

# JESUS WAS ARRESTED, TRIED, AND SENTENCED TO DEATH

John 18:1-19:16a

Key Verse: 18:37

*“You are a king, then!” said Pilate. Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.”*

In today’s passage, John describes how Jesus was arrested, tried and sentenced to death. Humanly, these events would have terrified him. But throughout the ordeal, Jesus showed his determination to drink the cup of suffering in order to fulfill God’s will to save sinners like you and me. May God help us to know how and why Jesus had to go through the trials!

## I. JESUS WAS ARRESTED (18:1-11; 15-18; 25-27)

In Chapter 17, Jesus prayed that he would glorify God through his death on the cross. He said, “Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you” (17:1). When he had finished praying, he left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. There was an olive garden there (1). This garden was called Gethsemane. Why did Jesus come to this place and what did he do? John doesn’t say it but it was his favorite place to pray. Jesus wanted to pray more to prepare for the upcoming events.

Matthew 26 describes his prayer in Gethsemane. His soul was overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. With his human nature, it was very difficult for Jesus to drink the cup of death. He was troubled at the thought of not only the excruciating pain he would have to endure, but the mental anguish of shouldering the sins of the world. But he did not yield to his own desires. He struggled in prayer to overcome his human limitations. He struggled to obey God’s will. His prayer struggle in Gethsemane was so intense that his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground (Lk 22:44). What was his prayer topic? He prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will” (Mt 26:39). He repeated this prayer for many hours. The question for Jesus at this point was not whether to drink the bitter cup or not. He had already decided to drink the cup. He prayed that God would give him strength to drink the cup in obedience to God’s will, not a passive obedience, but a wholehearted obedience. In this way, our Lord Jesus prepared for his crucifixion.

While Jesus was praying, a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and the Pharisees came to arrest him. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons (3). Judas Iscariot, the betrayer, led them there because he knew the place (2). They were armed with weapons. They came like a SWAT team to arrest a drug dealer. They were expecting a resistance from Jesus. They were in for a surprise.

Let’s read verses 4-6. *Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, “Who is it you want?” “Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “I am he,” Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) When Jesus said, “I*

*am he,” they drew back and fell to the ground.* They were heavily armed, but Jesus did not hide behind an olive tree. Instead, he came forward, asking, “Who is it you want?” They were startled when he declared, “I am he.” When Jesus said, “I am he,” he declared that he was the Son of God. He declared that he was the Messiah who came to die for the sins of the world. They drew back and fell to the ground. Jesus was in control of the situation. He knew all that was going to happen to him (4). Yet, he surrendered himself voluntarily because he really wanted to fulfill God’s redemptive purpose for his life. We must know personally that when Jesus said, “I am he,” he identified himself as our Savior.

Again he asked them, “Who is it you want?” “Jesus of Nazareth,” they said. Jesus answered, *“I told you that I am he. If you are looking for me, then let these men go”* (8). What was his concern at this time of crisis? It was his disciples. Jesus is the good shepherd who cares about his sheep even in his difficult moment. Meanwhile, what did his disciples do? We can imagine how frightened they were to face the armed mob at night. Verse 10 says that Peter drew his sword and struck the high priest’s servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant’s name was Malchus.) Peter appeared to be heroic in this scene. But actually, he did not know what he was doing.

Look at verse 11. *Jesus commanded Peter, “Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?”* Jesus told Peter why he decided to surrender himself. He had to drink the cup because the Father had given him the cup of suffering to drink. Jesus knew why he had to endure the suffering. It was a painful moment for Jesus; one of his own disciples betrayed him with a kiss (Lk 22:47-48). The Jewish leaders were about to arrest him and hand him over to the Romans to be executed. But he had no grudge or complaint. Instead, we see his determination to drink the cup. How could Jesus remain calm in this situation? We learn here that after his intense struggle in prayer, Jesus was ready to obey the will of God. He had the courage to face the situation, not passively, but actively. He was in charge of the situation.

Now let’s think about Peter (15-18; 25-27). There’s no doubt that Peter loved Jesus. He had boasted that he would lay down his life for Jesus (13:37). But his confidence was based on his emotion, not on the word of God. And the confidence utterly failed when the reality hit him. He denied the Lord that night. He told the servant girl that he was not one of his disciples (17). So what was the difference between Jesus and Peter? We know that Peter and the other disciples were sleeping while Jesus prayed in Gethsemane (Mk 14:37-38). Without prayer, Peter had no clear direction based on God’s will. So when a difficult moment came, he could not stand firm. He did an unthinkable thing--he denied his beloved Lord not once, not twice, but three times that night.

