
As we continue, I want to reiterate that the Religious Leaders had conspired together and were acting in accordance with a well thought out and carefully designed plan to ensure that not only does Jesus get killed but also that they retain their *power* over the people, their *politics* in terms of Rome, and their *positions* in terms of individual leadership in the community. But what is actually kind of amusing is that despite all their plotting and scheming, they were merely just fulfilling ancient prophecy spoken by King David close to 2,000 years before.

Psalm 59:3-4

For behold, they have set an ambush for my life; fierce men launch an attack against me, not for my transgression nor for my sin, O Lord, for no guilt of mine, they run and set themselves against me.

So far things were going fairly well and according to plan. They had their traitor, they had their victim, and in the trial before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin they overcame the issue of not having any witnesses to wrongdoing when Jesus admitted that He is the Son of God (***Luke 22:70***). But the plan was not quite complete. There were two more players that were critical to their success: the crowd and Pilate. These two, however, were not going to be easily manipulated and required a very clever hand to get out of them exactly what was needed.

As we stated last week, this is why the Religious Leaders were so concerned with not being publically “defiled.” They wanted to officiate and participate in the Passover so everyone would believe things were normal and their faithful leaders

were still in control. It was obvious that they were not all that concerned with personal defilement as they broke practically every rule of law and justice on the books when it came to how they handled Jesus. So personal purity was not even an issue; this was not about God or holiness, it was about politics.

Therefore, it was their appearance before the crowds that they needed to preserve. They knew that they would soon need the total backing of the crowd as they made their case before Pilate. Their plan depended upon a credible threat of a riot in order to effectively coerce Pilate to take action on their behalf. Again, this is why they refused to enter the Praetorium. Let's pick up the story there.

John 18:29-32

Therefore Pilate went out to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this Man?" They answered and said to him, "If this Man were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him to you." So Pilate said to them, "Take Him yourselves, and judge Him according to your law." The Jews said to him, "We are not permitted to put anyone to death," to fulfill the word of Jesus which He spoke, signifying by what kind of death He was about to die.

What John communicates to us in this passage is more than remarkable. Look at their bravado. They have not come to their governor asking for a favor, they do not suck up to his position, and they do not in any way ingratiate themselves to Pilate, as would be appropriate for a man of such authority; rather, they make demands—this man must die and we have brought Him to you to carry out the dirty deed. They had already tried, convicted and condemned Jesus and they

came to Pilate merely for the execution orders. Pilate asks what Jesus had been accused of and they antagonize him by saying only that He was an evildoer; they exhibit no respect for this man. But understand this is all part of their strategy.

Look at the position they purposefully put Pilate in? This is an obvious power play and he knows it. They are banking on the hope that his pride and disdain for the Jews would invoke his resistance. They knew that Jesus saying that He is the Son of God was not an actionable offence under Roman criminal law; so they were not going to take their chances. They were going to manipulate Pilate to ensure their plan would prevail. They would use his resistance to incite an emotional fervor from within the crowds and rile up a mob against Pilate.

It seems that Pilate knew that they were up to no good so he said, take Jesus and judge Him according to your own law—in other words, this is not a Roman affair. But their reply is that they are not permitted to put anyone to death.

This has been a statement that has troubled many Bible students. Clearly, if we skip forward to the book of Acts and the stories of the first disciples learning to live out their faith, we see that the Religious Leaders officiated over the stoning of Stephen. Stephen stood before the Sanhedrin and gave his testimony of belief that Jesus is the Messiah and the Religious Leaders flipped out in crazy rage. They dragged Stephen out of the city where the official witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul (who would eventually be Paul the Apostle) and they stoned Stephen and killed him. Soon, thereafter, they gave letters of authority to Saul to start a massive persecution of those who belonged to the Way—which is the name by which Christianity was first known. See **Acts 6:8-8:1; 9:1-2**.

So clearly this statement that they do not have the right to put a man to death does not mean what it seems in the absolute sense. So what is going on here? I believe this is part of the wiliness of their plan.

The Religious Leaders knew that many believed Jesus was a great prophet and that there were others who believed He was the Messiah, but the details did not matter all that much; they were concerned about the fact that He had a more than significant following and they wanted to avoid any backlash that might come about because of Jesus' death. They did not want to take the blame. They wanted to pin it all on the Romans and walk away clean. That is why **Matthew 26:3-5** tells us that they purposefully planned to arrest Jesus in secret and put Him to death quickly lest there be a riot and in **26:16**, that even after Judas said that he would betray Jesus, the Religious Leaders waited and waited until just the right time when Jesus would be alone with His disciples—they thought, with no crowd around Him then we can't fail.

