

68. God on trials – Part 2

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Do you know what the common denominator is between king Charles I of England and king Louis XVI of France? If you are a hopeless history buff, you would know the answer. These two kings were tried and executed by their political enemies for their treasons.

Charles I had plenty of enemies from both political and religious sides. He lost two English Civil Wars against the Puritans and the Rump Parliament. He was tried and executed in 1649. About 150 years later, the rival of England, France also tried and executed her king Louis XVI who was very popular among his subjects at the beginning of his reign. Later he was stuck amongst the power players of the French Revolution, and he was considered as a stumbling block of its movement. He also was executed in 1793.

Unlike these two earthly kings whose kingdoms were taken away by the hands of their enemies, the King of kings the Lord Jesus, though He was tried six times and executed within 15 hours period, has an eternal kingdom that cannot be destroyed, or taken by any power in the universe.

As a matter of fact, one of these days, the very ones – Annas, Caiaphas, the Sanhedrin members, king Herod, and Pontius Pilate – who were the judges of these kangaroo courts will stand in front of the very One who will judge them for their eternal lives. Even while these so-called judges presided over these trials, they were the ones who were judged by Jesus who was bound at this time. Even a situation like this, the magnificence of Jesus Christ becomes very, very obvious and radiant.

A. THE FOURTH TRIAL BY PILATE

John 18:28 Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas to the Praetorium, and it was early morning. But they themselves did not go into the Praetorium, lest they should be defiled, but that they might eat the Passover.

Between v24 and 28 Jesus went through two more Jewish trials – one at the home of Caiaphas, the current high priest, and the other by the Sanhedrin which was the supreme court of the Jews at “Council Chamber” which was located in the Hall of Hewn Stone at the east side of the temple. This was the only place they could carry out their official business. So they had to bring Jesus here and waited for the sun to rise.

The Sanhedrin had a very short meeting and rushed to judgment against Christ and took Him to Pilate who was at the Praetorium in Jerusalem during the Passover season. It was customary for the Roman governor to be in Jerusalem during Passover in case there were any outbursts of Jewish nationalism that would lead to riots against Rome in the streets of the capital city of Israel.

V28 shows me one of the lowest parts of human depravity coupled with hypocrisy at its worst. These Jewish religious rulers didn't have one bit of a problem in their hearts to accuse an innocent Man Jesus with the concocted false charges and they were conspiring to murder the Man, yet they didn't want to go in because of any possible ceremonial defilement from the Gentile's residence. What an irony!

B. THE FALSE ACCUSATIONS AND PRE-DETERMINED VERDICT

John 18:29-32 Pilate then went out to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this Man?" 30 They answered and said to him, "If He were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him up to you." 31 Then Pilate said to them, "You take Him and judge Him according to your law." Therefore the Jews said to him, "It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death," 32 that the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled which He spoke, signifying by what death He would die.

Pilate's initial question was the normal opening inquiry of a trial. Pilate was proceeding by the usual routine of Roman law and would not automatically pronounce a sentence without knowing the alleged crime. The high priest no doubt knew that Jesus was not guilty of any crime under Roman law and that there was no evidence to support a charge.

In response to Pilate's initial question, the Jewish religious leaders didn't answer him directly rather they skirted around the question. According to Luke 23:2, they came up with three charges:

Luke 23:2 And they began to accuse Him, saying, "(1) We found this fellow perverting the nation, and (2) forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, (3) saying that He Himself is Christ, a King."

Even though a life of a Jew didn't mean anything to him, the last thing Pilate had in mind was to get sucked into a Jewish controversial court case, especially at Passover. So He tried to push the issue back to them and let them handle it. Pilate thought, "If you want to kill Him so bad, do it yourself."

As a matter of fact, the Jewish religious rulers just did that. In several weeks later, this same group of people stoned Stephen to death according to Acts 7:57-60. Obviously Rome was lenient with the Sanhedrin on some capital cases.

Then, you have to wonder why these Jewish rulers insisted crucifixion over stoning Jesus. They wanted to shame Jesus as much as possible by having Him on the cross – dying an excruciating slow death with shame of nakedness in public. Besides, they remembered the Scripture that says,

Deuteronomy 21:22-23 If a man has committed a sin deserving of death, and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, 23 his body shall not remain overnight on the tree, but you shall surely bury him that day, so that you do not defile the land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance; for he who is hanged is accursed of God.

Galatians 3:13 Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"),

Jesus was to bear the curse of the law and become a curse for us; and in order to do this, He had to hang on a tree that is a cross.

In God's sovereignty, He knew what these religious rulers wanted, God the Father prepared His Son's death as the Atoning Sacrifice for mankind.

