

The King of the Jews – *John 18:39 – 19:22*

Introduction – If Pilate had been a man of integrity, his judicial decision would have ended the matter (18:38). Instead, for many reasons, he offered to release Jesus in accordance with a custom at that season (18:39). It goes bad for Pilate. It goes worse for the Jewish authorities and the crowd they corral. Mocking, threatening, and humiliating go back and forth and in the end, Jesus is sent to be crucified. In the midst of it all, the love of God over His Son provides Him with perfect strength: “*You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, for he trusts in You*” (Isaiah 26:3).

A Detailed Overview: We begin by carefully walking through the narrative as John presents it -

Barabbas (18:39-40) – The other gospels tell us Barabbas was an insurrectionist who was guilty of murder. The Sanhedrin would not desire this troublemaker to be set free and so Pilate appeals to this as a means of releasing Jesus (as though He had been guilty but then released). Jesus had claimed He was a king and so, mockingly Pilate asks if they would like the “*King of the Jews*” released. The authorities vehemently reject the offer.

Back in the Praetorium (19:1-4) – Pilate tries again. He has Jesus scourged (this may have been one of two floggings, the second would be given after the sentence of death and would be much more brutal). The Roman soldiers twist a crown of thorns on Jesus’ head, mockingly “*Hail*” Him as king and strike Him with their fists. Pilate then goes out to the Jews again, repeats his verdict that Jesus is innocent, and says He will bring Him out (trying to appease the Jews with the violent shaming of Jesus). Isaiah 50:6 comes to mind.

“Behold the Man” (19:5-6) – Jesus is brought out, bloodied and dressed in a purple robe. Mockingly, to both Jesus and to the Jews, Pilate cries out “*Behold, the Man!*” Zechariah (6:11-13) was told by God to make a crown of silver and gold and to set it on the head of the high priest, Joshua (Hebrew, Jesus in Greek), and then proclaim, “*Behold the Man...*” But instead, the chief priests and officers cried out, “*Crucify! Crucify!*” Peter denied Jesus three times and for the third time Pilate proclaims that he can find no fault in Jesus. He doesn’t want to have anything to do with Jesus and so He tells the Jews to do the deed themselves.

The Son of God (19:7-11) – The Jews make clear that he should die because Jesus made Himself the Son of God. For the superstitious Romans, the claim that Jesus was some kind of god was not so implausible – and Pilate just had him whipped. He was “very much afraid” and takes Jesus back into the Praetorium and asks Him where He is from. But Jesus remained silent. The pressure is on and Pilate must have felt that Jesus didn’t realize he was trying to get Him released – “*don’t you know the power I have?*” But Jesus knows where all authority comes from. Even the vilest use of power cannot escape God’s sovereignty while at the same time rendering guilty those who are free, responsible agents. Jesus then says that those with more knowledge have the greater sin than Pilate who is sinning in ignorance.

The Politics of Pilate and the Blasphemy of the Jews (19:12-16) – The Jews paint Pilate into a political corner, threatening to give report to Tiberius Caesar that Pilate let a man go who claimed the throne. Pilate concedes but does so rendering as much humiliation as possible upon the chief priests and officers. He brings Jesus onto the Pavement where the judgment seat was for rendering public sentencing. It was in a portion of the temple where a common place existed for Gentiles to enter, elevated and paved with smooth stones. Either Pilate sits in the seat or possibly sits Jesus there (the Greek is ambiguous) and declares, “*Behold, your King!*” Jesus Himself said He was the new temple (John 2:19) and He is the stone that the builders rejected (Matt 21:42). And it is here that the Jews cry out “*Away with Him! Crucify!*” Pilate pokes them again, “*Shall I crucify your King?*” and the chief priests disown their King, their God, their Messiah, and any messianic hope – for expediency. Compare their creed, “*we have no king but Caesar*” with Psalm 44:4, 74:12, Luke 1:32-33, John 12:13. Pilate’s cowardly hands were tied and so he delivered Him over to the soldiers (this is where the extremely violent scourging would take place to weaken the criminal so that he wouldn’t survive on the cross for too long).

The King of the Jews (19:17-22) – It was common for those condemned to bear the horizontal beam of the cross after the scourging. Golgotha (Calvary in Latin) was named apparently for its appearance – a hill that looked like a skull. Naked, bleeding, nailed to the cross, the ghoulis, torturous death was to bring the greatest shame upon the victim. The crimes for which one was crucified would be written on a tablet and attached to the cross. Pilate, again to provoke the Jews, wrote “*The King of the Jews*” and did so in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin so all could read. This incensed the Jews but Pilate would not back down.

(John has more to tell us, but we will stop here for now). – So what happened? What really happened?

Crucifixion – This form of death was done for public humiliation, shame, torturous pain administered slowly and intensely. And yet, through all of this, Jesus despised the shame (Heb 12:2). Jesus took upon Himself your sin AND your shame. Never forget that.

If Jesus was the Son of God, how could He be crucified? This was a scandal to the Jew. And to the Gentile it made no sense at all (1 Cor 1:23). How is a King crucified a sign of victory? But we celebrate the cross, we wear crosses, as a badge of honor, identifying with His shame – because it was ours He bore on the cross. Later, the disciples would rejoice to share in the shame when they are punished (Acts 6:40-42). Paul would write similarly while in prison (Phil 3:7-11).

And note what Paul says of this crucifixion: “*And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it*” (Co 2:13-15). The moment of shame was actually the moment of conquest – for those who have eyes to see – for those who are given faith.

We can look at these events and notice Jesus triumphing over both the desires and actions of the Jews and Pilate. But something far deeper was taking place. Nailing Jesus to the Cross at Golgotha was the fulfillment of Gen 3:15 where God promised that the Seed of the Woman would crush the head of the Serpent. Just as Jael drove a spike into the skull of Sisera, so Jesus, the seed of a virgin-woman, drove His spike, the Cross, into the Place of a Skull.

When I Survey the Wondrous Cross – If you aren’t looking with eyes of faith, you see shame and foolishness. But with eyes of faith, you see “love so amazing, so divine,” and a love that conquered sin and death – your sin and death.

Romans 9:33 - “As it is written: “Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.””