

Masterwork of the Messiah

Expositional Study Of Matthew's Gospel

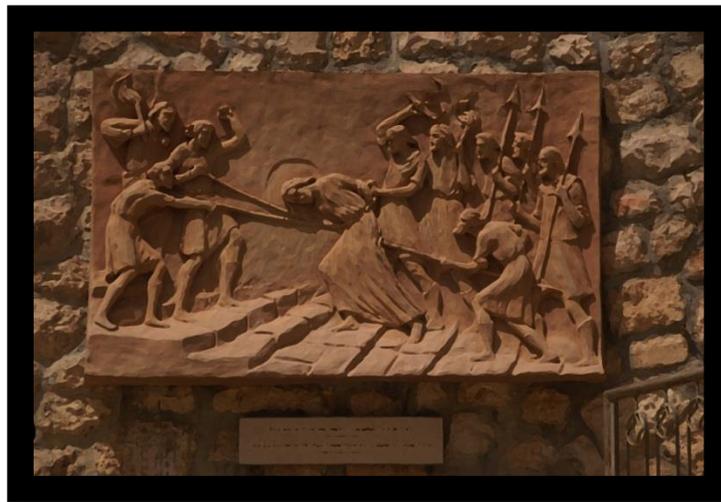
Four Roads To Oblivion

Matthew 27:11-26

Written By

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Christ's put spiritual life in ominous perspective as He closed His Sermon on the Mount, a sermon devoted to teaching believers how to live as kingdom members here and now:

¹³Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it. ¹⁴For the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it (Matthew 7).

According to Christ, you are either on the narrow, less traveled road which leads to eternal life, or you are on the broad, highly congested road leading to eternal destruction. Which road are you on? Those who embrace, by faith, Jesus as their Savior are on the former road. Those who efface Him, by unbelief, are on the latter. Again, I ask you the most important question of all of life: Which spiritual road are you on?

Taking Christ's metaphor a little further as we study His trumped up trail in Matthew (Matthew 26:47-27:26), which was composed of three Jewish and three Roman phases, we can readily identify four separate ruinous roads, or lanes, for those headed to eternal oblivion. These roads readily present themselves in bold relief as we analyze the people formally or informally involved in our Lord's Roman trial. As we consider each of them, I must challenge you to ask yourself a pivotal question: "Do any of these people and their spiritual reactions to Jesus describe

me?” If your answer is unequivocally ... and maybe uncomfortably “yes” ..., then my prayer is that you would switch roads this day by placing your faith in Jesus as your personal Savior and Messiah. From what the historical biblical narrative states, none of these people made that life-changing decision and it cost them eternity. What will you do? Yes, what will you do with Jesus? The answer to this query all starts when you consider the premise arising from an exegetical study of Matthew 27:11-26.

Four Roads Lead To Death; One Road Leads To Life (Matthew 27:11-26)

As I stated, each of these four roads to oblivion are identified by the people who put Jesus to death. However, before we take a look at them, I must first make some cursory observations of our passage:

- None of the gospel writers gives us a full account of Jesus’ trails, choosing, conversely, to describe bits and pieces of it from their perspectives. This fact warrants, therefore, our reading and study of all or their accounts. In this particular study, this will be our method for so much important information is found in the other accounts. So, be prepared to move from book to book and chapter to chapter.
- In light of this last point, logically, it is difficult to isolate the entire historical flow of Christ’s Roman trail. Where Matthew’s account is concerned please realize it is highly abbreviated, as are the others. Ostensibly, this means it didn’t flow as smoothly as Matthew records, but had other events occurring here and there. I will attempt to plug those episodes, as presented in the other parallel gospel accounts, in at what I believe are the appropriate places.
- I grope, as any interpreter, pastor, and teacher does with the spiritual magnitude of these historical narratives of the death of Jesus, our Messiah. Who can even begin to say at the end of the day that they have effectively isolated the historical, theological, spiritual, and emotional import of a passage such as this? I can’t; therefore, I say I am merely humbled by the choice of the Savior to endure all of this for my sin, and yours as well. So, please wake up. This is no mere academic exercise, but a cognitive appraisal of some of the most holy, sacred actions found in Scripture.
- Since we will cover a variety of texts, you will need your Bible. It is not manageable to place all of these texts on Power Point slides

With all this in mind, I now direct your attention to the *Four Roads To Oblivion*. Each of these, of course, must be understood and seen in light of three phases of Christ’s Roman trail:

Phase #1: The First Roman Trail Before Pilate (Matthew 27:11-14)

Luke tells us, more precisely, what happened after Christ’s “conviction of blasphemy at the house of the High Priest, Caiaphas:

¹ Then the whole body of them got up and brought Him before Pilate (Luke 23).

