

OUR *Guide* FOR USE IN *the Protestant Reformed Sunday School*

Lesson 48

Jesus' Trial by Pilate

The Scripture Lesson

John 18:28-38

The Sanhedrin had decided that Jesus was guilty of blasphemy and that He must die. But how should they put Him to death? — that was the question. When the Jews were a free people, they had the right to stone a man to death if he blasphemed. But no longer are they free. They are under the Romans, who do not allow them to punish anyone with death. To put someone to death they must go to the Roman governor.

Just as soon as the sun was up, the chief priests led Jesus to the place called the Praetorium, where Pilate, the governor, tried the cases that the Jews brought before him. When Pilate came out of the Praetorium, he asked, What charge, or accusation, do you have against this man? What has He done wrong?

The Sanhedrists did not want to answer that. Their charge was that Jesus was a blasphemer; and they knew that Pilate, who was an unbelieving Gentile, did not care at all about the religious laws of the Jews. So they said, If He were not an evil doer, we would not have brought Him to you. What they hoped was that Pilate would just take their word for it that Jesus was a criminal who deserved to die. But Pilate was not willing to do that. He told them that, if they had no charges,

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they would have to judge the man themselves. The Jews, of course, did not want *that*, because then they would not be able to *kill* Him.

So the Sanhedrin quickly began to accuse Jesus of crimes that would sound serious to a Roman. They told Pilate that Jesus stirred up the people, by telling them that they should not pay taxes to the Romans, and by saying that He was a king.

These charges were all lies. Jesus had actually told the people that they *should* pay their taxes. And He had never said that He was the kind of king that *they* were talking about. But these were serious charges against Him, and the governor must question Jesus to find out if they were true. So he took Jesus inside the Praetorium and asked Him if He really was the King of the Jews.

That was a question that could not be answered in one word. Jesus could not simply say *yes* — because the Sanhedrin and Pilate were both talking about an *earthly* kingdom. But Jesus cannot say *no* either — because He really *is* the King of the Jews. It was important that Pilate understand the difference, because he must judge Jesus. In order to declare Him guilty or innocent, he must know if the charges against Jesus are true. So Jesus said to Him, “My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world,

then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews.”

Do you see what Jesus meant? He was really *proving* that it could not possibly be true that He hoped to overthrow the government and make Himself king. He did not even have followers who were able to keep Him from being captured by a small band of soldiers. Who would ever be afraid that He could fight against the whole Roman army?

Pilate could see that what Jesus said was true. But he wondered yet about Jesus' kingdom. If it was not an earthly kingdom, then what was it? Jesus explained that He was King over those who loved the truth of God.

Pilate did not understand Jesus' kingdom. But he could tell very well that the charge of the Jews was a lie. So he went out to them and said, “I find no fault in him at all.”

Jesus Before Herod

Luke 23:5-16

The chief priests and elders, when they heard the verdict of Pilate, were angry. They were determined that Jesus must die; so they were simply not going to let Pilate get away with that. They began therefore to make all kinds of charges against Jesus, trying to convince Pilate that Jesus was a dangerous criminal.

Pilate should never have listened to any of that. He was the *judge*. After pronouncing Jesus innocent he should have immediately released Him, and sent the crowd of Jews away. But Pilate was afraid of what the Jews might do. They might get him in trouble with Caesar. So he did not send them away. And he did not release Jesus. He listened to all the charges.

Jesus listened, too, and He did not say a word. He did not tell the chief priests that they were liars — though they certainly were. He did not argue or complain. Pilate could hardly believe it. He asked, Don't you hear what things are witnessed against you? And we read that “Jesus yet answered nothing; so that Pilate marvelled.” The prophecy of Isaiah that the Messiah would be led as a lamb to the slaughter was again being fulfilled before the very eyes of those wicked Jews.

Pilate, we said, was afraid of the Jews. But he was becoming more and more afraid of Jesus, too. He wished he could somehow get rid of this problem. Then he had an idea. He asked if Jesus was a Galilean; and when the chief priests said that He was, Pilate right away sent Jesus to Herod, who was king of Galilee. Pilate hoped that he could now forget about this whole business.

When Jesus arrived in Herod's court, Herod was very pleased. He had heard much about Jesus and His many miracles, and he hoped that Jesus might do a miracle for him.

Herod began to ask Jesus questions. And the chief priests began again to bring all kinds of charges against Him. But Jesus said nothing. He did not answer Herod's questions; He did not argue against the charges of the Sanhedrin; and He would not do a miracle.

