

THE SIX TRIALS OF CHRIST

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Chapter 12

THE SECOND TRIAL BEFORE PILATE

We now begin the sixth and last trial for the Lord JESUS CHRIST. It is the second time that he appears before Pilate. The previous trial before him ended in acquittal, and Pilate will state this himself as he reviews the proceedings. This trial, because it ultimately ends in the Lord's crucifixion in spite of the fact of His complete innocence, is very extensive and is covered by all four evangelists. It should be kept in mind that only Luke gives us the true sequence of two trials before Pilate with the trial before Herod between them, while the other writers merely record the events before Pilate as one continuous, unbroken series of incidents.

Matthew 27:15-26,
Mark 15:6-15,
Luke 23:13-25,
John 18:39-19:16.

During the time that CHRIST was before Herod, the city was beginning to awaken from its slumber of the night unaware of the events that had transpired while they slept. They begin to congregate together before the Praetorium because it seems Pilate had established a precedent each year previously of releasing a prisoner to them on this feast day.

While this certainly was not justice, it was mercy, and was loved by a people who were bitterly opposed to the yoke of Rome over them. It was also much like the very birth of the nation itself for which they commemorated the passover days. The nation had been guilty of gross sins in Egypt:

"And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain. Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates" (Exodus 20:6-10).

and were in the place of bondage. They were not redeemed because of any righteousness on their own part, but merely because of the mercy of GOD:

"Speak not thou in thine heart, after that the Lord thy God hath cast them out from before thee, saying, For my righteousness the Lord hath brought me in to possess this land: but for the wickedness of these nations the Lord doth drive them out from before thee. Not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness of thine heart, dost thou go to possess their land: but for the wickedness of these nations the Lord thy God doth drive them out from before thee, and that he may perform the word which the Lord sware unto thy Fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Understand therefore, that the Lord thy God giveth thee not this good land to possess it for thy righteousness; for thou art a stiffnecked people" (Deuteronomy 9:4-6).

Once delivered they were permanently free from their former bondage.

The people, who had each year secured this act from Pilate, do not want to let it die, but will vigorously clamor to have it done again.

Thus we read:

"Now at that feast he released unto them one prisoner, whomsoever they desired. And there was one named Barabbas, which lay bound with them that had made insurrection with him, who had committed murder in the insurrection. And the multitude crying aloud began to desire him to do as he had ever done unto them" (Mark 15:6-8).

When JESUS is led back to Pilate there is a considerable crowd before him of the town's people, and it is not merely a crowd consisting mainly of the members of the Sanhedrin as was true the first time.

Furthermore, not all of the Sanhedrin had accompanied CHRIST to Herod's residence, so as they return, the entire Sanhedrin must be summoned. It appears that they were together in one place, presumably at the Temple, and they quickly came. **"And Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people"** (Luke 23:13). Pilate begins to address them, and rehearses the decision of the two civil trials.

"Said unto them, Ye have brought this man unto me, as one that perverteth the people: and, behold, I, having examined him before you, have found no fault in this man touching those things whereof ye accuse him" (Luke 23:14).

Herod's own verdict was for acquittal.

"No, nor yet Herod: for I sent you to him; and, lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto him" (Luke 23:15).

Herod's verdict was that the case was too ridiculous to even try. It was a joke, and was

so treated.

Pilate had unquestionably hoped that the case had been settled by Herod for this would have gotten him off the hook from making a decision concerning JESUS CHRIST before the Sanhedrin and this multitude. With the populous of the city gathered before him now, conditions were even worse for Pilate than before.

We must realize too, that Pilate was technically justified in sending JESUS to be tried by Herod, as well as suspending His release until He returned from him. Even though Pilate had found no fault with this man, yet he could have been ignorant of the customs and laws of the nation and the interrelation of these laws with Roman laws. Herod would have been thoroughly acquainted with both.

