
The Crimes Of Christ

“Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas into the Praetorium, and it was early; and they themselves did not enter into the Praetorium so that they would not be defiled, but might eat the Passover. Therefore Pilate went out to them and said, ‘What accusation do you bring against this Man?’” (John 18:28, 29).

When morning came, Jesus was taken to Pilate, the Roman governor. Annas, Caiaphas, and the Sanhedrin had already made their decisions concerning Christ. They had united in finding Him guilty of blasphemy and in concluding that He should be executed (Matthew 26:66). Next, they had to take Him to the Roman governor. They hoped to present to Pilate a case that would convince him to render a similar verdict and pronounce the sentence of death upon Jesus.

Seizing the early part of the morning, they took Jesus to Pilate so that he could try Him. The clock was ticking against them, for the day would quickly pass and the observance of the Passover would begin. If they were not able to have Jesus condemned to crucifixion that Friday morning, their opportune time for His condemnation would be gone. If they held Jesus in custody until after the Passover, it would be even more difficult to get the judgment that they wanted against Him.

When Archelaus, heir to Herod the Great, was banished to Gaul in A.D. 6, the territory that he ruled—Judea, Samaria, and Idumaea—was made into a province and was placed under a Roman procurator, or governor. Pilate was the fifth in a line of procurators to serve over this region. He had held this position for six years before the trial of Jesus. Having been appointed in A.D. 26, he remained in office four more years, until A.D. 36, when he was deposed. Even at this time, his relationship with the Jews and Rome was in peril. Because of his cruelty and poor leadership, Rome was ready to replace

him—and the Jews despised him. At times, he had dealt with them brutally, even mingling the blood of some Jews with their sacrifices at the temple (Luke 13:1). His tenuous and declining relationship with Rome and the Jews pressured him to be more concerned about keeping the peace than about rendering a just sentence regarding a controversial prisoner.

The governor made it a point to be in Jerusalem during a major feast like the Passover. The population would swell, maybe even doubling or tripling, from the influx of visitors who gathered in the holy city to kill their paschal lambs and observe the week of unleavened bread. Pilate knew that at Jewish gatherings of this magnitude, the possibility of a riot or an uprising of some kind was always present. Therefore, he would travel from Caesarea with reinforcements and would stay in Fortress Antonia, a palace-like structure that was located near the temple. Supposedly, he was always present, prepared, and ready for any problem that might arise.

As Jesus was taken to Pilate for the Roman trial that He would have to endure, He was led through a gateway and out to the open pavement in front of the palace where Pilate stayed. This was typical, for such a trial as this usually took place in the open, public space between the two wings of the palace. The chair of state, draped in purple, was carried out. Pilate took his seat on it, listened to the charges against the accused person, and then rendered a verdict. The accused stood before him with the witnesses on each side of him or in a group to one

side of him. As procurator, Pilate sat in his chair and engaged in the necessary interrogation. At the end of the process, he issued his verdict. The whole affair was conducted in a manner similar to a public forum.

For Jesus' trial, Pilate must have been told that the Sanhedrin wanted to see him and that he needed to be ready to meet them. Pilate probably knew, as John recorded, that the members of the Sanhedrin did not want to go inside the Praetorium because they would become ceremonially unclean and would be unable to partake of the Passover (John 18:28). Therefore, when the chief priests took Jesus to Pilate, he was already outside the Praetorium, ready to meet with them. Jesus' trial was conducted primarily in the open area on The Pavement, although at times Pilate took Jesus inside to talk with Him alone, away from the tumult.

When the Jews arrived with Jesus, Pilate's first question called for a listing of the charges against the accused. He said, "What accusation do you bring against this Man?" (John 18:29). These chief priests were then to present their evidence and state a valid case against Jesus. The first-time reader might think, "Now the truth will surface!" These men had no evidence that Jesus had committed any crime. What kind of judges were these? Was this a kangaroo court or a true court of law? In presenting their case, the Jews were confused about what to say due to their lack of evidence.

In desperation, they first asked for a "take-our-word-for-it" decision. They said, "If this Man were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him to you" (John 18:30). Their appeal was "Let us skip the talk about evidence. We have already decided the matter. Just support our judgment in this matter and announce that He should be crucified!"

This approach did not work; Pilate did not fall for their ploy. He told them, "Take Him yourselves, and judge Him according to your law" (John 18:31a). In other words, he replied, "Why have you come to me? If I am not going to be a part of this, then you handle it. If I cannot judge Him according to Roman law, then you judge Him according to your Jewish law." His response forced them to say, "We are not permitted to put anyone to death" (John 18:31b). "No," they implied, "we cannot do it without

you." It humbled them to admit that they needed Pilate's concurring verdict, but they forfeited their pride as they stumbled forward to get his judgment. "All right, then," Pilate must have said, "I will handle this according to Rome's will, not yours." Sometime following this interchange, Pilate took Jesus inside and interrogated Him alone.

