
Day 1

Learn: Prayerfully read John 18.37-40. Pilate found no basis for accusing Jesus, but instead of setting Jesus free, he continued posturing with the Jewish religious leaders, chiding them with the use of the title “King of the Jews” and trying to get them to say he should set Jesus free. The custom of setting free a prisoner was Pilate’s own, a way of appeasing the locals. The name Barabbas in Aramaic [the locally spoken language of that area in that day] meant “son of the father,” which must have seemed ironic to John: the Jewish religious leaders were asking for the release of a man named “son of the father,” while trying to condemn Jesus who really was the divine Son of God the Father. There is another irony, one which even Pilate must have noted. While the Greek term used to describe Barabbas can mean “robber” [as in NASB, ESV, NKJV], it also can refer to a rebel guerilla [NET, HCSB, NIV, NLT], and Barabbas was imprisoned along with rebels who had committed murder in a riot [Mark 15.7]. This was exactly the type of person the religious leaders wanted Pilate to think Jesus was, a threat to Roman rule. They were asking for freedom for a true rebel against Rome and crucifixion for an innocent man falsely accused of the same thing.

Reflect: Reflect today on Jesus being both God and man; reflect also on God being Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each having their own personalities and activities, but so unified in essence, character, and will that they are one God.

Day 2

Learn: Prayerfully read John 19.1-4. Pilate figured a whipping would suffice. He would have no qualms about whipping an innocent non-Roman [especially if it kept the peace during a Jewish religious festival], and expected the religious leaders to subside once they saw Jesus had been brutalized. The Romans gave “light” whipping for minor offenses, brutal flogging for serious offenses, and terrible scourging for those sentenced to death [so fierce it often left the accused dead]. Jesus received the worst kind before he went to the cross, but – comparing the four gospel accounts – it appears this was an earlier event, so it probably was the mildest form, still brutal and painful, but not as bad as what was to come. The soldiers engaged in vulgar barracks mockery, typical pagan behavior. The robe probably was an old military tunic, the purple color mocking the claim of royalty. The crown represented the radiant corona portrayed on an emperor’s head on coins [like the Statue of Liberty has]. The thorns might have been from date palms, ironic after the crowd waved date palm branches while welcoming Jesus as their king just five days earlier. The soldiers also welcomed Jesus as king, though in a mocking fashion; the Greek verb form indicates they repeatedly were taking turns to greet him sarcastically before smacking him in the face. The irony is that Jesus really is a king, and not just any king, but God the Father’s chosen and permanent king for the entire world!

Reflect: Talk with Jesus about being your king; commit to submit to him in *all* things; prayerfully confess to him about how you could improve in your obedience.

Day 3

Learn: Prayerfully read John 19.4-7. Jesus had been whipped and beaten repeatedly about the face. He appeared before the religious leaders dressed in his purple tunic with a crown of thorns, swollen, bruised, bloody, dirty. Pilate presented him as “the man,” meaning “the accused,” but also sarcastically, “*the man* you all think is a threat!” “*the man* y’all say calls himself a king!” To Pilate, Jesus is innocent of anything serious, so this is a joke. He showed Jesus as one who was not a threat, but easily brought under Pilate’s control, ridiculous and harmless, even senseless by this time. Pilate expected the religious leaders to compromise and be satisfied with the punishment already given. The irony is that here truly was “the one-of-a-kind man,” the Word made flesh, the pure man and image of God. They could not sense his glory as the unique Son of God, Messiah and king, but he was demonstrating it by willingly taking their best shot in order to fulfill his mission, willingly undergoing what he could have stopped so as to have victory over sin, death, and evil through his crucifixion and resurrection. The Jewish religious leaders were not appeased. Pilate likely was expressing frustration through sarcasm in 19.6, not offering to let them really carry out capital punishment. He might have been insulted they did not accept his verdict and were not satisfied with the punishment. The religious leaders portrayed Jesus as a revolutionary who deserved to die under Roman law [and some were concerned the Romans might react harshly if Jesus continued to build popularity as a supposed king], but in 19.7 they revealed the root of their hatred: Jesus made himself out to be not just “the man” as in king, not even

just “a son of God” which any true king of the Jews might be called, but “*the* Son of God,” truly divine like the Father [5.18; 8.58-59; 10.33-36], and that they could not accept, so they thought Jesus should die [Leviticus 24.16].