The very fact that Dr. Luke records that this **"And the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together: for before they were at enmity between themselves"** (Luke 23:12), is worthy of even further meditation. All through Scriptures we find the history of nations as well as individuals hinging on one little thing. It was true in Esther as it was true of the birth of CHRIST, and it is true here. Had Pilate and Herod retained their enmity this day and not have been reconciled by this event, Herod would have tried to give a different verdict from what Pilate had rendered. But such was not the case. Pilate announces Herod found Him innocent also.

"I will therefore chastise him, and release him" (Luke 23:16). And Luke adds why he said this: **"(For of necessity he must release one unto them at the feast.)"** (vs. 17).

Pilate was seeking to use this custom for his own benefit. He saw in this a way to get himself out of the dilemma in which he found himself. We dare not pass over this hurriedly. Pilate has just pronounced the verdict of both himself and Herod. JESUS has been tried and is acquitted. Justice demands that the case be immediately ended and the prisoner be released at once; and further that He be protected by Rome from all harm or violence should the need arise. But this is not what we read. Pilate, having rendered the dual verdicts of acquittal, now ceases to act as judge, and acts as politician. He will seek to appease the Sanhedrin's wrath by scourging CHRIST, and yet release Him because He is innocent.

Gerhard wrote in 1889 concerning Pilate's actions: "Be consistent with thyself, Pilate, for, if CHRIST is innocent, why does thou not send him away acquitted? And if thou believest him deserving of chastisement with rods, why dost thou proclaim Him to be innocent?"

At this point four reporters, representing the Associated Press, the United Press, the International Wire Service, along with local reporter from the Jerusalem Press-Scimitar, give us various aspects of what went on. Each is reporting what in truth he saw and heard, but each looks at the events in the light of his own personality and purpose for reporting. Each hears these things in the Aramaic language, but is forced to translate them into the language of international communication which is Greek, and this accounts for some slight variations. Let us as nearly as possible piece together the complete picture.

With the coming of day, the multitude was going up to the Praetorium and began to request that Pilate do as he had previously done and release a prisoner to them:

"And the multitude crying aloud began to desire him to do as he had ever done unto them" (Mark 15:8). With CHRIST having returned now from Herod, this presents in Pilate's thinking a way out for him. He knows the course of action he will take before he comes before the people. First he calls for the members of the Sanhedrin to all be assembled:

"And Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people" (Luke 23:13).

Then he takes his position on the tribunal which was the official seat carried to the pavement before the Praetorium since the people would not enter therein:

"When he was set down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him" (Matthew 27:19).

From this seat he addresses the Sanhedrin as the leaders of the people (Luke 23:13 above). He renders his verdict of innocence (Luke 23:14 above), and that Herod had found nothing worthy of death (Luke 23:15 above). Pilate's decision is then given: **"I will therefore chastise him, and release him"** (Luke 23:16). Here was Pilate's statement of intent, and with it his whole plan was exposed to his opposition. It now was only a matter of time for the Lord's opposition to rally its forces and defeat Pilate's plan.

The protest against this was immediate from the Sanhedrin

This would not satisfy them whatever. They had come from His death -- nothing else would appease them. With Pilate's original plan thwarted, he is forced to go one step further. He knows that Rome has one prisoner that is "notorious," named Barabbas. His crimes are listed by the Evangelists as robbery:

"Then cried they all again, saying, Not this man, but Barabbas. Now Barabbas was a robber" (John 18:40).

sedition, or high treason:

"(Who for a certain sedition made in the city, . . ." (Luke 23:19a).

and murder:

". . . and for murder, was cast into prison.)" (Luke 23:19b).

The penalty for these crimes against Rome was death by crucifixion. A cross was in the process of being prepared for this **"notable prisoner"** (Matthew 27:16). along with two

other lesser personages. These were to be crucified as an example of what will happen to any others that would commit such crimes against Rome.

Having placed the destiny of JESUS in the hands of the people, Pilate decides to give them the choice between two men. He will release either Barabbas or JESUS. So **"Therefore when they were gathered together, Pilate said unto them, Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ?"** (Matthew 27:17). For Pilate the decision was obvious. There was no logical comparison between the two. **"For he knew that for envy they had delivered him"** (Matthew 27:18). All reason and logic demanded that they select JESUS who is called the CHRIST. Their immediate response was,

"Then cried they all again, saying, Not this man, but Barabbas. Now Barabbas was a robber" (John 18:40).

