

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

JOHN 18:28 Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment: and it was early; and they themselves went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the passover.

29 Pilate then went out unto them, and said, What accusation bring ye against this man?

30 They answered and said unto him, If he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up unto thee.

31 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:

32 That the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled, which he spake, signifying what death he should die.

33 Then Pilate entered into the judgment hall again, and called Jesus, and said unto him, Art thou the King of the Jews?

34 Jesus answered him, Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me?

35 Pilate answered, Am I a

Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee unto me: what hast thou done?

36 Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.

37 Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.

38 Pilate saith unto him, What is truth? And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews, and saith unto them, I find in him no fault *at all*.

39 But ye have a custom, that I should release unto you one at the passover: will ye therefore that I release unto you the King of the Jews?

40 Then cried they all again, saying, Not this man, but Barabbas. Now Barabbas was a robber.

NOTES

Pilate: What Is Truth?

Lesson Text: John 18:28-40

Related Scriptures: Isaiah 53:1-9; Matthew 27:11-18, 20-24;
Mark 15:1-15; Luke 18:32-33; 23:1-25

TIME: A.D. 30

PLACE: Jerusalem

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GOLDEN TEXT—“Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence” (John 18:36).

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Lesson Exposition

DELIVERED TO THE GENTILES— John 18:28-32

Fear of defilement (John 18:28). After being formally charged with blasphemy before the Sanhedrin, over which Caiaphas presided, Jesus was led away to Pilate, the Roman governor. The “hall of judgment” (John 18:28) is literally the “praetorium,” the residence of the governor.

The Jewish leaders were very scrupulous about avoiding ceremonial defilement, so they refused to enter Pilate’s residence.

Empty denunciation (John 18:29-31). Placating the Jewish leaders, Pilate came outside to hear their complaint. As Roman governor, he alone held the legal power of life or death. Jesus’ trial occurred at a time in which the Jewish authorities no longer were allowed to execute criminals themselves.

Although the Jewish authorities had already condemned Jesus to death, they knew that their condemnation had to be confirmed and carried out by Roman authority. Rather than ex-

PLICITLY state the controversial nature of Jesus’ crime to a Gentile authority, they tried to get Pilate to take their word alone as sufficient grounds for Jesus’ execution. The word “malefactor” merely means “evil doer.” The word “criminal” would be a modern equivalent.

Fulfillment of prophecy (John 18:32). Jesus had told His disciples that He was headed to Jerusalem, where He would be rejected and killed. That the means of His death would be by crucifixion is implied in statements about Him being “lifted up” (John 3:14; 12:32-33). In order for all of these prophecies to be fulfilled, the Jews needed to hand Jesus over to the Romans for crucifixion.

Realizing that the Jewish religious leaders were trying to entangle him in some religious dispute, Pilate told them to deal with Jesus on their own. When they made clear that they wanted Jesus’ death, Pilate likely was surprised. He would have to examine Jesus personally to ascertain His guilt or innocence for himself.

FACED WITH THE TRUTH— John 18:33-38a

Two-way interrogation (John 18:33-35). Pilate took Jesus back into the praetorium to question Him. Luke tells us that the Jews had told Pilate, “We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that he himself is Christ a king” (Luke 23:2). Clearly, they were accusing Jesus of being a threat to Roman authority.

When asked pointedly if He claimed to be the King of the Jews, Jesus answered by asking another question. He wanted to know if this was Pilate’s own inquiry or if he was merely repeating what others had told him.

To Jesus’ question, Pilate answered, “Am I a Jew?” (John 18:35). Obviously, he was not, and the form of the question expects a negative answer.

Pilate’s agitated response indicates that he was feeling frustrated.

A different kind of kingdom (John 18:36). Jesus’ profound response to Pilate’s impatience changes the atmosphere of the interrogation. “My kingdom is not of this world” is significant on many levels. For Pilate, it was a direct clarification that Jesus was indeed no political threat to Rome.

When Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world,” He was declaring that His kingdom was from another place or realm. It is a heavenly kingdom.

The challenge of truth (John 18:37-38a). Since Jesus had spoken of His kingdom, Pilate pressed Him to tell him more about it. Jesus revealed that the very reason He had been born was to bear witness to the truth.

Pilate’s response, “What is truth?” has puzzled commentators. Most think he was being cynical.

TRUTH DISCARDED— John 18:38b-40

An attempt at reprieve (John 18:38b-39). Pilate declared, “I find in him no fault at all.”

Since there existed at this time an annual good-will gesture of releasing one prisoner at Passover, Pilate suggested that Jesus might be that one to be released at this time.

Repudiation of truth (John 18:40). But instead of agreeing to His release, the chief priests and their cronies railed furiously against any such notion. They instead clamored vociferously for the release of Barabbas, a notorious criminal who was a convicted insurrectionist and murderer!

—John Alva Owston.

QUESTIONS

1. What was the “hall of judgment?” (John 18:28)?
2. Why did the Jews refuse to enter the hall of judgment?
3. Why did the Jewish authorities need to take Jesus to Pilate?
4. What is a “malefactor” (vs. 30)?
5. For what other reason was it important that Jesus be turned over to the Romans?
6. What was Pilate’s initial response to the Jewish leaders’ demand?
7. What accusation against Jesus did the Jewish leaders bring that caught Pilate’s attention?
8. What did Jesus mean by saying that His kingdom “is not of this world” (vs. 36)?
9. What did Pilate mean by his response, “What is truth” (vs. 38)?
10. Who was Barabbas?

—John Alva Owston.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Some religious people do despicable things (John 18:28).
2. We should not expect straightforward answers from people bent on doing wrong (vss. 29-30).
3. The Lord uses the plans of evil people to bring about His own plan for our salvation (vss. 31-32).
4. We need wisdom to tell if some people's questions are sincere or hiding an agenda (vss. 33-35).
5. The hearts of those who follow Jesus have been opened to the truth (vss. 36-37).
6. Like Jesus, we can be cleared of wrongdoing and still suffer an unjust penalty (vss. 38-40).

—Charity G. Carter.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. How could such devoutly religious people have no problem falsely accusing Jesus (John 18:28-30)?
2. Why did Pilate tell the Jewish leaders to judge Jesus (vs. 31)?
3. In order to ascertain Jesus' innocence or guilt, Pilate asked Him, "Art thou the King of the Jews?" (vs. 33). Explain why Jesus responded with His own question.
4. What did Jesus mean when He said, "My kingdom is not of this world" (vs. 36)?
5. Pilate asked, "What is truth?" (vs. 38). How would you answer that question?

—Charity G. Carter.

Golden Text Illuminated

"Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence" (John 18:36).

In this week's text, Jesus says that His kingdom is not of this world, meaning that it has a divine origin.

In explaining His kingdom to Pilate, the main idea that Jesus conveyed was the word "truth" (John 18:37), emphasizing, it seems, the spiritual nature of the kingdom.

Theologians tell us that God's kingdom is both already here and still on the way. They use the expression "now and not yet." Though they await the physical descent of the kingdom, Christians can now experience some of the powers of the "world to come" (Heb. 6:5).

Because He is sitting at God's right hand, Jesus is already "Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). "All power is given unto [Jesus] in heaven and in earth," so with the promise of this King's presence, Christians can make disciples and teach the nations to observe God's Word (Matt. 28:18-20). Prayers can be answered; miracles can happen.

Christians engage in spiritual warfare. We do things like living righteously, preaching the gospel, trusting in God, loving our enemies, persevering through trial, and praying in the Spirit (Eph. 6:15-18). We honor our governing authorities, but if we are asked to disobey the commands of God, we say: "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). By God's grace, we honor Him.

—David Samuel Gifford.