

John 18:39

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But ye have a custom, that I should release unto you one at the passover: will ye therefore that I release unto you the King of the Jews?

Analysis

Ye have a custom (συνήθεια δέ ἔστιν ὑμῖν)—The Passover amnesty tradition is attested nowhere outside the Gospels, likely a local concession Pilate extended to maintain order during volatile festival seasons. The Greek *synētheia* (custom, habit) suggests established practice.

Will ye therefore that I release unto you the King of the Jews?—Pilate's cunning stratagem: force the crowd to choose. By calling Jesus "the King of the Jews," Pilate mockingly throws their accusation back—and tests whether they truly fear him as a political threat. The tragic irony: Pilate offers freedom to the one who alone possesses it (8:36), while the crowd demands release of Barabbas, whose name means "son of the father"—a false son freed while the true Son dies. This exchange epitomizes substitutionary atonement: the guilty go free, the innocent suffers.

Historical Context

Passover commemorated Israel's liberation from Egypt, making it politically charged—Roman authorities stationed extra troops in Jerusalem during festivals. The crowd's choice of Barabbas (described as a robber/insurrectionist in John 18:40) over Jesus reveals revolutionary fervor: they wanted a violent Messiah who would overthrow Rome, not a suffering Servant who would conquer sin.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. What false messiahs (political solutions, self-help ideologies, nationalistic fervor) do you choose over Christ?
2. How does Barabbas's release picture your own salvation—the guilty freed through the innocent's death?
3. In what ways do you prefer a conquering hero to a crucified Savior?

Interlinear Text

ἔστιν δὲ συνήθεια ὑμῖν ἵνα ἔνα ὑμῖν ἀπολύσω
have But a custom unto you that one unto you I should release
G2076 G1161 G4914 G5213 G2443 G1520 G5213 G630

ἐν τῷ πάσχα· βούλεσθε οὖν ὑμῖν ἀπολύσω τὸν
at G3588 the passover will ye therefore unto you I should release G3588
G1722 G3957 G1014 G3767 G5213 G630

βασιλέα τῶν Ἰουδαίων
the King G3588 of the Jews G2453

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