From Luke's words we are formally introduced to ...

Road #1: The Consumed. These were the religious leaders who didn't care about justice, truth, or mercy. No. All they cared about was the preservation of their distorted, legalistic view of Judaism and Christ's complete affront to that religious system. Dangerous are those who blindly hold to the trappings of a works-oriented method for possibly garnering a place in God's holy presence.

In your mind's eye, you can just about imagine the angry mob of priests, attorneys, and judges, along with their heavily armed guard, escorting the beaten, battered, and defenseless Jesus to the Antonia Fortress built on the northern wall of the Temple which was the home of the Roman Governor, Pilate. You can also imagine the commotion in the fortress that morning at the break of dawn as Pilate's soldiers woke and informed him of an angry delegation of the Sanhedrin



Looking north at the southern wall of the temple, with the Antonia Fortress situated strategically on the northwest wall.

standing with a prisoner outside the fortress lest they be contaminated on the Passover by entering an unclean Gentile domain. The Governor, of course, was not completely out of the loop regarding this meeting because he had, in fact, permitted a contingent of Roman troops to go to the Garden of Gethsemane earlier that morning to arrest a supposedly questionable individual. On the other hand, he had no idea what he was in for.

With Christ the accused standing at a lower point in front of him, surrounded by the Sanhedrin and their armed guard, Pilate probably sat down (though this is debatable) on the chair located on the *Lithostrotos*¹, or the elevated platform where

¹ *Lithostrotos* is Greek. *Lithos* is the word for stone and it speaks of a large mosaic stone floor upon which rested the Bema, or Judgment Seat. The Aramaic, Gabbatha, speaks lexically of an elevated, raised area. From excavations of this area it is possible this entire stone area encompassed some 3,000 square feet (cf. Carson, D. A. *The Gospel according to John*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991): 603. Additional info can be gleaned from Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of The New Testament And Other Early Christian Literature*: **λιθόστρωτος, ον** (s. λίθος, στρώννυμι; Soph. et al.; Epict. 4, 7, 37 v.l.; POxy 2138, 15; PFlor 50, 97 [268 A.D.] ἐπὶ τοῦ λιθοστρώτου δρόμου Ἑρμοῦ; 2 Ch 7:3; Esth 1:6; SSol 3:10; EpArist 88; Jos., Bell. 6, 85; 189) 'paved w. blocks of stone', also subst. τὸ λιθόστρωτον (IG IV²/1, 110, 19 [IV/III B.C.]; Κυπρ. I p. 58 no. 1 ἀπὸ τοῦ Ἑραίου ἕως τοῦ λιθοστρώτου; 2 Ch 7:3) **stone pavement** or **mosaic**. In **J 19:13** either *pavement* or *mosaic* is poss.; the place meant is the one called 'in Hebrew Gabbatha' (s. Γαβ.), where Pilate pronounced judgment on Jesus.—REngelmann, BPhW 27, 1907, 341; 1652ff; Vincent-Abel, Jérusalem II 1926, 570; LVincent, RB 42, '33,

judgments were rendered (John 19:13). With a wave of his hand, I'm sure he quieted the agitated, noisy group and asked for the formal charges against the accused. Luke gives us those charges, which were modified to mislead and motivate the Roman leader to execute Jesus.

² And they began to accuse Him, saying, “We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, and saying that He Himself is Christ, a King” (Luke 23).

All of this was a lie, of course, because these religious leaders knew Pilate wouldn't execute Jesus on their charge of blasphemy. The present tense infinitive “to accuse” (κατηγορεῖν), coupled and followed by the present tense participle, “saying” (λέγοντες) grammatically suggests they made this volatile, impassioned, definitive statement more than once. Mark this well. Articulating a false statement repeatedly doesn't make it true; however, it can deceive and sway weak minded individuals,



people who are afraid, for a variety of reasons, to stand up for justice and truth. Such will be the case as we consider the people on these four roads to oblivion.

