



Jesus before Pilate

God's Kingdom Revealed

About the Story

The Passion narrative continues. Jesus has been arrested by the Jewish authorities with the help of Roman soldiers. After his arrest, Jesus was brought to the home of the high priest and interrogated there. During this time, Simon Peter waited outside, but he denied knowing Jesus three times, as Jesus had predicted. Now, Jesus has been brought to the highest Roman authority in the area, Pontius Pilate. The Jewish authorities demand that Pilate take over the case from here, and accuse Jesus of claiming a kingship that would oppose Roman rule. Pilate, however, seems aware that he is being drawn into an internal Jewish struggle, and he tries to push the decision-making back onto the Jewish authorities. Throughout the scene that we read today, Pilate shuttles back and forth between Jesus and the Jewish authorities waiting outside. Pilate's worldly authority seems to be completely useless to him in the face of the events that are unfolding. All those who appear to have the most power and authority find themselves unable to force Jesus to say or do anything that is not within God's plan. Meanwhile, Jesus, who is bound and held prisoner, appears to be completely calm and in control of everything that is happening.

The Point:

Unlike the powers of oppression in our world, Jesus' kingdom proclaims the truth.

Throughout the Passion narrative, Jesus faces various factions in Jerusalem's political scene, each competing for worldly power. The Romans subdue the Jews, while the Jewish authorities are willing to sacrifice one of their own in order to maintain some scrap of power. Jesus, however, is not interested in worldly power. He brings us a different way of understanding power. According to Jesus, we do not have to put one another down in order to have power. Our influence and impact is built on relationships. By giving ourselves to and for one another as Jesus has done, we find a power that is based in love, not in oppression.

Opening Prayer

God, you are the true ruler of this world. Be with us now as we study your Word. Open our minds and our hearts to your kingdom and your kingship. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

The "Jews"

The writer of the Gospel of John often refers to Jesus' opponents as "the Jews." In most cases, the term is used to refer to the Jewish authorities that sought to lessen Jesus' influence, not to the Jewish people as a whole.

Into the Story

Who are some of the most powerful and influential people you know of? Make a list together of these people—political, religious, cultural and other public figures. Think about the people who have had the most impact on your life. Are these the same people? How does formal power, such as political office, impact your daily life? Compare that influence to those individuals with whom you have a direct relationship.

Last Week/Next Week

Last week, Jesus answered the questions of the priests. His answers showed that even now, the priests do not understand who Jesus is. In the meantime, Peter was questioned in the courtyard, and his answers revealed that Jesus truly knows the hearts of his followers. This week, Pilate questions Jesus about kingship, and Jesus insists that God's kingship is not the same as earthly kingship. Next week, Pilate and the crowds will denounce Jesus' kingship, and he will reveal the true nature of God's kingship by turning himself over to death.

Learning the Story

Jesus is brought before Pilate, but remains calm during interrogation.

Read John 18:28-32 – At Pilate's Door

- ❓ At what time does this scene take place? Why do you think the time is important?
- ❓ Does Pilate appear to be in control of what is going on? If not, who is?
- ❓ Do the Jewish authorities answer Pilate's question about Jesus' crime? Why do you think they answer as they do?
- ❓ What do you think Pilate wants to have happen? What do the Jewish authorities want? What does Jesus want?

Read John 18:33-36 – In Pilate's Hall

- ❓ Does Pilate appear to be in control of this conversation? If not, who is?
- ❓ Does Jesus answer Pilate's questions about his crime?
- ❓ What do you think his answer means?
- ❓ What do you think Pilate wants to have happen?

Read John 18:37-38a – Pilate's Questions

- ❓ Who appears to be in control of this conversation now? Why? Why do you think John has written this scene this way?
- ❓ What do you think Pilate's question in verse 38 means? Is it rhetorical or does he want an answer? How would you answer it?

Read John 18:38b-40 – Pilate's Offer

- ❓ Who appears to be in control of this scene? Does Pilate, who is the Roman authority here, ever appear to be in charge?
- ❓ Why do you think Pilate offers to release Jesus? Why do you think he keeps him when he finds no case against him?

