

Exposition of the Gospel of John CHAPTER 64 CHRIST BEFORE PILATE (CONCLUDED)

by A.W. Pink

Transcript

Exposition of the Gospel of John

CHAPTER 64

CHRIST BEFORE PILATE (CONCLUDED)

John 19:1-11

Below is an Analysis of the passage which is to be before us:— 1. Christ scourged and mocked, verses 1-3. 2. Pilate re-affirms His innocency, verse 4. 3. Pilate appeals to the Jews' sympathies, verse 5. 4. The Jews' response, verses 6, 7. 5. Pilate's fear, verses 8, 9. 6. Pilate's boast, verse 10. 7. Christ's reprimand, verse 11. Nowhere in Scripture, perhaps, is there a more striking and vivid demonstration of the sovereignty of God than Pilate's treatment of the Lord Jesus. First, Pilate was assured of His innocency, acknowledging, no less than seven times, "I find no fault in him." Second, Pilate desired to release Him: "Pilate therefore willing to release Jesus" (Luke 23:20); "I will let him go" (Luke 23:22); "Pilate sought to release him" (John 19:12); "Pilate was determined to let him go" (Acts 3:13), all prove that unmistakably. Third, Pilate was urged, most earnestly by none other than his own wife, not to sentence Him (Matthew 27:19.). Fourth, he actually endeavored to bring about His acquittal: he bade the Jews themselves judge Christ (John 18:31); he sent Him to Herod, only for Christ to be returned (Luke 23:7); he sought to induce the Jews to have him convict Barabbas in His stead (John 18:39,40). Yet in spite of all, Pilate did give sentence that Christ should be crucified! What does man's will amount to when it runs counter to the will of God? Absolutely nothing. Here was Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea, determined to release the Savior, yet prevented from doing so. From all eternity God had decreed that Pilate should sentence His Son to death, and all earth and hell combined could not thwart the purpose of the Almighty—He would not be all-mighty if they could! Christ was "delivered up (Greek) by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23). As God's servant fearlessly announced, Both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done" (Acts 4:27, 28). This is not simply "Calvinism," it is the explicit declaration of Holy Writ, and, woe be unto the one who dares to deny it. Christ had to be sentenced by Pilate because the eternal counsels of Deity had foreordained it. Moreover, Christ was dying for sinners both of the Jews and of the Gentiles, therefore Divine wisdom deemed it fitting that both Jews and Gentiles should have a direct hand in His death. But, it will at once be objected, This reduces Pilate to

