

## Easter Teaching No. 8

### The Civil Trial before Pilate

Matthew 27:2, 11-14, Mark 15:1b-5, Luke 23:15 and John 18:28-38

Luke's account tells us that the Sanhedrin took Jesus to the Praetorium where Pilate was waiting but they did not go inside, as entering the building of a gentile at the time of a Feast would have rendered them ceremonially unclean and they would have been unable to eat the special Passover meal reserved for the priests later that morning. So Pilate came outside and spoke to them.

So we introduce another person to the Easter story. Pontius Pilate. Pontius Pilate was Procurator of Judea from 26-36 AD. He was a man known for his cruelty and was dismissed from public service for his cruel behaviour to the Jewish people, by Rome in 36 AD.

Pilate was ready and waiting for the leadership and was surprised that Judas, who had given him the indictment against Jesus the night before, was not present. In the meantime, once Judas had heard that Jesus had been condemned to death, he tried to return the money to the chief priests. He was remorseful that he had betrayed innocent blood. However they refused to take the money back, so Judas threw it onto the floor of the Temple and went and hanged himself.

That is why, as the crucial prosecuting witness, Judas was not present for this trial.

John 18:29 Pilate asks the religious leaders 'What charges are you bringing against this man?' but the religious leaders had no specific charges and wanted to rely on Pilate trusting in their religious authority to believe that they wouldn't bring an innocent man to him. They said:

'If this man were not an evildoer we should not have delivered him to you'.

This was not good enough under Roman law, and he told the Jewish leaders to take Jesus away and judge him according to their own law'.

Then the real issue came up, the leadership replied 'It is not lawful for us to put any man to death'.

Pilate would not condemn this man without an accusation, without an accusation there would be no proceedings at all. Pilate then went inside the Praetorium and questioned Jesus. Jesus maintained his claim to be the King of the Jews, but this was not in competition to the Roman rule, because he said his kingdom was not of this world.

Pilate asked him if he was a king in any sense of the word and Jesus replied that he was king of the truth and that 'Everyone on the side of truth listens to me', and this is when Pilate famously responded 'What is truth?'

It was obvious to Pilate that this man was no threat to Caesar. Pilate was not interested in Jewish teachings and theology, he was a Roman leader and was reassured that this man was not in competition to Rome, and he said:-

Luke 23:4 'I find no basis for a charge against this man'.

The leaders insisted that Jesus stirs up all the people in Judea with his teaching which started in Galilee and has now come to Jerusalem.

When hearing this, Pilate asked if the man was a Galilean, When he learned that Jesus was, this put Jesus under the authority of Herod's jurisdiction, and so Pilate sent the party of religious leaders and Jesus to Herod Antipas, who was also in Jerusalem at that time for the Passover festival.

### **The Trial before Herod**

Luke 23:6-12

Herod Antipas was one of the sons of Herod the Great and he ruled over the Galilee. He had been the Herod who had John the Baptist beheaded. He had wanted to meet Jesus hoping he would witness a miracle performed by him and was delighted to meet him. However Jesus refused to perform miracles to entertain the King.

Then Herod asked him questions but Jesus did not answer him. The chief priests and elders were there accusing him but he made no answer.

Herod and his soldiers mocked him and ridiculed him, dressing him in an elegant robe as though he were a king and sent him back to Pilate, refusing to pass the death sentence on the Jewish 'Messiah'.

Interestingly Luke 23:12 tells us that from that day, Pilate and Herod became friends. Previously they had been enemies. When Pilate had first become procurator of Judea, he sent shields to be put into the Temple but this was against the sensitivities of the Jews as the shields had images of the Emperor on them and this desecrated the Temple. The people were incensed in Jerusalem and Herod had written to Pilate asking him to have them removed. Pilate refused and so Herod wrote to the Emperor who then made Pilate remove them. They had been enemies ever since then. However in this case Pilate recognised Herod's authority over this citizen and passed him over to Herod for interrogation. That smoothed things over between them and they became friends on the back of Jesus trials. Herod handed Jesus back to Pilate.