This is why everything was done quickly and in secret. They wanted it all done before Jesus' followers even knew what happened. And Passover provided the perfect opportunity. First, everyone would be busy with their own families preparing and making all the arrangements for this grand festival; and, if things went well, Jesus would be dead before anyone but His' disciples got a hint of the treachery. Second, there would be millions of people in Jerusalem who had made the Passover pilgrimage. There was a good chance that many of these people would have no familiarity with Jesus and could therefore be manipulated to turn against some rogue blasphemer who claimed to be the Son of God.

But still they could take no chances; they had to make the whole thing a Roman affair. Just in case anyone did get wind of their scheming they needed to be able to point the finger at Rome. In addition, if there were to be any blow back they wanted the Romans to have to play the heavy and put down any reaction. They wanted the blood to be firmly fixed on Roman hands and not on Jewish hands.

But their dilemma was in figuring out how to make this a Roman affair. Clearly, crimes of purely a religious nature were of no concern to the Romans; hence, Pilate's directive to go and take care of it themselves. So they had to up the ante and package this as a crime against the state. Sure, they could stone a religious blasphemer, but that would put everything in jeopardy. They could not risk the crowd turning against them. They therefore trumped up charges to paint Jesus as a traitor to Rome for treason was a capital crime that fell within the exclusive jurisdiction of Rome. In this context, their statement was true. They have no power to put a man to death who is convicted of a capital crime against the state; that power belonged exclusively to Rome alone.

Now we know that the Sanhedrin had convicted Jesus because He said that He is the Son of God, but we are told in **Luke 23:2, 14** that they ultimately accused Jesus of treason. The charges were: leading a revolt, claiming to be a king, and telling the Jews to not pay taxes to the Roman government. Treason was a capital offense and if Jesus was found guilty the Romans would have to act. Pilate was being squeezed and he could feel their fingers wrapping around his throat.

Just by way of historical reference, there is a big debate about the exact timing of when the Jews lost, in the absolute sense, their power to legally put a man to death. Everyone agrees that when the Romans tore Jerusalem to shreds in 70 A.D.

that the remaining survivors had no authority to govern and no legal authority to take life. But some argue that this right was taken away 40 year earlier in 30 A.D. just a few years before Jesus was tried. Still there are others who argue that by the time Jesus was standing before Pilate this power had been abdicated to the Romans but not technically revoked. I think this argument makes sense especially considering 1) there is no historical record indicating that a law had been passed to strip the Jews of their limited self-rule and 2) our discussion about the total corruption of the Jewish leadership. Remember, they had become so vile and complicit in evil that no one could legitimately sit in the seat of justice and be held to the standard of the Law set forth in ***Deuteronomy 16:18-21***. Thus, over time they tended, out of guilt and fear, to cede this power to their Roman occupiers.

Do you know that the Jews losing the power of self-rule, the power to put a man to death, was prophesied back in Genesis? Even the timing was predicted.

Genesis 49:10

The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes

In this prophecy, we find that Judah's descendents (the meaning of "from between his feet") would not lose the power to rule and govern the people (which would include the power to take a life in capital crimes) until Shiloh comes. Shiloh is an Old Testament epithet for the Messiah and literally means tranquility. Thus, according to this prophecy the Messiah would have to come first before the power of self-governance was lost and before any descendent of Judah had no

representation in the national power structure, which is symbolized by the scepter or ruler's staff.

It is believed there had always been a remnant of leadership, from the tribe of Judah, not only during the time of exile in Babylon (through the deposed kings) but all the way up to the time of Jesus. However, after their exile, this leadership was not administered as an exclusive sovereign, as it was in the times of the kings, but was administered via a council. We first see this in ***Nehemiah 7:7*** where there is a list of 12 men who returned from Babylon and helped govern the exiles. It is believed that these were leaders from each tribe, including the tribe of Judah.

Tradition has it that even though Israel was ruled by council consensus preference was still given to the descendants of Judah. Over time, however, this council mutated and more and more priests took council seats and the power of the royals and the elders was weakened, but not entirely stripped away. Eventually this governing body became known as the Sanhedrin.