This made Herod angry. He and the members of his court began to mock Jesus. They dressed Him in a gorgeous robe and made a joke of His Kingship — tempting Him all the while to do a miracle.

Herod was an Edomite — of the line of Esau. Esau was the firstborn of Isaac; but he was a wicked reprobate. The promise of God was to Jacob and to his seed, not to Esau. Yet, here is Herod, sitting on the throne of Israel. Before him stands Jesus, the *real* King of the Jews. And Herod pokes fun at Him.

Jesus bore it all silently. He is content to wait patiently for God to fulfill His promise. Not Herod, but Christ is the King, higher than all the kings of the earth. And when, someday soon, Jesus comes again as Judge, the whole world will see that He is indeed Lord.

MEMORY WORK

Group A

John 18:36 “Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.”

Group B

John 18:36b “If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews.”

ACTIVITIES

This paper has been prepared in the hope that it will be used by students of all ages. The activities are designed so that the oldest will be challenged, and the youngest will find some of it within reach. Parents should encourage their children to attempt only what they can handle without frustration. For some that will be much, for others little.

DO YOU AGREE?

If you do, write Yes; if you do not, write No.

_____ 1. Under the Romans it was not lawful for the Jews to put to death a man who deserved to die.

_____ 2. The leaders of the Jews therefore took Jesus to the Roman governor, in order that he might sentence Jesus to death.

_____ 3. As soon as Pilate came out to them, the Sanhedrists began immediately to accuse Jesus of many crimes.

_____ 4. Pilate therefore brought Jesus into the judgment hall to question Him concerning the charges.

_____ 5. Jesus however remained silent to all of Pilate's questions.

_____ 6. Pilate then went out to the Jews and declared that he found no fault in Jesus at all.

_____ 7. Disappointed at Pilate's judgment, the leaders of the Jews decided to bring Jesus to King Herod for trial.

_____ 8. In response to Herod's questions, Jesus explained that He was indeed a King, but His kingdom was not of this world.

_____ 9. Herod and his men then dressed Jesus in a kingly robe, to mock Him for thinking He was king.

_____ 10. Herod then pronounced Jesus guilty and sent Him back to Pilate.

QUESTIONS FOR YOUNGER READERS

1. Why did the Sanhedrin decide to bring Jesus to Pilate?

2. When Pilate asked them what Jesus had done wrong, why did the Jews not right away tell him that Jesus had claimed to be the Son of God?

3. How did the Jews try first to avoid bringing any charges at all?

4. When Pilate insisted that they state their charges, what did they accuse Jesus of? Had Jesus really done what His accusers said He did, or did the Jews here tell lies to Pilate?

5. When Pilate examined Jesus he asked, "Art thou the King of the Jews?" Why would a simple yes or no not be answer enough to Pilate's question?

6. Sometimes Jesus did not answer questions put to Him. Do you know why He *did* answer this question of Pilate?

7. How did Jesus prove to Pilate that He was not trying to be an earthly king?

8. What was Pilate's verdict?

9. What did the Jews do when they heard Pilate's verdict? Why did Pilate permit the Jews to question his judgment? What *should* he have done?

10. Why did Pilate send Jesus to King Herod?

11. Why was Herod glad to see Jesus?

12. How did Jesus answer the charges of the Jews and the questions of Herod?

13. What did Herod and his men then do to Jesus?

COMPLETING SENTENCES

1. From Mark 15:1 we learn that the chief priests met once more, early Friday morning, to hold a _____ with the whole _____. The purpose of this meeting was very likely to decide how best to carry out the sentence which had been passed in their earlier meeting. According to the law of Moses, he that _____ the name of the Lord must be put to _____. In fact, Moses went on to say that the _____ shall certainly

_____ him (Lev. 24:16). The Sanhedrin, however, had no intention of carrying out the death sentence against Jesus themselves. For one thing, they were afraid that it would start a riot in Jerusalem, by all of Jesus' supporters who were present there for the Passover celebration. Besides, the Romans did not allow it. As the Jews later said to Pilate, "It is not _____ for us to put any man to _____." John adds, however, that, though the Jews had *their* reasons for proceeding as they did, all this was done that the _____ of Jesus might be _____, signifying what _____ He should die (John 18:31, 32).

2. After determining how best to make their case before the Roman governor, the whole _____ of them arose and led Jesus unto _____ (Luke 23:1). The reference here is of course to the entire Sanhedrin, with a detachment of temple police. An impressive assembly of Jewish dignitaries it was, therefore, that appeared at the crack of dawn outside the hall of _____ (John 18:28).

