

# OpenTheo

## Matthew 27:11 - 27:14



### Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

In this passage from Matthew 27:11-14, Steve Gregg analyzes the conversation between Jesus and Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea. Pilate questions Jesus about the accusations against him and whether he is the king of the Jews, to which Jesus responds that his kingdom is not of this world. Despite the claims made by the Jews that Jesus is a threat to Roman government, Pilate does not find Jesus guilty and marvels at his refusal to respond to the accusations against him. Gregg's analysis highlights the historical and legal implications of the exchange between Jesus and Pilate, shedding light on the cultural context of the time.

### Transcript

In Matthew chapter 27 and verse 11, we find Jesus standing before Pontius Pilate, the governor, the Roman governor in Judea. The chief priests of the Jews, in their own council, the Sanhedrin, had found fault with Jesus because he claimed to be the Christ, the son of the living God. And because of that, they said he blasphemed and therefore they wanted to put him to death.

Actually, that's not quite correct. That's not why they wanted to put him to death. They wanted to put him to death because they hated him.

And they simply used the charge of blasphemy as a pretext for finding fault with him and trying to get him condemned. However, they did not have the ability under Roman law to put a man to death, even though this is what they wanted to do. They needed to get the approval of the Roman governor for this.

And therefore, they took Jesus to Pilate and they tried to get him crucified that way. Pilate, however, did not have any interest in the charge of blasphemy, nor did he have much interest in pleasing the Jews. And therefore, they had a hard time getting Pilate to see it their way.

Pilate didn't have any problem condemning men to death, but when the man was being condemned by the Jewish court, I think Pilate automatically had some sympathy for the man because he disliked the Jewish court so much. And Matthew describes Jesus' trial

before Pilate, but does so in a greatly abbreviated way. We have, oh, more than a chapter's worth of treatment of this trial in the Gospel of John, but it's treated in a very brief manner by Matthew.

For example, in Matthew 27, 11, it says, Now Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, saying, Are you the king of the Jews? So Jesus said to him, It is as you say. Now that's a very short treatment, but for example, in the Gospel of John, there are 11 verses covering this same period, this same trial before Pilate. And in fact, let me take you there because there's much there that Matthew skips over without commenting about it or without recording it.

If you would turn to John chapter 18, beginning at verse 28, it says, Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas to the praetorium, that's where Pilate was, and it was early morning. But they themselves did not go into the praetorium, lest they should be defiled, but that they might eat the Passover. You see, this was the Passover season, the Jews didn't want to be ceremonially unclean, or else they'd have to skip the Passover.

They couldn't take it if they were unclean. And they had a custom that if they went into the home of a Gentile, they would be made unclean by doing so. Now the law of God didn't say that, that was just their tradition.

But they didn't want to incur ceremonial uncleanness, so they wouldn't go into the praetorium. This is so hypocritical on their part. Here they're taking an innocent man and trying to get him to be condemned to death.

They're doing an atrocity in terms of morality, and yet they don't want to defile themselves by going into the home of a Gentile and get a ritual defilement upon themselves that would prevent them from keeping the Passover. The praetorium was Pilate's house. He was a Gentile, so they didn't want to go in there.

Therefore Pilate went out to them and said, What accusation do you bring against this man? They answered and said to him, If he were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered him up to you. Now this response on their part seems to indicate that Pilate, his comment was somewhat suggestive that they didn't have good grounds for bringing Jesus to him. When he said, What accusation do you bring against this man? That could have simply been a request for information, or it could have been a challenge to them saying, This man is innocent.

How dare you come to me about this and bother me this morning about this? I defy you to present some accusation against him that justifies you disturbing me this morning. I mean, all that could have been implied in the tone of his voice. And apparently it was, because the response of the Jews only makes sense if that's what he was implying.

He's implying, You have no grounds to bother me with this case. How dare you come?

What accusation can you bring against this man? And their answer was, Well, if he wasn't an evildoer, we would not have delivered him up to you. In other words, we do have grounds against him.

We would not have bothered you with this if he hadn't really done something wrong. Then Pilate said to them, You take him and judge him according to your law. Therefore the Jews said to him, It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death.

Now, Pilate didn't know much about this case apparently yet. And he knew that these Jews didn't like Jesus for some reason. It's not clear how much Pilate may have known about Jesus.

After all, Jesus was operating right under his watch. Whenever Jesus was in Jerusalem teaching or doing miracles, that was where Pilate was. And certainly he probably would have heard reports about Jesus.

