

**A Declaration of Those Things Which Are  
Most Surely Believed Among Us  
An Expository Study of the Gospel According to Luke  
Chapter 23- **Luke 23:1-25**  
343- The Love of the World; The Condemnation of Jesus  
and The Sovereignty of God- Part 5**

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April 9, 2017

**Luke 23:1-25**

**1** Then the whole body of them got up and brought Him before Pilate.

**2** And they began to accuse Him, saying, "We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, and saying that He Himself is Christ, a King."

**3** So Pilate asked Him, saying, "Are You the King of the Jews?" And He answered him and said, "*It is as you say.*"

**4** Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, "I find no guilt in this man."

**5** But they kept on insisting, saying, "He stirs up the people, teaching all over Judea, starting from Galilee even as far as this place."

**6** When Pilate heard it, he asked whether the man was a Galilean.

**7** And when he learned that He belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod, who himself also was in Jerusalem at that time.

**8** Now Herod was very glad when he saw Jesus; for he had wanted to see Him for a long time, because he had been hearing about Him and was hoping to see some sign performed by Him.

**9** And he questioned Him at some length; but He answered him nothing.

**10** And the chief priests and the scribes were standing there, accusing Him vehemently.

**11** And Herod with his soldiers, after treating Him with contempt and mocking Him, dressed Him in a gorgeous robe and sent Him back to Pilate.

**12** Now Herod and Pilate became friends with one another that very day; for before they had been enemies with each other.

**13** Pilate summoned the chief priests and the rulers and the people,

**14** and said to them, "You brought this man to me as one who incites the people to rebellion, and behold, having examined Him before you, I have found no guilt in this man regarding the charges which you make against Him.

**15** "No, nor has Herod, for he sent Him back to us; and behold, nothing deserving death has been done by Him.

**16** "Therefore I will punish Him and release Him."

**17** [Now he was obliged to release to them at the feast one prisoner.]

**18** But they cried out all together, saying, "Away with this man, and release for us Barabbas!"

**19** (He was one who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection made in the city, and for murder.)

**20** Pilate, wanting to release Jesus, addressed them again,

**21** but they kept on calling out, saying, "Crucify, crucify Him!"

**22** And he said to them the third time, "Why, what evil has this man done? I have found in Him no guilt *demanding* death; therefore I will punish Him and release Him."

**23** But they were insistent, with loud voices asking that He be crucified. And their voices *began* to prevail.

**24** And Pilate pronounced sentence that their demand be granted.

**25** And he released the man they were asking for who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, but he delivered Jesus to their will.

To the Glory of God

Now last week we saw how Pilate had sent Jesus over to Herod because he really didn't want to condemn Jesus. And this was for two reasons:

1. He didn't want to be used by the Sanhedrin, which he despised.
2. He honestly thought that Jesus was innocent.

But, as we have discovered, Pilate was a perfect example of what worldliness looks like. He is competent and calculating. And he is pragmatic and self-preserving. Pilate was a man of pragmatic worldly wisdom. He probably saw himself as a realist, which was ironic, because he got Reality dead wrong. He seemed to see Jesus as a disposable

pawn in a political chess game, when, in reality, Pilate himself was the pawn and Jesus the King.

So, we must understand that it was not God's Will for Herod to condemn Jesus. Pilate was chosen by God to be the man who would forever be linked with the final condemnation of the Lamb of God. And all of the Gospel writers agree with this.

