

“A JOURNEY THROUGH THE GOSPEL OF JOHN” SERIES

#34: “Jesus Before Pilate”

SCRIPTURE: John 18:28-40

INTRO:

Note that...

***THE JEWS WOULD NOT ENTER THE GOVERNOR’S OFFICE SO
PILATE WENT OUTSIDE TO MEET WITH THEM.***

The Scripture passage for today says that the Jews did not enter the governor’s office *“so that they would not be defiled but could eat the Passover.”* Now, what’s that all about?

The Jews had three main annual feasts (Leviticus 23:4-44) which they observed: Passover, Pentecost (a.k.a., Harvest), and Booths (a.k.a., Tabernacles). The Passover is synonymous with the Feast of Unleavened Bread, named after the bread the Jews ate the night they departed Egypt under Moses. The Bible often uses leaven as a metaphor for evil since it permeates the bread. Thus, bread without leaven symbolized leaving evil influences behind in Egypt which of course represented slavery and idolatry. Passover began on Nisan 14 (March/April) and lasted eight days, recalling God’s deliverance of the Jews from Egyptian captivity in 1446 B.C. under Moses.

On Passover the Jews were to select a lamb on Nisan 10 and keep it in the house until the 14th when the head of the house would kill the lamb and roast it (Exodus 12:2-6). In the year Jesus was most likely crucified (A.D. 33), Nisan 10 was a Monday. So, the Jews would have selected a lamb on the Monday of Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem for their Passover celebration. On Tuesday Jesus cleansed the temple, on Wednesday He taught extensively there and then gave His Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24), and on Thursday, Nisan 14, He observed the Passover. The next day was Friday and Jesus offered Himself as *the* Passover Lamb when He died during the Passover feast. Hence, Jesus Christ is “our Passover” (1st Corinthians 5:7).

Since celebrating the Passover was very important to the Jews, they had to remain ritually pure to partake of it. All Jews believed that Gentiles and their homes were unclean, so entering the home of a Gentile was thought to make a Jew ritually unclean and in need of purification (Numbers 19:11-13). This is why the Jews didn't enter the homes of Gentiles – nor the headquarters of Roman governors like Pilate's Praetorium – since it prevented them from observing a feast due to uncleanness. The irony of this is that the Jews had no problem breaking their trial laws and turning Jesus of Nazareth, an innocent Jew, over to the Romans to be crucified.

Second, answer the question:

WHY DID THE JEWS TAKE JESUS TO PILATE AND NOT PRONOUNCE THEIR OWN JUDGMENT ON HIM?

Pilate told the Jews, *“Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law.”*

They replied to him, *“It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death.”*

Now, wait a minute! The Law of Moses had the death penalty, didn't it?

Pilate and these Jewish leaders had very little love for one another. Pilate felt that they were nothing but trouble, and at every opportunity he tried to make trouble for them. So, he viewed this Jesus matter as just more trouble from the Jews. He didn't want to become involved in one of their local situations.

So, reluctantly, Pilate privately questioned Jesus.

But what about this matter of the death penalty? The Torah imposes a penalty of death for a range of misdeeds. These include ritual infractions, such as violating the Sabbath, worshiping idols and cursing God; sexual sins, including incest, adultery, anal sex between men, and bestiality; and various criminal acts, including murder, kidnapping and giving false testimony in a capital case.

According to the Mishnah, the written form of the oral traditions of the Jews, capital cases had to be decided by a Sanhedrin of 23

judges. If the conviction in a capital case was unanimous but rendered too quickly the accused was acquitted on the assumption that the judges had not adequately considered the possibility of the defendant's innocence. Perhaps most onerous of all, the offense had to be witnessed by two people who warned the perpetrator immediately prior to committing the act that it was a capital offense. There's a famous Mishnah passage that states that if a Sanhedrin executed as many as one person every seven years, it was considered destructive.

The bottom line is that the Jews, at least at this time, did not believe they should put anyone to death, even Jesus, so they wanted Pilate to issue the execution order.

Third,

HOW WAS TAKING JESUS TO THE ROMAN GOVERNOR A FULFILLMENT OF PROPHECY?

John inserts a comment after quoting the Jews: ***"It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death."*** He says, ***"This was to fulfill the word that Jesus had spoken to show by what kind of death he was going to die."***

Several Old Testament passages prophesy the death of Jesus by crucifixion. They appear primarily in the books of Psalms, Isaiah, Daniel, and Zechariah, which were written between about 1000 and 400 BC.

Historically, the first forms of crucifixion were used as early as 522 B.C., so we can say that Jesus' death by crucifixion was prophesied around 500 years before it was known to be a form of execution. So, taking Jesus to Pilate for a death-by-crucifixion sentence was a fulfillment of prophecy. It was also a fulfillment of the words of Jesus Himself in John 3:14-15 – ***"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life."*** In John 12:32-33 He said, ***"And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."*** And John comments, ***"He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die."***

Fourth,

WHAT SEEMS TO BE PILATE'S ATTITUDE TOWARD JESUS?

He doesn't care. All he cared about was keeping the Jewish leaders satisfied so he could keep his position as governor. It was out of self-interest, pure and simple, that he sought to release Jesus. Pilate was not a tender-hearted man nor concerned with spiritual truth. He just wanted to be done with Jesus and the Jewish authorities.

When Jesus says, *"...I have come into the world – to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice,"* Pilate says, *"What is truth?"* When people say that, even today, it means that they don't believe in absolute truth. They believe that truth is whatever a person believes it to be. Pilate cared nothing about truth. He wasn't even interested in it.

He figured that Jesus was just a fanatic Jewish rabbi who was just stirring up the religious leaders to jealousy. But, finding no cause for executing Him, He thought he had the solution and brought up the Jewish tradition of releasing a prisoner at Passover, thinking that he could dispose of the matter with this custom. But the members of the Jewish court would have none of it. They said, "Give us Barabbas!"

John adds, *"Now Barabbas was a robber."*

Fifth,

WHAT'S THE DEAL ABOUT BARABBAS?

Believe it or not, Jesus and Barabbas actually share more than one similarity. Not only did they both get convicted and sentenced with a capital punishment, but they both share similar names.

Barabbas' full name was most likely Jesus Barabbas, in which the church father Origen took major issue, going as far to say that heretics put in the holy name of Jesus in front of Barabbas' name.

Similar to the Yom Kippur tradition, one sacrifice is set free and one dies, which happens to Jesus and Jesus Barabbas in **Matthew 27**.

Barabbas, a criminal on the brink of receiving his execution, gets set free by the Jewish people when they are given a choice between releasing either Barabbas or Jesus from their penalty, a customary pardon as part of the Passover Feast (think about the American pardoning of a turkey by the President on Thanksgiving).

No doubt, the members of the Jewish court influenced any onlookers or bystanders to cry out for the release of Barabbas.

Barabbas was an insurrectionist – one who was part of a violent uprising against the powers that be – both Roman and Jewish. He was an enemy of the state. He was one mean dude. He was on death row.

IN CLOSING...

So, Jesus is about to be executed. We'll get to that next Lord's Day...