At this point in the trial, as a kind of statement of the charges, they cried out that Jesus was a seducer and a perverter of the people. Perhaps after Pilate's clear declaration that he would try Him according to Roman law or not at all, many of the Jews cried out, "We found this man misleading our nation . . ."; "He stirs up the people, teaching all over Judea, starting from Galilee even as far as this place" (Luke 23:2a; 5b). In order to get a conviction, the Sanhedrin had to change its verdict to charges. This high and holy court of the Jews had already reached the verdict that Jesus should die because of His claim to be the Son of God, but before Pilate they had to make some sort of charge against Him that Rome would consider contemptible. Jesus' claim to deity would not concern Rome; therefore, they quickly twisted what they knew about Him and made it appear that He was a troublemaker, a deceiver of the people, one who roused the people to riot.

Yes, the Gospels confirm that people had gone out in large numbers to hear Jesus, as they had to hear John the Baptist. However, Jesus had never instigated a riot or caused any political unrest. Pilate could see through this accusation.

Further, as they continued to fabricate charges against Jesus, they told Pilate that Jesus taught people to withhold tribute from Caesar. In the same breath that charged Jesus as a seducer, they voiced this indictment. Shouting in an almost unbroken sentence, with the noise of an accusation that had no factual basis, they said, "We found this man . . . forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar" (Luke 23:2a, b). This charge was patently false. It was an unmitigated lie.

Jesus had indeed addressed this issue when He had been asked about it, but He had said the opposite of what they were charging. Review the occasion as recorded in Matthew 22. Jesus said, "Show Me the coin used for the poll-tax." Someone gave Him a denarius. He then said,

“Whose likeness and inscription is this?” They answered, “Caesar’s.” He said, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; and to God the things that are God’s” (Matthew 22:19–21). He gave them the perfect answer to their question about the lawfulness of Roman taxation. Those who heard Him “were amazed,” and left Him, marveling at what He had said (Matthew 22:22). Nothing but blinding envy and hatred could take a response like this and configure it to mean that Jesus had said they should withhold tribute from Caesar. Because they had no evidence with which to accuse Him, Jesus’ enemies voiced this lie about Him.

Continuing further to grope for an accusation that would get Pilate’s attention, they blurted out that Jesus claimed to be a king and was a threat to the empire. They said, “We found this man . . . saying that He Himself is Christ, a King” (Luke 23:2). This accusation was surely a serious charge to the ears of Pilate. The Jews knew that they had to make Jesus appear to be a threat to Rome, or they were not going to get the verdict that they desired. Yes, Jesus, the Son of God, was King: He was King of God’s spiritual kingdom. He will reign over it until the end of time (1 Corinthians 15:24). His rulership in no way conflicted with or violated the political dominion of the emperor or the Roman Empire.

Later, in his personal interview with Jesus, Pilate asked Him, “Are You the King of the Jews?” (Matthew 27:11a). Jesus answered, “It is as you say” (Matthew 27:11b), but He explained that His kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36). His kingdom was not an earthly kingdom like Rome; it was spiritual, involving God’s will and God’s heavenly purposes. After

hearing Jesus’ explanation of His kingdom, Pilate said, “I find no guilt in Him” (John 18:38).

After hearing the flimsy charges made against the Christ by these corrupt judges who could not bear the light of Jesus’ purity and truth, Pilate announced three times that he had found no guilt in Him (John 18:38; 19:4; 12). However, he was trapped between what Rome might do if one more riot broke out or one more tumultuous situation were mishandled, and what these chief priests and their followers might do if they did not get their way. In the end, Pilate melted from fear and weakness.

What, then, were the crimes that Jesus committed? For what sinister deeds was Jesus crucified? The truth of the matter is this: Jesus, the second member of the Godhead, came in the flesh to show us what God is like, to give us His way of salvation so that we could be rescued from our sin, to tell us of God’s love for us, to prepare us to live as part of His spiritual kingdom, and to get us ready to live eternally with Him. If these high and holy purposes are crimes, then reality is undone. If Jesus was guilty of any crime, then the ocean has no water, the atmosphere has no air, and there is no such thing as truth.

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Jesus—perfect, matchless, and sinless—was crucified because He, the Son of God, brought God’s love and light to our world. Men, blinded by their sin, did not want Him here and did not want to receive what He offered.