But he did not know exactly what was the complaint these people had against him. He did not immediately know or assume that they wanted to put him to death. And so he said, Go ahead and judge him according to your own law.

Because the Jews were allowed to do that up to a point. But not to the point of putting someone to death. And so they say, Well, we can't do that because it's not lawful for us to put anyone to death.

They don't mean according to the Jewish law it was not lawful. But it means under Roman law they were not permitted to do so. Now John makes this comment in verse 32.

That the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled which he spoke signifying by what death he would die. What's that talking about? Well, earlier on, Jesus had said that the Son of Man must be lifted up. And John had said this was a signification of how he would die.

That is, he'd be lifted up on a cross. He'd be raised up on a cross. So Jesus had earlier predicted the manner in which he would die.

Namely, he would die by being lifted up on a cross. Now, when they said it's not lawful for us to put anyone to death. John says they said this fulfilling Jesus' prediction that he would die on a cross.

Now, how was their comment a guarantee of that fulfillment? Well, see the Jews actually, although they didn't have the right to put anyone to death, sometimes they would do so anyway in a mob action. They would just get the job done and then disperse before the Romans could come in and find out who the guilty parties were. And they did this, for example, in the case of Stephen.

When Stephen was charged with blasphemy, the Sanhedrin took him out in a mob

action, stoned him to death. They didn't get permission from the Romans. They just stoned him and got away from there.

And, you know, they got away with it. Now, they could have done that to Jesus, but they didn't for some reason. And it's strange that they did not because they did it later to Stephen, but they wouldn't do it to Jesus.

Why not? John said because Jesus had predicted that he would die in a certain way, namely that he would be crucified. The Jews didn't crucify people. The Romans did that.

And therefore, in order to fulfill that prediction, apparently God did not allow the Jews to have it cross their mind that they could do this as a mob action. They wanted to submit it to Rome. They wanted Jesus to die in the Roman fashion, and they could not lawfully do that.

So they brought it to Rome. They brought it to Pilate in order that he might give them permission to crucify Jesus. And it says, then Pilate entered the praetorium again and called Jesus and said to him, Are you the king of the Jews? Now, see, that's the part that Matthew records.

Matthew 27, 11 says, he stood before the governor and the governor asked him, saying, Are you the king of the Jews? So Jesus said to him, It is as you say. That's the whole of Matthew's account of this. But we have more of it in detail here.

Pilate said, Are you the king of the Jews? And Jesus answered him, Are you speaking for yourself on this, or did others tell you this about me? In other words, are you wondering if I'm the king of Jews out of idle curiosity? You've heard this somewhere. You're trying to confirm a rumor, or are you really interested? In other words, would it make a difference to you personally? Are you interested in knowing? Are you asking this for your own sake? Or are you just trying to confirm a rumor you've heard? Now, by the way, there are many people who inquire as to who Jesus is. After all, he's an interesting historical person at the very least.

And he's been, you know, tremendous claims have been made about him by Christians. And it has raised the curiosity of many who were not Christians to just look into this. And say, Who is this guy, Jesus of Nazareth? But there's two things that could motivate such an inquiry.

One is the sense that I need to know because I want to follow him if he is who he claims to be. The other is simply the curiosity about settling a dispute or confirming or disconfirming a rumor. And if a person's inquiries into Jesus, trying to discover who he is, are motivated by idle curiosity, it will not necessarily benefit them to find the answer.

However, if you are seeking Jesus because you know yourself to be in need of a relationship with God, and you've heard that Jesus is the Savior, that he is God's Son,

and that he is the one who can reconcile you to God, and if that's the motivation for inquiring, you will find him. Because those who would seek God, those who would come to God, must believe that he exists and that he is the rewarder of those who diligently seek him. Jesus is asking Pilate, Okay, Pilate, you're asking me if I'm the king of the Jews.

Are you curious about this because you're seeking God? If I was the king of the Jews, would that make a difference in your life? Would you want to submit to me? Or are you just asking it because you've heard it and you're curious about it? Well, Pilate answers him in verse 35, Am I a Jew? In other words, I just asked you if you're the king of the Jews. Why should that matter to me? I'm a Roman. I'm not a Jew, am I? I mean, you can tell me whatever you want about being the king of the Jews.

How could that affect me? Am I a Jew? Now, the fact of the matter is it could affect him because Jesus, though he was the king of the Jews, was not merely the king of the Jews. He was the king of all kings. And therefore, even the Gentiles are commanded to submit to him in Scripture.