The Apostle Levi said this in **Matthew 27:26**:

**Then he [Pilate] released Barabbas for them; but after having Jesus scourged, he handed Him over to be crucified.**

John Mark wrote this in **Mark 15:15**:

**Wishing to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas for them, and after having Jesus scourged, he handed Him over to be crucified.**

... and the Apostle John said this in **John 19:16**:

**So he [Pilate] then handed Him over to them to be crucified.**

How utterly tragic that Pilate condemned Jesus to rescue his own political career! Now we pick back up in verse 11 when Herod further assaults Jesus and mocks Him and then sends the Lord back to Pilate. And in verses, Dr. Luke wrote:

**13 Pilate summoned the chief priests and the rulers and the people,  
14 and said to them, "You brought this man to me as one who incites the people to rebellion, and behold, having examined Him before you, I have found no guilt in this man regarding the charges which you make against Him.**

**15 "No, nor has Herod, for he sent Him back to us; and behold, nothing deserving death has been done by Him.**

**16 "Therefore I will punish Him and release Him."**

Now remember that Pilate was inside the "Praetorium", the Roman palace where Roman law was adjudicated by the Roman Praetor. And the Sanhedrin and the other Jewish rulers were outside.

And so, when Pilate realizes that Herod was not going to condemn Jesus, he got up and went outside and told the Jews:

**14 ..."You brought this man to me as one who incites the people to rebellion, and behold, having examined Him before you, I have found no guilt in this man regarding the charges which you make against Him.**

**15 "No, nor has Herod, for he sent Him back to us; and behold, nothing deserving death has been done by Him.**

Now this is the *second* time that Pilate has proclaimed Jesus' Innocence. The first was back in verse 4 when Pilate asked Jesus if He was the King of the Jews and Jesus looked him right in the eye and said, "*You're the one who says I am.*" And we saw how this answer could very well have been uncovering some private conversation that Pilate had had with his wife or with others about Jesus, and that Jesus said this to confront Pilate with his own need for a Savior.

But, in any event, after this initial confrontation, Pilate went out and told these religious frauds:

**I find no guilt in this man.**

... and he never did. Pilate never thought Jesus was guilty, and yet, out of political expediency, he condemned the Prince of Life. And now, here in verses 14 & 15, Pilate is actually trying to *reason* with the Sanhedrin over the innocence of Jesus. And, in verse 15, he includes the fact that not only has he himself not found any guilt in Jesus, but Herod didn't either. Now look what Pilate says in verse 16:

**Therefore I will punish Him and release Him.**

Now the reason that Dr. Luke gives this information to us is very important. Because there is reason to believe that what Pilate was actually saying here was:

*"I will punish Jesus myself"*

In other words, Pilate knows that the Sanhedrin is *determined* to have Jesus killed. And more than anything else, Pilate wants to try to

keep peace with the Jews. Over his short time in power, Pilate has already had to deal with several riots that the Jews carried out because they felt that the Romans were ignoring their concerns. And the more riots Pilate had to deal with, the more likely that the authorities back in Rome would remove Pilate from power. So, he is anxious to go along with what they want to do to Jesus.

But Pilate also knows that Jesus is categorically innocent of the charges. He knows full well that every single charge against this man has been trumped up. Now what is fascinating here is that normally, Jesus' innocence would not have been a big deal. *Many* innocent people had come before Pilate and he never hesitated in condemning them to death. It was common to have prisoners fall down before Pilate and beg for their lives, only to see Pilate cruelly reject their pleas and hand them off to die.

But, Pilate didn't beat anybody *personally*. Pilate never actually killed people *himself*. His job was to find guilt or innocence, and then order the prisoner to either be set free or condemn him to die. But here, with Jesus, Pilate is taking the unprecedented step in offering to *personally* beat Jesus and then set Him free, in the hope that by beating Jesus *himself* that would satisfy the Sanhedrin and Pilate would then be free to let Jesus go.

Now, in verse 17, Luke gives us insight into a very interesting legal maneuver that was in place back in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century when he said:

**[Now he was obliged to release to them at the feast one prisoner.]**

In **John 18:39**, the Apostle John says that Pilate *himself* made this offer when he said:

**But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover; do you wish then that I release for you the King of the Jews?**

So, this offer by Pilate was designed to try to pacify the Jewish crowd and not the rulers. Pilate is speaking this to all the Jews who were gathered outside the Praetorium, who by this time were a fairly large crowd. When the Sanhedrin first brought Jesus to Pilate, around 5-6 am, there weren't that many there. But, as the news spread that Jesus had been taken, a crowd gathered.