a mere machine! Our first answer is, What of that?—better far to reduce him to a non-entity than to deny the Word of the living God! Away with the deductions of reason; our initial and never-ceasing duty is to bow in absolute submission to the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. Our second answer is, The deduction drawn by the objector is manifestly erroneous. An honest mind is forced to acknowledge that the Gospel records present Pilate to us as a responsible agent. Christ addressed Himself to Pilate's conscience: "Everyone that is of the truth heareth my voice" (John 18:37); God faithfully warned him that Christ was a just Man and to have nothing to do with Him (Matthew 27:19). Should it be asked, How could God consistently warn him when He had decreed that he should sentence Christ to death? Our reply is, His decree was a part of His own sovereign counsels; whereas the warning was addressed to Pilate's responsibility, and he will be justly held accountable for disregarding it. Christ announced that Peter would deny Him, yet a few minutes later said to him, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation"! Finally, the Savior Himself told Pilate that he was sinning in holding Him: "he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin" (John 19:11)—therefore it follows that Pilate's failure to release Him was a great sin! "Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged him" (John 19:1). We believe that the real explanation of this awful act of the Roman governor is intimated in verse 4—"Pilate therefore went forth again, and saith unto them, Behold, I bring him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in him." It was a desperate move, made against his better judgment, and, also made, we fully believe, against the strivings of his conscience. It was his third and last effort at a compromise. First, he had asked the Jews to judge Christ for themselves (John 18:31). Second, he had pitted against Him a notable outlaw, Barabbas, and made them take their choice. That having failed, he made a final effort to escape from that which he feared to do. He hesitated to speak the irrevocable word, and so scourged the Lord Jesus instead, and suffered the soldiers to brutally mistreat Him. We believe Pilate hoped that when he should present to the gaze of the Jews their suffering and bleeding king, their rage would be appeased. Luke 23:16 bears this out: "I will chastise him and release him." How entirely this wretched device failed we shall see by and by. "Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged him." "The cruel injury inflicted on our Lord's body, in this verse, was probably far more severe than an English reader might suppose. It was a punishment which among the Romans generally preceded crucifixion, and was sometimes so painful that the sufferer died under it. It was often a scourging with rods, and not always with cords, as painters and sculptors represent. Josephus, the Jewish historian, in his 'Antiquities,' particularly mentions that malefactors were scourged and tormented in every way before they were put to death. Smith's Dictionary of the Bible says that under the Roman mode of scourging, 'The culprit was stripped, stretched with cords or thongs on a frame, and beaten with rods'" (Bishop Rile). "And the soldiers plaited a crown of thorns, and put it on his head, and they put on him a purple robe, and said, Hail, king of the Jews! and they smote him with their hands" (John 19:2, 3). "One question springs from the heart on reading this—How could it be! Where is the lauded Roman justice in this scourging of a bound prisoner of whom the judge says, 'I find no fault in him!' Why is an uncondemned one given into the rude hands of Roman soldiers for them to mock and smite at their pleasure? Where is the cool judgment of Pilate, that a little while ago refused to take action lest injustice be done? Why is Jesus treated in a way wholly unparalleled so far as we know? What is the secret of it all?" (Mr. M. Taylor). Difficult as it would be, impossible perhaps, for unaided reason to answer these questions, the light which Scripture throws on them removes all difficulty. First, who was this One so brutally, so unrighteously treated? He was Immanuel, "God manifest in flesh," and fallen man hates God. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jer. 17:9). "The carnal mind is enmity against God" (Rom. 8:7). "Their throat is an open sepulcher; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: Their feet are swift to shed blood: destruction and misery are in their ways" (Rom. 3:13-16). Never before or since did these awful

