

Christ, Pilate and Herod

Key Verse:
**“Christ Jesus,
 who while
 testifying before
 Pontius Pilate,
 made the good
 confession.”**

1 Timothy 6:13

Extra: Find out what you can about Roman law and justice.

Level 5 lesson 37

Read: John 18:28-39

Further: Luke 23:1-12

EARLY TRIAL: Following Jesus’ arrest and hurried questioning by the Jewish religious leaders, He was marched off for sentencing before the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate. Earlier, they had heard Jesus claim to be the Son of God [Luke 22:70,71] and in their unbelief, they saw this as blasphemy. Under Jewish religious law this was punishable by death, but being now under Roman rule, they were not permitted to carry this sentence out themselves. The death sentence had to be pronounced and carried out by the Roman authorities, after a proper trial. It seems as though these wicked men were very keen to get Jesus’ ‘trial’ over and done with very early in the morning - before the people of Jerusalem knew what was going on. Also, it appears they expected Pilate to merely ‘rubber stamp’ their decision without probing too deeply into the case. This shows clearly in their response to Pilate’s first question. “What accusation do you bring against this man?” he asked. Concerned at Pilate’s interest in Jesus’ case, they disrespectfully replied, “If He wasn’t a criminal, we would not have handed Him over to you!” Things had not begun as they had hoped; it seemed Pilate planned to give our Lord a fair hearing! After all, the Romans prided themselves on their justice system. No doubt, Pilate knew about Jesus and had heard reports of His activities.

Looking at Jesus, he realised that the Jewish leaders were merely envious of Him and that this was perhaps a ‘religious’ matter which they could sort out amongst themselves. So he said, “Take Him, and judge Him according to your law.”

FALSE CHARGES: “Oh no!” they answered, revealing their true intentions. “It is not lawful for us to put any man to death” - least of all Jesus! But they wanted Him dead, and so began to make accusations against Jesus which they hoped would be of more interest to Pilate. “We found this man subverting our nation,” they said. “He opposes paying taxes to Caesar, and claims to be Christ a King!” These were not all true of course, as Jesus had instructed His disciples to pay to Caesar whatever taxes were due (Mark 12:17), but they were serious charges which Pilate dare not ignore - especially the last one.

So Pilate called Jesus aside and put a very straight question to Him. “Are You the King of the Jews?” Jesus acknowledged that He was, but explained that His Kingdom was of a very different nature from that suggested by His accusers. His Kingship did not, and would not, involve His followers in a conflict with Caesar or the Roman authority. It was a spiritual Kingdom and one that meant bearing witness to the truth; it did not have anything to do with political conflicts.

Pilate did not fully understand what the Lord was driving at, but could see quite clearly that the charges against Him were groundless. Jesus posed no threat to Caesar as they claimed. So he went out again to the Jews and gave his verdict in these notable words, “I find no basis for a charge against Him.”

VERDICT DELAYED

Having been declared innocent by the Roman Governor, there was only one just course of action; to immediately set the prisoner free. Instead, Pilate was intimidated by the crowd, who made a fierce uproar, crying out, “He stirs up the people, teaching throughout Judea, beginning from Galilee to this place.” Frightened by this opposition, Pilate wavered in his verdict and didn’t do the right thing. In a real quandary now, the word “Galilee” alerted him to a possible solution. Making some hurried inquiries, he discovered that Jesus was from Galilee, a territory over which his enemy, King Herod ruled. Here was the answer! Send Jesus on to Herod - let him take the responsibility of dealing with this unpleasant matter! This seemed a good way out, and so Jesus was taken before Herod.

CONTEMPT FOR EVIL KING

Herod was glad of an opportunity to see Jesus; he had heard lots about Him. However, he was a wicked man who merely hoped that Jesus would perform a miracle for his entertainment. He questioned Jesus about all sorts of things but He refused to answer even one question; imagine the One who claimed, “I am.....the Truth” being interrogated by a liar as evil as Herod! Herod, annoyed by this open disrespect, saw that he could get no satisfaction and handed Jesus over to his soldiers. They mocked Him and brutally beat Him, before taking Him back to Pilate.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

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| 1. What was Pilate’s first question to the Jewish leaders? | |
| 2. What did their answer indicate? | |
| 3. What charge against Jesus made Pilate question Him? | ..... |
| 4. What was Pilate’s verdict? | ..... |
| 5. After giving his verdict, what should Pilate have immediately done? | ..... |

My Name is: _____ Age: _____

Christ Before Pilate

Key Verse:
“You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you.”

