

So Pilate said to [Jesus], ... **"Do you not know that I have authority to release You and authority to crucify You?"** Jesus answered him, **"You would have no authority over Me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered Me over to you has the greater sin."** From then on Pilate sought to release Him, but the Jews cried out, "If you release this Man, you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar."

In Christ Jesus, to whom all authority has been given in heaven and on earth, empowering His Church unto the end of the age, dear fellow redeemed:

Pilate was a big man, at least in his own estimation. He was a Roman Governor after all, assigned to one of the most difficult provinces in the Roman Empire. If Pilate could get through his stint governing these rebellious people of Palestine, a cushy position of even greater authority might be his next step. But in the face of Pilate's *braggadocios*, our Lord turned the tables on him by saying: "You would have no authority over Me at all unless it had been given you from above."

Consider what great authority Pilate actually had: he wanted to release Jesus because he knew Him to be innocent of all the charges leveled against Him, but he would not, could not, without stirring up the riotous Jews. For having authority, we came to see his hands were actually tied by a greater authority. They were fettered to a hate-filled mob which promised to bring up charges against him before the Emperor Tiberius. Their threat certainly got his attention: "If you release this Man, you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar." If he ended up being tagged with the false charge that he was traitorous toward Caesar he could kiss any hopes of advancement goodbye after completing his governorship of Palestine. He could even face his own execution.

Historians tell us that about seven years after this, Pilate got in trouble having slaughtered a number of Samaritans. He was on his way to Rome to defend himself, when Tiberius died. Within the next four years, not knowing exactly in what politics may have embroiled him, we are informed that Pilate committed suicide. A tragic end to the man who condemned an innocent man/the perfect God to death even trying to wash himself clean with a man-made baptism of water.

Listen to Jesus' answer again: "You would have no authority over Me at all unless it had been given you from above." Jesus was acknowledging Pilate's authority over Himself as Governor. Jesus was a citizen of Palestine. But there was an even greater authority than the Roman Governor or even Emperor, it was from above, from heaven.

We can actually hear the words of the Apostle Paul to the Romans here: “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed.” So Jesus in perfect obedience to the authority of His Father needed to submit to the earthly authority of Pilate. God instituted his authority over Jesus. Even though Pilate used his authority unjustly and sinned by exercising his authority, Jesus, in obedience to the Father, remained perfect in his submission to Pilate – perfect for you, and all sinners.

But think of how this was all being processed by Pilate. Jesus’ accusers were calling upon Pilate’s authority to carry out the unjust sentence, but Jesus pointed out that this authority comes from above. Pilate was not buying the Jewish religious leaders false accusations against Jesus as a traitor. But now the Jewish accusers brought up Jesus’ claim that He was from ABOVE. This caused Pilate, steeped in his polytheistic culture, to become even more afraid and asked Jesus “Where are you from?” Jesus gave him no answer. This then caused Pilate to pull rank, nervously though, and asked this right before our text: “You will not speak to me?”

Jesus’ answer was informing Pilate that his authority actually was given to him by Jesus Himself. Pilate, though he was tied up in knots by the accusation of treason, was now witnessing one of his subjects claiming to be the authority from above. No wonder Pilate sought to release Jesus! Remember Pilate’s wife warned him to have nothing to do with Jesus.

The Jewish leaders in desperation said to Pilate as he sought forgiveness by washing his hands in a basin of water: “His blood be on us and our children” Pilate in his confusion may have latched on to the words of Jesus: “he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin.” This was not absolution, but humanly speaking it was an escape. Pilate still was sinning by meting out his unjust sentence of death, but those who drove him into that sinful act were guilty of a greater sin, but no less damning before God. Just like your sins, as minor as they are in your opinion compared to Pilate’s and chief priests and elders’ sins, they are just as damnable.

Jesus’ blood was upon those Jewish leaders and their children, you, me and all sinners of all time. It was spilled to cover us all. In Jesus’ baptism we have a fountain filled with His blood washing us clean making us as white as snow. There are arrogant leaders throughout the world even to this day who imagine they have authority over Christ because they persecute His Church. But their authority too comes from above. The Lord of the Church will always have His Church here on earth until the day He returns.

You may be afraid when you hear the bluster of worldly authorities against the Christian Church. Fear not, the Lord of the Church still rules all things for your benefit. Look at how your Lord used the hatred of the

religious leaders and the impotence of the mighty Roman Governor. Through their wickedness, salvation was secured for the entire human race.

Kim Jong-Un, Xi Jinping, Narendra Modi, Ali Khamenei, leaders even in our own country may have their anti-Christian policies, but all their authority is from above. Christ's kingdom is the only one that will last through all eternity. He promises His subjects, you and me, that all things even anti-Christian policies will work together for our eternal good. We are washed in His blood and are forgiven and given life everlasting. No earthly authority can take that away from you. Amen.