"And they cried out all at once, saying, Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas" (Luke 23:18).

As Pilate sat there on the judgment seat at this very moment, an important event occurs:

"When he was set down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him" (Matthew 27:19).

Matthew alone records this event. As such, it is another indictment against his own people. Just as earlier in the Gospel, wise men from afar came to worship the young child while Israel did not, so here a Gentile heathen woman knows concerning His person and character, but Israel does not know.

GOD has often used dreams in making known Himself to man. He did so with Pharaoh and with Nebuchadnezzar, and so He does with Pilate's wife. It seems that it was only during the reign of Tiberius that the governors of provinces had been permitted to take their wives with them. For Pilate's wife, who tradition names as Claudia Procula, to send a messenger to her husband while he was occupied with official business shows something of the impression the dream had upon her. She knew it was supernatural. Upon arising and finding her husband gone, she must have inquired as to the nature of his business at such an early hour. Learning that it concerned the One of whom she had dreamed and had suffered many things in her dream, she felt compelled to warn her husband. It could not wait. The Lord in His compassion was in this giving Pilate himself a warning. What Pilate does will be against increased light. He himself knows JESUS is innocent. Now there is the confirmation through his wife of this fact from Heaven.

Her message to her husband was short and to the point. It is literally to have nothing to do between him and that righteous man. No one can prosper who allows anything to come in between them and Him. Pilate did not prosper even though he sought to wash his hands of the affair and to make the Nation bear the entire guilt.

He was soon to be banished from his office, and the historian Eusebius says that soon afterward, "wearied with misfortune," he killed himself. How can we hope to prosper if we allow something between us and this Man who is infinitely righteous? Since He is righteous, to the extent something is between ourselves and Him, it only indicates our unrighteousness.

"Nothing between, e'en many hard trials,
Tho' the whole world against me convene;
Watching with prayer and much self-denial,
I'll triumph at last, with nothing between.

"Nothing between my soul and the Saviour,
So that His blessed face may be seen;
Nothing prevented the least of His favor,
Keep the way clear! Let nothing between."

-- C.A. Tindley

While Pilate was receiving the messenger with the urgent appeal from his wife, probably no more than 30 seconds went by. He had previously committed the case into their hands. They had been empowered with the verdict. They have the choice between two men: Barabbas and JESUS. This short space of time was enough to allow the members of the Sanhedrin to disperse among the crowd to persuade them to ask for Barabbas.

"But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus" (Matthew 27:20).

"But the chief priests moved the people, that he should rather release Barabbas unto them" (Mark 15:11).

Having mingled with the crowd the entire Sanhedrin will be united as one voice for Barabbas to be released and for JESUS to be crucified. Coming from every section of the crowd and with others joining in with them, when the question is asked it will appear as if the whole were united.

The governor, having regained his composure after this message from his wife, is now ready to ask them again for their decision.

"The governor answered and said unto them, Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you? They said, Barabbas. Pilate saith unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ? They all say unto him, Let him be crucified. And the governor said, Why, what evil hath he done? But they cried out the more, saying, Let him be crucified" (Matthew 27:21-23).

Mark's account is almost identical:

"And Pilate answered and said again unto them, What will ye then that I shall do unto him whom ye call the King of the Jews? And they cried out again, Crucify him. Then Pilate said unto them, Why, what evil hath he done? And they cried out the more exceedingly, Crucify him" (Mark 15:12-14).

Luke only enlarges on a few statements:

"Pilate therefore, willing to release Jesus, spake again to them. But they cried, saying, Crucify him, crucify him. And he said unto them the third time, Why, what evil hath he done? I have found no cause of death in him: I will therefore chastise him, and let him go. And they were instant with loud voices, requiring that he might be crucified. " (Luke 23:20-23a).

Pilate had placed the decision in their hands thinking he knew which way they would go, but he was wrong. He is trying desperately to change their course of action, but to no avail.