facts receive such exemplification. Never were the desperate wickedness of the human heart, the fearful enmity of the carnal mind, and the unspeakable vileness of sin's ways, so unmistakably evidenced as when the Son of God was "delivered into the hands of men" (Mark 9:31). All Divine restraint was withdrawn, and human depravity was allowed to show itself in all its naked hideousness. Second, this was Satan's hour. Said the Savior to those who came to arrest Him in the Garden, "This is your hour, and the power of darkness" (Luke 22:53). On the day when sin entered the world, Jehovah announced that He would put enmity between the serpent and the woman, and between his seed and her seed (Gen. 3:15). That enmity was manifested when Christ became incarnate, for we are told, "And the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born" (Rev. 12:4), and he it was who moved Herod to slay all the young children in Bethlehem. But God interposed and the dragon was foiled. But now God hindered no longer. The hour had arrived when the serpent was to bruise the Savior's heel, and fully did he now avail himself of his opportunity. Jews and Gentiles alike were "of their father, the devil," and his lusts (desires) they now carried out with a will. Third, Christ was on the point of making atonement for sin, therefore sin must be revealed in all its enormity. Sin is lawlessness, therefore did Pilate scourge the innocent One. Sin is transgression, therefore did Pilate set aside all the principles and statutes of Roman jurisprudence. Sin is iniquity (injustice), therefore did these soldiers smite that One who had never harmed a living creature. Sin is rebellion against God, therefore did Jew and Gentile alike maltreat the Son of God. Sin is an offense, therefore did they outrage every dictate of conscience and propriety. Sin is coming short of the glory of God, therefore did they heap ignominy upon His Son. Sin is defilement, uncleanness, therefore did they cover His face with vile spittle. Fourth, Christ was to die in the stead of sinners, therefore must it be shown what was righteously due them. The Law required "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," a quid pro quo. All sin is a revolt against God, a treating of Him with contumacy, a virtual smiting of Him; therefore was Christ scourged by sinners. Again, when man became a sinner the righteous curse of the thrice holy God fell upon him, hence Christ will yet say to the wicked. "Depart from me ye cursed"! Unto Adam God declared, "cursed is the ground for thy sake... thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee" (Gen. 3:17, 18); therefore the last Adam, as the Head of those He came to deliver from the curse, was crowned with thorns! Again, by nature and practice we are defiled: our iniquities cover us from head to foot—sins which are "scarlet" and "crimson" (Isa. 1:18); therefore was the Savior enveloped in "a purple robe"—Matthew actually terms it "a scarlet robe" (Matthew 27:28), and Mark says "they clothed him with purple" (Mark 15:17). Finally, they mocked Him as "king of the Jews," for "sin hath reigned unto death" (Rom. 5:21). Here then is the Gospel of our salvation: the Savior was scourged, that we might go free; He was crowned with thorns, that we might be crowned with blessing and glory; He was clothed with a robe of contempt, that we might receive the robe of righteousness; He was rejected as king, that we might be made kings and priests unto God. "Pilate therefore went forth again, and saith unto them, Behold, I bring him forth to you that ye may know that I find no fault in him" (John 19:4). The private interview which Pilate had had with Christ at least convinced him that He had done nothing worthy of death; he therefore returned to the Jews and re-affirmed His innocence. The "therefore" points back to what is recorded in John 19:1-3: he had gone as far as he meant to. "I bring him forth to you": there is nothing more that I intend to do. "I find no fault in him": how striking that the very one who shortly after sentenced Him to death, should give this repeated witness that the Lamb was "without blemish!" More striking still is it to observe that at the very time the Lord Jesus was apprehended and crucified as a criminal, God raised up one after another to testify of His guiltlessness. Of old the prophet had asked, "And who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living" (Isa. 53:8). A sevenfold answer is supplied in the Gospels. First, Judas declared "I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood" (Matthew 27:4) Second, Pilate declared, "I find no fault in him"