3. Pilate therefore came _____ unto them. Hoping to take care of this matter in short order, the governor asked immediately, "What _____ bring ye against this man?" Now, the Jews knew very well that they had no charge that would hold up in a Roman court. Hoping to impress Pilate by their numbers and by a show of confidence, they tried to get by without stating a charge. "If he were not a _____," they said, "we would not have _____ him up unto _____" (John 18:29, 30).

4. Proud Pilate was however not of a mind to be put off so easily. "Take ye him," he said, "and _____ him _____ to your law" (John 18:31). That is, if your judgment is indeed enough, then go ahead and judge him according to your law — only within the limits of *Roman* law; and don't again bring the matter to *me*. Hardly is that what the Jews wanted. They wanted the *death penalty*, and they needed Pilate

to pronounce it. The first part of their strategy had thus failed; but they had very likely, in their early morning consultation, planned a second approach. For they began immediately to _____ Jesus before Pilate, saying, "We found this fellow _____ the nation and forbidding to give _____ to Caesar, saying that he himself is Christ a _____" (Luke 23:2).

5. All three charges were lies. And Pilate probably suspected as much. But he was obliged to investigate them. So he ordered that Jesus be brought into the Praetorium for questioning. "Art thou the _____ of the Jews?" he asked Jesus. An important question that was. And Jesus will surely answer it. For the world power, represented here by Pilate, must know exactly what they are doing when they too stand before the question, "What will you do with the Christ?" Pilate's judgment must not be based on a misunderstanding. Jesus does not therefore give a simple yes or no answer. First He asks Pilate, "Sayest thou this thing of _____, or did _____ tell it thee of me?" That is, "Do you, Pilate, understand by 'kingship' anything other than what was intended by the Sanhedrists when they accused Me of laying claim to a political, earthly kingship?" And Pilate showed clearly that he had nothing other than an earthly kingdom in mind, when he answered, "Am I a _____?" (John 18:33-35).

6. Jesus went on then to explain to Pilate, "My _____ is not of this _____; if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants _____, that I should not be delivered to the _____." Convincing proof this was, that Jesus was no threat to the earthly rule of Herod, Pilate, Caesar, or anybody. Pilate was ready therefore to dismiss the charges against Him; but he was nevertheless puzzled by Jesus' answer. This pagan governor knew of only one kind of kingship, and that was *political*. What is this kingdom of which Jesus speaks? "Art thou a _____ then?" Pilate

asks (John 18:36, 37).

7. Jesus assures Pilate that He is indeed a King. And He adds that, far from seeking an earthly kingdom, He came into the world only to bear _____ unto the _____. In a world given over to the lie of the devil (as manifest in the paganism of the Gentiles and in the unbelief of apostate Israel) Christ is a testimony to the one true God. Pilate, however, saw this as nothing more than a philosophical issue with no practical value, so he dismissed it all with the question, "What is _____?" He then went out of the Praetorium to the waiting Jews and announced, "I find in him no _____ at all" (John 18:37, 38).

8. That should have been the end of the matter. But Pilate could see how much the Jews hated Jesus and how badly they wanted to be rid of Him; and he knew too that the Jewish leaders were capable of making life miserable for him if he did something that angered them. So he permitted them to object to his sentence. The Jews, taking full advantage of Pilate's indecision, were the more _____, saying, He _____ up the people, teaching throughout all _____, beginning from _____ to this place (Luke 23:5).

9. Pilate sat and listened to this volley of charges. He knew very well they were lies. And he was amazed that Jesus made not one attempt to defend Himself. Finally he asked, "_____ thou not how many things they _____ against thee?" But Jesus _____ him to never a _____; for it was the duty of the *judge*, not of the *accused*, to silence the angry accusations. And the governor _____ greatly (Matt. 27:13, 14).

10. Hearing the chief priests' reference to Galilee, Pilate grabbed onto that as a possible way out of his dilemma. As soon as he knew that Jesus belonged unto Herod's _____, he sent Him to Herod,

who was at _____ at that time for the Passover (Luke 23:6, 7).

11. Herod was exceeding _____ to see Jesus because he hoped to see some _____ done by Him. He found, however, that, though he _____ Him with many words, Jesus answered him _____ (Luke 23:8, 9).

12. The Sanhedrists, hoping for a guilty verdict from Herod, stood and _____ accused Jesus. Herod cared very little about those charges. And since the chief priests and elders were not in his jurisdiction (as they were in Pilate's), he had no reason to be afraid of offending them. Herod was, however, himself angered by Jesus' refusal to cooperate with him, so he and his servants set Jesus at _____, and _____ Him, and _____ Him in a _____ robe. Thus did he mock Jesus' Kingship (Luke 23:10, 11).

