

JESUS CHRIST AND PONTIUS PILATE
John 19:28-40

Intro: Tonight we turn our attention to the Roman governor of Judea during the days of our Lord's public ministry. His name was Pontius Pilate.

Tacitus, Josephus, and Philo are the only men outside of the Scriptures who give us any information about Pilate. He was the fifth governor, or procurator, of Judea. His territory included roughly all of southern Israel including Samaria. He was directly responsible to Tiberius who was the Roman Emperor at the time.

His primary responsibilities were financial, but he was also vested with civil, military, and criminal jurisdiction. The Romans allowed the Sanhedrin to exercise a lot of authority as long as it did not conflict with Roman rule, but the Jews did have to come to the Romans if they wanted to inflict the death penalty on anyone. This is the reason that the Lord Jesus was brought before Pilate.

Luke tells us that Pilate was governor when John the Baptist was preaching. Therefore, he had some opportunity to know of the entire public ministry of Jesus Christ, as we saw last week concerning Caiaphas. The historian Josephus tells us that Pilate was governor for 10 years.

But we are not interested tonight in the traditions and legends which surround his life; we want to see him in his relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ--an opportunity which was given to very few men.

All four of the Gospel writers refer to him. He is such an outstanding person in the events that led up to the crucifixion that he cannot be ignored. Humanly speaking, and by his own testimony, Pilate was the one man who had the authority to deliver the Lord Jesus from death.

The details in each Gospel generally are the same, but there are some differences. Matthew is the only one who mentions the dream which Pilate's wife had. Luke is the only one who tells us that Pilate sent the Lord to Herod, but that He was with Pilate both before and after His time with Herod. Mark gives the shortest account, while John tells more about the conversation which went on between our Lord and Pilate than do any of the other Gospel writers.

However, as we read over these records, ONE THING STANDS OUT WHEN WE LOOK AT THE THINGS WHICH PILATE DID. IT IS THIS: THERE WERE SEVERAL INSTANCES IN WHICH PILATE VIOLATED HIS CONSCIENCE!

Please turn to Rom. 2:13-15.

In the Bible you have God dealing with men generally in two groups: the Jews and the Gentiles. In these we see how God deals with men even today (as He always has).

- (1) He sought to reach the heart of the Jew through His Word--and this was to be preached to the Gentiles as well. Men were brought under conviction as they heard the Word.
- (2) Where men did not have the Word, or where they refused to read the Word, God still has had a means of reaching men's hearts. This is through the conscience.

This is where Rom. 2:13-15.

There were at least five times during this brief period when Pilate refused to listen to his conscience, and in this way his doom was sealed!

- I. HIS OWN INVESTIGATION OF JESUS CHRIST. (And this was supported by Herod's investigation.) Cf. Luke 23:4 (before our Lord was sent to Herod) and Luke 23:14, 15 (after He had returned from seeing Herod).

Many people pass judgment upon our Lord without any investigation; Pilate investigated and found no reason why He should be condemned to death.

This alone was reason enough to set Him free!

- II. THE DREAM WHICH PILATE'S WIFE HAD (Matt. 27:19).

People often ask about dreams. Does God use dreams. Yes, He does sometimes, but dreams always need to be tested in the light of the truth of the Word of God. This was the most crucial moment in history. Men were making decisions that were measureless in their influence. God was speaking.

Pilate's investigation had led him to the decision that Jesus Christ had violated no law! He was a righteous man! Now his wife comes to him saying the same thing! The evidence was mounting for Pilate, and his conscience was wrestling with the evidence.

- III. PILATE'S KNOWLEDGE OF WHAT LAY BEHIND THE ACCUSATIONS OF THE JEWS. Matthew (27:18) and Mark (15:10) both mention this. "For he knew that for envy they had delivered him." "For he knew that the chief priests had delivered him for envy."

What is "envy"?

Both Matthew and Mark use the same word (ἀθεόωον). It means that the chief priests themselves had seen in the Lord Jesus that which was fine, and noble, and good. They could see the qualities which had led other to confess that He was God. But instead of accepting the rebuke and wanting to be like Him, their hearts were filled with intense envy--they wanted to bring the Lord Jesus down to their level, and lower, if possible.

Pilate knew this about the Jews. He knew that they were violating their consciences, and he was in the process of doing the same.

Is it any wonder that Solomon said, "A sound heart is the life of the flesh; but envy, the rottenness of the bones" (Prov. 14:30).

IV. THE DEMAND OF THE JEWS THAT BARABBAS BE SET FREE.

Who was Barabbas? All four Gospels mention him too.

Mark tells us that he was an insurrectionist, a man who had taken part (probably leading it) in an armed rebellion against Rome. During the uprising he had committed murder. Cf. Mark 15:7. Luke (23:19) tells us the same. John says (18:40a): "Now Barabbas was a robber." Matthew tells us that he was "a notable prisoner" (27:16), he was a marked man, well-known for his ruthless, criminal acts. MARKED FOR IDENT. AS A COIN.

Pilate felt perfectly free to offer Christ or Barabbas because it was inconceivable that the religious leaders of Israel would publicly take sides with Barabbas! BUT THIS IS JUST WHAT THEY DID! Do you see why? To choose Barabbas would mean that they felt that Barabbas was a better man than the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is where their "envy" had led them.

Seven hundred years before Isaiah had prophesied this. "He was numbered with the transgressors" (Isa. 53:12). The Jews were not satisfied just to put Him to death; they wanted Him to be crucified as the worst of men!

But perhaps the greatest impact was made upon the conscience of Pilate by

V. THE BEHAVIOR OF THE PRISONER HIMSELF, JESUS CHRIST THE SON OF GOD.

This is seen in two ways: (1) by our Lord's silence;

(2) by our Lord's words. Solomon, in writing Ecclesiastes said that there is "a time to keep silence, and a time to speak" (Ecc. 3:7b). Our Lord was a master in knowing the time for each.

It is certainly safe to say that Pontius Pilate never was faced by a prisoner like Jesus Christ--either before or afterwards.

Note first

A. His silence.

Cf. Matthew 27:12-14. Usually a prisoner would be pleading for his life. The fact that the Lord Jesus said nothing obviously bothered Pilate tremendously. Mark and John also refer to this (Mark 15:5; John 19:9, 10).

This latter verse led to

B. His speaking. Cf. John 19:11. What majestic words these are! How expressive of His deity, His absolute confidence in His Father! It must have had something of the same reaction on Pilate that our Lord's words did to the men who came to take him prisoner in the garden. "As soon, then, as he had said unto them, I AM . . . , they went backward, and fell to the ground" (John 18:6).

Under normal circumstances Pilate might have had a prisoner struck dead for uttering such words. But have you ever noticed the effect that it did have?

Notice: "And from then on Pilate sought to release Him" (John 19:12a). There was something about the words which Jesus spoke which convinced Pilate that he was telling the truth!

Concl: What is the end? Turn to Matt. 27:24.

Is it not a shame that Pilate did not know Jer. 2:22, "For though thou wash thee with lye, and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before me, saith the Lord God"?

I am sure that Pilate knew that he had not washed away his guilt--in spite of his talk! May we take this as a warning if we do not know the Saviour. "What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus."

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