

Lectionary Gospel Commentaries

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Based on the Lectionary Pericope Covering:

John 18:1-19:42

SOLA-LSB (Lutheran Service Book): Years A, B, C - Good Fri, Text: Jn 18:1-19:42 (or Jn 19:17-30)
RCL (Revised Common Lectionary): Years A, B, C - Good Friday, Text: John 18:1-19:42

In John Chapters 1-12, Jesus' words and actions relate to Jewish beliefs and practices. Jewish leaders look and listen while John reports their reactions. After Jesus raises Lazarus from death, the Sanhedrin decides that Jesus must die (11:45, 53). Jesus then goes to Ephraim, to the north of Jerusalem. He returns to Bethany on the Mount of Olives on a Saturday (12:1), enters Jerusalem on a donkey the next day, and celebrates a meal with His disciples on Thursday evening.

Verses 18:1-11 (The Garden): Although Jesus goes to a garden in the Kidron Valley after the meal, John makes no reference to Jesus praying in the garden (He prays while still in the Upper Room; see chapter 17), but refers only to His capture by a detachment of soldiers along with "police" from the chief priests and the Pharisees. Jesus' captors bind Him and take Him to Annas, who was deposed as High Priest in 15 AD, and whose son-in-law, Caiaphas, was now High Priest.

Verses 18:12-27 (At the High Priest's House): The Jewish trial is over before it begins. There are no formal charges.. No witnesses are called. No charge of blasphemy is leveled against Jesus. Annas questions Jesus about His disciples and His teaching, and he then sends Him to the incumbent High Priest, Caiaphas, who sends Him to Pilate (18:24, 28). Jesus is not mistreated. His judges level no accusations, but attack Him with violent gestures (18:22). Jesus remains calm and dignified. Within this narrative, Peter is also being questioned, and John uses two scenes to describe Peter's three denials.

Trial Before Pilate

John's description of Jesus' trial by Pilate (a Gentile), the Roman procurator, is comprised of seven scenes.

Scene 1 (Verses 18:28-32): The Jewish leaders bring Jesus to Pilate, state that they have already tried and sentenced Him to death, and ask Pilate to execute Jesus. Since they will not enter Pilate's headquarters for fear of being rendered ritually unclean by yeast, Pilate

goes out to them. Interestingly, they are concerned about being polluted by yeast while plotting a murder!

Scene 2 (Verses 18:33-38): Pilate returns to his quarters, has Jesus brought to him, and begins questioning Him. Pilate's questions are pointed: "Are you the King of the Jews?" "What have you done?" "So you are a king?" When Jesus states that He is indeed a King, but the King of truth, Pilate walks away and denies that it is possible to know ultimate truth.

Scene 3 (Verses 18:38b-40): Pilate gives Jesus' accusers the opportunity to ask for the release of either Jesus or Barabbas (who might have been either a Zealot or a bandit). They ask for the release of Barabbas.

Scene 4 (Verses 19:1-3): Pilate orders his soldiers to flog Jesus, and they mockingly dress Jesus in "royal robes" as they do this. Though the soldiers' actions are designed to denigrate Jesus, they ironically express a divine truth about His Person. Jesus is indeed a King!

Scene 5 (Verses 19:4-7): Pilate brings Jesus out to the crowds and twice says that he plans to release Him (18:38-40; 19:4, 6) because he can find no case against Him (18:38; 19:4, 6). The Jewish leaders shout for Jesus' crucifixion and declare that, according to their Scriptures, Jesus must be put to death!

Scene 6 (Verses 19:8-12): Pilate returns to his quarters, taking Jesus with him. Pilate knows about Roman beliefs of gods showing up in human form, and with fear asks Jesus where He comes from. Jesus does not reply. Pilate reminds Jesus that he has authority to determine whether Jesus lives or dies. Jesus reminds Pilate that he can do nothing apart from what Jesus permits him to do. When Pilate again seeks to release Jesus, the crowd threatens to report him to Caesar and place his privileged status as a "Friend of the Emperor" in jeopardy. Territories controlled by Rome were classified as either senatorial (the governor was appointed by, and answerable to, the Roman senate) or imperial (the governor was appointed by, and answer-

able to, the emperor, and belonged to a special “club” whose members were referred to as “Friends of the Emperor”). Pilate belonged to the latter group.