Moving from *The Consumed*, we now turn to ...

The Coward. According to John's parallel account, Pilate eventually took Jesus inside some part of the Praetorium to question Him privately.

³³ Therefore Pilate entered again into the Praetorium, and summoned Jesus and said to Him, “Are You the King of the Jews?” ³⁴ Jesus answered, “Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about Me?” ³⁵ Pilate answered, “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests 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, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm.” ³⁷ Therefore Pilate said to Him, “So You are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify 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 guilt in Him (John 18).

This is where Matthew's account begins:

83–113; 46, '37, 563–70; 59, '50, 513–30; ECerny, CBQ 4, '42, 159f; PBenoit, RB 59, '50, 531–50.—DELG s.v. στόρνυμι. M-M. Spicq.

¹¹ Now Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor questioned Him, saying, “Are You the King of the Jews?” And Jesus said to him, “It is as you say.” ¹² And while He was being accused by the chief priests and elders, He did not answer.

Concerning these texts, we must pause and offer some salient observations.

First, if anyone knew what was going on in Jerusalem, it was Pilate. He had spies everywhere in order to maintain control of a historically volatile region. He had to know that Jesus, who had spoken many times in public, had no troops, no weapons, and no political aims. According to Matthew 27:18, he also knew the charges of the Sanhedrin were based on envy and jealousy. He knew these religious leaders couldn't stand the fact that the masses were more drawn to Jesus than their own highly skilled and supremely educated religious leaders. Further, he had just seen (or at least heard) from his fortress vantage point, Jesus elevated by those masses as He rode into town on a donkey and debated the religious leaders on the crowded temple mount. Hence, Pilate knew the charges were bogus and unfounded as he questioned Christ.

Second, since Pilate knew Christ was innocent, his opening question, “Are You the King of Jews” was designed to give Jesus an out of His unfortunate predicament. All He had to do was say, “No, I'm not,” and Pilate could have immediately released him and ended his dilemma.

Third, Christ's answer didn't go as Pilate anticipated from an innocent man. By couching His answer with an emphatic personal pronoun, followed by a present tense verb (Σὺ λέγεις), Jesus stressed this possible translation: “You are maintaining this position,” or “You have this perspective.” Put differently, because Jesus didn't say, “Yes, I am,” He didn't identify himself strictly as the earthly Jewish King, and because He didn't definitively remark, “No, I'm not,” He didn't disassociate Himself from the fact that He was, most certainly, a king. What He did substantiate in this somewhat cryptic reply is He was a king, but not in the sense that the Jews or Pilate might classify Him. Jesus went on to give Pilate an education about His person and mission. He was a king, but His kingdom was, first and foremost, spiritual. He didn't go into how He would, in fact, eventually be the great Davidic king over Israel, as prophesied (2 Samuel 7; Isaiah 2, 9; Psalm 89; Jeremiah 23:5; 33:14; Daniel 7, 9). Jesus, then, acting like a judge, challenged Pilate with a statement revealing that spiritual truth seekers understand His person and mission.

Really, you can't tell me ol' Pilate hadn't heard the essence of Christ's teaching about this very topic from His other teaching venues on the temple over the last three years. As the despotic, iron-fisted ruler, he had to know Christ claimed to be the spiritual light of the world as well as the great I AM of history (John 8), which were teachings articulate in the Temple (John 8:2). His reply of “What is truth?” merely shows you he completely disregarded the possibility of their being any such thing as total, absolute spiritual truth. His very premise was unfounded, however, because to say there was no such thing as absolute truth proved the point, by definition. This philosophical reality should, then, have been weighed against all the miracles Jesus performed right under the nose of the Governor. But none of this happened because he was, innately, a coward. To embrace Christ as the true King would have cost him his job, maybe his marriage, his power, his contacts, his respect from his godless or polytheistic troops and so forth. No. Pilate's evasive question betrayed the fear in his own heart, fear to make the right life decision based on the facts.

Ascertaining he didn't have a insurrectionist before him, Pilate stepped out once again on the Lithostrotos, and, according to Luke (23:4) and John (18:38), he announced to the Sanhedrin:

I find no basis for a charge against him (John 18:38)

With that, the Jewish leaders verbally went into the attack mode.

¹² And while He was being accused by the chief priests and elders, He made no answer (Matthew 27).

