

From Gethsemane to Golgotha

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It was late. According to one researcher, probably well after 11 pm. Earlier that night, Jesus and the eleven had exited the city, travelled east/northeast over the Kidron Valley, and entered a garden near (or on) the western slope of the Mount of Olives. “Gethsemane” meant “oil press.” Probably the “garden” was an olive orchard, maintained for the production of olive oil. Jesus and His apostles often gathered there (**John 18:2**).

Judas arrived with a “detachment” of troops—a cohort, likely, normally consisting of 600 Roman legionnaires. With them, the Sanhedrin had also sent the temple guard and their captains (**Luke 22:52, John 18:3**). Altogether, it constituted “a great multitude”—hundreds of “young men,” armed with sword and clubs, out to arrest the Son of God (**Matthew 26:47, Mark 14:51**). Perhaps because of the hour (so late that the Passover’s full moon had nearly set behind the mountain), they arrived by lantern and torchlight.

Jesus stepped forward.

“Whom are you seeking?” He asked.

“Jesus of Nazareth,” came the reply.

“I am He.”

And then hundreds of military men drew back and fell to the ground (**John 18:6**). The power of the Son of God (fear of which had probably kept the Jewish leaders from attempting an arrest sooner) was exerted. Jesus was the One in control. There would be no arrest except by the consent of the Arrested.

More dialogue.

Then the soldiers made their move. Peter, in an act of remarkable (even if rash and misguided) courage, drew his sword and attacked. One against hundreds. A fisherman against warriors. *“Put your sword into the sheath,”* Jesus told him. *“Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?”* (**John 18:11**). After three prayers in the garden, Jesus had come to know that this was the Father’s will. Peter needed to know that as well.

They led Jesus back into the city. For the next nine hours (or so), He would be dragged through six separate hearings—three Jewish and three Roman.

They led Him first to Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the current high priest. Annas had been high priest, himself, only fifteen years prior, but had been deposed by Pilate’s predecessor—ironically, for imposing and executing capital sentences. He questioned Jesus about His disciples and His doctrine. A Sadducee, Annas denied a future resurrection. Yet here before him stood the One who would bring that resurrection about!

From Annas, they led Jesus to Caiaphas and the council (**Mark 14:53, 55**). By now, it was *very* late. During this hearing, the rooster would crow the second time, an occurrence corresponding to the “third watch” (**Mark 14:30, 13:35**)—approximately 3 am. Probably only to keep up appearances and/or to appease the few truth-loving members of the council (e.g. Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea), witnesses were brought forward. But none of their charges could be sustained. Desperate to achieve his goal, Caiaphas unlawfully attempted to procure the necessary grounds for conviction, himself. He administered the “Oath of the Testimony.” *“I put You under oath by the living God,”* he declared. *“Tell us if*

You are the Christ, the Son of God!" (**Matthew 26:63**). Jesus answered, *"I am"* (**Mark 14:62**). Finally, Caiaphas had what he wanted! *"What further need do we have of witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy!"* (**Mark 14:63-64**). It remained only to wait until morning to finalize matters.

A trial for life was only to be held during daylight hours. *"Immediately in the morning,"* then, *"as soon as it was day,"* Caiaphas and the council convened to "convict" the Savior (**Mark 15:1, Luke 22:26**). As He had in the night, Jesus again made the good confession (**Luke 22:70, 1 Timothy 6:13**). And with that, they bound Him and led Him to Pilate.

Three Jewish hearings were past. Behold, three Roman hearings remained.

No time was lost. They arrived at Pilate's Jerusalem residence while it was still *"early morning"* (**John 18:28**). These "holy" men would not enter Pilate's Gentile residence, so he was forced to go outside to speak with them. He listened to their accusations, then went back inside, calling Jesus to appear before him (**John 18:33**). Pilate learned of Jesus' claim to kingship over a kingdom not of this world, but heard nothing subversive (**John 18:36-38**). Returning outside, he said to the Jewish leaders and the crowd that had gathered, *"I find no fault in this Man"* (**Luke 23:4**). But the council members would have none of it. They responded with only fiercer efforts to impugn Jesus (**Luke 23:5**). Pilate then learned that Jesus was from Galilee. Here might be an out! Galilee was Herod's jurisdiction, and Herod was in town. Pilate sent Jesus to Herod (**Luke 23:5-7**).

Herod Antipas had wanted to see Jesus for a long time. He hoped to see a miracle. But his hopes were dashed. Jesus would not perform. He would not even answer. Antipas questioned Him at some length, but received only silence—no doubt, because Jesus was living out His own teaching: *"Do not give what is holy to the dogs"* (**Matthew 7:6**). The Jewish leaders who had followed Jesus from Pilate's residence attempted to compensate for His silence, hurling accusations against Him (**Luke 23:10**). But Antipas could see that Jesus was innocent (**Luke 23:14-15**). Still, He regarded Him only with contempt. He and his men mocked Jesus, dressing Him up *as if He really were* the King of the Jews. When they'd finally had their fill of fun, Antipas sent Jesus back to Pilate (**Luke 23:8-11**).

And so Pilate had to make a decision, after all. And whatever decision he made, it was going to cost him something. He knew Jesus was innocent. All the information that had come to him, including his wife's ominous warning (**Matthew 27:19**), had collaborated to drive that reality home. And though he knew Jesus was from Galilee, he had also begun to wonder if that might not be the whole story. After Jesus' return from Antipas, the Jews outside Pilate's residence had said that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God. At that, Pilate had grown more afraid (**John 19:8**). He went back inside and asked Jesus, *"Where are you from?"* (**John 19:9**). *Where are you from, really?*, in other words. *Earth or heaven?* Pilate was going to have to make a decision. And the stakes were increasing. What to do?

The Bible, of course, tells us what Pilate did. And it goes on to tell us what Jesus did. And the one question that remains is: What will we do?