

# “Not Passing Over the Praetorium”

John 18.28–32

<sup>28</sup>Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas into the Praetorium, and it was early; and they themselves did not enter into the Praetorium so that they would not be defiled, but might eat the Passover. <sup>29</sup>Therefore Pilate went out to them and said, “What accusation do you bring against this Man?” <sup>30</sup>They answered and said to him, “If this Man were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him to you.” <sup>31</sup>So Pilate said to them, “Take Him yourselves, and judge Him according to your law.” The Jews said to him, “We are not permitted to put anyone to death,” <sup>32</sup>to fulfill the word of Jesus which He spoke, signifying by what kind of death He was about to die. [NASB]

HOPE  
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## I. Introduction

Following a brief jump last week through the cross to resurrection appearances, we return now to Christ's preparation for the cross. We find ourselves swept up in another parade... this time a Parade to the Praetorium. The occasion is an Inverted Passover. And on stage with the Lamb is the Prophetically Trapped Pilate.

## II. Parade to the Praetorium (28)

Well I guess you can't say He didn't draw a crowd. A few days ago, He had entered Jerusalem amidst the hue and cry of Hail to the King; Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. The city was abuzz with expectation; now the Sanhedrin were abuzz with condemnation. The city had cheered with acclamation, joyously savoring His slow procession upon the donkey's colt. Now the Sanhedrin couldn't drag Him to death quickly enough. Had they the authority to lynch Him themselves they may not have waited a moment longer. Important holiday coming up, after all.

But partly on account of such impulsiveness in the past, the Roman Law prohibited the Jews from exercising capital punishment... particularly punishment of the cross. So the Sanhedrin, the Jewish rulers all seventy-some of them, scuffle Jesus on down to the Praetorium.

The Praetorium is the official residence of the Roman governor. It was probably in the Antonia Fortress, which was a high Roman fortress at the northwest corner of the magnificent temple area Herod had built. The thing about the magnificent Temple, is that it was also a place where Jewish unrest tended to foment, under the frustrated resentment of Roman rule. The Antonia Fortress served well to keep watch over activities in the courtyards. And when needed, a garrison of soldiers could gush out of the fortress in battle formation and stifle the sedition.

Oh, did we mention it was early? That's generally when roosters crow, in my experience, and the Jews had some important holy rites to attend to that day, so the sooner we get this over with, the better. No sense in giving this Exposer of their hypocrisy any extra time to build His case of defense. So what if they rush His death through on the fast-track? So what if they ignore all the Jewish laws giving a defendant time to gather just one more piece of evidence that may lead to his acquittal?

Quickly now, quickly! This governor has no scruples... we must take advantage of the situation! He has proven himself a thoroughly unsavory character! He has a bloodthirsty tongue! He is cruel, corrupt, violent... He'll give us no resistance! Quick! Quick! Parade to the Praetorium! Let's get the Romans to do our dirty work! What else are they good for anyway?

## III. Inverted Passover (28b-30)

And so the parade scurries on down to Roman town in high gear... and then you get the picture that they suddenly slam on the brakes and let the cargo go flying, catapulted in through the front door of the palace while they screech to a halt just short of the line of defilement. There's a scent of burning rubber from the soles of their sandals... but they definitely did *not* cross the line! Hooray for the Passover day! Get this done so we can eat the lamb so sweet! Don't get defiled or we'll just have to cheat! Meanwhile their catapulted cargo, namely Jesus of Nazareth... well, it doesn't matter if He gets defiled by touching Gentile oppressor ground, He's just a dead Lamb walking, as far as we're concerned.

What's the buzz, tell me what's a happening? Pilate hears the disturbance and goes to check it out; what are these silly Sanhedrin up to this time? As if he didn't know. Pilate wasn't stupid. He had plenty of eyes and it was his job to know what was going on in town.

Nevertheless, if the Jews were coming to him, it was to seek a judgment. Judgment for what? What are the charges? You bring a man to the bar... well? What's your accusation?

You can picture the Sanhedrin catching their breath, glancing furtively at one another and saying, “Huh? What's *that* got to do with it? Aren't you on our side? Why would you insult *us* with a question like *that*? What are *you* accusing *us* of? *We* wouldn't have thrown him upon you if he were not an evildoer!”

But now it's our turn to put on the brakes. Why all the rush? It was the feast of Passover, and the Jews had counted on Pilate rubber-stamping their plan... after all, he had given them a battalion of soldiers to arrest Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Now suddenly Pilate seems to be backpedaling. And doing so would be *very* inconvenient to the Jews who wanted to get this thing over and done with so they could go on their jolly way to Passover.