So, Pilate's offer to release a prisoner in accord with their custom was not made to the leaders, but to the general public. And in doing this, Pilate was being very shrewd. Now remember, at this moment, Pilate knew two things:

1. Jesus was innocent
2. The Sanhedrin wanted Jesus dead

... and being worldly, Pilate was concerned about setting off a riot if he released Jesus, and that this would compromise his political power.

But, Pilate remembered the great crowd that had welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem just a few days earlier as Jesus rode down "Main Street" on the colt of a donkey. And Pilate knew that Jesus had a reputation of great admiration and devotion with the people.

So, because Pilate knew that the people loved Jesus, he thought that by offering to release a prisoner, in accord with their custom, that the people would naturally want Jesus. And that would take care of both of Pilate's problems. He could tell the Sanhedrin that he released Jesus because the people wanted Him, which would quell any chance of a riot, and he could refrain from condemning a Man that he knew was innocent.

So, Pilate stacked the deck in his own favor by padding the question, and he by-passed the Sanhedrin and asked the Jewish crowd:

**... do you wish then that I release for you the King of the Jews?**

... thinking for sure that they would all ask for Jesus to be released.

Now there are very few events in the Life and Ministry of Jesus that are recorded for us in all four Gospel Records, but the issue of Barabbas is one of the notable exceptions. All four Gospel writers included this man in the Accounts, and that is important.

Now, first of all, his name was not "Barabbas", but "Bar- Abbas". The prefix "Bar" meant "son" or "son of", and "Abbas" is a Hebrew derivative of the Aramaic word for "Father". If you remember, in Jesus called His Father "Abba" in **Matthew 14:36**, and the Apostle Paul used that phrase to illustrate the intimate relationship that genuine believers have with the God through their Salvation in Jesus Christ in both **Romans 8:15** and **Galatians 4:6**.

So, "Bar-Abbas" was "the son of the father". And the Bible gives us some interesting information about this man.

- ✓ **Matthew 27:16** calls him a "**notorious prisoner**"
- ✓ **Mark 15:7** says that he was an "**insurrectionist who had committed murder in an insurrection**"

So, first of all, we know he was a Jew because of his name. And Bar-Abbas was also well-known by both the Jews, who would have counted him as a hero, and the Romans who would have called him "notorious". This man had worked to undermine the Roman authorities and had murdered someone in an attempt to overthrow the Government. Now this tells us that Bar-Abbas was probably among the group of Jews called the "Zealots" who were the first terrorists in that region. And these Zealots would kidnap, assassinate, or murder Romans in their pursuit to have what they called a "pure society" of Jews who rigorously kept the Law.

They had a small little knife with a curved blade that they kept hidden in the sleeve of their robe and they would stand in the crowd and work their way behind a Roman, and reach around and slice his jugular vein, and then blend back into the crowd. And if things got too hot for them in Jerusalem, these Zealots would run up to Galilee to hide.

But the Zealots would also murder other Jews that they considered to be compromisers with the pagan Romans. And so, the only way to get along with these Zealots was to agree with them about everything or they would put you on the list to kill.

Now what is interesting is that one of the disciples of Jesus that the Lord chose to be an Apostle, back in **Luke 6**, was a man named "Simon", who was a member of this group of Zealots. And another Apostle was "Levi", or "Matthew", who had been a tax collector. And the Zealots considered the tax collectors to be the very epitome of evil because they had "sold out" their Jewish brethren and were oppressing their own people by "doing business" with the Romans.

Now normally, a Zealot and a tax collector would have been at each other's throats, and yet there is no mention at all of any hostility between these men. And this is a testimony of how genuine Salvation can overcome very serious political and social differences. And that

tells you that social issues and politics are *not* the main thing. Jesus is the main thing, but not politics.

