixion, which explains perfectly why Jesus had to appear, from a biblical perspective, before Pilate since crucifixion was the Roman form of execution.

So let me ask you a question. Was Christ the first person to indicate that He would die by crucifixion? And the answer is no! Though Christ indicated the manner of His death by crucifixion on numerous occasions, it was King David, in Psalms 22, that described it in even greater detail.

The Jews on numerous occasions had sought to stone Jesus and were unable to do so. They, finally in the garden of Gethsemane, with the help of a Roman cohort under the command of Pontius Pilate, finally were able to secure His arrest. But securing Roman assistance came with a price. They would have to work through Pontius Pilate in order to execute Jesus, thus guaranteeing that if they were successful in working through Pilate, that

Christ, rather than being stoned, would, in fact, be crucified, just as Jesus and the Old Testament Scriptures had prophesied.

There is only one thing in this world that we can put our trust in. And what is that? God's Word! Every promise will be honored and every prophecy fulfilled.

May we, by the grace of God, as we celebrate Christ's death on the cross of Calvary, renew our commitment to build our lives upon the firm foundation of God's Word alone.