

## **Connecting Minds**

"These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31)

### The Gospel of John

Chapter 19:10-12

**"Then Pilate said to Him, 'Are You not speaking to Me? Do You not know that I have power to crucify You, and power to release You?' Jesus answered, 'You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore, the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin.' From then on Pilate sought to release Him, but the Jews cried out, saying, 'If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar's friend. Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar.'"**

Pilate has asked Jesus where He came from but Jesus remained silent. At this point Pilate becomes angry and states his authority that he holds over Jesus in judgment - "I have power to crucify You, and power to release You..." For a moment, Pilate exercised some caution and even reverence toward Jesus after he heard the charge of "Son of God." But now he reverts to abuse. You can almost sense a small chuckle come over Jesus when Pilate says "I have power to release You..." If Pilate did, would Jesus still be standing in front of him after being acquitted twice?

So often through this trial Jesus has remained silent. But at this point Jesus actually rebukes Pilate - "You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above..." Jesus is rebuking the pride of Pilate. He submits to Pilate's authority when Pilate holds it rightly. He even submits when he abuses his power (the unlawful scourging). But when Pilate elevates his power above God's, then Jesus rebukes him.

The Greek word for "power" that Jesus used to describe Pilate's authority means "it is permissible, allowed... it is a combination of right and might." From this we learn that the power of a civil magistrate is a delegated power, from above; it is a limited power, limited from above; but it is a real power.

"The one who delivered Me to you..." Jesus is referring to the Jewish leaders, Caiaphas in particular, who have the "greater sin." Look at verse 7. They have the law - they have even admitted to it - "We have a law..." They knew the

prophecies of the Messiah. Their sin is against greater knowledge. But there may be more to this statement. Jesus says that Pilate has authority from above, and *therefore* the sin of the Jewish leaders is greater. Pilate had wanted to release Jesus and he possessed the God-given authority to do so, but because of the pressure of the Jewish leaders Pilate would eventually commit Christ to crucifixion. Matthew Henry writes that the Jewish leaders sin is greater "who, from envy and malice, urge [Pilate] to abuse [his] power."<sup>1</sup>

Is Pilate therefore innocent of guilt? Can we excuse ourselves based on someone else's greater sin? No. Pilate's sin is great, but there are some whose sin is greater. This does not mean that we are innocent just because someone engages in greater sin.

"He sought to release Him..." This was Pilate's plan all along but in verse 12 Jesus' lot is sealed. The Jewish leaders put the greatest of pressure upon Pilate when they say "If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar's friend..." What are Jewish leaders are doing is what we would call "blackmail" today. Pilate was under Caesar's authority and if news of a bad handling of any situation were to reach Rome it could be very bad for Pilate. Caesar, after all, was a god in the Roman scheme of things.

The charge the Jews would bring against Pilate in Rome, they are hinting at, would be that Jesus is a rival king and Pilate acquitted Him. The problem for Pilate is that he knows the case. Jesus has said nothing to oppose Caesar. Jesus has not acted in any way to oppose Caesar. Jesus has said "My kingdom is *not* of this world." Jesus has said that His servants will not fight for His deliverance. Jesus has acknowledged the delegated authority of Pilate, and thus of Rome. Pilate knows that Jesus is no threat to Rome and that the charge against Him is baseless.

But what finally moves Pilate towards a position of condemning Christ is a fear of man, and in particular, a fear of Caesar. "You are not Caesar's friend..." If Pilate wanted to remain in the favour of Caesar, he may have to condemn Christ to death.

## TableTalk

Read Daniel 5:19,20. When Nebuchadnezzar raised himself up above God, saying that he had power to execute and to keep alive, what happened to him?

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<sup>1</sup>Matthew Henry's Commentaries, vol. 5, Matthew Henry, pg. 963