Scene 7 (Verses 19:13–16): In the final scene, Jesus, Pilate, and the crowds are together. Pilate presents Jesus to the crowds as their King. They respond by demanding Jesus’ death. When Pilate asks why, they (ironically) reply that their only loyalty is to the emperor. However, the charges they level against Jesus apply totally to themselves!

According to John 19:14, the Friday on which Jesus is handed over for crucifixion is the Day of Preparation for Passover — and not the Day of Passover itself (as in Mark, Matthew, and Luke). Furthermore, Jesus is handed over at midday — not at 9 a.m. as in Mark (and possibly also Matthew and Luke). At this hour on the Day of Preparation, people began to bring their lambs to the Temple priests to ritually slaughter them for the Passover meal that evening. Jesus, the Lamb of God (1:29, 36), is handed over on the same day at the same time. Thus, Jesus is the final Passover Lamb. Through His shed blood, humanity is rescued from the powers of sin, death, and the devil — once and for all. Like Pilate, we ask Jesus, “Where are you from? What kind of a King are You? What have You done? What is truth?” But Jesus is asking us, “Where do you think I am from? What kind of a King do you think I am? What do you think I have done? What is your definition of truth?” Jesus asks: “What does all this mean for you?” The implications of Jesus’ questions are huge!

Follow-up: Notes on John 19:17–42

- When Jesus walks from Pilate’s quarters to Golgotha, He walks alone. No reference is made to weeping women or to Simon of Cyrene.
- Jesus walks with dignity. No mention is made of Jesus collapsing under the weight of the crossbar. Jesus’ hour has come. Jesus is on His way to His coronation — and coronations are always dignified events. Jesus is about to be “lifted up” on to His throne. Jesus is about to show His Father’s glory! (Note John 17:1–5.)
- Although Jesus is crucified between two men, no exchange of words takes place among them.
- Pilate has an inscription nailed to the cross above Jesus’ head. It reads, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” Although meant to be a scathing taunt,

it expresses a sublime truth.

- After Solomon’s coronation, Bathsheba sat on a throne to her son’s right (1 Kings 2:19). After Jesus’ coronation, His mother stands on the ground beneath her Son’s throne — a cross. Jesus’ first words from the cross have to do with the future care of His mother (19:26–27).
- When David fled from Absalom, Barzillai the Gileadite and two others made sure that David lacked nothing (2 Samuel 17:27–29). When Jesus, David’s descendant, hangs on a cross, He cries out for something to drink (John 19:28).
- Jesus’ final words from the cross are, “It is finished” (19:30). Jesus does not mean, “Thank God it’s all over.” Rather, Jesus says, “I have completed the work that I came to do.” Jesus’ executioners do not take His life from Him. Instead, Jesus bows His head and gives up His spirit. Jesus performs the ultimate act of the ultimate Servant: He gives up His life!
- There is no need to break the bones in Jesus’ legs to hasten His death. But then, the bones in Passover lambs were never broken. Jesus is the ultimate Passover Lamb (19:31–33).
- After a soldier thrusts a spear into Jesus’ side, blood and water flow from the wound. The blood can be linked to the ritual of slaughtering the Passover Lamb. The water may be linked to Ezekiel’s vision in 47:1–12. From Jesus, the true Messianic Temple, comes the healing stream that makes all things new.
- Jesus’ body is placed into a new tomb (19:41–42); the body of a king was always placed into a new tomb. His body is anointed with about one hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes — the traditional amount used in royal burials (19:39–40). In attending to Jesus’ burial, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus render themselves ritually unclean and ineligible to celebrate Passover the next evening. Their actions would have created suspicion in the minds of the Jewish leaders.

Jesus’ anointing into office as Servant-King took place when He was baptized (Mark 1:9–11). His coronation has now taken place. Jesus’ people look beyond His throne to the empty tomb to hear the cry, “The King is risen! The Kingdom is established! The King lives forever!” And they ask, “My Lord and King, what should I believe? How should I live?”