We learn how important it is for us to pray and accept God’s will through our personal Bible study. Our struggle is not against flesh and blood. It is a spiritual battle against the devil. We must not depend on our feelings, because our emotions are not dependable. The thing is, people often say, “I feel good about that,” or “I don’t want to do it because I don’t feel like doing it.” But when we depend on our feelings or human logic, situations can dominate us. That’s what happened to Peter. We must learn to obey

God through prayer and the word of God, as Jesus did. Then we can have a clear purpose and direction in life. Let us learn from Jesus who identified himself before his enemies by saying, “I am he.” Let’s learn obedience from Jesus who said, “Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?”

## II. JESUS WAS TRIED (12-14; 19-24; 28-40)

The Jewish officials arrested Jesus. They bound him and brought him first to Annas for trial (12-13). Then Jesus was tried by the Sanhedrin and finally by the Roman governor.

**First, Jesus’ trials before the Jewish leaders** (12-14, 19-23). Annas was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest at that time. Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that killing Jesus was politically expedient for their country (11:49-50). However, Annas was in control in an unofficial capacity behind his son-in-law. We don’t want to stand in trial, not even in a traffic court. But Jesus was tried by politically motivated people, not once or twice, but three times. Look at verse 19. *Meanwhile, the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching.* Why did Annas question Jesus about his disciples and his teaching? Was he interested in learning about Jesus’ teaching? No. It was to find a basis to charge him. He was a religious leader—a servant of God. But he had no love of God in his heart. In fact, he became an enemy of God.

Look at verses 20-21. *“I have spoken openly to the world.” Jesus replied. “I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret. Why question me? Ask those who heard me. Surely they know what I said.”* Jesus told Annas that his life and his teachings were open book. Jesus taught the word of God openly to people who came to him. His teachings were in the public domain. When Jesus said this, one of the officials nearby slapped him in the face. “Is this the way you answer the high priest?” he demanded. Jesus replied: “If I said something wrong, testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?” (22-23) Annas could not counter what Jesus said, which was the truth. So he sent Jesus bound to Caiaphas, who was with the members of the Sanhedrin.

From the other gospels, we learn that the trial before the Sanhedrin was held at night and lasted all night. According to the Jewish law, it was illegal to have a trial at night. But they violated their own law to eliminate Jesus. All through the night, they mocked and beat him (Mt 26). It was a kangaroo court because they had decided the verdict even before the trial began. They neither had a clear charge, nor witnesses, nor evidence. So they just spit in his face and beat him. Finally, at daybreak they sent Jesus to the Roman governor.

**Second, Jesus’ trial before Pilate** (18:28-40). Look at verse 28. *Then the Jewish leaders took Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor. By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness they did not enter the palace, because they wanted to be able to eat the Passover.* The Jews wanted to deal with Jesus quickly so that they could enjoy the holiday celebration. So they brought Jesus to Pilate

early morning. They needed Pilate's help in killing Jesus, for the Jews had no right to execute anyone (31). They did not enter the Roman governor's palace to avoid ceremonial uncleanness. What hypocrisy! Outwardly they were very religious. But their hearts were set on killing an innocent man because of their jealousy toward him.

Pilate was unhappy that the Jewish leaders tried to use him for their own agenda. So he asked them, "What charges are you bringing against this man?" (29) When they could make no clear charge, he said, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law" (31). Pilate told them that it was only a religious matter and they'd better settle it on their own. In his eyes, there was no crime committed. Yet, Pilate felt the political pressure coming from the Jewish leaders. So he went back inside the palace to question Jesus. On the one hand, Pilate found no basis for a charge against Jesus. He repeatedly said so three times (38; 19:4,6). On the other hand, he needed the support of the Jewish leaders for his political career. He knew the truth about Jesus, but he was a politician who was not willing to sacrifice his career for the sake of justice.

The long-awaited Messiah had finally come to save his people (Isa 9:6,7). But they condemned him and turned him over to a foreign governor to be executed. It was a tragedy. But the author comments in verse 32: *"This took place to fulfill what Jesus had said about the kind of death he was going to die."* The Jews reported to Pilate that Jesus claimed that he was the king of the Jews. They tried to bring a treason charge against Jesus so that they could use the Roman governor in eliminating Jesus. So Pilate went back inside the palace and asked Jesus, "Are you the king of the Jews?" Jesus asked him back, "Is that your own idea?" (34). Pilate answered, "It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me" (35).