“Being accused” (κατηγορεῖσθαι) is a present infinitive in Greek and grammatically points to the fact they merely kept shouting and reasserting the same lie-ridden charges against Christ. Again, these religious zealots didn’t need to be bothered by the facts or evidences of Christ’s messiahship anymore. Why? They were beyond all this because their collective hatred of His challenge to their finely turned, works oriented religious system blinded and consumed them, resulting in their desire to see Him executed. Christ’s silence to their false accusations took the breath away from the cold, calloused Governor:

¹³ Then Pilate said to Him, “Do You not hear how many things they testify against You?” ¹⁴ And He did not answer him with regard to even a single charge, so that the governor was quite amazed (Matthew 27).

Jesus didn’t answer because, according to Isaiah, He, as THE sacrificial lamb, was prophesied to walk meekly, quietly, and silently to His redemptive death (Isaiah 53:7). He also didn’t answer because more arguments and more proofs would have fallen on stony ground. Let me warn you. It is a serious thing when your hard heart, your constant, perpetual rejections of Christ’s message and mission results in the absolute, deafening silence of God.

According to Dr. Luke, during this loud, verbally convoluted shouting match at the Governor, he happened to hear that Jesus was a Galilean.

⁶ When Pilate heard it, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. ⁷ And when he learned that He belonged to Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod, who himself also was in Jerusalem at that time (Luke 23).

“This,” he must have thought, “... is my way out of this thorny, potentially riotous situation on this Passover morning.” With that he dispatched the blood-spattered, swollen-eyed, wobbly-legged Jesus to the palace of Herod Antipas, the ruler over Galilee who just happened to be in Jerusalem for Passover. In Matthew’s narrative, this event is missing but should probably be inserted right after verse 14. Dr. Luke is the only gospel writer who includes it.

Formally, this is classified as ...

Phase #2: The Second Roman Trial Before Herod (Luke 23:6-12)

Unlike his father, Herod the Great, Herod Antipas was a sly fox, as Jesus once labeled him (Luke 13:32). He had, along with the Pharisees, attempted to deter Christ from His mission of dying for the sins of mankind in Jerusalem; however, Christ saw through his devious, godless goal and called him what he was: Nothing short of a crafty animal desirous of opposing God. Bo Reicke, the historian, further describes this wicked ruler who put Jesus on trial.

Like his father, he was a supporter of Hellenistic culture, a tendency he expressed most strongly in his building activities, which often offended the sensibilities of the devout. Antipas nevertheless sought to take Jewish piety into account: he put in an appearance at the festivals in Jerusalem; he issued coinage without images; he later rejected Pilate's attempt to place gold plaques with the name of the Emperor in Herod's Jerusalem palace. In this way Antipas steered a middle course between the various interests, and was able to rule for three decades without disturbances. The last ten years of his reign, however, took a form less happy and serene.²

Antipas divorced his first wife, a Nabatean princess, and had an adulterous affair with his sister-in-law, Herodias, whom he eventually married. When John the Baptist criticized the in-your-face and highly public sexual sin of Antipas, Herodias eventually had her daughter, the King's step-



The red-roofed palace of Herod with the Antonia Fortress in the background. Another red-roofed building just like this was situated just out of view in this photo. The very structure, with its glistening in-laid white stone flooring had the appearance of a massive eagle sporting out-stretched wings. Christ, I'm sure, was not impressed.

daughter, perform a sexually explicit dance before the perverted politician at a dinner party. When Antipas told her in light of the dance she could have whatever she wanted, her mother told her to ask for the head of John. Antipas conceded and murdered John, the first cousin of Jesus. Now Jesus, who probably looked somewhat a lot like John, stood before the devious, hedonistic, purely power-hungry, godless king.

The short walk over to the massive, marbled palace of Herod, which

some said looked like a magnificent eagle with outstretched wings, didn't impress Christ.

⁸ Now Herod was very glad when he saw Jesus; for he had wanted to see Him for a long time, because he had been hearing about Him and was hoping to see some sign performed by Him. ⁹ And he questioned Him at some length; but He answered him nothing. ¹⁰ And the chief priests and the scribes were standing there, accusing Him vehemently. ¹¹ And Herod with his soldiers, after treating Him with contempt and mocking Him, dressed Him in a gorgeous robe and sent Him back to Pilate. ¹²

² Bo Reike, *New Testament Era* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981): 124-125.