So, back in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century, a "tax collector" was considered to be a "sell- out" and a "traitor to his own people". And, in **Matthew 18:17**, Jesus Himself said that a person who laid claim to being saved, and yet who refused to repent when confronted with blatant sin, three separate times, was to be excommunicated from the world-wide Christian Church, and was to be treated as a "Gentile" and a "tax collector". And this is because by not repenting, he is *acting* like an "unbeliever" (Gentile), and by *abandoning* the Church and embracing sin, he is *acting* like a tax collector.

And so, a person who engages in ongoing, blatant, and public sin, and who, after *repeated* attempts at getting him to repent *refuses* to acknowledge his sin and remains proud and arrogant, that person has *forfeited* his blessings of membership and should be *excluded* from the Household of Faith until he can repent. And, once he is excluded, he is now living *outside* the "Ordinary Means of Grace" that God has provided through His Church, and the Apostle Paul phrased it this way:

### **1 Corinthians 5:5**

***I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.***

Nobody has the "right" to lay claim to be a Christian and then continually live in such a way that is blatantly opposed to all that Scripture teaches, and keep the blessings and the protection and the joys that God has provided within the Church. Either that person is deceived about his Salvation and needs to be born again, or else he needs to be placed in the hands of satan so his spirit may be saved in the day when Jesus comes back. But either way, proud and impenitent people cannot be tolerated.

Now you can think that I'm a hard man by what I just said. But you would be wrong. I would remind you that I didn't write the Bible. And so, what you *should* think about what I just said is that I take Jesus and the Apostles and God's Word and Christ's Church very seriously because Jesus and the Apostles took God's Word and Christ's Church very seriously. And what you should also think is that the person who lays claim to be saved and yet who doesn't think enough

about Jesus to live in humble submission to the Authority of Scripture, *that* is the one who is hard, not me.

Now evidently, Bar-Abbas had been involved in one of the many efforts by the Jews to fight against Pilate and the other Roman authorities and drive out the pagans from the land of Israel. Now history tells us that these efforts went on all the time. And as we already found out back in **Luke 21**, Jesus promised that these efforts would escalate after His Resurrection until Rome had to do something about it. And in 70AD, they did, by crushing the Jews and destroying the city of Jerusalem and the Temple. And with that destruction, the order of the Levitical priests was ended along with animal sacrifices and the entire Jewish way of life. And so, God used a pagan nation to bring to an end the reign of the First or the Old Covenant.

And, evidently, their effort to overthrow the Roman rulers failed and they were captured, and Bar-Abbas had been in prison since that time, awaiting his execution. But what is fascinating is that in **John 18:40**, the Apostle John calls Bar-Abbas a “robber”, which comes from the very same Greek word we get “thief” from. And we also know that these Zealots never acted alone. There would have been several men who had joined together in this plot to overthrow the Roman rulers. And at the Crucifixion, **Mark 15:27** says:

**They crucified two robbers with Him, one on His right and one on His left.**

... so, it is very possible that the two “robbers”, or the two “thieves”, that were crucified with Jesus were part of the plot to overthrow the Romans that Bar-Abbas participated in.

Pilate was confident that if he was to offer to release a prisoner to the Jewish crowd that they would overrule their leaders and ask for Jesus, and then Pilate could go back to his life. But look what happened from **Mark 15:11**:

**But the chief priests stirred up the crowd *to ask him to release Barabbas for them instead.***

So, much to Pilate's dismay, the Sanhedrin saw what he was doing and they counteracted his efforts by “stirring up the crowd”. And so,

when Pilate asked the crowd if they wanted him to release Jesus, Dr. Luke says they replied:

**Away with this man, and release for us Barabbas!**

Now, evidently the response of the crowd grew louder and more forceful because several times Pilate asks the same question. And the reason he kept asking is because he was certain that they would eventually want Jesus. Who had healed them and fed them, and to whom many of these same people had followed Him all over Israel for years now. But, the more he asked, the more this crowd turned away from Jesus.