Acts 3:14

Extra: Pilate tried to compromise with evil. How do we do the same these days?

Level 5 lesson 38

Read: Luke 23:13-16 and Matthew 27:15-32
Further: Mark 15:6-15

FATAL COMPROMISE: Pilate was probably a bit disappointed when Herod sent Jesus back to him. He had hoped that he would have finally dealt with Jesus one way or another, but this had not happened. There was nothing for it now, but to call together the chief priests and rulers and tell them the position. Pilate told them, “You brought this man to me, as one of the people and I have examined Him and found no fault in Him ... Neither has Herod; for he sent him back to us as you can see. He has done nothing to deserve death.” (Luke 23:14-15).

Having made his summation of Jesus’ case, he went on to make a suggestion which he hoped would appease the Jewish leaders. “I will therefore, punish Him and let Him go.” Having just proclaimed Him innocent, we may well ask, “Why punish Him, Pilate? Why not just let Him go?” Surely the right thing to have done was to free Jesus immediately!

Pilate soon realised he’d made a fatal mistake; there could be no compromise with these evil men! They would accept nothing less than the death penalty for the Lord. Becoming increasingly angry, they responded to Pilate’s offer by chanting and screaming, “Away with Him! Away with Him! Crucify Him! Crucify Him!”

FOOLISH MAN: In desperation, Pilate tried to think of an alternative. He remembered it was the custom at this time of year to release a notable prisoner in honour of the occasion. So Pilate sent to the prison and brought Barabbas, a very wicked man, who had been imprisoned for treachery and murder; to stand before the crowd alongside Jesus. What a comparison!

Barabbas had been a notorious criminal, guilty of murder. Jesus in contrast, had brought blessing and life; He had gone about doing only good. Pilate planned to give the angry mob a choice; they could have Barabbas or Jesus – possibly thinking they would surely choose Jesus instead of Barabbas?

How badly mistaken he was again; to Pilate’s dismay, they cried out, “Away with this Man (Jesus) and release to us Barabbas!”

FINAL CHOICE: So, as our Key Verse points out, the people “denied the Holy One and desired a murderer instead.” Pilate was compelled to face his responsibility squarely and to ask this solemn question, “What shall I do then with Jesus, who is called Christ?” He could evade the issue no longer; he must do something with Jesus, who is called Christ. And in fact, we do something with Him every time we hear the Gospel message. We either accept Him or reject Him. May I ask, “What have YOU done with Jesus?” Remember your answer to that question will one day decide your eternal destiny! John 3:36 (KJV) makes this so clear: “He that believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he that believes not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”

FRENZIED MOB: So the now frenzied mob hurled their reply at Pilate; “Let Him be crucified!” they yelled. “Why?” asked Pilate, “what evil has He done?” “Just crucify Him!” was the hate-filled reply again. Seeing Pilate was still not persuaded, the Jews tried another crafty line of attack. “If you let this man go - you are not Caesar’s friend!” they cried. (John 19:12) This thought had perhaps not occurred to Pilate before, and the thought of being perceived as an enemy of Caesar struck fear into his heart; he trembled as he thought of possible punishment by the all- powerful Roman Emperor. Calling for a basin of water, he symbolically washed his hands, proclaiming his innocence of “the blood of this just Man.” He then released Barabbas, scourged Jesus, and delivered Him to be crucified.

Poor Pilate! How mistaken he was to think that washing his hands in water and claiming innocence would clear him! No, there is only one way he (or you and I too) can be free from guilt before God. That is by taking sides with Jesus; accepting Him as the sinless Son of God. May God give us grace to do this, in a world which crucified Him and rejects Him still. May our fear of man, friends, companions or anyone else, never prevent us from taking a stand for the Lord.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. Pilate made a great mistake. What was it?	.....
2. What was Pilate’s idea asking the people to choose between Jesus and Barabbas?	.....
3. What solemn question did Pilate ask after the people demanded Barabbas’ release?	.....
4. What made Pilate ‘wash his hands’ of Jesus?	.....
5. Would you like to tell us what YOU have done with Jesus, who is called Christ?	.....

