

Christ Before Pilate

John 19:1-7

Part 4

One of my very favorite Bible passages is **John 14:1-3**. “**Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. (2) In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. (3) If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.**”

This is my ultimate hope, to be with Christ in glory. This is what excites me. And this thought is what should excite you. Just the thought of this glorious future day should keep everything in this life in perspective, whether it is good or bad.

Isn’t this what Christ communicated to His disciples in **John 14:1-3**? If Christ’s disciples could keep their thoughts focused on this future glorious day, when they would once again be united with Christ, then their hearts, according to Christ, would no longer be troubled, and the same thing is true for us as well. We, as the disciples of Christ, may be in this world but we are not of this world. We are simply passing through.

Can we count on this? Can we count on this no matter who or what might seek to stand in our way? Absolutely! Everything that God in Christ has promised through His Word will, in fact, come to pass no matter what. This truth, I believe, comes alive for us in the passage that we began to study several weeks ago and will continue to study this morning.

In this particular passage, **John 18:32–19:16**, we find Christ before the judgment seat of Pilate. And what have we seen and will continue to see as we continue our study of this passage? We have seen and will continue to see Pilate’s repeated but futile attempts to overturn the promise of Christ concerning the manner of His death. Christ had promised His disciples in **John 3:14; 8:28** as well as **John 12:32-33** that He would die by crucifixion.

Therefore, based on the promises of Christ to His disciples that are recorded for us in His Word, Christ could not die by a heart attack, by cancer or by a stroke or by stoning. Christ had to die by crucifixion. And there was no one

including Pilate that could keep this from happening. And this is exactly what we will see as we continue our study.

And of course my hope for this study is that Pilate's inability to thwart the promise of Christ concerning the manner of His death might reassure us that no promise of Christ can be thwarted, including Christ's promise that one day He will return and take us back with Him to glory. This is my hope for this message.

So, what was the first part of Christ's trial that we have examined? The first part was Pilate's initial meeting with Christ's accusers (John 18:28-32). This meeting was in a sense a preliminary hearing, which resulted in formal charges being brought against Christ.

So, what was the second part of this trial? The second part of the trial was Pilate's initial examination of Christ (John 18:33-38a). This initial examination of Christ concluded with Pilate concluding that all the Jewish charges against Christ were, in fact, bogus and therefore without any basis.

But even though he had found Christ innocent and should have released Him, he did not do this because he felt he needed to protect his own political career. He therefore, rather than releasing Christ based on his findings, tried to find another way to release Christ without provoking the Jews and thus jeopardizing his own personal interests.

This balancing act led to the third part of Christ's trial before Pilate. And what was the third part of the trial? Pilate, being convinced of Christ's innocence, sought for the very first time to deliver Christ from crucifixion by offering the Jews a choice between Barabbas and Christ (John 18:38b-40). So let me read this passage for you.

Now remember what I am about to read you took place after the initial preliminary hearing and after Pilate's initial examination of Christ. **“And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews and said to them, ‘I find no guilt in Him. (39) But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover; do you wish then that I release for you the King of the Jews?’ (40) So they cried out again, saying, ‘Not this Man, but Barabbas.’ Now Barabbas was a robber.”**

Now who exactly was Barabbas? Barabbas, according to **Mark 15:7**, had committed murder during a Jewish insurrection, but he was not nearly as noble as other Jewish insurrectionists. He also, according to **John 18:40**, was a robber, which in effect reduced him to simply a murderous thug. This was the choice that Pilate offered to the Jewish people. And of course we all know whom Pilate thought the Jewish multitude would choose to have him to release. He thought that they would choose Jesus, and why was this?

Pilate believed that many Jews, based on His triumphal entry into Jerusalem just a few days before, actually believed that Jesus was their king and would therefore gladly accept His offer to have Jesus released in honor of the tradition that had been established.

But Pilate had very much underestimated the fickleness of people in general and the hatred of the Jewish leaders in particular. And as a result, his first attempt to protect Christ from crucifixion and inadvertently thwart the promise of Christ concerning the manner of His death had failed miserably.

But Pilate is not done. Pilate will continue to seek to find a way to protect Christ from crucifixion while at the same time trying to protect his own political career, which leads us to the fourth part of Jesus trial before Pilate.