Now Herod and Pilate became friends with one another that very day; for before they had been enemies with each other (Luke 23).

Herod Antipas had heard of Jesus' ministry from countless sources either back in Galilee or in Jerusalem. Yes, he had heard from firsthand witnesses, mostly likely, of the plethora of divine miracles; however, he NEVER went to check them out. Why? His heart was hardened by his ingrained sin. He loved this world more than he loved the things of God. He, as we see here, probably thought Christ's actions were more magical than anything else. To him, Jesus was a loser, a bottom-rung nobody from the backwater town of Nazareth. He couldn't have been the Messiah, therefore, he was just a crafty charlatan, like so many others. This is why he simply wanted to see a sign from Jesus, something to wow him. He just wanted Jesus to perform a trick for him, something never seen before.

Jesus didn't oblige the carnal, sin-ridden false King. Again, all the evidences of His messiahship had been readily available to Antipas. He, therefore, didn't need to supply him with any more to prove His identity. Makes you wonder, doesn't it? How many signs and evidences for the person and work of Jesus, the Messiah and Savior, have you balked at, laughed at, or walked away from? There comes the time when He doesn't give you any more evidences, and you stand judged based on your own hard-hearted negligence.

Jesus didn't answer the King either. He didn't have to because there was nothing more to say. The corrupt political system pushed for His execution regardless of what He could say in His defense; therefore, argumentation was out of order. Again, woe to the man when God becomes silent to you.

How did the sexual deviant and murderous king respond to the stately, righteous, innocent Savior? He, along with his guard detail, mocked and laughed at Him and placed a worthless robe His bloodied shoulders to further deride Him as a king. Or in other words, Antipas, in the face of the God of Creation, acted like a complete, ludicrous clown. To him, the things of God were not worth considering. To him, the things of God were worth poking fun at. To him, the things of God were a joke. I'm sure he is not laughing now.

He also failed to see any proof that Jesus was a real king or threat to Rome, therefore, he didn't help Pilate out by sending him back to the fortress ... but that's exactly what he did.

What about you? Are you traveling down the road of this kingly clown? You might mock and laugh now, but the day will come when you will stand before this same Savior and have to give account for your life and why you lived it contrary to the evidences of His gospel (Philippians 2:10; Revelation 20:11-15).

Arriving at the Antonia Fortress, Jesus now stepped into the final phase of His trumped up trial.

Phase #3: The Third Roman Trial Before Pilate (Matthew 27:15-26; Mark 15:6-15; Luke 23:13-26; John 18:39-19:16).

Once more, we encounter what I call ...

The Coward. According to John 18:8, Pilate headed back into the fortress to speak privately with Christ. Pragmatically, this means once the Sanhedrin party arrived, he commanded his heavily armed troops to whisk Christ into a setting out of sight so he could get to the bottom of this "criminal" case. This action set up the verbally violent, almost riotous exchange with *The*

Consumed, who wanted a murderous insurrectionist released per the merciful tradition established at Passover.

¹⁵ Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release for the people any one prisoner whom they wanted. ¹⁶ At that time they were holding a notorious prisoner, called Barabbas.

Barabbas, or the Hebrew for “son of the father.” Quite an ironic name, wouldn’t you say? The true Son of the Father was on trial for crimes He had not committed, while the other “son of the father” was awaiting his rightful execution for his murderous insurrection against Rome (Luke 23:19). And the fact that the other two criminals slated for execution that day were called “rebels” or *lestai*, in Greek, we can surmise they were probably co-conspirators with their leader Barabbas. Based, therefore, on the ruthless, jihadi-like behavior of these men, men who had killed innocent people, death was warranted. So Pilate, thinking he could spare Christ, the innocent one, made a strategic mistake in his next move to fix the complex political dilemma.

¹⁷ So when the people gathered together, Pilate said to them, “Whom do you want me to release for you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?” ¹⁸ For he knew that because of envy they had handed Him over.

Based on this testimony, it looks like Pilate anticipated the people, especially the priests who were faced with the fact that the Governor and the King both found no guilt in Christ, would naturally opt for freeing Jesus. He thought wrong. They, *The Consumed*, would let nothing get in their way of ridding the world of One who’d dare oppose them and their religious beliefs.