"And the voices of them and of the chief priests prevailed" (Luke 23:23b).

Luke is telling us that the verdict was very definitely one-sided, but by no means unanimous. These gathered before Pilate were mainly the people of the city and area of Jerusalem. They were not the same as the Galileans who had accompanied JESUS into the city with shouts of **"Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest"** (Matthew 21:9b). This present assembly was mainly the people of Jerusalem who were under the complete control of the Sanhedrin. The common message that the fickle crowd shouted "Hosanna" at the first of the week, and "Crucify" toward the last of the week, is entirely wrong.

"When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it" (Matthew 27:24).

Notice that this act was done, not at the very end of Pilate's dealings before the crowd, as has been supposed by many, but actually midway in them. Even after CHRIST had been scourged He is brought forth to the crowd, and Pilate's hope is that they will say it is enough and change their verdict. The point we are making is this: Though Pilate is washing his hands he is still not through in seeking to get JESUS CHRIST freed, but will try twice more to attain this decision, but to no avail.

What is Pilate seeking to do in washing his hands before the people?

This action by Pilate has been greatly misunderstood, mainly from a lack of understanding of the culture of the nation. It is poor and faulty exegesis to read into this event what it would signify in our culture. We must come to understand what it signified in their culture.

"And all the elders of that city, that are next unto the slain man, shall wash their

hands over the heifer that is beheaded in the valley: And they shall answer and say, Our hands have not shed this blood, neither have our eyes seen it.

Be merciful, O Lord, unto thy people Israel, whom thou hast redeemed, and lay not innocent blood unto thy people of Israel's charge. And the blood shall be forgiven them. So shalt thou put away the guilt of innocent blood from among you, when thou shalt do that which is right in the sight of the Lord" (Leviticus 21:6-9).

The entire rite and the words used were Jewish, not Roman. Under the Law in Deuteronomy 21:6-9 the elders of a city would wash their hands with water when they were free from the murder of a person and they were unable to find the guilty person.

Moreover, David the king cried out when Joab killed Abner: **"And afterward when David heard it, he said, I and my kingdom are guiltless before the Lord for ever from the blood of Abner the son of Ner"** (II Samuel 3:28). The judgment was to rest on Joab and his seed from that moment on, and it did: **"Let it rest on the head of Joab, and on all his Father's house; and let there not fail from the house of Joab one that hath an issue, or that is a leper, or that leaneth on a staff, or that falleth on the sword, or that lacketh bread"** (II Samuel 3:29).

"I will wash mine hands in innocency: so will I compass thine altar, O Lord . . . Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency" (Psalm 26:6; 73:13) speak of the same language.

Edersheim informs us: "The Mishnah bears witness that this rite was continued. As administering justice in Israel, Pilate must have been aware of this rite. It does not affect the question, whether or not a judge could, especially in the circumstances recorded, free himself from guild. Certainly, he could not . . ." (II, 578).

Pilate is unable to reason with the people who are now given to their emotions. He has only one recourse that he knows at present. Normally this would have been effective to bring the people back to complete sobriety. "When a Judge, after having declared the innocence of the accused, actually arises from the judgment-seat, and by a symbolic act pronounces the execution of the accused a judicial murder, from all participation in which he wishes solemnly to clear himself, surely no jury would persist in demanding sentence of death" (II, 577-8).

This is what Pilate is doing. did it have the desired effect upon the nation which Pilate wished? Not at all. Nothing Pilate is trying is working. When the Elders performed this rite, the prayer response was: **"Be merciful, O Lord, unto thy people Israel, whom thou hast redeemed, and lay not innocent blood unto thy people of Israel's charge."** (Deuteronomy 21:8a). Then GOD says: **"And the blood shall be forgiven them"** (Deuteronomy 21:8c).

Here is no request for mercy whatever, but on the contrary a brazen request for His blood. **"Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our**

children" (Matthew 27:25). How calloused; how defiant.

Pilate even in the province of GOD uses the very words -- "**See ye to it**" -- that the Sanhedrin had said to Judas which broke him to such grief because he had betrayed the innocent blood "**Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood**" (Matthew 27:4) that he went out and hanged himself. Yet it didn't phase these people.