And I, myself, for example, am of Gentile stock, and many of our listeners are, probably most of them. And yet we have submitted to Christ. So whether I'm a Jew or not is not really relevant.

If Jesus is the king of the Jews, if he's the Messiah of Israel, he is also the Messiah to whom all the Gentiles will pay homage. And therefore, the question, Am I a Jew? is not really relevant. Whether I'm a Jew or not, I should desire to know, Is Jesus really this Messiah of Israel? Because if so, he's my Messiah also.

But Pilate, when he's asked this, says, Am I a Jew? He says, Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you to me. What have you done? Now, the Jews had not pressed any obvious charge that made sense. And so Pilate hopes to find out directly from Jesus.

What have you done anyway? Why are these people so angry at you? Now, I'm going to suggest to you that Pilate knew some things about Jesus, but not too much. He probably knew about Jesus' political activities, which were none, really. There were people who tried to get Jesus involved politically.

Many Jews tried to get him angry at the Romans, and even angry at Pilate. On one occasion in Luke chapter 13, some people came and reported to Jesus an atrocity that Pilate had committed against some of Jesus' countrymen, the Galileans. And he refused to get involved.

He didn't suggest the overthrow of the government or anything, as many Jews would have done. You see, Jesus was there to seek and to save that which was lost, and to redeem men to God, and to get us right with God. He was not here to change the

political situation at that point.

Now, that is no doubt why Pilate was unthreatened by him. There had been many Jews who had been hailed as the Messiah by other Jews. And these Jews were threats to the Romans, because the Messiah usually was one who was coming to overthrow the Romans, or to try to do so.

And so whenever the crowds began to hail somebody as the Messiah, the Romans usually had to send their troops in, take that guy down, take him out and crucify him, and get rid of him, because he was a threat. Now, Jesus had been proclaimed Messiah, and that not even secretly. Just a week earlier than this, a little less than a week earlier, Jesus had ridden into Jerusalem on a donkey with great crowds surrounding him, saying, Hail King of the Jews, and Hosanna to the Son of David, and so forth.

Now, this was a public spectacle. And with Pilate having his offices right there in Jerusalem, and his soldiers everywhere always looking out for signs of Jewish uprisings and so forth, one cannot doubt that Pilate had spies or even soldiers there watching this event, and reporting back to him. I believe that Pilate had a file on Jesus, and that he had inquired, you know, is this guy a threat or not? However, there were people like Herodians that had come to Jesus and said, Is it right to pay tribute to Caesar or not? And Jesus had said, Render to Caesar what is Caesar's.

It was clear that Jesus had not tried to overthrow the authority of Caesar. And when they came and told Jesus about the Galileans that Pilate had killed in the temple, he just said, Well, you know, unless you repent, you'll all likewise perish. He did not say we should overthrow Pilate.

It's possible that on those occasions when Jesus was asked political questions, that some of those who were sent to ask him were reporting back to Pilate what he said, so that the dossier that Pilate had on Jesus would have recorded, This man is not politically a threat. This man has a great following, but he's not trying to get politically involved. He's not speaking against the Romans.

He's not trying to raise up an army. He's on a different wavelength altogether. And that file that he had on Jesus, I'm assuming he had, because it's hard to imagine a competent ruler of the Romans in that situation not hearing about all these activities that Jesus was doing and drawing great crowds and so forth.

I think that Pilate had information that Jesus was not a threat to the Roman government, even though most people who claimed to be Messiah were. And so he's saying, Okay, Jesus, what have you really done here? You say, Are you the king of the Jews? Are you or are you not? And Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would fight so that I should not be delivered to the Jews.

But now my kingdom is not from here. Now, this statement is very enlightening, because Jesus indicated that his kingdom was not to be a kingdom like other earthly kingdoms. Among other things, Jesus acknowledged that earthly kingdoms do use force to defend their kings.

He said, If my kingdom were of this world, obviously, as all other kingdoms are, if my kingdom was of this world, too, then my servants would have fought, he said, to deliver me from the Jews who came to arrest me. Now, what he's saying there is, of course, it's legitimate for earthly kingdoms to defend their kings and even to use force. If my kingdom was that kind of kingdom, my servants would have done the same thing.

However, he says, My kingdom is not earthly. It is from heaven. And because it is from heaven, it does not operate on the same principles as earthly kingdoms do.

