

Bible Stories for Adults

Jesus Before the Romans

Matthew 27:1-26

Opening

Gathering: Should government leaders strive to do what is right and just or should they try to do what the public wants? Which do they do? Why?

Today's Focus: Although Jesus was found by the Romans to be innocent of all charges, He was sentenced to death in Governor Pilate's effort to politically appease the Jewish leadership.

Key Verses: *Pilate answered, ... "I find no basis for a charge against Him."* John 19:6

When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, he washed his hands in front of the crowd. "I am innocent of this man's blood," he said. "It is your responsibility!" Matthew 27:24

Opening Prayer

Lesson

Recognizing the Claims (*Mark 2:5-7*)

Why did devout Jews start to have trouble with Jesus even early in His ministry?

Mark 2:5-7 = Knowledge of the Scriptures led them to recognize that Jesus claimed to be God

Did Jews other than the leaders have troubles with Jesus' claims?

John 6:60-66 = Yes, even some disciples couldn't accept that Jesus could be God

C. S. Lewis - A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic - on the level with a man who says he is a poached egg - or he would be the devil of hell. You must take your choice. Either this was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.

Handling the Blasphemer (*John 8:58-59*)

How did the leaders understand the fact that so many people flocked to Jesus?

John 7:45-49 = He was a master deceiver and the crowd was ignorant of God's truths

How did devout Jews react to Jesus' continued claims to be God?

John 10:24-25, 30-33 (8:58-59) = They tried to stone Him to death

How could this have been the right reaction? = They truly believed Jesus wasn't God

Leviticus 24:13-16 = Anyone who blasphemed God was to be executed by stoning

C. S. Lewis - One man said to me, "Three Hundred Years ago people in England were putting witches to death. Was that what you call the Rule of Human Nature or Right Conduct?" But surely the reason we do not execute witches is that we do not believe there are such things. If we did - if we really thought that there were people going about who had sold themselves to the devil and received supernatural powers from him in return and were using these powers to kill their neighbors or drive them mad or bring bad weather, surely we should all agree that if anyone deserved the death penalty, then these filthy quislings did.

Making it Personal (*Matthew 21:45-46*)

How did Jesus add fuel to the fire? = He made it personal to the leaders

Matthew 21:45-46 = He pointed out the leaders' hypocrisy and bad examples

What else did Jesus do that personally offended the top Jewish leadership?

Mark 11:15-18 = Cleared the marketplace from the temple - the Bazaars of Annas

What else further motivated the leadership to stop Jesus? = Weren't controlling their people

John 11:43-48 = As Jesus' followers grew, afraid Romans would see political threat

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Putting a Plan Into Motion (*John 11:49-53*)

What did this meeting of the Sanhedrin decide to do about this threat?

John 11:49-53 = Shut Him up permanently to protect the nation

Why didn't they act immediately to stop this troublemaker? = Could spark a riot

Matthew 26:3-5 = He was too popular – wait until after the Feast of Unleavened Bread

Why didn't they wait until the people left for home as planned?

Matthew 26:14-16 = An insider offered to turn Him over quietly

When did they take advantage of this opportunity? = First night of the Feast of Unleavened Bread

John 13:1-2; 18:12 (Luke 22:7, 14, 39, 47, 54) = The night of the Passover Feast

The High Priest (*John 18:13-14*)

Where was Jesus taken after He was arrested?

John 18:13-14 = To Annas, father-in-law of Caiaphas, the High Priest

Why didn't they take Him directly to Caiaphas, the High Priest?

Luke 3:2 (Acts 4:6) = Annas was considered the real High Priest by Jews and had the power

Note: Romans deposed Annas in 6 AD; he retained control by having his family members succeed him

Religious Trial 1 - Annas (*John 18:19-24*)

Was Annas able to get a convictable confession while the Sanhedrin was being gathered?

John 18:19-20 = No, Jesus didn't offer anything, Said He had always spoken openly

What did Annas do when it became obvious that he wouldn't get anything out of Jesus?

John 18:24 = Sent Him to Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin

Religious Trial 2 - Caiaphas (*Matthew 26:57-68*)

Having prepared for months to get rid of Jesus, did the Jewish leaders have a solid case?