Just as they asked, they received

GOD granted their request. These people began to suffer mercilessly after GOD gave them space to repent under the Apostles, and still they hardened their hearts even more: "**Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your Fathers did, so do ye**" (Acts 7:51). Then in 70 A.D., 38 years as GOD reckoneth the generation in the wilderness, it came upon their children, who were just like their Fathers, and it came upon them:

"But there shall not an hair of your head perish. In your patience possess ye your souls. And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto. For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. But woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck, in those days! for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled" (Luke 21:18-24).

Still they suffer and will continue and will continue to do so until in the great tribulation they acknowledge their sin and seek His face:

"I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early. Come, and let us return unto the Lord: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up. After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight. Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth" (Hosea 5:15-6:3).

Little did the people or the Sanhedrin even remember their words, for in Acts 5 when the Apostles were brought before the Sanhedrin, "**Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us**" (Acts 5:28).

No, the Apostles were not motivated with the purpose of bringing the innocent blood of the Son of GOD whom the nation and leaders murdered upon the city. The Sanhedrin

had already brought it upon themselves and their city. The Apostles were proclaiming that there was salvation for them individually and collectively in no other name:

"And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people . . . Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under Heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved . . . Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins" (Acts 3:23; 4:12; 5:31).

The nation, who had been judicially blinded:

"For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord" (Matthew 23:39).

"Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation" (Luke 19:42-44).

willingly accepted the judicial guilt for the murder of CHRIST. Pilate's guilt will be personal and moral. He was wrong because he was willing to gamble with an innocent man's life. He gambled and lost. He in no way goes free of responsibility, but our Lord's words are very exact in this regards: **"Jesus answered, Thou couldst have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin" (John 19:11).**

So, Pilate's command to scourge JESUS is obeyed.

What was the reaction of the Sanhedrin at the sight of JESUS, the Man?

"When the chief priests therefore and officers saw him, they cried out, saying, Crucify him, crucify him" (John 19:6a).

The sufferings CHRIST had endured might have been enough for the people, but this was not enough for the Sanhedrin. Nothing but His death would suffice. His wounds would heal, they felt; His death would not. How wrong they were.

Pilate had reached the end. He is exasperated that they will not listen to reason: **"Pilate saith unto them, Take ye him, and crucify him: for I find no fault in him" (John 19:6b).**

Even though Pilate says this, yet this action is impossible for the Jews to do. Pilate has gone around in a circle. He started out with the statement: **"Then said Pilate unto**

them, Take ye him, and judge him according to your law. The Jews therefore said unto him, It is not lawful for us to put any man to death" (John 18:31). This did not satisfy because the Jews wanted death. Now Pilate refers the entire case to their own actions. He will not simply ratify their decision. If they want crucifixion, let them do it.

Pilate now is controlled also by emotion. The fact that they cannot crucify anyone seemingly does not cross his mind.

"I find no fault in him."

It might do us well to gather together at this closing declaration, just how many times Pilate has rendered this verdict.

1. At the 1st Trial before Pilate.

"Then said Pilate to the chief priests and to the people, I find no fault in this man . . . he went out again unto the Jews, and saith unto them, I find in him no fault at all" (Luke 23:4; John 18:38).

2. At the 2nd Trial before Pilate.

"Said unto them, Ye have brought this man unto me, as one that perverteth the people: and, behold, I, having examined him before you, have found no fault in this man touching those things whereof ye accuse him. No, nor yet Herod: for I sent you to him; and, lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto him . . . When he was set down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him" (Luke 23:14-15; Matthew 27:19).

3. After the crowd renders their decision.

"And the governor said, Why, what evil hath he done? But they cried out the more, saying, Let him be crucified . . . Then Pilate said unto them, Why, what evil hath he done? And they cried out the more exceedingly, Crucify him . . . And he said unto them the third time, Why, what evil hath he done? I have found no cause of death in him: I will therefore chastise him, and let him go" (Matthew 27:23; Mark 15:14; Luke 23:22).