Reflect: List ways Jesus’ character conflicts with worldly expectations for a king; also ways the life of Jesus conflicted with expectations for the Messiah. What are the implications for how we should live compared to how other people – even in the church – might expect us to live?

Day 4

Learn: Prayerfully read John 19.7-11. Romans generally were superstitious, believing in many gods with malicious intentions, and in “divine men” who had certain super-powers. Pilate might have had a tremor of fear that Jesus was one of these “divine men,” who might not appreciate being mocked and beaten, and thus might come back to harm Pilate later. So Pilate brought Jesus back inside, hoping to alleviate his new fear. But as scholar D.A. Carson asks, what answer could Jesus give Pilate, who was more interested in political maneuvering than justice, who had superstitious fear but not remorse, who strutted on the stage of human power but was enslaved by sin and the threats of his opponents? Pilate probably spoke angrily in 19.10; Jesus calmly gave him a surprising answer. If God the Father planned the crucifixion as the means to relieve us of our sin and condemnation for sin, then it could not be that the pagans and sinners were dictating events. But there must be some human responsibility for the decisions being made, for if the religious leaders were not sinning by condemning Jesus, then he would deserve to die. Jesus knew that people were perpetrating evil and sin, but this was playing into God the Father’s plan to bring Jesus to the cross, and so all of this would fulfill God’s purposes. God placed Pilate in this position in anticipation of this event; and since Jesus as the Son of God understood all this, he remained at peace.

Reflect: Can you feel peace even during the worst situations, knowing God is aware of the circumstances, even knew them in advance, and has a plan he will work out? Pray about becoming stronger in this.

Day 5

Learn: Prayerfully read John 19.11-16a [the first sentence of 19.16]. Tiberius Caesar was known to be suspicious about the loyalty of his subordinates and ruthless in punishing them. The Jewish religious leaders already had complained to Tiberius about Pilate’s treatment of them, so Pilate could not afford to think they were bluffing. How could he defend himself against a paranoid dictator when asked why he let go a man charged by the highest local officials with rebellion? Ironically, the Jewish religious leaders, who hated Rome, threatened to claim they were more loyal to Rome than the Roman governor assigned to rule them! Pilate knew his hand was forced, so he went to his judgement seat. John tells us it is Friday, about noon [long after Jesus first appeared before Pilate early that morning!], thus Jesus would die as the second set of Passover lambs were slaughtered at the Temple. Though trapped into killing Jesus, Pilate still taunted the religious leaders by calling Jesus their king, and thus manipulated them into a pledge of loyalty to Roman rule, in direct violation of their covenants with God. Though God remained in control and all this was playing into his plans for providing salvation, Pilate still was accountable for his sins, including the one he was about to make of sending Jesus to the cross. But to Jesus there was someone with greater sin. You might think this refers to Judas Iscariot, but Judas betrayed Jesus to the religious leaders, not Pilate. It is Caiaphas whom Jesus had in mind. As High Priest, Caiaphas was responsible before God for what happened religiously in Israel during his time in office, but Caiaphas helped plot against the Messiah from God [11.49-53] and judged against him [Mark 14.61-64]. His guilt was greater than Pilate’s because he was supposed to be the religious leader of Israel, so he should have recognized and served the king when he appeared, and represented God the Father to the nation in the absence of the king. In that latter regard, he should have led Israel to seek empowerment from God so as to represent God to the nations and gain their independence from those nations, but instead – by going to Pilate for help in killing Jesus – he repeated the mistake of many of his ancestors by seeking empowerment from the Gentile nations and thus sinning against God and joining their rebellion against God.

Reflect: Hardened hearts led the religious leaders – despite their extensive knowledge of scripture – to misjudge the Messiah, willfully sin in multiple ways, and thus betray God in the worst ways. That is why passages like Hebrews 3.13 tell us we must have accountability partners to warn and exhort us. Do people have permission to confront you with your sin and deceptions? Are you regularly in a small group or class to learn and discuss?