

The Glory of Jesus' Suffering, Death, and Resurrection

Lesson Five

The King Is Condemned for Telling the Truth

Roaring lions tearing their prey open their mouths wide against me. (Psalm 22:13)

1. The King of truth meets the governor of skepticism

2. The innocent King is sentenced to death

Worship

Read responsively Psalm 22:6-11.

A: I am a worm and not a man,

B: Scorned by men and despised by the people.

A: All who see me mock me;

B: They hurl insults, shaking their heads:

A: "He trusts in the LORD; let the LORD rescue him.

B: Let him deliver him, since he delights in him."

A: Yet you brought me out of the womb;

B: You made me trust in you even at my mother's breast.

A: From birth I was cast upon you;

B: From my mother's womb you have been my God.

A: Do not be far from me,

B: For trouble is near and there is no one to help.

Prayer: Dear Lord, we come before you today as people who are set free from sin and eternal death. As we watch you unjustly accused and sentenced, we thank you from the bottom of our hearts that you allowed yourself to go into captivity. Thank you for becoming a captive so that we might be set free. Amen.

Introduction

Scripture references:

Matthew 27:11-31

Mark 15:1-20

Luke 23:1-25

John 18:28-19:16

Would you like your name to be spoken every Sunday by millions of Christians around the world? It truly sounds like an honor, unless your name happens to be Pontius Pilate. For many centuries, Pilate's infamous name has been pronounced every time Christians join in the Apostles' Creed. No matter what else Pilate may have done in the ten years he was governor of Judea, he will be remembered by his decision to send Jesus to the cross. Pilate could have—should have—set Jesus free. But he didn't. In the midst of the second miscarriage of justice in one day, we again see the glory of our Savior's sufferings.

Background

Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea from A.D. 26 to 36. He served under Emperor Tiberius. While history does not reveal Pilate to be bumbling or incompetent (his rule over Judea was the second longest of any first-century Roman governor), he did have several unnecessary confrontations with his Jewish subjects.

The Herod we briefly meet in this portion of the passion history is Herod Antipas. He is the son of the bloodthirsty Herod the Great, who murdered the infants of Bethlehem (not to mention hundreds of other subjects). Herod Antipas had learned well from his father. He was the one who had imprisoned and then beheaded John the Baptist.

The King of truth meets the governor of skepticism

Little could Pilate have guessed, as he went out to face the cases awaiting him early that spring morning, that the most important trial in world history was on his docket.

Read John 18:28-38.

1. The leaders of the Sanhedrin told Pilate that Jesus was “subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Christ, a king” (Luke 23:2). Why do you think the Jewish leaders changed the charges from blasphemy to treason?
2. Why do you think Pilate seems to dismiss the first two charges but questions Jesus on the third?
3. What did Jesus mean when he said, “My kingdom is not of this world”?
4. What is “the truth” to which Jesus came to testify? (See John 8:31-36; 10:7-10; 14:6.)
5. How do you understand Pilate’s question: “What is truth?”
6. Why might Pilate be called a spokesman for our society and even for much of modern Christianity?

7. What are the many blessings we enjoy as those who stand on the side of Jesus' truth?

How wonderful it is to belong in the spiritual kingdom of the King of truth! We don't have to deny the truth that we are sinners, and we can rejoice in Jesus' forgiveness.

At this point Pilate tries another way to get rid of this case. As Luke tells us, upon hearing that Jesus hailed from Galilee, Pilate sends him just a couple blocks away to the palace of Herod Antipas, who was in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. By doing this: (1) Pilate would be offering an olive branch of peace to Herod and perhaps the hostility between them could be ended; (2) he hoped that Herod would take upon himself the responsibility of killing another prophet or at least disposing of the case for him. Pilate received the first benefit but not the second.

The innocent King is sentenced to death

Historical sources reveal little about the origins of the custom of releasing a prisoner at the Passover. Clearly Pilate was still looking for an easy way out. How sadly he underestimates the hatred of Jesus' enemies. He finds himself backed into a corner from which his own fearful cowardice will not release him. In this event, though, we also see a hint of why Jesus is going to the cross. The sinless Son of God is the captive, while sinful human beings are set free.

Read John 18:39–19:16.

1. Pilate had failed to get the crowd to bite on releasing Jesus instead of Barabbas, a murderer. Why did Pilate now have a man he knew to be innocent flogged, pummeled, and humiliated? As you answer this question, picture what Jesus must have looked like as Pilate pointed to him and said, "Here is the man!"
2. Some assume that many who shouted "Hosanna to the Son of David!" on Palm Sunday shouted "Crucify him!" on Good Friday. While sinful human nature is certainly fickle, why might this be an assumption we cannot prove?
3. In what way did the charge about Jesus' claim to be the Son of God almost backfire on the Jews?

4. Finally the Jews said, “If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar” (John 19:12). Why was the final accusation a stroke of evil genius?

5. Agree or disagree: Since God the Father was using all these events to fulfill his eternal plan of salvation, we really can't hold accountable any of those involved in Jesus' trial.

Jesus allows himself to be tried and condemned by the same powers he himself established to maintain justice in the world. In fact, Pilate is willing to let a criminal go free and condemn an innocent man. How clearly Jesus' willingness to obey his Father's will is put on display.

During the week

Reread the references listed at the beginning of this lesson. Pay special attention to the accounts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, since we didn't focus on the details they give us about Jesus' trial before Pilate.

Next week we will study the depths of Jesus' suffering. Read the following references for next time: Matthew 27:32-66; Mark 15:21-47; Luke 23:26-56; and John 19:17-42.

If you want to be amazed by the detail of Old Testament prophecy about Jesus' crucifixion, read Psalm 22. In this psalm the Messiah himself speaks through the inspired pen of King David one thousand years before the events of Good Friday.