4. At the washing of Pilate's hands.

"When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it" (Matthew 27:24).

5. After the scourging of JESUS.

"When the chief priests therefore and officers saw him, they cried out, saying,

Crucify him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Take ye him, and crucify him: for I find no fault in him" (John 19:6).

He is the Holy One and the Just One: **"But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you"** (Acts 3:14).

With Pilate referring the case to them, the Sanhedrin bring out to Pilate the real reason for their bringing JESUS to him asking for crucifixion. This is an entirely new complaint with a new examination.

"The Jews answered him, We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God" (John 19:7).

But the Sanhedrin never examined the evidence concerning His deity. No man makes himself the Son of GOD. He either is or he is not. Since they would not take the evidence of His miracles, He Himself said there would be no sign but the sign of the prophet Jonah -- death, burial, resurrection and the Gospel going to the Gentiles.

For being prophet, CHRIST suffered the mockery following the trial of Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin. For being king, CHRIST suffered the mockery of the Roman soldiers. For being the Son of GOD, He suffered the mockery on the Cross.

No longer is the Sanhedrin appealing to Roman law or a Roman crime. They are appealing now to their own law and to a crime against that law, which, they feel, is Pilate's duty to uphold since he is their governor.

"When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he was the more afraid" (John 19:8).

Up to this point Pilate had been quite apprehensive about the entire proceedings. He had heard of JESUS before and everything he heard was good. He knew that for envy the Sanhedrin had brought JESUS to him. He had received his wife's stirring message and may have even gone to speak personally with her while JESUS was being scourged and mocked, for Pilate would never have permitted the mocking of JESUS by his men had he been around. When he returned and saw what they had done, he decided to use the mocking as a means of securing JESUS' release. Above all of these things he had observed the composure of JESUS CHRIST during the entire time, and this could not have strongly impressed Pilate. His prisoner was not like other men.

We must remember that Pilate is a Roman, and when he hears of JESUS' claim of being the Son of GOD, he would understand this according to his own background. Among the various religions and traditions of the nations, the gods had sons, and some of them appeared on earth.

In Acts 14 when the people saw what Paul and Barnabas had done in their city, they thought: **"The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men"** (Acts 14:11).

In light of this new development, Pilate wants to speak to JESUS one more time.

"And went again into the judgment hall, and saith unto Jesus, Whence art thou?"
(John 19:9a).

When Pilate asked JESUS, "**Whence art thou**," he is not asking for his earthly origin because Pilate already had sent JESUS to Herod when he learned that He was a Galilean. He is asking in effect: "are you from earth or from Heaven?"

"But Jesus gave him no answer" (John 19:9b).

This is the fourth time we have seen the silence of JESUS CHRIST before His accusers.

1. Before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin.

"And the high priest arose, and said unto him, Answerest thou nothing? what is it which these witness against thee? But Jesus held his peace. And the high priest answered and said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God" (Matthew 26:62-63).

" But he held his peace, and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked him, and said unto him, Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" (Mark 14:61).

2. Before Pilate in the 1st Trial.

"And when he was accused of the chief priests and elders, he answered nothing. Then said Pilate unto him, Hearest thou not how many things they witness against thee? And he answered him to never a word; insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly" (Mark 27:12-14).

"And the chief priests accused him of many things: but he answered nothing. And Pilate asked him again, saying, Answerest thou nothing? behold how many things they witness against thee. But Jesus yet answered nothing; so that Pilate marvelled" (Mark 15:3-5).

3. Before Herod

"Then he questioned with him in many words; but he answered him nothing"
(Luke 23:9).

4. Before Pilate in the 2nd Trial (John 19:9 above)

In each case His silence was far more eloquent than any word He could have spoken. It is a mark of wisdom not only to speak, but also to be silent.

Why was CHRIST silent at this point? Some have felt it was a question He could not answer with a yes or no to Pilate. Had He answered "yes," Pilate would have understood it in a pagan idea which would not have been right. He could not say that

He was not the Son of GOD and therefore He said nothing.