At one point, Pilate said:

**Matthew 27:22b**

**... Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?**

... and the Apostle Levi says that they all said:

**Crucify Him!**

And once again, the Sovereignty of God is at work here. **John 19:37** says that the reason that these people asked for Jesus to be Crucified was so that the prophecy from **Zechariah 12:10** would come to pass:

**Zechariah 12:10**

**I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn.**

And it was at this point that Pilate became exasperated and cried out:

**Luke 23:22**

**Why, what evil has this man done? I have found in Him no guilt *demanding* death ...**

Now it was somewhere during this discussion about Bar-Abbas that another amazing event occurred. The Apostle Levi tells us this from:

**Matthew 27:19:**

**While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent him *a message*, saying, "Have nothing to do with that righteous Man; for last night I suffered greatly in a dream because of Him."**

Now in my studies, I came across many things that we could discuss here. But the main thing to know is what God the Holy Spirit inspired, and let us leave the rest to human conjecture. There are extra-biblical legends that Pilate's wife became a believer and sought for Jesus later on. There are other tales and stories that bend curious minds. Back in 1882, Charles Spurgeon preached an entire sermon on this single verse<sup>1</sup>. But all we know for sure is that Pilate's wife sent him this message saying Jesus was a "righteous Man", and warning her husband to "*Have nothing to do...*" with Him because she had gone through what she described as a lot of "suffering" in a dream because of Jesus.

How much or how little this dream was of God, or from God, we don't know. And what effect this event had on Pilate and his wife, we don't know. I hope it had a great effect on both of them, but Scripture doesn't tell us. But, what we *do* know, is that her plea went unanswered. We can prove nothing else from Scripture, and so it is best to state what we know is true and then move on.

But what is amazing is that, in effect, this brutal, unmerciful, pagan tyrant is now standing in the place of Jesus' defense attorney, pleading for His Life. And then, for the send time, Pilate offers to appease the crowd by taking the unprecedented step of beating Jesus *himself* by saying:

**... therefore I will punish Him and release Him."**

The way the Greek is worded here shows us that Pilate was not saying, "*I will have Jesus punished*", or "*I will order Jesus to be punished*", but rather, "*I will personally punish Jesus.*"

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<sup>1</sup> CH Spurgeon; *The Dream of Pilate's Wife*; Sermon #1647; 1882; <http://spurgeongems.org/vols28-30/chs1647.pdf>

Now many people in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century would not see this as an effort by Pilate to help Jesus precisely because he is saying here that he will personally punish Jesus. But we must remember that no matter how terrible the beating might be, it is preferable to death. But even after offering to beat Jesus himself, Dr. Luke tells us the condition of the crowd:

**Luke 23:23**

**But they were insistent, with loud voices asking that He be crucified. And their voices *began* to prevail.**

Now keep in mind that this is not a single cry from the crowd but an *ongoing* cry, and a cry that grew in intensity and force. And it was at this point, when Pilate began to see that the crowd was going to win, that several very amazing things happened. And these events are very important because God the Holy Spirit moved upon the Biblical writers to tell us, and I would say they are also important for us to understand in our day as well. And to begin to see what transpires next go to John 19 with me.

**John 19:1**

**Pilate then took Jesus and scourged Him.**

Now evidently, Pilate took Jesus back inside the Praetorium, away from the crowds, and scourged Him *personally*. Now the term "scourged", as used here, comes from a Greek word that is used only this one time in the entire New Testament. And unlike the way the Hebrew derivative is used in the Old Testament, this word was reserved solely for Roman punishment, and *not* the type of scourging that the Jews carried out. And the word means: *punishment by whipping or beating*. So, Pilate beat the sinless Lamb of God, *personally*.

Now there were restrictions placed on the Roman authorities as to how they could administer this kind of scourging, especially to other Roman citizens. For example, Roman law stipulated that if a person could survive 40 lashes, they would have to set them free. And so, they got around the law by beating Roman citizens 39 times. And that way, they could beat them repeatedly. And the case of the Apostle Paul, **2Corinthians 11:34** says that they beat him on 5 different occasions, each

one with 39 stripes. But that was because Paul was a Roman citizen. Jesus was not. And so, Pilate could have beaten Jesus with much more than 39 stripes.

