

April 3, 2022

“Jesus Testifies to the Truth”
Lesson 5 of Unit

John 18:28-38

Intro

Most of the countries of the world has had a king at some point in their history. It could have been a tribal chieftain, or the city king, or someone like a Roman emperor. The nation of Israel had a long history of Kings, beginning with Saul about 1050 BC and ending with the Babylonian exile in 586 BC. There was no other king in Jerusalem for about 400 years.

This new “king” was Judas Maccabee, and later members of his family. He liberated Jerusalem in 165 BC, and took the title “King of the Jews”, although this title was done with the approval of the Roman empire. Herod the Great took the title of king of the Jews from the Maccabees in 37 BC. Unlike Judas Maccabee, Herod served Rome as king, not the nation of Israel. When Herod's reign ended, his kingdom was split up, with Judea going to his son Herod Archelaus. He was so poor a ruler that the Romans exiled him and installed a Roman governor in his place.

This history is one of tension between Jews like Judas Maccabee who wanted freedom from Rome and a return and Jews like Herod, who sided with Rome. The faithful Jews of Jesus' day hated Rome and those Jews who helped Rome, wanting a deliverance like that of Judas Maccabee and a king like David. The Romans were aware of this, and were not about to let that happen.

Pontius Pilate was one of the Roman governors of Judea, serving from 26-36 AD, which is a longer term than most governors served. He spent most of his time in the coastal town of Caesarea Maritima. He was in Jerusalem, like other Roman governors before him, during the Passover in case any type of rebellion was attempted.

Read John 18:28-38

1. vs. 28: This verse talks about Caiaphas, who is the high priest at the time

There is also a 2nd high priest, Anna, Caiaphas's father-in-law

The Roman governor of Syria, Quirinius, appointed him as high priest in 7 AD

Annas was removed in about 14-15 AD by Valerius Gratus, another governor

Annas apparently was not easy for the Romans to control or manipulate

He apparently maintained a powerful influence

Luke 3:2 refers to “the priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas”, as if they were co-high priests

John 18:13 notes that Jesus is taken from Pontius Pilate to Annas first, before Jesus is taken to Caiaphas

Acts 4:5 refers to Annas as “the high priest”, even though he was deposed roughly 15 years earlier

Annas appears to be the mover, working with Caiaphas

The palace mentioned is likely the one formerly used by Herod the Great

John uses the word “praetorium”, referring to a military headquarters

This palace has a place for the governor to receive audiences
However, the Jews cannot associate with Gentiles without becoming ceremonially
“unclean”

If they become unclean, they cannot participate in the Passover the next day

2. vs. 29: Three things of importance happen in this verse

1) Pilate comes out to the group, so they don't have to come in

This could be seen as a kindness, a concession, on his part

As the governor, he certainly could have demanded they come in to see him

2) Pilate gets right to business—no small talk

He asks for the charges against Jesus

The word used for “charges” is where we get our word “category”

Pilate's asking for the formal category of charges, based on the written law

He's insisting that everything be legal, based on the law

3) The Jews have had to come to Pilate to get this ruling against Jesus

They are under Roman law/rule, so they can't do this on their own

Having to come to Pilate might have been humbling

It shows that they aren't the masters of their own land

3. vs. 30: The Jews' answer doesn't list the charges

They basically say, “He's a criminal. We've already established that. All you need to do is sign the death warrant.”

4. vs. 31: The Romans allowed the Jews to carry out their own law system

Pilate tells them, “Judge him by your own laws”

The Jews respond by saying “We have no right to execute anyone”

The Romans don't allow the Jews to use capital punishment

The law says that blasphemy is punishable by death (see Lev. 24:16)

Jesus has been convicted by the Sanhedrin of blasphemy (Matt. 26:63-66, Mark 14:61-64)

There is a kind of game going on here

Both sides know the Romans control things, and also what Jewish law/custom says

5. vs. 32: God's divine plan for Jesus is at work in what is happening between Pilate and the Jews

If the Jews could execute Jesus, they would stone him to death (Lev. 24:16)

Jesus knew the death he would suffer would be on a cross

He said he would be “lifted up” (John 12:32-33)

He knew He would be convicted in a Gentile court (Mark 10:33-34)

This event is further proof of Jesus' divinity and the power of God

Jesus predicts these things well before they happen

Jesus couldn't make them happen as they do while on earth; only God could

6. vs. 33: Pilate goes back into the palace to talk to Jesus, who is being kept there

The Jews won't go in because it would ceremonially defile them

They aren't concerned that Jesus, a Jew Himself, will be defiled

This could indicate that they don't think he will live to enjoy Passover

Over the next several verses, Pilate asks Jesus multiple questions

The first is here: "Are you the king of the Jews?"

Remember from the intro that the Romans will not allow the Jews to have a king

If Jesus is the "king of the Jews", then he will be killed

Jesus and His disciples have been active and increasingly known for 3 years

It's hard to imagine that Pilate isn't aware of all that He has done

There is no Scripture showing Pilate as concerned about Jesus as the "king"

7. vs. 34: Jesus answers the question with a question

His response shows calm

This whole situation is under God's control

He basically asks Pilate, "Who told you (accused Me?) of being a king?"

Jesus is making Pilate aware that He knows who is being all the charges

8. vs. 35: Pilate asks his second question

"Am I a Jew?"

It's a rhetorical question; both Pilate and Jesus know that he is not a Jew

The question is essentially a complaint / defense

Pilate knows he's being dragged into something he wants no part of

Pilate is in a no-win situation

If he lets Jesus go, he angers and alienates the powerful in his province

If he kills Jesus, he has become the pawn of those powerful Jews

So Pilate looks to Jesus for a way out

"What have you done?" (in other words, "Why are they so angry with you?")

9. vs. 36: Jesus' answer doesn't resolve Pilate's dilemma

Jesus says His kingdom "is not of this world"—it and He are not a threat to Rome

Jesus points out that His disciples did not fight when He was arrested

There is Peter's brief attempt, but Jesus healed the wounded man

Jesus points this out as proof that His kingdom is not on Earth

Pilate is not helped by this answer

It's truth doesn't answer the question of why these men want to kill Jesus

10. vs. 37: The first response from Pilate has been translated in two different fashions

Some translate it as a statement: "You are a king, then!"

Some translate it as a question: "You are a king, then?"

Jesus' response in vs. 36 about His kingdom creates another question for Pilate

If you are a king of some kind, what sort of king are you?

Jesus' explanation doesn't clear things up for Pilate

His answer doesn't deal with politics or religion/faith

He talks about truth

He says in essence that He is the king of those who love the truth

11. vs. 38: Pilate's last question is "What is truth?"

It's a good question, and calls for some discussion

However, Scripture says that Pilate leaves to go talk to the Jews

It appears that Pilate doesn't wait for an answer from Jesus

Pilate tells the Jews there is "no basis for a charge against him"

Legally, there isn't a case

The ball is now back in the Jewish leadership's court

Application: The Bible rightly does not separate Truth from God, for all truth comes from God. Just hours before appearing before Pilate, Jesus prayed to God, "Sanctify them (the disciples) by the truth; your word is truth" (John 17:17). Jesus says of Himself in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." Pilate was in the presence of the Truth, and didn't see it. This is true also of those in our world who reject Jesus. We are blessed to have our spiritual eyes and hearts open to be able to respond rightly to the Truth.

Prayer: Father God, as with the first disciples, we also desire to be sanctified in Your truth. Help us to continually hear Jesus' voice and to obey His call and trust Him in all circumstances. In Jesus name, Amen.