



The DAILY JESUS NEWS #313
Friday... Day of Agony and Atonement

Jesus' Three-Phase Roman Trial

Phase I of the Roman Trial: Before Pilate
JN 18.33-38 (Parallel Texts : MT 27.11-14; Mk 15.2-5; LK 23.2-5)

=====

^LAnd they began to accuse Jesus, saying: “We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Christ, a King.”

33 ^JPilate then went back inside the palace, and summoned Jesus. ^{MT}He stood before the governor, and the governor ^Jasked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?”

34 ^L*“Yes, it is as you say,”* Jesus replied. ^J*“Are you saying this as your own idea, or did others talk to you about me?”*

35 “Am I a Jew?” Pilate replied. “Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What have you done?”

36 Jesus said, *“My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would have been fighting to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is not from here--this world.”*

37 “You are a king, then?” said Pilate.

Jesus answered, *“You are saying that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone who is born of the truth listens to me.”*

38 “What is truth?” retorted Pilate.

With this he went out again to the Jews gathered there and ^Lannounced to the Chief Priests and the crowd, ^J“I find no basis for a charge against him.”

^MThe chief priests accused him of many things. ^{MT}When he was being accused by the chief priests and the elders, he gave no answer. ^MSo again ^{MT}Pilate asked him,

“Don’t you hear the testimony they keep bringing against you? ^MAre you not going to answer? See how many things they are accusing you of?

^{MT}But Jesus made no reply--not even to a single charge--to the great amazement of Pilate.

^LAnd they insisted, “He is stirring up the people all over Judea by his teaching. He started in Galilee and has come all the way here.”

=====

NOTE: We use superscript identification of the source gospel in "blended texts" as follows: Matthew = ^{MT}, Mark = ^M, Luke = ^L, John = ^J, Acts = ^A. This "superscript ID" is inserted at the beginning of the quoted text, identifying that Bible book until a different superscript appears. In addition, *red italics identify the words of Jesus*. Old Testament quotations are CAPITALIZED.

	CONTEXT DIGEST
Location	The Praetorium: Palace of the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate
Timeline	Early April (Month 39)
Jesus' Life Context	Stage VIII: Passion Week
	E. Friday: Day of Agony and Atonement
	Jesus' Three-Phase Roman Trial
Title	Phase I of the Roman Trial: Before Pilate

In today's reading Jesus was questioned the first time by Pontius Pilate, the Roman Procurator and Governor of the district of Judea. The Sanhedrin had brought Jesus to Pilate to obtain a death sentence against him as an enemy of Rome, and thereby see him crucified. The Jewish authorities did not have the official right to execute criminals (though they sometimes did, such as the martyr Stephen), and their method was stoning, rather than the cross.

We can see that the charges they brought against Jesus before Pilate were different from the Jewish phase of the trial. This was another travesty of justice. The contrast between the Jewish treatment of Jesus, and Pilate was vivid. The Sanhedrin treated him like dirt; the more Pilate found out about Jesus, the more he respected him. A little objectivity goes a long way in examining the claims of Christ.

The Sanhedrin's charges against Jesus were bogus, and Pilate saw through them easily. They misquoted Jesus' answer to the leadership's question to him on Tuesday of Passion Week, concerning paying taxes to Caesar. Jesus had actually advocated payment of taxes to Caesar. ***"Render to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God, what is God's."***

The claim to be a King was something extremely serious as far as Rome was concerned, if the King did not submit to the authority of the Emperor in Rome, and serve him. The Roman policy was to leave local kings and authorities in place when they conquered an area, after making sure that the local, lesser authorities gave their full and unqualified allegiance to Rome. Thus, the nature of Jesus' kingship was a key issue for Pilate.

Jesus' words about the nature of his Kingdom not being ***"of this world"*** are as important for us as they were for Pilate (JN 18.36). They showed Pilate that Jesus was no threat to Rome. They show us the transcending nature of the Kingdom in which we live and move and have our being. Because Jesus' reign is not ***"of this world,"*** it is not limited to this world; it is as universal as God's omnipresence.

We can see Jesus probing Pilate here as he witnessed to him about himself. The roles were reversed; instead of Pilate examining Jesus, our Lord was in control of the conversation, examining Pilate. This was another example of the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit working in Jesus as he witnessed before those in authority.

This is the same power he promised to us. As he told Pilate, Jesus was born to bear witness to the truth, and he took every opportunity to do so, even when his life was on the line. We, too, were born from above by the Spirit to serve Jesus as his witnesses.

After his conversation with Jesus, Pilate was deeply impressed. He went out and made the first of many declarations of Jesus' innocence in the Roman phase of Jesus' trial. These official pronouncements that Jesus was without sin are critical for understanding the meaning of his death, and for the witness of the early church in the Roman Empire. We will think of these matters in more detail in future DAILY JESUS NEWS.

While Pilate, like many people in today's world, was cynical about the existence of any objective truth, he recognized the sincerity and inherent truthfulness of Jesus' character. His words could be trusted. What an opposite view to the Jewish leadership, who continued to hurl baseless charges against Jesus. It was increasingly obvious to Pilate that the Sanhedrin was biased and unjust in its attitude toward Jesus.

Pilate did not want to be caught in the middle of this mess. When he heard that Jesus was from Galilee he quickly seized the chance to send him to Herod Antipas for judgment, because Herod was in charge of the district of Galilee. Pilate thought he was off the hook, but it would not turn out that way. In the meantime, Jesus was on his way to Herod for Phase II of his Roman trial.

APPLICATION:

Jesus was using every opportunity to witness, and lead the Romans with whom he dealt to come to faith in him. Isn't that amazing? He was speaking the truth in love, and forgetting about his own needs. This was another expression of the glory of God.

Do you grasp every opportunity to witness? Do you defer your own needs in order to speak the truth in love to those who need to hear it, like Jesus? How does your life compare with Jesus' example in this reading?

On the other hand, Pilate's man-pleasing character was already emerging in Phase I of this trial. He had determined that Jesus was innocent. That should have ended the proceedings right there. Jesus should have been set free. Pilate did not have the courage to overrule his own subjects--the Jewish leaders--when he knew it was the right thing to do. He was a wimp. This aspect of Pilate's character will become very obvious by the time the Roman trial is over.

How does the desire to please people influence your behavior?

Do you see any similarity between yourself and Pilate in this area?

What do you need to do about that?