Just as the crowd was about to erupt in a shocking chant for Barabbas, Pilate’s wife slipped him a note.

¹⁹ While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent him a message, saying, “Have nothing to do with that righteous Man; for last night I suffered greatly in a dream because of Him.”

Being a superstitious Roman, and one who worshipped at the feet of a plethora of gods, Pilate’s wife, who was probably awakened by all the commotion, didn’t want him to have anything to do with Jesus. Why? She had been troubled by a dream the night before about this godly man. For her husband not to exercise his right as the ruler and stop this insanity would be tantamount to angering the gods, therefore, she made sure he received the note on his seat of judgment. He didn’t listen. Why? The problem was bigger than her and his cowardice was bigger than him. If he let Christ go and the people then rioted, then he was directly responsible not to the Senate, but to Caesar. Yet for a moment he mulled her words, and while he did, the priests walked around the crowd, many of whom could have been assembled to ask for the release of Barabbas, and convinced them to loudly clamor for the release of the insurrectionist.

²⁰ But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to put Jesus to death.

They did this because they knew they didn't have an airtight case against Jesus. All Pilate had to do was wave his hand and declare Jesus innocent, and the middle cross meant for Barabbas, would, indeed, find the insurrectionist on it forthrightly. So, devoid of hard evidence for a capital case, they chose to get their blood-thirsty verdict on emotional, verbal intimidation alone. Don't think this spirit is gone from the world today, either. Read on and you'll see it in action in Christ's case:

²¹ But the governor said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas." ²² Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said, "Crucify Him!" ²³ And he said, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they kept shouting all the more, saying, "Crucify Him!"

Pilate was noticeably taken-back. He had seen his share of capital crucifixion cases; however, he had never seen anything like this case. He knew the accused was innocent. He knew the Sanhedrin knew the accused was innocent. However, when Pilate had Christ step out onto the platform he couldn't believe what he heard. John adds these important details to the emotionally super-charged situation:

⁶ So when the chief priests and the officers saw Him, they cried out saying, "Crucify, crucify!" Pilate said to them, "Take Him yourselves and crucify Him, for I find no guilt in Him." ⁷ The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and by that law He ought to die because He made Himself out to be the Son of God" (John 19).

Ah, there was a bit of information the Governor hadn't heard. The Jewish leaders were really angry because Jesus claimed to be the Son of God. Even to a humanistic, hardened politician like Pilate, the mere possibility this might be true, sent a shiver down his spineless back. He was superstitious enough to pause the proceedings and seek further insight and evidence:

⁸ Therefore when Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid; ⁹ and he entered into the Praetorium again and said to Jesus, "Where are You from?" (John 19).

Note this well. He already knew Jesus was from Galilee (Luk3 23:6-7). His question, therefore, was about origins heavenly. Ostensibly, he asked, "Are you really from the gods?" "Are you from the realm of the gods?" Did Jesus reply? No.

But Jesus gave him no answer.

Why not? He had already told Pilate He was, in fact, a king from a supernatural world and the politician didn't believe him. Further words, then, were unnecessary. Again, I caution you: There comes the time when you, who've been too afraid to embrace the evidences for Jesus being the only Savior and Lord, will find be left with divine silence ... with no further revelatory word from the living God. Better to listen and act now in faith, which was something Pilate didn't do. He merely exercised his positional power:

¹⁰ So Pilate said to Him, "You do not speak to me? Do You not know that I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify You?"

At this juncture, Jesus did respond because Pilate needed to know that his power was only on loan from Christ's father, God. Gulp. Who was on trial here? Not Jesus.

¹¹ Jesus answered, "You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above; for this reason he who delivered Me to you has the greater sin." ¹²

Heading back outside onto the judgment platform, Pilate now, fearful of what might happen for his mistreatment of a god, weakly tried to reverse the capital crimes nature of Christ's situation.

As a result of this Pilate made efforts to release Him, but the Jews cried out saying, "If you release this Man, you are no friend of Caesar; everyone who makes himself out to be a king opposes Caesar."

With that last argument, Pilate folded, knowing that he had to appear loyal to Caesar at all costs, even if it meant murdering Jesus. What would Caesar think if he allowed a person the populace felt was an insurrectionist against Rome to walk free? He couldn't afford the potential blowback from Rome.