13. Herod understood that Pilate had turned the case over to him. He could therefore have released Jesus, had he wanted to. But he didn't. He decided instead to return the favor. He had considered it a friendly gesture on Pilate's part to give him the right to judge a Galilean; and by sending Jesus back to Pilate, Herod was showing his willingness to approve whatever might be the governor's judgment. The result of this exchange was that the same day Pilate and Herod, who before were at _____ between themselves, were made _____ together (Luke 23:12).

14. Pilate was hardly happy to see Jesus back in his court. The governor knew that *justice* required that he release Jesus. But he was afraid of the Jews. And by this time he was afraid not only of the accusers but also of the accused. So, in order to try again to gain approval of his verdict he called back the chief priests and the _____ and the _____

to his court in front of the Praetorium. Yes, now the common people are on hand too. Before them all Pilate reviewed the case. You have brought this man unto me, as one that _____ the people, Pilate said, but I have found no _____ in this man. No, nor yet _____, for I sent you unto him. And then, instead of sending the mob away and releasing Jesus, Pilate offers a compromise: I will therefore _____ Him, and then _____ Him (Luke 23:13-16).

Would the growing crowd of common people allow Pilate to have Jesus scourged? And, if that is indeed what they wanted, would they be *satisfied* with that? Thus the people are also faced with the question: "What will *you* do with Jesus?"

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT

1. According to Roman law, the Jews could sentence a man to death, but they were not allowed to carry out the sentence themselves. Sometimes, however, they did it anyway — as in the case of Stephen (see Acts 7:57, 58). In fact, earlier in Jesus' ministry they had tried the same with Him (see John 10:30-39). With Jesus in their custody at this Passover celebration, however, they would not have dared to take the law into their own hands. Nor, for that matter, would they have *wanted* to. Can you think of any reasons why that would be true?

2. In Luke 23:1 we read that "the whole multitude of them arose, and led him to Pilate." Why did they consider it important that they go to Pilate as a body — that is, the entire Sanhedrin, with a detachment of temple police?

3. The leaders of the Jews were careful not to enter the judgment hall of Pilate (see John 18:28). How did they thereby demonstrate the truth of what Jesus said of them in Matthew 23:23-28?

4. Of the three charges mentioned in Luke 23:2, the first two were barefaced lies. Was the third charge true ... or was it, as to the intention of the Jews, just as much a lie as the other two?

5. Very likely Pilate knew little about the ministry of Jesus. But he did know the Sanhedrin. What do you think, would he have been inclined to believe, or *not* to believe, the charges brought by the Sanhedrin against Jesus?

6. Jesus said nothing in response to the false witness that was brought against Him in the trial before Caiaphas (see Mark 14:60, 61a). However, when *Pilate* asked Jesus concerning the false charges brought against Him by the Sanhedrists, Jesus *did* answer (see John 18:33-37). Can you explain why Jesus would address the lies in one instance and not in the other?

7. Read John 18:36. Can you explain why this answer of Jesus would have satisfied Pilate completely that Jesus was not the threat to Roman authority that the Sanhedrists had accused Him of being?

8. Pilate judged correctly: with respect to all the charges, Jesus is innocent. Can you tell from Luke 23:4-6 how Pilate failed utterly, as judge, in the *pronouncing* of his verdict? Later on, Pilate was firm with the Jews (see John 19:21, 22). Why did he not treat them that way right from the beginning?

9. Jesus answered not a word to all the charges brought against Him by the Jews in response to Pilate's verdict of innocence (Matt. 27:12-14). Why was silence the *proper* response, at this point, in Pilate's court? And if it was indeed right, why did Pilate find it so remarkable?

10. Concerning Pilate's decision to send Jesus to Herod, try to explain the following: a) Why Pilate did that; b) Why he should *not* have done that; c) Why it *must*, in the end, be *Pilate*, not Herod, who renders the final verdict?

11. How did Herod, throughout this "trial," show his contempt for the very idea that Christ could be the King of *God's* choosing?

12. Had Pilate approved a death sentence as quickly as the Sanhedrists wished, the trial would have been over before many of the common people even knew that one was being held. As it turned out, however, the delays gave time for crowds of people to gather in front of the judgment hall. As far as the purpose of God in the trial of His Son is concerned, why was it important that the people be there?

13. In his next attempt to escape the dilemma, Pilate offered to whip Jesus (Luke 23:16). Do you see how this was an attempt to *compromise* — that is, to have each side give in a little? Can you show that this was an exceedingly wicked offer?