Let me now read for you **John 19:1-7**. **“Pilate then took Jesus and scourged Him. (2) And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and put a purple robe on Him; (3) and they began to come up to Him and say, ‘Hail, King of the Jews!’ And to give Him slaps in the face. (4) Pilate came out again and said to them, ‘Behold, I am bringing Him out to you so that you may know that I find no guilt in Him.’ (5) Jesus then came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, ‘Behold, the Man!’ (6) So when the chief priests and the officers saw Him, they cried out saying, ‘Crucify! crucify!’ Pilate said to them, ‘Take Him yourselves and crucify Him, for I find no guilt in Him.’ The Jews answered him, ‘We have a law, and by that law He ought to die because He made Himself out to be the Son of God.’”** These verses record for us the fourth part of Christ’s trial. So, what was this fourth part of His trial? The fourth part of Christ’s trial was Pilate’s second attempt to deliver Christ from crucifixion (John 19:1-7).

So now let us take a look at the very first verse. **“Pilate then took Jesus and scourged Him.”** Now why did Pilate do this? Why did Pilate have Jesus scourged? Clearly it was not in preparation for His crucifixion.

Based on Luke 23:16, Pilate had Jesus scourged, not to prepare Him for crucifixion, but rather to prepare Him for release. “Therefore [in speaking to the Jewish multitude, he said...] I will punish Him [or in other words, I will scourge Him] and release Him.” So was the scourging of Christ to prepare Jesus for crucifixion or release? He was scourged in order to prepare Him for release.

So, what was Pilate thinking? Why did Pilate think that by scourging Christ he might then be able to release Christ without producing civil unrest in the city of Jerusalem?

Pilate believed that if he beat and mutilated Christ by scourging Him that it might satisfy the Jews, thus making it possible for him to release Christ without causing a riot.

It might be difficult for us to appreciate how the scourging of Christ in Pilate’s mind could have satisfied the Jewish hostility toward Christ. But if we truly understand the nature of scourging and how truly horrific this procedure was I believe that we can better understand the thinking of Pilate.

A Roman scourge was a thick stick wrapped in leather. At the end of this stick were leather thongs of some length. On the ends of those leather thongs were bits of brass, lead and bone. The victim was either stretched flat on the ground with his back facing up, tied hanging to a post, or strapped suspended above the ground. Then the man who was accustomed to performing the scourging would lash the back forty times with the scourge. From what we understand from historians, the back of the victim was torn and lacerated to such an extent that even the deep-seated veins and arteries, and sometimes the entrails and inner organs, were exposed.

This is the punishment that Pilate in **John 19:1** directed Christ to undergo. And this is exactly what took place. But this was not all that Christ would suffer.

In addition to the scourging, the Roman soldiers also took the time to mock Jesus (John 19:2-3).

Let me now read for you **John 19:2-3**. “**And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and put a purple robe on Him; (3) and they began to come up to Him and say, ‘Hail, King of the Jews!’ and to give Him slaps in the face.**” This behavior on the part of the Roman soldiers, though not necessarily authorized, was certainly not unusual for them. They often times made sport of those whom they deemed pathetic individuals. And apparently in their minds Jesus qualified as such.

So how did this mocking of Jesus most likely unfold? It appears that the first thing they did after they had scourged Christ was to put a crown of thorns of His head. And of course they most likely did not simply place it on His head. They most likely would have pressed it down on His head in such a way that the thorns would have penetrated the scalp causing drops of blood to run down His face and His neck. Then what? After they had pressed the crown of thorns down upon His head, they then found a purple robe and put it on Him. This most likely was a discarded and faded soldier’s mantel.

In addition to this, they also found a reed that they placed into in His hand as a mock scepter. This is not recorded for us **John 19**, but it is recorded for us in **Matthew 27:2**. And finally, after dressing Him up as a clownish caricature of a king, they paraded themselves before Him and said to Him, “Hail, king of the Jews!” And as they did this they most likely gave to Jesus a mocking Roman salute, which was then followed by a what? A slap!

And while all this was going, how do you believe Christ was responding? Was He filled with anger, hatred, with a desire for revenge? No! He, while suffering unjustly, patiently endured. And this is what we need to do. In fact, this according to **1 Peter 2:21** is all a part of following in the footsteps of Jesus. And we need to consider it a privilege.