Certainly this cannot be the full explanation because He who is truth surely could have witnessed and conveyed truth to Pilate so he could have understood.

Remember, however, what we have already discussed. When Pilate left speaking to JESUS CHRIST before in the Praetorium, he left asking the question: **"What is truth."** He never waited for the answer. Pilate at that time rejected truth, and he is not given any more truth with the exception of the fact of his sin and the reason for it: **"Jesus answered, Thou couldst have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin"** (John 19:11). CHRIST broke His silence to Pilate for this one thing alone.

Stalker adds also: "JESUS would say nothing about whether He was the Son of GOD or not, because He did not wish to be released on this ground. Not as a Son of GOD, but as an innocent man, which Pilate had again and again acknowledged Him to be, was He entitled to be set free; and His silence called upon Pilate to act on this acknowledgement."

Krummacher states that had CHRIST disclosed His true person and nature to Pilate, it would only have increased Pilate's responsibility and judgment. His act of silence was, therefore, an act of compassion and mercy.

Before we leave this, we need to realize even a further significance. Had JESUS CHRIST not have been the Son of GOD, He was duty bound to stop such a thing right here. This is the only way He could have been a good man. Had He made the statement: "I am not the Son of GOD," the charges would have been dropped by the Sanhedrin, and the case dismissed. Since He did not make that statement, He will die. He will die, not because He made Himself the Son of GOD, but because He was in fact the Son of GOD. He will prove that He was by His resurrection from the dead:

"And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead" (Romans 1:4).

Pilate is upset because CHRIST will not reply to his question

"Then saith Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?" (John 19:10).

The "me" is emphatic in the whole sentence. Oh how haughty is a little man in a big place. The only way he can show his importance is with words. Yet Pilate was speaking the truth in one respect. He could have released CHRIST, and because he did not the responsibility for failing to do so was his.

CHRIST now breaks His silence to judge His judge.

"Jesus answered, Thou couldst have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater

sin" (John 19:11).

Think of the dignity with which He speaks in such a situation as He was, with the intense pain in His body from the scourging. CHRIST judges the entire situation. It is not Pilate who is the judge, but He is the Judge. Pilate is on trial. And here is the verdict of the righteous Judge. The Sanhedrin has the greater sin because they have sinned through wickedness, while Pilate is sinning through weakness. They have full knowledge, while Pilate does not. Pilate has been forced to try the case, while the Sanhedrin has been responsible for the indictment.

All the power Pilate has is that which is given **"from above."** The Lord Himself has delegated that authority to men even though it would be used against Himself. He is the CREATOR of the ages (Hebrews 1:3) and all that occurs in the various ages.

Notice also that sin is not the same. There are degrees in reference to sinning, and therefore there are degrees in regard to punishment. Every man will be rewarded according to his works against the truth.

The answer greatly impressed Pilate. It causes him to think rationally again rather than emotionally. He returns determined to release JESUS CHRIST.

"And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release him: but the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar" (John 19:12).

For every move Pilate makes, the Sanhedrin had a countermove, and a more effective move. Pilate was being backed into a corner. Being **"Caesar's friend"** was the most coveted position a politician could have, while to incur Caesar's wrath was always feared. Pilate was even now being investigated by the imperial throne, and to have a new charge brought against his administration was the last thing Pilate wanted. The Sanhedrin knew this and they played it for all they could.

One of the last proverbs recorded of the wisest man in the Old Testament was **"The fear of man bringeth a snare"** (Proverbs 29:25). It is always true. Pilate feared to do the right thing -- the just thing -- which his conscience told him he should do because he feared for the consequences. A charge brought against him of releasing a man who claimed to be king over Israel, when which release brought a tumult among the Jews, would certainly be hard to explain. Furthermore, any local king would, in the eyes of Caesar, be in competition against him; and for a Roman governor to uphold such an one, would be a charge of high treason. If Pilate were convicted of malfeasance in office, it would mean banishment and perhaps even execution. The Emperor Tiberius was a despot who only too well enjoyed humiliating subordinates, particularly those who manifested any threat to himself. Philo, who lived at this time, tells us that the Sanhedrin had once before held this same threat over Pilate's head to secure what they wanted.