(John 19:4). Third, of Herod Pilate said, "No, nor yet Herod: for I sent you to him; and, lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto him" (Luke 23:15). Fourth, Pilate's wife entreated, "Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him." (Matthew 27:19). Fifth, the dying thief affirmed, "We receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss" (Luke 23:41). Sixth, the Roman centurion who glorified God, said, "Certainly this was a righteous man" (Luke 23:47). Seventh, those who stood with the centurion acknowledged, "Truly this was the son of God" (Matthew 27:54)! "Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe" (John 19:5). "That our blessed Lord, the eternal Word, should have meekly submitted to be led out after this fashion, as a gazing-stock and an object of scorn, with an old purple robe on His shoulders, a crown of thorns on His head, His back bleeding from scourging, and His head from thorns, to feast the eyes of a taunting, howling, blood-thirsty crowd, is indeed a wondrous thought! Truly such love 'passeth knowledge'" (Bishop Ryle). "And Pilate saith unto them, 'Behold the man!'" (John 19:5). We fully believe that Pilate was here appealing to the Jews' pity. See, saith he, what He has already suffered! He had no need to say more. The shame, the bleeding wounds, were tongues sufficiently moving if only they had ears to hear. Pilate hoped that their wrath would now be appeased. Is He not already punished enough! It is surely striking that the Governor said not, "Behold this man," but, "Behold the man." It was the ungrudging testimony of an unprejudiced witness. Never before had any other who had stood before his bar carried himself as this One. Never before had Pilate seen such quiet dignity, intrepid courage, noble majesty. He was deeply impressed, and avowed the Lord's uniqueness. "When the chief priests therefore and officers saw him, they cried out, saying, Crucify, crucify" (John 19:6). Pilate's scheming failed here as completely as had his previous attempts to avoid condemning our Lord; nothing short of His death would satisfy the Jews. The pitiful sight of the bleeding Savior softened them not a whit. Like beasts of prey that have tasted blood, they thirsted for more. The humiliating figure of their Messiah crowned with thorns by these heathen, instead of humbling, only infuriated them. They were "past feeling." Solemn it is to observe that the chief priests were to the fore in demanding His crucifixion—the "officers" were the personal followers and servants of the priests, and would naturally take up the cry of their masters; the word for "cried out" signifies a boisterous shout. It is a painful fact that all through this dispensation the most cruel, relentless, and blood-thirsty persecutors of God's saints have been the religious leaders—in a hundred different instances the "bishops" (?) and "cardinals" of Rome. Nor is it otherwise to-day. The form of persecution may have changed, yet is the opposition which comes from those who profess to be the servants of Christ the most relentless and cruel which God's children have to endure. It is to be noted that the cry was not "Crucify him," but "Crucify, crucify"—refusing Him the "the man" of Pilate! It was Israel, all through, who hounded Him to His death: how wondrous then that God shall yet have mercy upon them. "Pilate saith unto them, Take ye him, and crucify: for I find no fault in him" (John 19:6). Pilate was disgusted at their lawless clamor, indignant at their challenging his decision, angry at their insistence. "Take ye him," if you want; "and crucify" if you dare. They had had the effrontery to appeal against the findings of his court, now he mocks them in regard to the impotency of their court, for according to their own admission, they were powerless (John 18:31). The Jews were insisting that Pilate should commit a judicial murder, now he challenges them to defy the Roman law. His "For I find no fault in him" was his challenge for them to continue opposing Caesar's authority. "The Jews answered him, We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God" (John 19:7). Their words here show plainly that they discerned the satire in Pilate's offer: had he really given them permission to crucify Christ, they would have acted promptly. They knew that he had not spoken seriously; they felt his biting irony, and stung by his sarcasm they now attempted some defense of their outrageous conduct. "We have a law" they insisted, much as you scorn us for wanting to act lawlessly. We have a law as well as you! "By our law he ought to

