

Christ's Civil Trial  
John 18:28-40

Last Sunday: The fall of Peter and the rise of Christ.

Today: Christ's civil trial before Pilate.

Pontius Pilate has many questions with few answers:

- "What accusation do you bring against this man?" (18:29)
- "Are you the King of the Jews?" (18:33)
- "Am I a Jew?" (18:35)
- "What have you done?" (18:35)
- "So you are a king?" (18:37)
- "What is truth?" (18:38)
- "Do you want me to release the King of the Jews?" (18:39)

Time frame: Christ's civil trial occurs after a long night of religious trials by Annas, Caiaphas, and the entire Sanhedrin where "they sought out false witnesses against Jesus" (Mt. 26:59).

"Jesus remained silent. And the high priest said to him, 'I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are **the Christ, the Son of God**.' Jesus said to him, 'You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man **seated** at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.' Then the high priest tore his robes and said, 'He has uttered blasphemy. What further witnesses do we need? You have now heard his blasphemy. What is your judgment?' They answered, 'He deserves death.' Then they spit in his face and struck him. And some slapped him, saying, 'Prophecy to us, you Christ! Who is it that struck you?'" (Mt. 26:63-68)

**18:31** - "It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death."

What do the Jews mean by this?

1. Rome did not allow the Jews the right of execution (The Talmud agrees with this).
  - a. What about the law against Gentiles trespassing at the temple?
  - b. What about Stephen (Acts 7) and James, the brother of Jesus (Josephus)?
2. Rome did not allow the Jews the right of execution **by crucifixion**.
  - a. Deut. 21:23, "If a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree."
  - b. They wanted Jesus to die as an imposter, as one cursed by God.

**18:38** - “What is truth?”

This question can be taken one of two ways:

- True question: Jesus could have answered, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” (Jn. 14).
- False question: Pilate is being sarcastic or even reflective but not really interested.

What happens next?

Luke 23: 4-12 gives added detail:

“Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, ‘I find no guilt in this man.’ But they were urgent, saying, ‘He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee even to this place.’ When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. And when he learned that he belonged to Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent him over to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time. When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had long desired to see him, because he had heard about him, and he was hoping to see some sign done by him. So he questioned him at some length, but he made no answer. The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him. And Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him. Then, arraying him in splendid clothing, he sent him back to Pilate. And Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day, for before this they had been at enmity with each other.”

**18:39** - “So do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?”

Why does Pilate give the Jews a choice?

1. He was helping the Jewish leaders to save face— a political maneuver.
2. He was hoping the Jewish people would choose Jesus.
3. He was trying unsuccessfully to heed his wife’s warning:

Mt. 27:18-19, “He knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered him up. Besides, while he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, ‘Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much because of him today in a dream.’”