Mark 14:55-56 = Even with many false witnesses, they couldn't get two to match

Was the Sanhedrin ever able to find two people who would agree on incriminating evidence?

Mark 14:57-58 = Yes, they said He threatened to destroy the new temple

Realizing this twisted evidence couldn't hold up before the Romans, what did Caiaphas try?

Matthew 26:62-63 = He directly asked Jesus if He was the Messiah, God's Son

How did Jesus then answer Caiaphas' question even deeper than they expected?

Matthew 26:64 = *You said it...* You'll see proof when I return on God's right hand

How did the Sanhedrin react to Jesus' reply? = High priest not to tear his clothes (Leviticus 21:10)

Matthew 26:65-66 = Here's our evidence! We've got plenty of witnesses now

Religious Trial 3 - Sanhedrin (*Luke 22:63-23:1*)

What was the next step in trying to give this kangaroo court a semblance of proper justice?

Luke 22:66 = Holding an "official" trial at daybreak; Matt 27:1 - Sentenced early in morning

Note: Sanhedrin had power to execute until 30 AD = Would have stoned Jesus to death

Only Roman government had ability to execute = Crucifixion fit Messianic prophesies (next wk)

Needing a Roman conviction to execute, did they send Jesus to the governor with a few guards?

Luke 23:1 = All went as a body, Pilate in Jerusalem to handle problems from visiting crowds

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Pontius Pilate

- Palestine had been divided between Herod's sons when he died (Archelaus, Antipas, Philip)
Only 18, Archelaus was a bad & ruthless; Rome replaced him with a governor (prefect)
Matthew 2:22-23 = Joseph returned to Nazareth instead of Bethlehem due to Archelaus
- Pilate was 5th prefect, ruled for 10 years, was from hills outside Rome, Pontius was family name
Didn't like or understand Jews, Had 3 incidents with Jews before today's story:
- Strike 1 - The Affair of the Roman Standards (Poles with medallions on top instead of flags)
Prefect headquarters in Caesarea, Visited Palestine towns every year
Previous prefects removed eagles and Caesar's image before marching into Jerusalem
On his first visit, Pilate refused to remove graven images (Caesar was a god)
Jews demonstrated 5 days, Pilate relented after mass surrender by Jews in amphitheater
- Strike 2 - Aqueduct Construction
Pilate built a much needed aqueduct to bring water to Jerusalem from Bethlehem
Used funds provided by temple leaders, People resented it and rioted
Plain clothed soldiers mingled in streets, then attacked mob with swords at a given signal
- Strike 3 - Votive Shields
Had golden shields made and hung in Herod's Palace in Jerusalem
Although they had no images, they were engraved with dedications to Caesar Tiberius
Refused to remove until Jews and Herod Antipas formally protested to Tiberius
Tiberius scolded Pilate and ordered him to remove shields and to respect Jewish customs
- You're Out! - Samaritan Massacre
3 years after Jesus, a false prophet promised to uncover sacred vessels hidden by Moses
Samaritans gathered at Mt. Gerizim to watch, some brought weapons
Pilate ordered troops to attack and slaughtered the crowd
Samaritans complained, Pilate ordered to return to Rome, Tiberius died while en-route

Roman Trial 1 - Pontius Pilate (*John 18:28-38*)

- Why did the assembly stay outside of the Praetorium (governor's palace)?
John 18:28 = To stay clean for the rest of the 7-day Feast of Unleavened Bread
- How quickly did Pilate find out the seriousness of his first case this morning after Passover?
John 18:29-32 = They asked for the death penalty, didn't have much of a charge to offer
- Since Pilate wouldn't care about a charge of blasphemy, what did the Jews charge Jesus with?
Luke 23:2 = Being a revolutionary, inciting people not to pay taxes, claiming to be king
- Which of these three charges did Pilate feel was serious enough for further investigation?
John 18:33-37 = Claiming to be a king; Jesus said He was, but of a different kingdom
Note: Pilate questioned Jesus privately in accord with Roman law
- How did Jesus respond to the other charges? = See *Silence of The Lamb* at bottom of page 4
Matthew 27:11-14 = He kept silent, as a lamb before its slaughter
- What was Pilate's decision, how was it received and what out did he find?
Luke 23:4-7 = Innocent; Jews upset; Sent to Herod since He was Galilean