die, because he made himself the Son of God"—their reference was to Leviticus 24:16. Instead of retreating before Pilate's outburst of indignation, they continued to press their demands upon him. We charge your prisoner with having broken our law, the punishment for which is death. Their aim was to make out Christ to be a dangerous impostor as well as a seditious person, opposed both to Jewish religion and Roman law. Pilate had challenged them; now they challenge him. You have dared us to defy the Roman law; we now dare you to refuse to maintain the Jewish law. "We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God." It is indeed remarkable that as soon as Pilate said "Behold the man," they proceeded to charge Him with "making himself the Son of God"! Their motive was an evil one, but how evident that a higher power was overruling! Finding the charge of sedition had broken down, and that Pilate could not be induced to sentence Him to death on that score, they now accused Christ of blasphemy. But how their hypocrisy was manifested: they appealed to their own "law," yet had no respect for it, for their law called for stoning not crucifixion, as the penalty for blasphemy! A careful comparison of the Gospel records reveals the fact that the Jews preferred just seven indictments against Christ. First, they charged Him with threatening to destroy the temple (Matthew 26:61); second, with being a "malefactor" (John 18:30); third, with "perverting the nation" (Luke 23:2); fourth, with "forbidding to give tribute to Caesar" (Luke 23:2); fifth, with stirring up all the people (Luke 23:5); sixth, with being king" (Luke 23:2); seventh, with making Himself the Son of God (John 19:7). This sevenfold indictment witnessed to the completeness of their rejection of Him! "When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he was the more afraid" (John 19:8). The meaning of this is evident, yet, strange to say, many of the commentators have missed it. Some have supposed that fear of the Jews is what is intended; others, that Pilate was fearful lest it should now prove impossible to save Christ; others, lest he should take a false step. But the "therefore" is sufficient to show the error of these views: it was the declaration that Christ "made himself the Son of God" which alarmed the Roman Governor. Moreover, the "he was the more afraid" shows it was not an emotion which he now felt for the first time. The person of the Lord Jesus was what occasioned his fear. We believe that from the beginning there was a conscious uneasiness in his soul, deepened by an awe which the bearing and words of Christ had inspired. He had seen many malefactors, some guilty, some innocent, but never one like this. His "Ecce Homo" (John 19:5) witnesses to his estimate of Christ. The warning which he had received from his wife must also have impressed him deeply; and now that he is reminded his Prisoner called Himself the Son of God, he was the more afraid. "And went again into the judgment hall, and saith unto Jesus, Whence art thou? But Jesus gave him no answer" (John 19:9). This was the sixth question Pilate asked Christ, and it is deeply interesting to follow his changing moods as he put them. First, he had asked "Art thou the king of the Jews?" (John 18:33)—asked, most probably, in the spirit of sarcasm. Second, "Am I a Jew?" (John 18:35)—asked in the spirit of haughty contempt. Third, "What hast thou done?" (John 18:35)—a pompous display of his authority. Fourth, "Art thou a king then?" (John 18:37)—indicating his growing perplexity. Fifth, "What is truth?" (John 18:38)—asked out of contemptuous pity. Sixth, "Whence art thou?" In what spirit did he ask this question? Much turns upon the right answer, for otherwise we shall be at a loss to understand our Lord's refusal to reply. "Whence art thou?" Not "Whom art thou?" nor, "Art thou the Son of God then?" but "Whence art thou?" Yet it is clear that Pilate was not asking about His human origin, for he had already sent Christ as a "Galilean" to Herod (Luke 23:6). Was it then simply a question of idle curiosity? No, the "more afraid" of the previous verse shows otherwise. Was it that Pilate was now deeply exercised and anxiously seeking for light? No, for his outburst of scornful pride in the verse that follows conflicts with such a view. What, then? First, we think that Pilate was genuinely puzzled and perplexed. A man altogether unique he clearly perceived Christ to be. But was He more than man? The deepening fear of his conscience made him uneasy. Suppose that after all, this One were from Heaven! That such a thought