And it was during *this* scourging that Pilate allowed Jesus to be humiliated in a grotesque way:

**John 19:2-3**

**2 And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and put a purple robe on Him;**

**3 and they *began* to come up to Him and say, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and to give Him slaps *in the face*.**

So, you have cruel, ungodly men pushing a crown of thorns on the Head of the King of the Universe. And the thorns that were being pushed on Jesus' Head were about 1-1/2 inches long. And you have evil men mocking the Darling of the Trinity by placing a purple robe on Him. And you have wicked, hard hands slapping the Face of the Incarnate God. This is unimaginable Humility! We need to remember that if these men treated us this way, we wouldn't be able to do anything about it. But Jesus could. Jesus owns the Universe. Jesus controls their heartbeat. Jesus had the Power to end this all right then. Jesus had the Power to blink His Eyes and eviscerate them all right then. And yet as they mock Him and beat Him and spit on Him and slap Him, Jesus just looks at them and makes no move to defend Himself!

So, I have a question. After seeing how they treat Jesus here, how could any of us feel the need for vengeance against our own enemies? We are sinners, who have committed horrible acts of treason against God. But Jesus was perfectly sinless. And after watching Jesus humiliated like this, how could any of us ever complain about any mistreatment we might be given? How could any of us ever gripe about any persecution we might go through? After seeing Jesus here, how could any of us ever belly-ache about any hardship the Lord might bring our way? Truly for us to gripe and complain about *anything* requires that we close our eyes and forget who we are and what we are seeing here.

But, we know that the context here is that Pilate was beating Jesus to make a point to the crowd outside. And the reason we know that is because of what John records next:

**John 19:4**

**Pilate came out again and said to them, "Behold, I am bringing Him out to you so that you may know that I find no guilt in Him."**

So, after beating Jesus and mocking Him and humiliating Him, Pilate walks back outside and tells the crowd, who has been chanting over and over, "*Crucify Him!*" all this time,

**Behold, I am bringing Him out to you so that you may know that I find no guilt in Him.**

And it was at this point that they brought Jesus back out to present Him to the people. And John tells us:

**Jesus then came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe.**

... and then Pilate says:

**"Behold, the Man!"**

Now remember, Pilate's idea was to take the unprecedented step in beating Jesus *himself* in the hope that after doing this, the crowd would say, "*That's enough!*", and ask for Jesus' release. But, the only reason this effort might save Jesus' Life was if Jesus had been beaten so much that normal people would have been ashamed to carry it out any further. And so, there is every reason to suggest that when Jesus appears here, the sight of Him would have been shocking. What the crowd looked at here was a very bloody and weak and beaten Man, Who was just barely alive. And this is confirmed by what Pilate told them:

**"Behold, the Man!"**

In other words, Pilate was saying, "*Behold the Man you are all so worked up over! Behold the Man that your leaders want me to kill! Behold the Man Whom you say has done so much damage all*

*throughout Israel! Look at Him! Behold this pathetic Man, Who can barely stand upright. He is totally defeated! I beat Him myself! Behold the Man Who cannot harm you anymore. Behold the Man Who can barely live!"*

And I think it worked. I think Pilate's effort did indeed silence the crowd. The sight of Jesus swaying back and forth, about to pass out from the terrible beating He just endured, began to have its desired effect and the people grew quiet. And normally, that would have been it, the people had what they wanted and Jesus would have been set free, and we would all be yet in our sins. But when the Sanhedrin saw the sight of Jesus standing there as a beaten Man was having this effect on the crowd, John tells us:

**John 19:6a**

**So when the chief priests and the officers saw Him, they cried out saying, "Crucify, crucify!..."**

The crowd had had enough. Seeing the shocking sight of this beaten Man was enough. But, not the Jewish leaders. God had completely stepped aside and was allowing the evil that was in their hearts to be fully manifested. So, to stir up the crowd again, it was the leaders who cried out. And Pilate saw this too, and so John tells us:

**John 19:6b**

**... Pilate said to them, "Take Him yourselves and crucify Him, for I find no guilt in Him."**

Pilate is disgusted with the Sanhedrin and doesn't mince any words with them. But look at how these religious frauds turn this whole thing around to their favor.