Roman Trial 2 - Herod Antipas (*Luke 23:8-12*)

- How did Herod feel about this referral by his rival Pilate and how was their relationship affected?
Luke 23:8, 12 = He was excited to see the miracle man; became friends with Pilate
- What especially made Herod excited to meet Jesus? = Luke 9:9 - *He tried to see Him*
Matthew 14:1-2 = He wondered if Jesus might be John the Baptist raised from the dead
- Did Herod take care of this Jesus situation as Pilate had hoped?
Luke 23:9-11 = No, he got upset when Jesus wouldn't perform, sent Him back to Pilate

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Roman Trial 3 - Pontius Pilate (*Matthew 27:15-26*)

How did Pilate try a third time to resolve this situation of a mob against an innocent man?

Luke 23:13-16 = Offered to have Him flogged then released

What idea did Pilate have after this was rejected?

Matthew 27:15-18 = Gave them a choice between Jesus and a murderer, Barabbas

How did this idea work? = This crowd included the Sanhedrin and their supporters – others still home

Matthew 27:20-23 = No, it backfired and they demanded the crucifixion of Jesus

Besides his responsibility to uphold justice, what bothered Pilate about going with the crowd?

Matthew 27:19 = Bad omen – his wife had a nightmare about Jesus

Pilate's Efforts at Justice (*John 19:1-15*)

What did Pilate do to try to appease the blood-thirsty crowd?

John 19:1-5 = Had Him flogged, mocked and beaten

Did this satisfy the crowd?

John 19:6-7 = No, they insisted upon execution for religious reasons

Did Pilate give up and sentence Jesus upon this realization of their determination?

John 19:8-11 = No, he tried to dig deeper into the bottom of the situation

How did the Jews blackmail Pilate into having Jesus executed despite His innocence?

John 19:12 = Implied they'd complain to Caesar about him supporting a revolutionary

How did Pilate react to this threat?

John 19:13-15 = Presented Jesus as their king

Caught between a rock and a hard place, what did Pilate decide to do?

Matthew 27:24-26 = Sentenced Jesus to death and tried to wash his hands of it

Closing Prayer

Response - Consider and meditate on one each day this week

1. If I were a Jew in Jesus' day, how would I respond to His claims to be God?
(*Mark 2:5-7; 14:61-64; Matthew 16:13-20; John 3:1-2; 5:18; 6:14-15; 20:26-29; Acts 2:36*)
2. When have I been falsely accused of something?
(*Mark 14:55-59; Luke 23:1-2; Job 13:4; Psalm 27:12; 35:11-12; 119:69*)
3. When have I falsely accused someone else? (*John 18:29-30; Exodus 20:16; 23:1-3; Proverbs 6:16-19; 19:9, 28; 21:28; 24:28-29; 25:18; Jeremiah 7:9; Matthew 15:19; 19:18*)
4. How have I reacted when I have tried to do what was right while others encouraged me to sin?
(*John 19:4-16; Genesis 39:6-10; Daniel 6:6-11; 1 Corinthians 10:11-13; Galatians 2:11-14; 6:1*)
5. When have I fallen into sin because it seemed too hard to resist the temptation?
(*Matthew 26:11-26; Mark 14:37-38; Luke 11:2-4; 22:31-34, 54-62; 1 Cor 7:5; James 1:12-15*)

Silence of The Lamb

A man had worked for a meat packing firm for many years. He had cut the throats of animals. He had heard the cattle bellow, the fowl squawk, the pigs squeal.

One day a farmer brought a lamb to be slaughtered. As usual, the man took his knife and cut the lamb's throat. The lamb did not squawk, squall, or flounder like other livestock did. It did not bellow and then slump like the cattle.

The little lamb just silently stood before the man. With blood flowing from its throat, the lamb tottered toward its executioner, licked the blood from his hands, and began to totter from side to side. Then the lamb silently slumped and slipped into death.

The death of that lamb changed the life of the man forever. How has the slaughter of God's Lamb changed your life?