crossed his mind at this stage we fully believe, and this leads to the second motive which prompted his question:—Pilate hoped that here was a way out of his difficulty. If Christ were really from Heaven, then obviously he could not think of crucifying Him. He therefore has Christ led back again into the judgment hall, and says, Tell me privately your real origin and history so that I may know what line to take up with thine enemies. "We may well believe that Pilate caught at this secret hope that Jesus might tell him something about Himself which would enable him to make a firm stand and deliver Him from the Jews. In this hope, again, the Roman Governor was destined to be disappointed" (Bishop Ryle). "But Jesus gave him no answer." Ominous "but"; perplexing silence. Hitherto He had replied to Pilate's questions; now He declined to speak. At first our Lord's silence surprises and puzzles us, but reflection shows that He could not have acted otherwise. First, the fact that in John 19:11 we do find Christ speaking to Pilate, shows that His silence here in John 19:9 was no arbitrary determination to say no more. "With us, when we would patiently suffer in silence, there may be some such arbitrary purpose of our own; or, to put a better construction upon it, we cannot actually speak and at the same time suffer in patience, for we have inwardly too much to do with our own spirits, in order to maintain our proper posture of mind. But Christ is in His profoundest humanity elevated above this human imperfection; in His lips (as we shall hear from the Cross) the Word of God is never bound" (Stier). Second, Christ's silence here makes evident the spirit in which Pilate had put his question: it was not the cry of an earnest soul, honestly seeking light, for our Lord never closed the door against any such! Third, Pilate was not entitled to a reply. He had acted in grossest injustice when he refused to release One whom he declared was innocent; he had despised God's warning through his wife; he had declined to wait for an answer to his "What is truth"; he had, against his own conscience, scourged the Savior and suffered his soldiers to mock and maltreat Him. Why then should Christ reveal to him the mystery of His person! "Pilate had forfeited his right to any further revelation about his Prisoner. He had been told plainly the nature of our Lord's kingdom, and the purpose of our Lord's coming into the world, and been obliged to confess publicly His innocence. And yet, with all this light and knowledge, he had treated our Lord with flagrant injustice, scourged Him, allowed Him to be treated with the vilest indignities by his soldiers, knowing in his own mind all the time that He was a guiltless person. He had, in short, sinned away his opportunities, forsaken his own mercies, and turned a deaf ear to the cries of his own conscience. "He gave him no answer.' Most men, like Pilate, have a day of grace, and an open door put before them. If they refuse to enter in, and choose their own sinful way, the door is often shut, and never opened again. There is such a thing as a 'day of visitation,' when Christ speaks to men. If they will not hear His voice, and open the door of their hearts, they are often let alone, given over to a reprobate mind, and left to reap the fruit of their own sins. It was so with Pharaoh, and Saul, and Ahab; and Pilate's case was like theirs. He had his opportunity, and did not choose to use it, but preferred to please the Jews at the expense of his conscience, and to do what he knew was wrong. We see the consequence—'Jesus gave him no answer'" (Bishop Ryle). In addition to what has been pointed out above, may we not say, that as it had been Divinely appointed Christ should suffer for the sins of His people, He declined to say anything which was calculated to hinder it! True, Pilate was morally incapable of receiving the truth: to make him a definite answer would simply have been casting pearls before swine, and this the Savior refused to do. Moreover, had He affirmed His Deity, it would have afforded Pilate the very handle he sought for releasing Him. Thus we may say with Bishop Ryle "Our Lord's silence was just and well merited, but it was also part of God's counsels about man's salvation." Finally, let us learn from Christ's example here that there is "a time to be silent," as well as "a time to speak" (Eccl. 3:7)! "Then saith Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?" (John 19:10). Here the haughty, fierce, and imperious spirit of the Roman was manifested; the authoritative I asserting itself. We doubt not that all the emphasis was thrown upon the

