

EXPOSITION OF JOHN

Message #72

John 18:39-19:16

One doctrine that Christians better get some handle on, because you can't ignore it if you read the Bible, is **the doctrine of the sovereignty of God.**

If God is sovereign, then everything that is or happens has meaning and purpose, even if we don't see it or understand it. This is true of creation - the stars, the birds, the animals, the mountains and the seas and this is true of individuals and circumstances. If God is sovereign, He controls everything and things pertaining to everyone. Never is that more evident than when you look at a man like Pilate .

Pilate was a key person in the program of God. His role is played in getting Jesus Christ on the cross . In all reality, when Pilate concluded that there was no 'guilt' in Jesus Christ (John 18:38), He should have either immediately set Him free or else taken Him into protective custody so an innocent man would not be harmed. In the actual interview process between Pilate and Jesus, on three separate occasions Pilate announced publicly to the Jews that there is absolutely 'no guilt' in Jesus Christ - **18:38; 19:4; 19:6.**

Furthermore, Pilate made three attempts to get Christ out of this situation and two of them show up in this context:

- 1) Pilate physically beat Him to try and appease the Jews (**19:1-4**);
- 2) Pilate tried to appeal to a custom of releasing one prisoner at Passover time, which completely backfired (**18:39-40**);
- 3) Pilate tried to send the case to Herod, who sent it right back to Pilate (Luke 23:8-12).

Pilate was left holding the bag on all of this. He was the one who had to decide what to do with Jesus Christ. One cannot help but ask, with so many attempts by Pilate to let Christ go, how is it that Christ ended up being crucified? The answer is 'this was the sovereign plan of a sovereign God so sinners could be saved.'

The point we again see here is:

THREE TIMES PILATE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT JESUS CHRIST WAS NOT GUILTY OF ANYTHING BUT TOTALLY INNOCENT AND YET HE ENDED UP BEATING JESUS AND TURNING HIM OVER TO THE JEWS FOR CRUCIFIXION AND THE ONLY EXPLANATION FOR THIS IS, THIS WAS THE SOVEREIGN . PLAN OF THE SOVEREIGN GOD.

Pilate tries everything to get Jesus Christ released, except declare Him to be so. Yet he didn't succeed. He was the most powerful Roman official in Jerusalem at the time, so we must ask 'how is it that he couldn't get Christ released?' The bottom line of this is that the entire program of God hinged upon Jesus Christ dying on that cross.

In this section there are several attempts Pilate makes to release Jesus:

ATTEMPT #1 – Pilate tried to release Jesus by way of Passover custom . **18:39-40**

Pilate didn't have the courage to take a stand against the Jews even though his own convictions told him Jesus was innocent . Pilate knew of a Jewish custom in which at the Passover time, he was supposed to release one prisoner (Matthew 27:15; Mark 15:6; Luke 23:17). That seemed to make all of the Jews feel good about him, so this is typically what he did. It is kind of like an outgoing president who uses his power to pardon certain criminals.

In jail at the time was a notorious prisoner whose name was Barabbas. According to Mark and Luke, Barabbas was an insurrectionist, a sort of 'freedom fighter' who had committed a murder (Mark 15:7; Luke 23:19) and according to John he was a robber (**John 18:40**). He stirred up a lot of problems for the Jews because he was part of an insurrectionist movement against Rome and Rome did not take kindly to this kind of action. So the choice Pilate would give to the Jews was between an innocent Jesus Christ or a cold-blooded thief and murderer whose name was Barabbas.

Pilate was banking on the fact that Jesus was popular with many Jews and they would want Him released. After all He was their king. But he was in for a shock. Not only didn't they want Jesus Christ released, they wanted Barabbas released. See, they could stop Barabbas, but they couldn't stop Jesus Christ. If Barabbas got out and started trouble, they could just get him arrested and executed later. But, as Boice said, "How do you stop Jesus Christ?" He has no weapons, no hidden agenda, no behind scenes plots. All He does is go around and teach and perform some miracles and yet He is stirring up the whole world. Many Jews were believing in Him and the entire Roman world was in an uproar. The religious Jews knew they had to get rid of Jesus, so they asked for the release of Barabbas.

They would rather spend their life living with evil sinners, involved with evil sin, than spend their life with the Savior who could save them from their sins.

When one finds that he is drawn more to things sinful than to things Biblical, you may be certain something is drastically wrong in one's spiritual life.