Now it was King Herod who reigned in Judea from 73 BC to 4 BC who caused a big change in the composition of the Sanhedrin. Herod was extremely hostile to the nobility, for obvious political reasons, and this led to the substantial increase in influence of the Pharisees in the council. He accomplished this change by murdering 45 of the 70 members of the Sanhedrin most of who were royals. Thus, from the time of Herod the composition of the Sanhedrin was permanently changed from a body ruled solely by the aristocracy to one which was a mixture of nobility and Pharisees. The point to be made, however, is the rule of Judah was still preserved (though extremely marginalized) through the time of Jesus' coming as they had continuing representation in the nation's power structure.

Now the Sanhedrin remained as the governing body of the Jews until 70 A. D. when it was completely abolished by the Romans who stripped all self-rule from the Jews. This was when the scepter had officially departed. And even if they had lost the power to take life in 30 A.D., as some say, it was still after Shiloh came (after Jesus was born) and the prophecy fulfilled.

Can you imagine, this was predicted almost 3,400 years in advance? Fulfilled prophecy is just one of the reasons we can have absolute confidence in the infallibility of the Word of God. The precision and detail is mind blowing. There is no other book that has ever been written which has an internal method of self validation. The Bible makes detailed predictions sometimes thousands of years in advance and they always are fulfilled precisely as predicted.

Now in that vein, I don't want you to miss something absolutely spectacular—the fulfillment of other prophecies and a statement which screams of the absolute sovereignty of God. The Jews were busy concocting this complex, cunning, and totally brilliant plan to get rid of Jesus, blame it on the Romans, preserve their power and position, and walk away looking as if they did Israel a favor. But take note, they were just puppets in the hands of a sovereign God. They were just tools which the Father used to accomplish His own purposes. It is truly pathetic how much control we mortals think we have; the reality is that God does what He wants, when He wants, and His will always prevails.

In **verse 32** we are told that when the Jews said that they did not have the power to put Jesus to death that this fulfilled the Word of Jesus which He spoke, signifying by what kind of death He was about to die. Jesus predicted that He would be lifted up on a Roman cross.

John 3:14

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up;

John 8:28

So Jesus said, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me.

John 12:32, 34

"And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself." The Son of Man must be lifted up'?

So it was all happening according to Jesus' predictions which were all according to the Father's plan. For all their scheming and conniving, the Religious Leaders were actually just there to unwittingly fulfill prophecy. And imagine; some of this prophecy had been penned somewhere between 2,000-3,000 years in advance of the events actually occurring.

Let's take a moment to look at a few prophecies that would be fulfilled by Jesus being delivered to the Romans and crucified rather than killed in any other manner. Again keep in mind that these things were written thousands of years in advance.

- David Prophesied in ***Psalm 2*** and ***Psalm 83*** that a combination of Jews and Gentiles (a.k.a. the Romans) were going to come against the Messiah. In ***Acts 4:25-28*** Peter gave us understanding of the ancient prophecy when, in prayer, he said: “You spoke long ago by the Holy Spirit through our ancestor David, your servant, saying, 'Why were the nations so angry? Why did they waste their time with futile plans? (***Psalm 2***). The kings of the earth prepared for battle; the rulers gathered together against the Lord and against his Messiah' (***Psalm 83***). "In fact, this has happened here in this very city! For Herod Antipas, Pontius Pilate the governor, the Gentiles, and the people of Israel were all united against Jesus, your holy servant, whom you anointed. But everything they did was determined beforehand according to your will.”
- ***Psalm 34:20*** says: “He keeps all His bones, not one of them is broken.” If Jesus were to have been stoned, as was the method of capital punishment by the Jews, some of His bones would certainly have been broken but He was crucified and not one bone was broken.
- According to ***Exodus 21:4-9***, God has sent a judgment of poisonous snakes into the camp of the Israelites because of their ongoing sin and rebellion. When enough people were bitten and died they finally cried out for mercy. God then instructed Moses to make a bronze snake (bronze being a symbol for judgment and the snake a symbol for sin) and place it on a staff (a symbol of the cross) and raise it in the midst of the camp. Then wherever

those who had been bitten by a snake looked at the bronze serpent they were healed. This was a prophetic event that pointed forward to the time that Jesus would not only become sin our behalf but be raised up on a cross and judged for that sin so that all who look to Him would find healing from their fatal condition brought about by the bite of sin.

- **Deuteronomy 21:23** says that he who is hanged is accursed of God and **Galatians 3:13-14** explains that when Jesus was crucified and hung on a cross He became accursed of God as He took upon Himself the curse for the wrongdoing of every man, woman, and child.