What is the Passover? It was the kickoff for the annual Feast of Unleavened Bread. It was the annual reminder and reaffirmation of God's justice and mercy, judgment and grace, destruction and deliverance. It was the day to remember the big day in the past; and the day to look forward to the bigger day in the future. For a millennia and a half the Jews had been keeping this feast, barring a few years when in another captivity it was untenable to keep.

This feast recalled the night and the day when God delivered His people from Egyptian slavery. The night and day when, after 400 years of slavery in Egypt, God's people began a 40-year parade from Egypt, to Sinai, to Jordan, and beyond. It was the night and the day when The Lord struck down the firstborn of all in Egypt, starting with firstborn son of Pharaoh the king. It was the night and day when, after nine other plagues distinguishing Jews from Egyptians, Pharaoh finally catapulted the Jews *out* of Egypt so that they might land at the foot of the mountain of fire and smoke, the Mountain of the Lord, Horeb, Sinai.

But the Jews, unlike the Egyptians, still had all their firstborn with them. Why? Because they did not deserve the same judgment as the Egyptians? Because they were better people? More charitable? More productive in society? No, but for God's mere good pleasure He chose them and promised to their ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that He would deliver them from Egypt and give to them the land of Canaan.

The Jews, unlike the Egyptians, still had all their firstborn because God had told them to sacrifice a lamb for each household and brush blood of the lamb upon their doorposts and lintel. And when God went through the land to execute judgments, when He saw the blood on the doorposts He passed over them and no plague befell them to destroy them. (Exod12)

To receive God's mercy, all the Israelites needed to do, was to *believe* God, *sacrifice* a lamb, *show* the blood, and *stay* inside, ready to follow at His command.

But there was another reason why the Israelites still had their firstborn with them... and that is why this is an inverted Passover here at Pilate's Praetorium. God had promised that the Firstborn of all creation would come through the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Thus God had to preserve the Jews' firstborn. And while all those centuries of Passover feasts looked back in remembrance, they also looked forward to the Firstborn, the Lamb whom God Himself would provide to save His people from the slavery to their sins.

Only now, at long last here He is... catapulted into the house of the Roman governor. And now is the time at long last, when the Lord God was going to come and execute judgment. But this is the inverted Passover... this time the only safe place to be is *outside* the house with this

Lamb’s blood on it. For all the fury of God’s judgment was about to pass over all the land... and gather as if in a funnel to pour out upon the Lamb *inside* this house of the gentile governor.

Judgment for the sins of mankind. Atonement for the iniquities of God’s people. Satisfaction of the Holy Law for the transgressions of all... all, that is, who would *believe God, sacrifice the Lamb, show the blood, and stay outside*. Stay outside, casting their sins upon the One inside where the fury of God might exact rightful vengeance upon those sins covering the Firstborn of all creation.

#### IV. Prophetically Trapped Pilate (31-32)

And guess what? For the first time in his life perhaps, Pilate is scared. He’s still inside. Trapped. The parade has stopped at his Praetorium. And now, along with the Lamb in the house of this inverted Passover, stands a prophetically trapped Pilate. He’s scared and he starts squirming. <sup>31</sup>So Pilate said to them, “Take Him yourselves, and judge Him according to your law.” The Jews said to him, “We are not permitted to put anyone to death,” <sup>32</sup>to fulfill the word of Jesus which He spoke, signifying by what kind of death He was about to die.

Well the Sanhedrin peremptorily judged Jesus worthy of death... and they were precisely right in their judgment. Oh, not in their method. Not in their hearts. Not in their reasoning... apart from Caiaphas’s reasoning that it was expedient for one man to die on behalf of the people. No, but they were precisely right that Jesus was worthy of death. Death, that is, for your sins and mine. Worthy of death for the sins of mankind. Worthy of satisfying the justice of the Most High God, Jesus’ Father and our Father in heaven.

Yes, in fact Jesus *alone* was worthy of death for the sins of His beloved, the Church. No one else could ever substitute in your place or mine. Pilate’s problem was not that Pilate was worthy of death, but that Pilate was God’s chosen instrument to fulfill the eternal prophecy that Jesus must die according to the curse of the law... which means Jesus must die by crucifixion. As the Apostle Paul wrote to the Galatians, <sup>Gal3.13</sup>“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, ‘CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE.’”