Pilate feared men and it ensnared him. In place of doing what was right, and letting the chips fall where they will, even if it be his own life, he sought to save his own neck, and

to do so he had ultimately to sacrifice CHRIST. He sought to save his own life, but he lost it. The very thing that Pilate feared occurred. It was not long before those same men did lodge a complaint against his administration to Rome. Pilate was recalled from office, banished and he took his own life. The Sanhedrin were engaged in political blackmail, and Pilate became a mere puppet in their hands. When they had enough of him, they pulled the strings to have him removed in spite of his compromises with them. Pilate was too weak a person to say: "Here I stand," and so he yielded to their demands.

You will observe that the Sanhedrin began their proceedings before Pilate against CHRIST with the charge of treason against Rome, then sedition against Rome, then blasphemy according to their own law. Now if they do now get what they want, their charge will be against Pilate for high treason.

"When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha" (John 19:13).

JESUS is brought out again to the crowd after having been privately interviewed by Pilate. Pilate sat down on the Bema seat so that what action he now takes will be official. The sentence must be pronounced in the presence of the Accused.

The incident is so important for the whole world that John marks the exact place, day and approximate time in the Roman world.

"And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King!" (John 19:14).

Some hold that it is impossible for it to be **"about the sixth hour,"** but this is not so. The events of the trials, particularly before Pilate, are given by the four Evangelists in great detail because of the importance of what was occurring, while the actual time involved could have been very short. If it were 6:30 a.m., it would still only leave 2 1/2 hours for moving out to Mount Calvary, digging the holes for the crosses, crucifying each prisoner with probably JESUS crucified last. John records it as it was.

From all indications Pilate knows JESUS will not be released, but perhaps there is one ray of hope still left in the back of Pilate's mind: I want to give them one more chance. For this reason he says: **"Behold your king!"** Moreover, because he is seated on the judgment seat, their decision, as well as his, is official.

"But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King?" (John 19:15a).

This is the last Pilate will say to them. The response of the chief priests is the record of history: **"The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar" (John 19:15b).**

The nation has just officially committed national suicide. They not only reject their true MESSIAH, they accept the head of the nation from whom will arise the Man of Sin. For

the rejection of JESUS CHRIST the nation will suffer the destruction of their City and those within it, and will be in exile among the nations; for their making Caesar their king, they shall suffer the period our Lord called "**the great tribulation.**"

"Then delivered he him therefore unto them to be crucified. And they took Jesus, and led him away" (John 19:16).

The Sanhedrin won the case, not by justice but by craft and the clamour of the populace. This was true in spite of the fact that one of the finest laws of the Romans is: "The idle clamour of the population is not to be regarded, when they call for a guilty man to be acquitted, or an innocent one to be condemned" (Law 12, Code de Poenis).

Pilate signed the sentence for the crucifixion of JESUS CHRIST, and with it gave in writing an extract of the crimes He had committed which was to be placed over the head of the condemned criminal so that the public might know for what crime He died.

Since there was only one crime and there was ample space, Pilate wrote the crime in three languages: Hebrew (Aramaic) and Greek and Latin (John 19:20)

"JESUS OF NAZERETH THE KING OF THE JEWS"

The chief priests went to Pilate and object, but on this Pilate would not concede:

"Then said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate, Write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews. Pilate answered, What I have written I have written" (John 19:21-22). From this we know that Pilate was in charge of the crucifixion, not the Sanhedrin, for in that case they would have written what they wanted. This way they could not.

On what grounds was JESUS to die? One and only one. **"He came unto His own, and His own received him not"** (John 1:11). There GOD has made provision that as many as received him, to these He will give the privilege to become the sons of GOD. How is this accomplished? Simply by believing in His name, i.e., in whom He is and what He has done. He was **"God manifest in the flesh,"** and He died that whosoever it may be that believes in Him should never perish but have right now everlasting life.

JESUS is not on trial; you are on trial.

**You are the judge.
What is your verdict of Him?**

~ end of chapter 12 ~