C. MY KINGDOM IS NOT OF THIS WORLD

John 18:33-36 Then Pilate entered the Praetorium again, called Jesus, and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" 34 Jesus answered him, "Are you speaking for yourself about this, or did others tell you this concerning Me?" 35

Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me. What have You done?" 36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here."

The first question by Pilate to Jesus was a legitimate question, because Rome did not tolerate any insurrection from her occupied territories. When we read v34, did that sound like a trembling prisoner who was scared for his life to you? Jesus was not one bit concerned.

By the way, it has been said that it is not polite and proper to answer a question with a question. But when Jesus was the One who was asking a question in response to a question, He could do whatever He wanted. After all, He created languages for mankind, communication skills for us and He is the Master of communication.

This question of v34 from Jesus caught Pilate completely off guard. What was Jesus asking to Pilate? Jesus answered His own question, in somewhat indirectly, from v36. We need to pay attention here.

Jesus here declares the great and permanent difference between God's kingdom and the kingdoms of this world. Jesus' kingdom originates in heaven. As we all know, earthly kingdoms are based upon force, pride, the love of human praise, the desire for domination, and self interest. But the heavenly kingdom, exemplified by Jesus and the cross, is based on love, sacrifice, humility, and righteousness – and is to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Gentiles foolishness.

Yet it is important to note that the first-century Christians made no attempts to conquer paganism by reacting blow by blow. Instead, they outthought, outprayed, and outlived the unbelievers. Their weapons were positive, not negative. They prayed, preached, and proclaimed the message of the Gospel of Jesus.

As a result, these Christians dramatically impacted their world. In the end, they prevailed. In retrospect, where is Rome today? It is no longer a world power. Do we remember all the names of the great emperors of Rome? For the most part, no.

There have been numerous attempts throughout history to destroy the Christian faith. But they will always fail for one simple reason: Christianity is in Christ. He will prevail in the end and establish His kingdom. And because He includes us, we will win in the end too.

D. WHAT IS THE TRUTH?

John 18:37-38 Pilate therefore said to Him, "Are You a king then?" Jesus answered, "You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." 38 Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?" And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, "I find no fault in Him at all."

Please note how Jesus answered Pilate in v37. Jesus used the word "born" to show Himself as His 'humanity', but at the same time, "this cause I have come into the world" to explain His 'deity'.

Jesus not only told Pilate of His origin, but also He explained His ministry by telling him: "I should bear witness to the truth."

Yes, Jesus admitted that He is a King, but His kingdom does not come from the authority of this world, rather from God the Father in heaven. His kingdom is spiritual, He does not depend on worldly or fleshly means to advance His cause. Can you imagine Jesus depends on Christian supports to set up and maintain His kingdom? That would be the sorriest and most pathetic kingdom in human history. Be honest with me now, you hear?

Jesus never said that He had no kingdom in this world. He does have a kingdom in this world wherever there are people who have trusted Him and yielded to His sovereignty.

I want all of you to pay close attention on the last phrase of v37:

John 18:37c Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.

What did I teach you was the best way to interpret the Bible? Using the Bible. Jesus declared Himself as the truth in chapter 14.

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

And He also told us that those who are in Him know His voice.

John 10:14 I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own.

By combining these two verses, we can understand what we read in v37. Everyone who is of Jesus Christ hears His voice because He speaks the truth.

I don't believe that Pilate was a dummy, but he sure acted like one when he asked a question "What is the truth?" but he didn't want to find out the truth like the majority of people in the 21st Century. Even many born-again Christians are seeking the truth as long as the truth does not infringe on their lifestyle and carnal ways.

According to the Barna Research Group's report in March, 2009, 34% of all adults believe that moral truth is absolute and unaffected by the circumstances. 46% of the born-again adults believe in absolute moral truth. In other words, more than a half of the born-again Christians do not even believe absolute truth.

I have fun with these people whenever I meet them. They are very adamant about no absolute truth and insist that we have relative truth that is depending on individual emotion, background, education, religion, and etc. They say that we should be all inclusive and we must get-along.

Then, I would ask them a question that is based on what they insist, "So you believe that there is no absolute moral truth and no absolute biblical truth?" For that question, they proudly respond, "Yes." Then, I drive my point, "You believe that absolutely, right?" You have to see their faces. They are trapped in their own limited knowledge while they completely ignore the truth like this Pontius Pilate who asked, "What is the truth?" and walked away. The truth was standing right in front of his face.

Yes, there are absolute moral and biblical truths no matter what people want to think about it. You can face it or ignore it.

Ladies and gentlemen, some of you might have the same problem as Pilate. You have been seeking the truth. You just heard the truth about Jesus through the Word of God. What are you going to do with it? Walk away from it like Pilate, or step into the truth of God?

E. APPLICATION

Absolute moral and biblical truths exist absolutely. Anytime we stand against them, we are taking the side of untruth and embracing deceit that comes from satan.