Then what happened? After Jesus had been scourged and mocked, Pilate ordered Christ to be brought out so that the Jewish multitude could see Him (John 19:4-5). So let me read these verses for you. “**Pilate came out again and said to them, ‘Behold, I am bringing Him out to you so that you may know that I find no guilt in Him.’ (5) Jesus then came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, ‘Behold,**

the Man!” Not, “Behold your king,” but rather he said, “Behold, the Man,” thus highlighting for the Jewish multitude the weakness of Christ rather than any supposed strength He or others might think He had.

Pilate, in displaying Christ as a mutilated cartoonish caricature of a king, hoped that the Jewish multitude would think Christ had suffered enough.

Once again Pilate had made a serious mistake in judgment. He failed to take into account the true nature of their hatred. It was deep. It was intense and it was satanically inspired. Therefore, rather than the Jews calling out for His release, believing that Jesus had suffered enough, they went on to express their desire to see Him die and to die by crucifixion.

Let me now read for you **John 19:6**. “**So when the chief priests and the officers saw Him, they cried out saying, ‘Crucify, crucify!’**” This response obviously was a very big disappointment to Pilate.

So how will Pilate respond to this outcry on the part of these Jewish authorities! Let us continue to read **John 19:6**. “**So when the chief priests and officers saw Him, they cried out saying, ‘Crucify, crucify!’**” **Pilate said to them, ‘Take Him yourselves and crucify Him, for I find no guilt in Him.’**”

When we read this it might appear to us that Pilate had finally given up trying to protect Christ from crucifixion. But this is not how we should we should understand the words of Pilate at all.

When Pilate said to the Jews, “Take Him yourselves and crucify Him,” he was not officially transferring to them the power to execute. He was sarcastically taunting them.” How do we know this? We know this because the Jewish leaders, rather than taking him up on his offer, appealed to Pilate on a completely differently level.

So let us now read **John 19:7**. “**The Jews answered Him [Great hand Him over! No this is not what they said. Rather they said], ‘We have a law, and by that law He ought to die because He made Himself out to be the Son of God.’**”

Earlier, the Jews, in approaching Pilate to have Christ executed, found themselves providing Pilate with three different charges against Christ all related to Roman law. This was not apparent from our account in **John 18 and 19**, but this was made clear to us when we went back and read **Luke 23:2**.

So now once again we find the Jewish leaders bringing charges against Christ. But this time they are not secular charges. The Jews, realizing that Pilate was refusing to crucify Christ based on Roman law, appealed to Pilate to crucify Christ on the basis of Jewish law (John 19:7).

This is a very interesting twist in the legal proceedings before Pilate. Why in the world would he even consider a charge against Christ based on Jewish law?

Pilate was not only responsible for enforcing Roman Law, but could enforce local laws as well when it came to the matter of Pax Romana or in other words Roman peace.

The Jews have now have placed Pilate in a very difficult position. Pilate could certainly refuse to listen to this particular charge against Christ because it really has nothing to do with Roman Law, but on the other hand he knows that if he refuses to listen to this new charge then he could very well be found guilty by Rome of failing to maintain the peace when he, in fact, was in a position to do so if the Jews did, in fact, choose to riot.

So let me ask you a question. Had Christ made Himself out to be the Son of God therefore inferring that He had the same rights and authority as God Himself? Yes! He had! So if Pilate agreed to consider their more recent charge, which was based on Jewish Law rather than Roman Law, what would be Pilate's responsibility? If Pilate chose to consider the Jewish charge that Christ had made Himself out to be the Son of God, it would be his responsibility to determine if Jesus had done that and if it were true.

So will Pilate now consider this new charge? Yes! He will and this will lead to Pilate's second examination of Christ, which we will consider next week.

Christ had promised His disciples that at the time of His death He would be lifted up on a Roman cross. Christ had also promised His disciples that He

would one day return for them and receive them to Himself, that where He was they would be also.

Are the promises of Christ sure! Absolutely! There is no power in heaven or earth that can thwart the promises of Christ.

If Christ told His disciples that He would be crucified on a Roman cross that is exactly how He would die. He would not die of a heart attack, cancer or by stoning. He would die just as He said He would die no matter how relentlessly Pilate worked to protect Him.

And the same thing is true for us in respect to our future hope of spending eternity with Christ in glory. If we have placed our faith and trust in Him alone for our salvation, we will one day be with Him. There is no power in heaven or earth that can thwart us from realizing this hope.

May God give us the grace to build our lives on the promises of Christ knowing that they are certain and cannot be thwarted.