



SESSION 68 | JOHN 18:39-19:8

JOHN 18:28-19:16 | JESUS BEFORE PILATE

- Verses 18:28-38 – see session 67
- Verses 18:39-40 –
 - Why and where this **custom** of releasing a prisoner at Passover arose, we can only speculate. It was spoken of as a Jewish custom which the Roman government had gone along with.
 - Pilate, having found **no fault at all** (v. 38) with Jesus, wanted to release Him. However, He also knew the mob wanted Jesus sentenced to death.
 - Pilate appears to be hoping that the people would choose Jesus over Barabbas.
 - From Matthew 27:17 we learn that Pilate is the one that selected the candidates for release.
 - From Mark 15:7 we learn that Barabbas was an insurrectionist who **had committed murder in the insurrection**.
 - No doubt the people knew of the murder, and it would be my guess that he killed someone whom they admired, as Pilate was trying to give them what would be almost a “non-choice.”
 - However, the Jewish leadership had worked to persuade the crowd to choose Barabbas (Matt. 27:20).
 - A few practical lessons:
 - Never underestimate the potential of a politician toward sliminess.
 - Never underestimate the stupidity of a mob.
 - Never underestimate the power of the establishment to get what they want.
 - Why does the fourth Gospel only refer to Barabbas as **a robber** (v. 40) rather than an insurrectionist and a murderer? We can only speculate, but likely there is an underlying poetic allusion to Barabbas becoming the *robber of the Jewish throne*, displacing (as it seemed) the real King.
- Verse 19:1-3 –
 - The brutality and mockery of Jesus, unacceptable by any humanitarian standards (and especially one without a charge), was likely standard treatment for Roman subjects in the first century.
 - The fear brought by public pain and humiliation was used by the Romans as a deterrent to crime and the obedience of the subjects.
 - Knowing that Jesus was being delivered as the King of the Jews, the soldiers put the famous **crown of thorns** and dressed Jesus in a **purple robe** to visually mock His Kingship. They verbally mocked His Kingship by shouting, **Hail, King of the Jews!**
 - Why a **crown of thorns**?
 - From the soldier’s point of view, it was likely simply the closest and easiest material nearby to make a στέφανος [stephanos] (the wreath used in Roman days).

- In a spiritual sense, it is fitting, since thorns are specifically given as a sign of the curse (Gen. 3:18).
- Verse 19:4 –
 - Pilate once again tries to “get out of it,” while not having enough spine to actually get out of it.
 - Perhaps he argued that the torture of Jesus still brought forth no evidence of a crime.
 - Or, perhaps the beating was extra brutal and Pilate thought that the people would be satisfied.
- Verse 19:5 –
 - This scene is possibly the most painted scene of all the Bible, with the exception of the nativity and the crucifixion itself.
 - The phrase **Behold the man!** is *ecce homo* in Latin, and an internet search of the Latin phrase will yield hundreds of works of art, many by famous artists.
 - In Jerusalem there is the famous *ecce homo* arch, a symbolic location of this scene on the *via dolorosa*.
- Verse 19:6 –
 - Consistently through the crucifixion, it was a small number of leaders who wanted to see Jesus dead.
 - Here the **chief priests** (Annas, Caiphus, and others who may have been living) and the **officers** [of the Temple, hired by the chief priests] began to shout for Pilate to **Crucify**.
 - Pilate attempts to deliver Jesus into the Jews hands, possibly to “wash his hands” of the illegal death, or possibly to see if the leaders will do that which is illegal themselves (and thus be arrested).
- Verse 19:7 –
 - The Jews (i.e., *the leadership*) appear to be eager to do the work themselves, yet want full authority of Pilate. They speak of a Jewish law based upon which Jesus **ought to die**. Likely this is a reference to Leviticus 24:16.
 - To those skeptics who say that Jesus never claimed to be **the Son of God**, this verse should cause reconsideration. The Jewish leadership certainly believed that Jesus made such a claim.
- Verse 19:8 –
 - Why was Pilate **the more afraid** at this claim?
 - Was it because, yet again, his efforts to “trick” the Jews into changing their direction did not work?
 - Was it because up to this point Jesus was presented to him as *insurrectionist* but now as **Son of God** (or one who claimed to be)? Recall that his wife had a dream about Jesus, and based on this dream wanted her husband to release Jesus (Matt. 27:19).
- Verses 9-19 – *stay tuned!*