ATTEMPT #2 – Pilate tried to release Jesus by way of physical punishment . **19:1-8**

When Pilate saw that the Jews wanted Barabbas released and not Jesus, he decided that he would try something else. He would have Christ scourged with a whip (**19:1**), clothed with a crown of thorns and a purple robe (**19:2**) and punched in the face (**19:3**), while mocking Him as being the King of the Jews. Eusebius says that many who were scourged were torn to the bone, and veins and arteries were ripped open and many died. Pilate was thinking that if He roughed up Jesus the Jews would be happy with that and then he could send Jesus on His way. As G. Campbell Morgan said, "This was a dastardly thing for Pilate to do and it was illegal, to beat up one you just acquitted" (*Studies in the Four Gospels*, p. 289).

According to **verses 4-5**, Pilate paraded Jesus out in front of the Jews and announced, "Here is the man." According to Isaiah, people were astonished because His appearance was marred more than any man they had ever seen (Isaiah 52:14). You would think someone would feel sorry for the Lord, after seeing Him so degraded and hurting and humiliated.

He is about to die for the sins of the world and He is paraded in front of a crowd, broken and bruised, and is identified as just another man. Pilate is standing in the presence of God and he simply says here is the man. God had become man. But when the religious leaders saw Jesus they began to yell, “Crucify Him, crucify Him.” Pilate’s strategy hadn’t worked.

When you take one who is totally and completely righteous into the presence of those totally and completely evil, those who are evil will have a violent hatred and reaction against the one who is righteous. Don’t you forget this point. When you love Jesus Christ and you love the Word of God and you have God’s Spirit in you, your very presence will generate hostile and hateful things.

Before we move on, I want you to look for a moment at Jesus Christ. Who do you see standing there? Do you see Him as simply a man? Do you see Him as God? Do you see Him as your enemy? Do you see Him as your Savior? Do you see Him as One who was broken and beaten and crucified for you? Who do you see when you look at Jesus Christ?

If the same choice were given to you, Barabbas or Jesus, who do you choose? Would you pick the sinner or the Savior? Would you choose to stay in your sin like everyone else or be saved out of your sin? The choice is basically the same for people to this day.

Pilate was troubled by the fact that the Jews were yelling for him to crucify Jesus and so he said, “I don’t find any guilt in Him at all, so you take Him and crucify Him” (19:6b). But the Jews came right back at Pilate and said we have a law which says if a man makes Himself out to be God, He should die. This law is found in Leviticus 24:16, but the hypocrisy of it is that the law demanded death by stoning and they want Christ killed by crucifixion, not stoning (19:7).

Now notice **verse 8**, Pilate became more afraid. Jesus had just been identified as being God by the religious Jews. This was a charge he hadn’t heard before. Somewhere in the midst of all of this, Matthew tells us that Pilate’s wife sent Pilate word to leave Jesus alone. She had a terrible dream and she knew this was the innocent Son of God (Matt. 27:19). Pilate was greatly afraid; he knew there was something going on here way beyond the norm. So he went back into his palace to interview Jesus again.

ATTEMPT #3 – Pilate tried to release Jesus by way of verbal interview. **19:9-11**

In **verse 9**, Pilate asked Jesus where was He from? Notice in the last part of the verse that Jesus did not open His mouth and say one word. This fulfilled exactly what Isaiah predicted the Lamb of God would do - Isaiah 53:7.

We live in a world that promotes the idea that you must speak up for your rights. The attitude is if you don’t speak up for you who will? For one who is right with God, sometimes the best thing to do is not to say anything and just leave matters to God.

When Jesus did not answer, Pilate said in **verse 10**, “Don’t you know that I have the power to release you or crucify you?” As if to say, why aren’t you answering me; don’t you realize I am the one with the power to let you go or to kill you.

Now observe what Pilate says here. Don't miss this. He did have the authority and the power to release Jesus Christ and three times in this context he has said, "He is not guilty of anything." This seems like a no-brainer. If Jesus is innocent and you have the power to let Him go, set Him free. It is that simple. Why isn't Pilate setting Christ free when he has the power to do that?

Verse 11 is so critical because we learn that there was a major plan being worked out in this crucifixion. Pilate was not the one with authority here. Jesus says - the power that is presently controlling all of this is the power of God. Jesus tells Pilate your authority to do anything in regard to Me has been given to you "from above." That prepositional phrase "from above" is one that always means in John's gospel, "from God" (3:3, 7, 31; 8:23). In other words, Jesus tells Pilate, you have been permitted by God to have this power and that is the only reason I am here in your presence. The plan of God requires that Jesus go to Calvary and this is the only reason Pilate is in the picture.

