

Talking To Pilate

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In John 18:33-40, we find a conversation between Jesus and Pilate that helps open our eyes to the inner machinations of this peculiar governor and his motivation. While history shows that Pilate was a man of cruelty for much of his administration, something seems to lead him to believe that Jesus' life is worth attempting to save. *"Pilate is a type of the worldly man, knowing the right and anxious to do it so far as it can be done without personal sacrifice of any kind, but yielding easily to pressure from those whose interest it is that he should act otherwise. He would gladly have acquitted Christ, and even made serious efforts in that direction, but gave way at once when his own position was threatened"* (<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12083c.htm>). Perhaps Pilate speaks on behalf of Jesus because of the exhortation of his wife as he is sitting on the judgment seat. She pleads with him in Matthew 27:19 to *"have nothing to do with that righteous man"* because of a nightmare she had had that night about Him.

In any case, consider a few noteworthy points in the conversation between Jesus and Pilate. First, Pilate asks Him directly whether or not He is the King of Jews. In response, Jesus inquires as to why he asked the question – had he heard about Jesus from other people, or had he been genuinely curious about Jesus' role as King of the Jews? *"I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You to me; what have You done?"* (John 18:35). The answer to this question is one that puts to rest all claims that Jesus came into this world to establish an earthly kingdom. For any Zionist or Premillennialist, John 18:36 should be the silencing verse every time. *"My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm."*

"So You are a king?" Jesus answered, *"You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truths hears My voice"* (John 18:37). What does this say about citizenship in the kingdom? Clearly, one cannot be a citizen of the kingdom of Jesus Christ without accepting His Word on all matters. If He came to testify to the truth, then everything He said was truth, and we must live with it and love it.

"Pilate said to Him, 'What is truth?'" (18:38). It seems like Pilate is the consummate skeptic. He is a man who refuses to play games with the religious fanatics of his day, and is left dismayed and awe struck by the boldness of Jesus Christ. Rather than confront the logic of Christ's assertions, as well as His boldness and sincerity of faith, Pilate simply dismisses the whole matter, arguing that truth is relative and it is pointless to assert one's own view of truth onto another. The Bible, however, commands us to put our feet down on matters of truth. First, truth is a tangible thing – not anything like what Pilate asserts. *"And you shall know the truth..."* (John 8:32). Rather than truth being some amorphous concept that we all determine on our own, it is a firm idea that is determined by God (1 John 5:7, John 17:17). Truth is found in the Gospel (2 Corinthians 6:7, John 16:13, Ephesians 1:13).

After hearing Christ's response to all of his questions, Pilate concludes that no wrongdoing is present, and pleads with the Jews to drop the matter (18:38-40). All they are interested in, though, is putting Jesus to death and seeking the release of Barabbas. After releasing Barabbas (Luke 23:23-25), Pilate takes Jesus into the building and scourges Him, which means that He was beaten brutally with sticks and whips by the

Roman soldiers. This punishment would have been enough to make most men cry for mercy, but Isaiah 53:7 states that the Messiah would be silent in the face of His punishers. In the same chapter, we see clear prophecies fulfilled by Jesus in the Gospels. *“The chastening of our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed”* (Isaiah 53:5).

The governor seems to be a man with conflicting interests, for he spends such a great amount of time and energy trying to release Jesus, yet seems to fall so quickly when he is unable. Perhaps Pilate reverses his kindness so quickly because of frustration with the Jews; if they are going to be so unwilling to cooperate, he would have nothing more to do than to grant their wishes to the extreme. Another theory about the scourging is that Pilate may have believed that a thorough beating would be enough to satisfy the bloodlust of the Jewish mob. If Jesus was an innocent man, Pilate may have thought, then it would be better to beat Him and appease the crowd than to execute Him. Of course, this does not work because we see that the crowds cried all the more, *“Crucify, crucify!”* (John 19:6). When Pilate suggests that they go crucify Him themselves, they accuse Jesus of claiming to be the Son of God, which puts yet another layer of fear into Pilate’s heart. We will explore this in our next article.