Living the Story: WorshipBible Connections

- ✚ Paul is tried before the Roman officials in Caesarea Maritima and Jerusalem (Acts 24-26).
- ✚ The sheep follow Jesus the shepherd because they know his voice (John 10:4).
- ✚ In the other three Gospels, Jesus says he came to fulfill the law and prophets (Matthew 5:17), to serve and give his life (Mark 10:45), and to seek out and save the lost (Luke 19:10).

The Stations of the Cross is a traditional worship rite in some Christian denominations. Individuals move from station to station, retracing the steps of Christ as he moved through the events of the Passion. In most forms there are 14 locations, each representing one scene, spread around a room, sanctuary, garden, or even city, as in Jerusalem. The traditional stations are taken from all four Gospels, as well as non-biblical tradition. The suggested stations given here are taken only from John's Gospel. Using the space you have, set up the Stations of the Cross, and spend 15 minutes moving between the stations. At each station, you might read from Scripture, offer a prayer, or simply light a candle. Consider placing an object at each station, if you have space. If space is tight, you could simply sit and read together each of the scenes of the Stations from their corresponding Scripture passage. Stations, Scripture passages, and object suggestions are in the sidebar.

Stations of the Cross

1. Jesus is arrested - John 18:1-11: Lantern
2. Jesus is interrogated by the Jewish authorities - John 18:12-14, 19-24: Rope
3. Simon Peter denies Jesus three times - John 18:15-18, 25-27: Picture of rooster
4. Jesus is interrogated by Pilate - John 18:28-38a: Purple cloth
5. Jesus is flogged - John 18:38b-19:7: Whip or crown of thorns
6. Jesus is condemned - John 19:8-16a: Stone
7. Jesus carries his cross - John 19:16b-17: Cross
8. Jesus is crucified - John 19:18-22: the words "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews"
9. Jesus' clothes are divided - John 19:23-25a: clothing
10. Jesus speaks to his mother and disciple - John 19:25b-27: small house
11. Jesus drinks sour wine - John 19:28-29: wine
12. Jesus dies on the cross - John 19:30: nothing
13. Jesus' side is pierced - John 19:31-37: spear
14. Jesus is laid in the tomb - John 19:38-42: white cloth.

Closing Prayer

Lord God, you have entered into the world and accompanied us in our joys and in our sufferings, even to the point of death. Give us the eyes to see your kingdom in our daily lives, and the courage to embrace your truth. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

At Home

Bible Nuts & Bolts: The Roman Empire

The Roman Empire occupied Judea and the surrounding region in 63 BCE, beginning a period of oppression for the Jewish people. Over the course of the following century, Jews were deported as slaves, made subject to Roman-appointed political and religious authorities, pressured to accept Roman deities, and placed under military occupation. Dissenters were tortured and crucified. Eventually, Jewish factions rebelled, leading to war and the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 CE. The Jewish people were scattered, leading to the rise of local synagogues as the center of Jewish religious and cultural life.

- ✝ Rewrite this scene from Pilate's perspective. What do you think he was thinking and feeling in this interaction?
- ✝ Write an answer to Pilate's unanswered question, "What is truth?" What answer do you think Jesus would make? What answer do you think would satisfy Pilate? What answer would you give?
- ✝ Draw a picture of Jesus' answer in verse 36, depicting the various kinds of kingdoms that Jesus describes.

Daily Readings

Sunday—Read John 18:28-40

Pontius Pilate interrogates Jesus, and finds no case against him. What seems to motivate Pilate in this scene?

Monday—Read John 15:8-11

Abiding in Jesus' love is the key to discipleship. Write a definition of discipleship according to these verses.

Tuesday—Read John 15:12-17

Jesus gives the commandment to love one another. Compare this commandment to the Ten Commandments given in Exodus 20:2-27. How are they the same or different?

Wednesday—Read John 15:18-21

Serving Jesus will lead to persecution. Draw a diagram explaining these verses.

Thursday—Read John 15:22-27

Jesus promises the coming of the Advocate. What appears to be Jesus' understanding of sin in this passage?

Friday—Read John 16:1-4a

Jesus foretells a time when his followers will be put out of their communities. Write a paragraph reacting to this prediction of Jesus. How would you feel as one of his first disciples hearing this?

Saturday—Read John 16:4b-7

Jesus again promises to send the Advocate. From this passage, who or what do you imagine the Advocate to be?