We are, Lord willing, going to see Pilate trying to get out from under this prophetic burden, but to no avail. Of his own will, Pilate will buckle under pressure. The Jews have cast their Lamb—the Lamb whom God Himself provided—to the Gentiles so that they (the Jews) won’t be defiled... so that they supposedly can enjoy communion with God later that same day. The Jews through whom the promise came have tossed that promise to the dogs, the Gentiles. Not merely crumbs from the table, but the entire roast. They’ve thrown the lamb into the oven to be cooked at the hands of Pilate, while standing outside to make sure they can eat the Passover feast themselves.

*AND YOU MUST JOIN THEM.* Oh no... don’t dare to criticize. You too must stand outside and hurl your insults upon the Lamb of God who came to take away your sins. You yourself and I have been in the parade... who do you think all those people were?!? You and I must partake of this inverted Passover... what, would you have the fury of the Lord fall upon *you* for your sins against Him?

Jesus is going to the cross, and there is no stopping Him now. He himself has said, <sup>Jn12.32</sup>“I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself.” <sup>33</sup>But He was saying this to indicate the kind of death by which He was to die. Now look, Pilate is doing you a very, very big favor. He is frightened, he is nervous, for once in his life he is not enjoying this kind of thing. It is dirty work and someone’s got to do it.

Don't dare criticize the Jews for this. God preserved them for two thousands of years since Abraham for just such a time as this. The Jewish Sanhedrin are too hypocritical themselves to do this work, even though the Jews are the primary beneficiaries of the Messiah's great sacrifice. As a result, they will be last to come to the banquet. The secondary beneficiaries—gentiles like you and I—will be first to benefit. The Jews will thereby be made jealous and finally turn.<sup>Rom11.14</sup> But you see, you and I have no reason and no room to criticize those whom God chose to draw you and me to this inverted Passover.

Standing outside the Praetorium, join in the clamor for justice. It is our only hope. But the only way you will be undefiled is if Jesus takes all your defilement upon Himself. The only way you will be holy is if Jesus gives to you His holiness. Will you let Pilate do you a favor and condemn this Man for you?

Or will you deprive Pilate the privilege of condemning Jesus for *all* of your sins? Will you hold onto some of your sins for safekeeping? Will you examine carefully your thoughts? Will you examine carefully your words? Will you examine carefully your actions? Will you examine them carefully enough to decide if you need to cast them into the Praetorium before its too late? Or will you play it safe and not go into that examination room because it might hurt... or might lead you to give up something you don't want to give up?

But you have to do this carefully. Don't be like the Jews of the Sanhedrin. Don't make up rules in your own little rulebook that God didn't make up—Like that line of defilement where they burned rubber screeching their parade to a halt. Be careful of setting up scruples. There was no sin for the Jews to step on gentile ground or under gentile roof. Be afraid of being too afraid to live. Be afraid of being too afraid to love. Be afraid of being too afraid to let Jesus look into your heart and make right what seems so unfair. Jesus was condemned for your sins, so let Him take you and make you holy. In fact, Pilate would have been in no danger under that roof, had he not been afraid to be loved by Jesus.

I know it's hard standing outside the Praetorium. But amazingly, perhaps through Pilate's superstitions upon hearing his wife's warning dreams, God has slowed down the parade. The parade has stopped here at the Praetorium. But not for long. Passover is but hours away and the Lamb must be slain.

If you've cast your curses, your sins, your lies, your unfaithfulness, your covetousness, your bitterness, your hypocrisies, your dishonoring upon Him, you are safe. God's curse will pass over you, for it has fallen upon the Lamb instead of you. If you have not so cast your sins upon Him, then He implores you to give to Him everything that would draw that cyclone of curse toward you.

Now, while it is still today. Will He take—has He taken—your parade to the cross? If so, then His death is your death. The Lamb of God delivered up for your transgressions. And His life is your life. The Resurrected Savior risen for your vindication. Thank God for Pilate... but thank God so much more for Jesus who according to His own will let Pilate send Him to the cross to fulfill all the Law of God.

Don't let this parade proceed any further toward the cross until you've confessed to the Lamb the sins you would have Him take and nail to that cross. You see,, this really is not an inverted Passover after all. Jesus Himself *is* our Passover, sacrificed for us.<sup>1Co5.7</sup> Hurry now, be cleansed from the defilement *inside*, that we might keep the feast, not with malice and wickedness, but with sincerity and truth.<sup>8</sup>