¹³ Therefore when Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out, and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Pavement, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha. ¹⁴ Now it was the day of preparation for the Passover; it was about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, "Behold, your King!" (John 19).

He could have freed him based on his political power, but he chose to give into the mob mentality. Mark this well: A nation is neigh unto judgment when its political and spiritual leaders disregard truth, laws, logic, and hard evidence in order to suppress the person and work of Christ.

Just the statement, "Behold, your King!" set the religious leaders off. Such is the case with those who oppose the gospel, who reject Christ as the only Savior, who reject the Word of God and so forth. Just the mention of these truths sends them off the ledge:

¹⁵ So they cried out, "Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar" (John 19).

They hated Caesar, but now they stated he was their only king? With that confused chant, Pilate then moved to use one of their cleansing methods in murderous situations as found in Deuteronomy 21:1-9, to find cleansing for himself for moving to execute a man he knew was innocent. Shocking, a Gentile turned to obey the Mosaic Law while the people of the Law rejected it. Can you say the word "ironic?"

²⁴ When Pilate saw that he was accomplishing nothing, but rather that a riot was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this Man's blood; see to that yourselves."

This washing didn't absolve him of his sin. That type of inner, soul and conscience cleansing could have only come from the One who stood before Him; however, the politician made another tactical blunder by not turning to Him in trusting repentance. He, like so many, chose to embrace an outer method, a visible ritual which could never deal with man's sin problem. Who or what have you turned to?

Sad, isn't it? Pilate was the coward who caved. Why did he do it? His sordid past as a ruler finally caught up with him. At the beginning of his rule, with his headquarters in the coastal city of Caesarea, he marched to Jerusalem with the Roman standards in full view of the people, who saw the eagles and images of the Emperor on top of the poles are idols. He provoked the Jews to push a political power point. Later he built a much needed water aqueduct in Jerusalem by raiding the Temple treasury. They hated him, to say the least, and according to Philo, a Jewish philosopher in Alexandria (25 B.C. – 50 A.D.), Pilate feared the Jews would go to Caesar with his misdeeds, resulting in him being harshly reprimanded. In Christ's capital case, caving, therefore, was a viable option for him because his Jewish opponents had ample leverage to motivate him in light of his past devious, provocative activities. All Rome needed was to hear of him letting an insurrectionist free and it would be over for him; hence, he chose to give in and look the other way. Oh, for more leaders who have the courage to do the right thing, publically and spiritually.

In light of this, I must ask you: What pressures are being applied to your life, pressures which are keeping you from embracing Jesus in faith? Believe me, caving into those pressures because you are afraid will not be worth eternity apart from the Savior.

The last words we hear from the Antonia Fortress that menacing morning are these:

²⁵ And all the people said, "His blood shall be on us and on our children!"

Now, it was not just the religious leaders and their cronies who cried out for Christ's blood ... it was all the people present that day. A week before a number of them were probably crying in the massive crowd: "Hosanna to the Son of David" (Matthew 21:15). But today the words, "Crucify Him" rang loudly from their mouths. What had happened? Even though they had heard the teaching of Jesus, witnessed His powerful debate with the religious leaders, watched Him perform numerous divine healings, they still chose to listen to their religious leaders. If the so-called spiritual men collectively called for Jesus to be crucified, then all the evidences in the world regarding His message and mission didn't matter for a second. That's why I call this last group *The Controlled*. They went with the opinion of their sinful, mis-guided priests. They went their ritual and traditions. They went with a man who at least did something against Rome. They went with the public opinion. I'm sure they've regretted their decision ever since.

As with the other types of this passage, I must ask you, "Are you a member of *The Controlled*?"

Realizing he couldn't turn the crowd away from their desire for blood, Pilate did what he promised:

²⁶ Then he released Barabbas for them; but after having Jesus scourged, he handed Him over to be crucified.

He sent Christ to be crucified; however, through that one death, the sins of mankind would find atonement, and through it sinners on the road to oblivion would be given the opportunity to be

moved to the status of saints on the road to life. Just like Jesus promised Nicodemus, the Pharisee at the beginning of his ministry:

¹⁴ “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; ¹⁵ so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life. ¹⁶ “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. ¹⁷ “For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him (John 3).

Which road are you on? Be open and honest. Realize, also, that Jesus lovingly and patiently calls you to change roads. What are you waiting for?