The Crucifixion (Part 1)

Key Verse:
“For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.”

1 Corinthians 2:2

Extra: Give some reasons why Jesus died the way He did.

Level 5 lesson 39

Read: Matthew 27:32-38 and Luke 23:39-43
Further: John 19:19-37

THE CROSS: Today’s lesson brings us to the ‘main event’ in the Gospel story - the crucifixion of Jesus Christ on Calvary’s Cross. During His public ministry, Jesus often spoke of the Cross, and this event has since become the central point in history.

Following His farcical ‘trial’, Jesus was made to carry the heavy wooden cross through the streets of Jerusalem to a place outside the city called ‘Golgotha - the place of a skull.’ However, weakened by days of interrogation, beatings and lack of food, He fell beneath the weight of it. A bystander, Simon from Cyrene, was compelled to carry it for Him. He will always be remembered for this one act; I wonder if you too are willing to ‘take up your cross’ and follow Jesus?

CHRIST CRUCIFIED: On arriving at Golgotha, Jesus was offered a drink to deaden the pain, but refused. He was then stripped of His robe and laid on the rough, wooden beams. A notice was fixed above our Lord’s head bearing these words: “This is Jesus the King of the Jews.” John’s Gospel informs us that the chief priests didn’t like this, and wanted Pilate to alter it to read, “He said I am the King of the Jews.” Pilate refused to do this, and so the title remained, proclaiming the Lord’s identity for all to see, whether the rulers liked it or not!

Next, He was impaled on the cross, with fearsome iron spikes driven through His blessed hands and feet. Then the cross was raised skywards and dropped roughly into the hole prepared for it. We can only imagine the excruciating agony of all this! Their awful task completed, the soldiers tossed dice for His robe and then sat down with the others to watch Him. Two thieves were also crucified with Him - one on His right side, and another on His left.

CRUEL COMMENTS: Many in the large crowd and those who passed by, shook their heads and challenged Jesus to prove He was the Son of God by coming down from the cross. The Chief Priests and Scribes also mocked Him, saying sarcastically, “He saved others - but He can’t save Himself!”

We can imagine their sneering looks and cruel laughter as they taunted Him to, “come down from the cross and they would believe Him!” It was a waste of time trusting in God, they jeered; as they implied that He would not acknowledge Jesus to be His Son.

Initially, even the two thieves joined in, saying the same things. However, Luke’s Gospel records how one, perhaps observing Jesus’ forgiving response to His tormentors, repented and received forgiveness. Calvary’s Cross exposed plainly, the wicked heart of man. It also clearly revealed the amazing love, grace and mercy of God, that “while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” - and that includes you and me!

THE CALLS: These events took place between 9:00am and midday, when suddenly the whole land was plunged into pitch darkness! This sombre, impenetrable darkness lasted for three hours (see Matthew 27:45) during which time God Himself lay all the punishment for the sin of the world on His dearly beloved Son. The horrors of this occasion it seems, had to be blocked from human view.

Around the ninth hour (3:00pm), Jesus cried out loudly, “My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?” [v46] God the Father could not bear to look on His Son in this condition. Some people thought Jesus called for Elijah and waited to see if the prophet would answer. In the meantime, someone ran and filled a sponge with vinegar and gave the Lord a drink.

After drinking some of it, Jesus cried out, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit” then bowed His head and died. Immediately there was an earthquake, causing rocks to split and some nearby tombs to open. The Roman centurion, and the soldiers watching Jesus, saw all this and said, “Surely this man really was the Son of God!”

We too, can marvel at the way in which the events of Jesus’ crucifixion fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament scriptures. For example; tossing dice for His robe, two thieves being crucified with Jesus, the various drinks offered to Him, and the piercing of His hands and feet with nails. Remember, crucifixion was not even heard of as a method of execution, when these events were foretold centuries before!

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. Why did Jesus come into the world?	.....
2. What was written on a sign nailed onto the cross, above Jesus’ head?	.....
3. What did the passers-by and the rulers challenge Christ to do?	.....
4. What did the Centurion finally declare about the Lord Jesus?	.....
5. What was foretold in the Old Testament concerning the death of Jesus?	.....