personal pronouns—Thou mayest keep silence before the Jews, the soldiers and before Herod; but me also? What lack of respect is this! It was the proud authority of an official politician displaying itself. Knowest Thou not in whose presence Thou standest! You are no longer before Annas and Caiaphas—mere figure-heads. I am the Governor of Judea, the representative of Caesar Augustus. "Speakest thou not unto me?" It was his seventh and last question to our Lord, asked in the spirit of sarcasm and resentment combined. Accustomed to seeing prisoners cringing before him, willing to do anything to obtain his favor, he could not understand our Lord's silence. He was both perplexed and angered: his official pride was mortified. "Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee!" How he condemned himself. How he revealed his true character. Here was one on the bench talking about his power to commit a judicial murder! Here was one who had, over and over again, affirmed the innocence of his Prisoner, now owning his power to release Him, and yet shortly after condemned Him to death. And this from a man holding high office, who belonged to the nation which prided itself in its impartial justice! Mark also his consummate folly. Here was a worm of the earth so puffed up with a sense of his own importance, so obsessed with the idea of his own absolute freewill that he has the effrontery to say that the Son of the Highest was entirely at his disposal! Mark too his utter inconsistency. He was boasting of his legal authority: but if the Lord were innocent he had no judicial power to "crucify" Him; if He were guilty, he had no judicial power to "release" Him! Out of his own mouth he stands condemned. Carefully analyzed his words can only mean—I am above the law: innocent or guilty, I can do with you as I please. "This high-handed claim to absolute power is one which ungodly great men are fond of making. It is written of Nebuchadnezzar, 'Whom he would he slew; and whom he would he kept alive; and whom he would he set up; and whom he would he put down' (Dan. 5:19). Yet even when such men boast of power, they are often, like Pilate, mere slaves, and afraid of resisting popular opinion. Pilate talked of 'power to release,' but he knew in his own mind that he was afraid, and so unable to exercise it" (Bishop Ryle). "Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above" (John 19:11). For His Father's honor and as a rebuke to Pilate, the Lord once more spake, giving His last official testimony before He was crucified. Blessed it is to mark carefully the words of grace and truth which now proceeded from His lips. How easy for Him to have given the lie to Pilate's boast by paralyzing the tongue which had just uttered such blasphemy! How easy for Him to have made a display of His power before this haughty heathen similar to what He had done in the Garden! But, instead, He returns a calm and measured answer, equally expressive of His glory, though in another way. A careful study of His words here will reveal both His voluntary lowliness and His Divine majesty—how wonderful that both should be combined in one brief sentence! "Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me except it were given thee from above." The Lord acknowledged that Pilate did have "power" but of quite a different kind, from quite a different source, and under different restrictions from what he supposed. Pilate had boasted of an arbitrary discretion, of a sovereign choice of his own, of a lawless right to do as he pleased. Christ referred him to a power which came from above, delegated to men, limited according to the pleasure of the One who bestowed it. Thus Christ, first, denied that Pilate had the "power" to do with Him as he pleased. Second, He maintained His Father's honor by insisting that He alone is absolute Sovereign. Even so temperate a writer as Bishop Ryle says on this verse: "Thou talkest of power: thou dost not know that both thou and the Jews are only tools in the hands of a higher Being: you are both, unconsciously, mere instruments in the hands of God!" "Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivereth me unto thee hath the greater sin." Our Lord conceded that Pilate did have power: He acknowledged the authority of the human courts. To the very last Christ respected the law, nor did He dispute the power of the Romans over the Jews. But He insisted that Pilate's power came from above, for,

"There is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God" (Rom. 13:1) and compare Proverbs 8:15, 16. Christ acknowledged that Pilate's power, extended over Himself—"no power against me except," etc.—so thoroughly had He made Himself of no reputation. But it was because Pilate's "power," both personal and official, was "from above," that the Savior bowed to it. In His "he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin," the Lord, as in Luke 22:22, shows us that God's counsels do not abolish the guilt of the men who execute them. And mark here, for it is most striking, that the same One who meekly bows to Pilate's (God-given) authority, manifests Himself as the Judge of men, apportioning the comparative guilt of Pilate and the Jews. Thus did He maintain His Divine dignity to the end. This, then, was our Lord's reply to Pilate's "Knowest thou not?" I know, first, that all the power you have is from above; second, I know the precise measure both of your guilt and of him who delivered Me to thee! This, we take it, is the force of the rather difficult "therefore." Mark how, out of respect for Pilate's official personage, the Lord did not actually say "he that delivered me unto thee hath greater sin than thee"!—though plainly that was implied. Here, as in Luke 12:47, 48 Christ teaches degrees of sin and guilt, and therefore degrees of future punishment. The "he who delivered me up" refers not to Judas (his was the "greatest sin") but Caiaphas, acting as the representative of the nation. Finally observe that the last word which Pilate heard from the lips of Christ was "sin"—the next, in all probability, will be the sentence of his eternal doom. Below are the questions for our next study:— 1. Why did the "chief priests" take the lead, verse 15? 2. Why was Christ "delivered to them," verse 16? 3. Why "in the Hebrew," verse 17? 4. Why were two others crucified with Him, verse 18? 5. Why the inscription, verse 19? 6. Why in three languages, verse 20? 7. What is the meaning of verse 23?

Source:

<https://sermonindex.net/speakers/aw-pink/exposition-of-the-gospel-of-john-chapter-64-christ-before-pilate-concluded/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net