So it should be clear who is really in control. Yes, the Romans were critical to the success of the Religious Leaders' devious plan, but their involvement and the bloody cross were all part of the Father's plan; a plan which was announced to us thousands of years in advance.

John 18:33-38

Therefore Pilate entered again into the Praetorium, and summoned Jesus and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about Me?" Pilate answered, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You to me; what have You done?" Jesus answered, "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." Therefore Pilate said to Him, "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 truth hears My voice." Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?"

Pilate must have been totally freaked out. Who is this guy and why do they disdain Him so much? He takes Jesus back for a private discussion to get away from those devious manipulators. Hum, an evildoer? How so? Pilate was not convinced. By asking if Jesus was the King of the Jews we can tell that he knew Jesus was standing before him because of Jewish politics and not because of any legitimate accusation of crimes against the Roman state. Pilate does not even question Jesus about tax evasion or His inciting riots.

Jesus went with Pilate. He was not afraid, He did not lose His composure, He also was not arrogant or defiant; rather, He stood there in confidence. If Jesus' cool demeanor did not frighten Pilate, then surely His answer did. Jesus wanted to know if Pilate actually cared to know the truth. This answer alone carried the scary implication that Jesus was actually in the position, with the legitimate authority, to give Pilate the truth.

Disturbed with the inference, Pilate reacted and tried to reestablish his own authority: "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered **You to me**; what have You done?" Pilate knew the claim of treason was false, but he wanted to know what was behind all this tumult. Why did the Jews want Jesus dead?

So Jesus once again turns the discussion upside down and re-establishes His authority and says that His kingdom is not of this realm. My kingdom is a higher kingdom than yours—it is not of this world—as such it is not the kind of kingdom that you need to be worried about in terms of your little fiefdom here on earth. This is evidenced by the fact that I have asked no one to fight for me and no one is causing, or going to cause, any sort of rebellion to establish My kingdom; quite unlike what the Jews would otherwise want you to believe.

Also take note of the possessory claims; they were not lost on Pilate. “My Kingdom” is mentioned 3 times and “My servants” is mentioned once. Jesus lets Pilate know that He is supreme over this supernatural Kingdom and neither the Jews nor Pilate have any authority in His realm or over His people.

We know Pilate was shaken, hence his reply: "So **You are** a king?" In the Greek the emphasis on this statement is on the “**You are**” and not on “king.” In other words, Pilate was not being sarcastic saying, “oh so you think you are a King, do you.” Rather, with surprise and a bit of unease he all of a sudden starts to understand, "So **You are** a king?"

Jesus affirmed Pilate in his sudden epiphany. Our translation says: "You say correctly that I am a king" but in the Greek He once again merely speaks His name—the Father’s name which had been given to Jesus: “Ego eimi”—“I Am.” You say that I am a king, I Am. Pilate you don’t even know who you are dealing with. I am more than a man (as My Kingdom is not of this world); I am more than a king (I am entirely supreme); I Am.

Then Jesus puts the exclamation mark on this statement by saying: “For this I have been born (indicating that, yes, I am 100% man), and for this I have come

into the world (indicating that, yes, I Am not from this world, I preexisted and therefore came into this world, I Am 100% God), to testify to the truth. In other words, Pilate, don't worry I have not come to claim right and title to a throne here and now, but merely to testify to the truth, that "I Am." I came to give witness to the fact that I, the Lord God and creator of the universe, emptied myself and came in the form of man, so that I would be lifted up on a Roman cross in order that those who are of the truth would come to know and believe this truth—I came from the Father; therefore, I Am.

Jesus then says something that is very profound: "Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." Jesus strips the notion of truth away from merely a philosophical concept or away from some frozen standard and instead gives this word life and even an element of possession and self-awareness. He does not say: "everyone who knows the truth" but everyone who is of the truth. It takes a **present** and **active** awareness of the truth to belong to the truth and those who belong to the truth can **presently** and **actively** hear Jesus' voice.

This brings to mind **John 10** when the Religious Leaders asked Jesus point blank, "are you the Christ" and Jesus said:

John 10:25-28

"I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father's name, these testify of Me." But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep. "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand."

In other words, just look around, the truth is evident and has been displayed in your midst. But you don't believe because you can't believe because you don't belong to me. If you belonged to me you would not only hear, or be fully aware of the truth that I am the Christ, but you would also follow.