The Crucifixion (continued)

Key Verse:
**“May I never
 boast except in
 the Cross of our
 Lord Jesus
 Christ.”**

Galatians 6:14

Extra: What most impresses you about these sayings?

Level 5 lesson 40

Read: Mark 15:24-37; Luke 23:34-47
Further: John 19:25-30

CRIES FROM THE CROSS:

There is often special significance given to the last words of a dying person. They often reveal something of their innermost character and true personality. There are some wonderful lessons and thoughts to be had as we consider what Jesus said as He hung on Calvary's Cross, for you and me.

Scripture records seven audible 'cries from the Cross.'

1. FORGIVE (Luke 23:34) The first words are of incredible significance; they display so clearly both the character of Christ and the ultimate purpose of His death. "Father, forgive them; they don't know what they're doing." Even in terrible agony, His thoughts were for His murderers, that they, along with all who will put their faith in Him, might receive the forgiveness of sin.

2. ASSURANCE (Luke 23:43) Perhaps those amazing words of forgiveness opened the thief's eyes to who Jesus was. Soon afterwards, he rebuked his companion for his insults of the Lord, turned toward Jesus and in faith asked Him for a place in His kingdom. Jesus responded to this faith with words which brought immediate assurance of salvation to him, and millions down through the ages since: "I tell you the truth, today you will be with Me in paradise!"

3. CARE (John 19:26-27) Christ's third cry exemplifies His self-less concern for others - even as He suffered. Mary, His mother, was standing near the Cross with John, doubtless broken-hearted as she watched Jesus suffering. Kindly He said to her, "Dear woman, here is your son!" and to John He said, "Here is your mother!" Even from the Cross He provided for His mother, committing her to the care of the Apostle John. However, despite His obvious love and concern for Mary, it is interesting that we do not find any record of Him ever referring to her as mother - or virgin. The term 'virgin' could not be rightly used because Mary became Joseph's wife and had children by him, after giving birth to Jesus as a virgin.

4. FORSAKEN (Mark 15:34) After enduring firstly the wrath of man, then during the hours of terrible darkness, the wrath of God; the Lord gave the most heart-rending cry "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

We can understand Jesus being forsaken by His disciples, but His being forsaken by God is a great mystery. Scripture teaches us that the death of our Saviour was for our sins; He bore them, they were imputed to Him! He was made sin for us, a curse for us. During the darkness, God who is Holy, turned His face from Him as He endured the punishment due to you and me. We can never really understand or appreciate fully what it meant for God to forsake Him and for Jesus to be forsaken. We can only praise God, that in His infinite mercy, Jesus was forsaken so that we might be received, and not forsaken.

5. THIRST (John 19:28) "I thirst!" cried the Lord, and in exact fulfilment of Psalm 69:21 certain ones filled a sponge with vinegar and gave Him to drink. Of course Jesus was suffering terribly from thirst, but His great purpose in this cry was to fulfil the prophecy of Scripture, which cannot be broken.

6. TRIUMPH (John 19:30) Jesus' enemies had repeatedly challenged Him to come down from the Cross; to vindicate Himself, and prove His claims of Deity to be true. He refused because a far greater work, a far more important task, a more magnificent victory still lay before Him. The Lord could now cry, "It is finished!" What was this great work you may ask? The work He came to do - the work of our salvation! In announcing His coming, the angel had told Mary, "You shall name Him Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins." Now that mighty work was done! Sin and death had been defeated; the price of man's redemption had been paid. The way was clear for sinful man to be reconciled once more to God.

7. COMMENDATION (Luke 23:46) Here, in His last words from the Cross, Jesus demonstrated the truth of His statement, "I have power to lay down My life, and I have power to take it up again." [John 10:18] He simply said, "Father, into your hands I commit My spirit," and bowed His head in death. The Roman centurion sent to hasten the death of the victims by breaking their legs, was surprised to discover that Jesus had already laid down His life. His power to take it up again would be marvellously displayed in His glorious resurrection on the first day of the coming week!

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. What prayer did Jesus pray for His murderers?	.....
2. What did Jesus say to the thief who believed in Him?	.....
3. Why did God forsake Jesus?	.....
4. What did the sixth cry mean?	.....
5. What were our Lord's last words from the cross?	.....