**John 19:7**

**The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and by that law He ought to die because He made Himself out *to be* the Son of God."**

... and look at Pilate's reaction:

**John 19:8**

**Therefore when Pilate heard this statement, he was *even* more afraid;**

Now they had him. There are no more false accusations about insurrections or law or Moses or sacrifices now. No more games. *This* is the issue. This is the *one single issue* about Jesus. This has *always* been the issue with these people. Jesus must die because He said He was the Son of God. The one single issue that saves souls is the one single issue that brings about Jesus' Death. Jesus must die because of Who He is. Not the miracles, not the healings, not the casting out of demons. That isn't the issue. The issue is "Who is Jesus?"

Nobody gets mad because Christians feed the hungry or cloth the naked, or because we build hospitals and treat poor people for free. Nobody has a problem with the Church setting up homes for blind children or the deaf, or because we minister to lepers or those who are dying with AIDS. Nobody dies because Christians counsel unmarried women who are pregnant, or because we want political leaders to rule wisely. The issue is "Who is Jesus?" Christians die over the issue of Who Jesus is. Believers are beaten and robbed and tortured and their goods are confiscated, their homes are plundered, and their wives are ravished, and their children are sold into slavery because of Who Jesus is.

You cannot go to Heaven unless you know Who Jesus is. You cannot be forgiven unless you know Who Jesus is. You cannot be redeemed unless you know Who Jesus is. It isn't enough to believe in God anymore. Ever since this Man lived and died and rose again, nobody is saved unless they believe and confess with their mouth that Jesus is God Almighty in human flesh. That He was born of a virgin, that he lived a perfectly sinless Life, that He died a vicarious Death on the Cross, that he rose from the dead three days later in the very same Body that He died in, and that 40 days after that, He ascended into Heaven and sits at the Right hand of the Majesty on High, and He is interceding right now for us, and He is coming back again. And the only entity on earth that teaches this is the Church and the only people who believe this are Christians.

Who Jesus is is the issue. It was the issue back then, it is the issue today, and it will be the issue until Jesus comes back. Who Jesus is has *always* been the issue and it always will be the issue. Who Jesus is is what got Jesus killed. Who Jesus is is the source of all persecution against all Christians, and Who Jesus is is the only means of Salvation.

And Who Jesus is is what scared Pilate to death. And it scared him because he knew.

Jewish law was clear, blasphemy was punishable by death. Roman law was clear, anyone condemned correctly by Jewish law must be put to death. They had snookered Pilate and he couldn't wiggle out. So, look what he did next:

### **John 19:9-11**

**9** and he entered into the Praetorium again and said to Jesus, "Where are You from?" But Jesus gave him no answer.

**10** So Pilate said to Him, "You do not speak to me? Do You not know that I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify You?"

**11** Jesus answered, **"You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above; for this reason he who delivered Me to you has *the* greater sin."**

So, for the last time, Pilate had the beaten Jesus taken back inside so he could ask Him one final question:

**"Where are You from?"**

Now this is the equivalent of us asking someone, "*Who are you?*" How can one Man cause so much hate and disruption? Why do these people hate You so? Are you even from this earth? Are you from Heaven? And since Jesus has already answered this, He doesn't speak. But this irritates Pilate, and so he says:

**"You do not speak to me? Do You not know that I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify You?"**

You better talk to me, Jesus. I'm the only thing standing between you and these people who want you dead. And this is when Jesus says:

