

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 ἐστὶν 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	ἓνα	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
G935		G2453