Jesus declared: *"My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place"* (36). Jesus' kingdom is a spiritual kingdom. It is the kingdom of God. It is not of this world. Jesus plainly told him that he had no political ambition in this world. "You are a king, then?" said Pilate, as if he had not understood Jesus' point. He wanted to hear only what he wanted to hear. Jesus answered, *"You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me"* (37). Jesus was not intimidated by the Roman governor; rather, he wanted Pilate to listen to the truth and stand firmly on the side of God, for in his eyes the Roman governor was also created in the image of God. Jesus wanted him to accept his invitation to the kingdom of God, where Jesus rules as King, and become a citizen of his kingdom (Rev 5:12). It was time for Pilate to make a choice: to stand on the side of Jesus or to stand on the side of Satan.

When Pilate heard the voice of truth, he was frustrated. In bewilderment he exclaimed, "What is truth?" (38). He asked this question not because he did not know the truth, but because he had no courage to follow the truth. He knew the truth, but he did not choose to follow it because of his political ambition. "What is truth?" was the inner cry of a sinful man. We see that there are many people who love the truth of God, but follow this world instead.

Pilate turned his face away from the truth. But he still wanted to rescue Jesus from the hand of the Jews, partly because of his wife's message concerning her dream (Mt 27:19), and partly because of the truth he knew. So he went out to make a political compromise with the Jews. "I find no basis for a charge against him. But it is your custom for me to release to you one prisoner at the time of the Passover. Do you want me to release 'the king of the Jews'?" But the Jews shouted back, "No, not him! Give us Barabbas!" His plan to compromise was thwarted by the public opinion manipulated by the Jewish leaders.

Here we learn that it is one thing to know the truth and it is another thing to follow the truth. We have to make a decision of faith when we come to know the truth through our Bible study. May the Holy Spirit help us to stand on the side of God's truth, not on the side of Satan!

### III. JESUS WAS SENTENCED TO DEATH (19:1-16a)

Pilate was perturbed at the shout of the crowd. He could not afford to have another riot in Jerusalem. He knew that the Roman emperor hated political instability in the region. His career would be in jeopardy with another uprising. So he took Jesus and had him flogged, hoping to satisfy the Jews. The flogging was usually done by tying a victim to a pillar and whipping on his bare back with a leather whip with metal tips. Up to 40 lashes were applied. After the flogging, Pilate's soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on Jesus' head. Blood flowed down on his face. They clothed him in a purple robe and went up to mock him, saying, "Hail, O king of the Jews!" And they struck him in his bloody face again and again.

Look at verses 4-5. *Once more Pilate came out and said to the Jews gathered there, "Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against him." When Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, "Here is the man!"* Pilate expected that the Jews would become sympathetic toward the tortured Jesus once they saw his bloody face. But the public opinion had already been turned against Jesus. As soon as the Jews saw him, they shouted, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" (6). The crowd went wild when they saw the blood. Even a sense of sympathy, let alone truth and justice, was absent in the mob spirit of the crowd.

Pilate tried one more time to persuade the Jews. He told them, *"You take him and crucify him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against him."* But the Jews insisted, *"We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God."* When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid, and he went back inside the palace. *"Where do you come from?"* he asked Jesus, but Jesus gave him no answer. *"Do you refuse to speak to me?"* Pilate said. *"Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?"* Jesus answered, *"You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin"* (7-11). The Jews kept shouting, "If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar." The religious leaders also told Pilate, "We have no king but Caesar" (15). They tried to charge Jesus

with treason against the Roman emperor. The Jews hated the Romans, but in order to kill Jesus, they denied every principle they had. Finally, Pilate gave in to their demand to save his political career, and handed Jesus over to them to be crucified (16).

We learned today about the suffering and trials of Jesus. Now we have to ask the questions: Why did the Son of God have to be arrested and tried? Why did he willingly endure such pain and suffering? It was because of our sins. We sinned before God and were condemned. We are the ones who must be punished (2Co 5:10). But our Lord Jesus took upon himself all our sins. He was arrested and tried and sentenced to death because of our sins. The apostle Peter said later in 1 Peter 2:24, *“He himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds you have been healed.”* May God help us to remember the love of Jesus for us so that we may love him and live for him!