

Eternity Daily Bible Study - No. 320

Series: St. John's Passion - Gospel of John chapters 12-21

Verses: John 18:28-33

Topic: Into The Praetorium

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**John 18:28-33 MKJV** Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas into the praetorium. And it was early. And they did not go into the praetorium, that they should not be defiled, and that they might eat the Passover. (29) Then Pilate went out to them and said, What charge do you bring against this man? (30) They answered and said to him, If he were not an evildoer, then we would not have delivered him up to you. (31) Then Pilate said to them, You take him and judge him according to your Law. Then the Jews said to him, It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death (32) (that the word of Jesus might be fulfilled, which He spoke signifying what death He was about to die). (33) Then Pilate entered into the praetorium again and called Jesus and said to him, Are you the king of the Jews?

Three times in this short passage the phrase “into the praetorium” is used. The Praetorium was the official residence of the Procurator – the Roman Governor, in this case Pontius Pilate. It was Gentile territory and the Jews would not go into it “that they should not be defiled, and that they might eat the Passover.”

Firstly we see the upside down religious mentality that quibbles over rules of purity but gladly commits the murder of an innocent man. Jesus rightly calls this “straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel.” (Matthew 23:24) They were meticulous over the small things, and entirely missing the big things – such as justice, mercy and compassion.

Secondly we see that “they wanted to eat the Passover”. The Passover was like Christmas dinner – a large elaborate meal with the whole family that no-one wanted to miss. So they had to be ritually clean. In their eyes the murder the Son of God would not defile them, but setting foot on Gentile ground would! The true Passover was in their midst! The true Passover was happening in and to Jesus Christ!

Just like people eager to open Christmas presents often miss the true meaning of Christmas, the Jews eager to eat the Passover missed the true meaning of the cross.

Thirdly Jesus was not defiled. He went into the Praetorium and did so without losing His purity. In fact the presence of Jesus there made it holy ground. Jesus was undefile-able (if there is such a word). If you touched a dead body you were supposed to become defiled, but Jesus touched the young man on the bier and the young girl Tabitha Jesus was not defiled – instead they rose from the dead! Similarly lepers made one unclean – but when Jesus touched them He did not become unclean – rather they were healed. Another case is the woman with the issue of blood – who touched the hem of His garment. Jesus should have been made unclean – that did not happen, instead the woman was healed.

God cannot be made unclean by anything (or that thing would be more powerful than God) and Jesus was God. Thus Jesus can turn up anywhere – even in the Praetorium.

New Testament Christians have similar powers – to heal the sick, raise the dead, cast out demons, cleanse lepers and overcome all the powers that normally make people “unclean”. This is part of the reason that there are no unclean foods or drinks for Christians.

The concept that Christians could go into Gentiles homes without being defiled took a long time to sink in. After Peter visited Cornelius he received a “church delegation” on this matter: “Acts 11:2-3 MKJV And when Peter had come up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him, (3) saying, You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them.” In fact it took a major church conference in Acts 15 to settle the question that the Gentiles were acceptable to God, even without circumcision or Jewish ritual laws.

By going into the praetorium Jesus was entering the territory of the Gentiles, and furthermore by speaking respectfully to Pilate Jesus was demonstrating courteous human acceptance of those outside the Covenant.

Jesus entering the praetorium also tells us that the Word of God can enter the least religious of places – places of injustice, oppression, uncleanness, politics and power. The Word of God is not defiled by being shared with politicians or prostitutes or with a woman at the well.

Jesus enters into places that the “religious” would balk at going to. The Pharisees stood outside, but Jesus went inside and conversed. Salvation Army officers will go into a hotel that many other denominations would shun. That is why they are very much loved. We have to take the gospel to the sinners wherever they are and not fear personal defilement in the process.

The reason Jesus was brought to the praetorium is that the Jews wanted Jesus dead see verses 30 to 32 above. (Only Pilate could carry out executions.) Savage punishment was not enough, Jesus had to be finished with! Here was Jesus, bound in chains, taken to the Gentiles, to be condemned to death and yet His presence has such magnetism and power that Pilate asks “Are you the King of the Jews?”.

The final reason that Jesus entered the Praetorium is that it was on the site of the Jewish royal palace that Rome had commandeered for its use. In other words Jesus went into the praetorium because He should have been there all along because He was the King!

Blessings,

John Edmiston

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