In fact, Jesus says at the end of the verse that the one with the greater sin is the one who delivered Me up to you. Now there have been all kinds of opinions as to what this means. Some have said it is a reference to Satan, Judas, the Jewish religious leaders, the Jewish people and Caiaphas. You could build a theological and contextual case that God is the One responsible for delivering Christ up because what is at stake here is all about the sin problem. However, God cannot sin and be charged with committing sin. More than likely, Jesus is referring to Caiaphas the high priest of Israel who initially delivered Christ to Pilate. That high priest should have honored the Messiah but instead he wanted to crucify Him. He had much more culpability.

The point that Pilate could clearly understand from this is that God was orchestrating this whole thing and there were more people than Pilate more culpable in this process.

Verse 12 informs us that these words moved Pilate and he made every effort possible to get Jesus released.

Jesus was very respectful of political leadership. You do not find Him demeaning it no matter who or what it was. He realized that the authority they had was given to them from above and this is a good thing for us to remember as well. No matter what our political persuasion, when a leader is appointed to a political office, God has allowed the appointment. It is from above. It is for His purposes and His reasons, which we may or may not know. The best policy for us as believers is to be good, respectful citizens, realizing it is God who brings to office political officials even those with whom we may not agree.

ATTEMPT #4 – Pilate tries to release Jesus by way of public appeal. **19:12-15**

But even though the words moved Pilate, the Jews cried out and said to Pilate, if you release Jesus you are no friend to Caesar because this One makes Himself out to be a king who opposes Caesar. This is another lie. Now the Roman Caesar at the time was Tiberias, who was sickly, suspicious and often a very violent man. He was Pilate's boss and Pilate did not want Tiberias to get wind of the fact that he released someone who might be a threat to him.

So according to **verse 13**, when Pilate heard this threat, He brought Jesus out to the judgment seat (βῆμα) and the place where these official decisions were made is called "The Pavement" because it was a place covered with stones, and because it was near the temple it had a Hebrew name, Gabbatha, which means elevated place.

We may notice from **verse 14** that this occurred on the day of Passover preparation at the sixth hour. Some have attacked the Bible because John says this trial occurred in the sixth hour of the day, but then Mark says Jesus was crucified in the third hour of the day (Mark 15:25), and then it is revealed that darkness covered the earth from the sixth hour until the ninth hour of the day (Matthew 27:45-46; Mark 15:33-34; Luke 23:44). The solution is simple; John is using Roman time which starts the day at 12 midnight and Matthew, Mark and Luke use Hebrew time, which starts the day at 6 a.m. The chronology is this - these trials before Pilate occurred about 6 a.m. (the sixth hour by Roman time). At 9 a.m. (the third hour of the day by Hebrew time) Jesus is taken and crucified and He hangs on the cross for about three hours. From noon until 3 p.m. (the sixth to the ninth hour Hebrew time) an eerie darkness covered the whole land.

Pilate is finishing up his examination. This entire matter had started the wee hours of the morning (18:28). At about 6 a.m., Pilate went out and said to these Jews - look, this is your King.

But as **verse 15** says, they cried, "Away with Him, crucify Him!" Pilate again tried to say, this is your King, shall I crucify Him? The chief priests said He is not our king only Caesar is our king. These are hypocritical liars. These Jewish leaders were never loyal to a Roman emperor. In fact, had they been loyal to Rome, they would never have asked that Barabbas be released because he was one who was trying to stir up an insurrection against Rome.

There is a major movement right now in this country to get rid of anything that is connected to God and to Jesus Christ. The cry today is get rid of it, kill it, and destroy it. Just this past week, a vicious battle occurred because one family wanted to display a manger at Christmastime. People are in an uproar because the presence of anything connected to Jesus Christ still brings evil people to a violent hatred.

So we come to the final verse (**verse 16**) of the section, the final scene between Jesus and Pilate except for the request for Christ's body (John 19:38). It is the last glimpse we get of him in this context and it is a sad glimpse; he delivered Jesus to these Jews for crucifixion.

How could this happen? What went wrong with the system? How is it that the totally innocent, sinless Son of God could end up on a cross? There is only one answer to this - the sovereignty of God. Dr. Luke said that all of this that happened to Jesus Christ was predestined according to God's hand and God's purposes (Acts 4:27-28). Jesus Christ went to that cross for us and He will forgive you of "any sin" (Matthew 12:31). Will you choose Him right now? Will you invite Him into your life to be your Savior? If you will, though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.