**"You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above; for this reason he who delivered Me to you has *the* greater sin."**

Then John tells us:

### **John 19:12a**

**As a result of this Pilate made efforts to release Him...**

So, evidently, after this interchange, Pilate made even *more* efforts to have Jesus set free. But then, John says:

### **John 19:12b**

**... but the Jews cried out saying, "If you release this Man, you are no friend of Caesar; everyone who makes himself out *to be* a king opposes Caesar."**

So, now we're back to the crowd of Jews and not just the Sanhedrin. At some point during all of this, the Jewish leaders had manipulated the crowd enough to get them back into wanting Jesus dead. And they used the very thing that Pilate feared the most, his reputation and position.

As we have seen, Pilate was the very epitome of what worldliness looks like. And so, he valued who he was and what he had and the power he had been given and the prestige that went along with that, more than he valued anything else. And when that was threatened here by these scheming religious leaders, that was the last straw. And so, Dr. Luke tells us:

**24 And Pilate pronounced sentence that their demand be granted.**

**25 And he released the man they were asking for who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, but he delivered Jesus to their will.**

The Apostle Levi gives us this insight:

### **Matthew 27:24&25**

**24 When Pilate saw that he was accomplishing nothing, but rather that a riot was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this Man's blood; see *to that* yourselves."**

**25 And all the people said, "His blood shall be on us and on our children!"**

Now washing your hands like this was a symbolic gesture that had moral implications. It was begun back under the Old Covenant where God had revealed to the Jews about the "scape goat". And in **Deuteronomy 21:6-7**, the Scriptures say:

**6 "All the elders of that city which is nearest to the slain man shall wash their hands over the heifer whose neck was broken in the valley;**

**7 and they shall answer and say, 'Our hands did not shed this blood, nor did our eyes see *it*.**

So, by washing his hands publicly, Pilate was doing two things:

1. He was trying to alleviate his own guilty conscience.
2. He was using the Jews' law against them.

He succeeded at accomplishing the second one because the entire Jewish crowd responded in **Matthew 27:25**:

**... His blood shall be on us and on our children!**

... which is frightening on a number of levels. Not the least of these is the fact that some of these people were in the crowd that called Jesus' Name to heal them and feed them and to have Mercy on them. And yet, here, they cry for His Death. How desperately wicked the human heart is that one minute we can be friends with Jesus and in a moment of time, call for His execution! And yet, the reality is that those who thought they were condemning Jesus were only condemned themselves. And what I get out of that is that unless God changes our hearts, mercifully, sovereignly, and unless God keeps our hearts, mercifully, sovereignly, we have no hope.

But, even though those present that day were condemned, Pilate miserably failed at alleviating his *own* guilt that he had before God at condemning Jesus to die, even though it was God's Will that Jesus die. The wickedness of this man's heart was not overlooked by God, and unless Pilate repented and trusted in the very One he rejects here, he is among those screaming in hell right now. And the smoke of his torment will ascend forever.

So, we have seen some very tragic people: Judas, Annas, Caiaphas, Herod, and now Pilate; all of them in Jesus' Presence, all of them looking into Jesus' Eyes, all of them speaking to Jesus. And all of them, to some degree impressed with Him. And yet, none of them were saved. It is so tragic.

So, what about you? Will you spend time with Jesus only to remain lost in your sins? Will you read the Bible and go to Church and pray, and yet never be saved? Will you sit and hear the Bible preached and taught, and yet never be broken, never bow, and never be forgiven? Will you actually speak to Jesus and look into His Eyes and engage Him, and yet love this present evil world more than Him? How does that happen? And how can I avoid that happening to me?

Dear friends, I've done my best in this Sermon Series. But, however this has affected you, I've been changed by this series. I've been broken and humbled by being able to look at Pilate. And I'm amazed. I'm flabbergasted. And I'm bewildered that this man could be so close and yet remain so far. And I tremble for my own weak and troubled soul that God will have Mercy on me, the sinner.

Amen. Let's pray

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.