Among other things, it is not a kingdom defended with the sword. It is not a kingdom that requires servants to fight on behalf of its king. If my kingdom were of this world, they would have fought, but now my kingdom is not from here.

And therefore, my servants did not fight. Now, what Jesus is pointing out is this. Yes, I am a king.

Yes, I'm the king of the Jews. Yes, I have a kingdom. However, this kingdom is not particularly a threat to the power of Rome because most kingdoms would advance their cause by the sword and would defend their leader by violence.

My kingdom, however, is of a different place. It does not advance its cause by violence. It does not defend its king with the sword.

And because of that, of course, Rome has nothing to fear from it because there's not going to be a violent or military kind of overthrow of Rome attempted by this king of the Jews. And that's what Jesus points out. Pilate therefore said to him, Are you a king then? Now, the reason he said that is because Jesus said, My kingdom.

My kingdom is not of this world. Now, in saying my kingdom, he means he's got a kingdom. He is a king.

And so Pilate takes that as sort of an admission that he was a king. Are you a king then? And Jesus answered, You say rightly that I am a king. For for this cause I was born.

And for this cause I have come into the world that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice. 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 fault in him at all.

Now, Jesus said, The reason I've come here is to testify to the truth. And there are people

in this world who love truth. He describes them as those who are of the truth.

A person who is of the truth is a person who is, it's like truth is his father. He's got a loyalty, a family loyalty to the truth. He's of that.

That's the nation he's of, is the nation of truth. His loyalties are to truth. And those who are of truth will therefore recognize and receive what Jesus said, because what he said was truth.

He bore witness to the truth. And Pilate says, What is truth? Now this statement, What is truth? Unfortunately does not appear to have been a genuine inquiry into that matter. On Pilate's part, it was more like a cynical statement.

What is truth? As if perhaps he's questioning whether there was such a thing as truth, or if there is, whether it could even be known. A lot of people have cynicism about that very thing, because there's many different opinions about what the truth is. And that being so, some people feel like, Well, with so many opinions around, how can anyone really claim to know the truth? How can anyone claim that they have the truth? There are some people who think that Christians, for example, are arrogant, because we claim that Jesus is the truth.

And they say, Well, that makes the Hindus wrong, and the Buddhists wrong, and the Jews wrong, and the Muslims wrong, and all these other groups are wrong. And it sounds like an arrogant claim to some people. However, there's no arrogance in it.

There is something that's true. There are many things that are true, and we all acknowledge this. We all acknowledge that two plus two is four.

That's a truth. That is true. Two plus two is not five, or six, or seven, or three, or two.

And therefore, anyone who has a contrary opinion to the statement two plus two is four is simply wrong. Now, it's not that there's arrogance on the part of Christians to say they know the truth. We believe that God has revealed the truth in Jesus Christ.

We believe Him. That's not arrogance on our part. We humble ourselves and submit ourselves to the truth that He told, because we believe ourselves not to be capable of knowing the truth apart from Him.

We accept the truth as it comes from Him. Pilate, however, did not quite recognize Jesus as the truth, though he did recognize Him as innocent. And he said to the Jews, I find no fault with Him at all.

And while Jesus was being accused, it says in Matthew 27, 12, by the chief priests and elders, He answered nothing. Then Pilate said to Him, Do you not hear how many things these people testify against You? And He answered him not one word, so that the



governor marveled greatly. That is, Jesus stood, He did talk to Pilate privately, as we saw in the Gospel of John, but when He was hearing accusations against Himself from the Jewish leaders, Jesus didn't answer in His own defense at all.

And when Pilate says, Don't you hear all these accusations? Why don't you answer these accusations? Jesus still remained silent. This caused the governor to marvel greatly, it says. Pilate was a man who is known to have been a wicked man from history, and a cruel man.

But on this occasion, he was deeply touched and moved and impressed by Jesus Christ. As far as we know, Pilate never became a Christian, but he did have a chance here. He was on trial before Jesus, as it were.

To the world's eyes, Jesus was on trial before Pilate. But in fact, Pilate was on trial before Jesus. He was being exposed to the claims of Christ, and he, like every other man, was in a position to make a decision about Jesus Christ.

Is He true, or is He not the truth? You have heard many of the claims of Christ, and you are on trial. You have to make a decision. Is He true, is He not true? And your decision will affect your destiny and your fate, just as Pilate's decision affected his destiny and his fate.

Unfortunately, we do not think he made the right choice. I hope that you may.