You see, truth is all about Jesus. He is the truth and everything testifies to this truth. The Father testifies to the truth; the Son testifies to the truth; the Spirit testifies to the truth; and even all of creation testifies to the truth. This is why it is not some frozen standard or some mystical philosophical concept. The truth is all about knowing that Jesus came to manifest to the world that He is the Christ—the great "I Am," the true King, the only King, that sits over and rules over all of creation. As Pilate would soon confess, He is truly the man!

In retort, Pilate then said, "What is truth?" It would be easy to just write this off as some sarcastic comment and move on, but I think this reply says so much more and gives us insight into Pilate's overall worldview. We know that from Pilate's position as a regional governor that he was likely born into a middle class Italian family and had some military experience, but for the most part his life and his profession has been about politics. His world has been about variations on the truth, declinations of the truth, changing truths, and even downright perversion of the truth. He was unable to connect to what Jesus had said; His worldview had no frame of reference of truth being alive, self-aware, possessive, and found in a person. In his world of Politics, truth was always forced to submit to the practical realities of surviving this life; hence, to Pilate truth was always relative and ever changing.

John 18:38-40

And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews and said to them, "I find no guilt in Him." But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover; do you wish then that I release for you the King of the Jews?" So they cried out again, saying, "Not this Man, but Barabbas." Now Barabbas was a robber.

Pilate declares Jesus to be innocent of treason against the state, but he knows that it will not be so easy to get the Jews to let go of this bone that they are feverishly grinding. But after that private 1x1 with Jesus, he was very unsettled and just wanted to set Jesus free. So he comes out and announces his verdict and, in accordance with the custom at Passover to release someone who is imprisoned, he gives them an alternative that he believed would have ensured Jesus' release. **Matthew 27:17** says that Pilate gave them the choice between Barabbas and Jesus.

Now Barabbas was a very bad man. In addition to being a robber, we find out in **Luke 23:18-19** that Barabbas had been imprisoned for insurrection and murder, both of which were capital crimes against the state. And it is in this fact that I find Pilate's actions so intriguing. Barabbas had committed serious crimes against Rome; and as one who was charged with protecting Rome, it would not be in his best interest to let this man go. Therefore, even in offering Barabbas up as an alternative, Pilate declared Jesus' innocent and called attention to the travesty of having him killed. But make no mistake; Pilate was really not all that concerned with justice for justice sake, for without a foundation of "truth" even justice was,

to him, illusory. I think his offering up Barabbas revealed the fear that began to grow in his heart after his discussion with Jesus. What if this man is truly a king of this unseen world? What if He is not from here? Things were getting way too uncomfortable for Pilates' liking.

Pilate picked Barabbas thinking that there would be no way that the Jews would want this terrible man released knowing that if he was set free he would undoubtedly cause the Religious Leaders more trouble. He would certainly become more brazen with regard to his atrocities thinking that he must sail under a lucky star and was somewhat untouchable. I don't think Pilate could imagine for a moment that they would choose Barabbas over Jesus.

Pilate's confidence was way overstated, which is why he could not hold back his personal disdain for these Religious Leaders. He purposefully referred to Jesus as the "King of the Jews" knowing that it would provoke them. It is clear that he did not understand what was at stake and errantly believed they would be remotely rational. For sure Pilate did not know that these Religious Leaders were not acting on their own accord, but were following the instructions of their father the devil (who, by the way, was merely a tool to accomplish the Father's purposes). Remember in **John 8:38-47** Jesus made it clear whose voice they follow. Thus, they wanted Jesus dead and would stop at nothing until they saw him hanging on a cross!

In **Matthew 27:20-23**, we are told that the leading priests and other leaders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and they started the chant that Jesus must be crucified. **Mark 15:11** says that they stirred up the crowd. Luke tells us that this cry mentioned by John became a might roar and with one voice they

shouted, “Kill Him” (**Luke 23:18-23**). Ah, the power of the mob. The plan is coming together.

Remember, Jerusalem was packed with millions of people who had come to celebrate Passover. The population of Jerusalem would easily swell 3 to 4 times its normal size during these big festivals. I am sure that very few of those in the crowd had any idea who Jesus was or what was really going on. They just saw their leaders being mocked by Pilate and their foreign occupiers, their enemies, being resistant to what their leaders thought was best for Israel. So they were easily persuaded to follow and with very little effort on the part of the Religious Leaders they joined their voices with the voices of the priests and leaders in their cry, “not this man, but Barabbas.”

Once again, we must stop and we will continue this amazing tale next week.

Let's pray