

Series - A Walk with Christ to the Cross
You Can't Wash Your Hands of Your Responsibility

Pilate - The Political Decision Maker

Matthew 27:11-26; John 18-19;

Introduction: For the last two weeks, we've been taking a walk with Christ to the cross. And what we've focused on are the key events in the last hours before Jesus was crucified. And there are three main people we see whom I call the faces of failure: Judas, Peter, and Pilate.

Each of these stories represents a different kind of failure, and every one of us is prone to find ourselves in one of these scenarios.

Judas, *the disillusioned follower*, fails by demanding of Jesus what Jesus will not do. There are lots of people who believe in Jesus just as Judas did. They believe in a Jesus who will fix messes and solve problems for them. And when he doesn't come through, they get angry.

Peter, *the determined and devoted disciple*, fails by not preparing for weakness. He trusted in his own strength and failed to join Jesus in prayer and eventually denied the Lord. Christians do not rise from failures like Peter's by determination, but by receiving the love, mercy, and grace of our Lord.

Today, we'll look at Pilate, the *political decision-maker* fails by trying to wash his hands of his responsibility. Here is a man thrust unsuspectingly into the Jesus story. A Roman governor, utterly unschooled in the things of God, called upon to judge the Son of God. The title of today's message is: **You**

Can't Wash Your Hands of Your Responsibility

A little history here: Back in Genesis chapter 3, verse 15, right after Adam and Eve fell and God visited them in the cool of the day, we have what's called the **protoevangelium**, or the *first gospel*. And that's when the LORD said to the serpent, **"I will put enmity (hatred, warfare) between your seed and her**

seed," speaking of the woman. "...between your seed and her seed." A woman doesn't have a seed. A woman has an egg. A man has a seed, but God said it's going to be between, "...your seed (from the serpent) and her seed (speaking of the virgin birth of Christ).

And then He said, "You shall bruise His heel, but He will crush your head." (KJV) And so, it's a verse that speaks of what is going to happen, and how the seed of the woman - Jesus, who was born of a virgin - is going to come into this world. The devil is going to bruise His heel, but He's going to crush the devil's head.

We will see Jesus' bruising taking place today at His arrest and trials, culminating in the crucifixion of Jesus. Let's PRAY

But before we get to Pilate specifically, I want to talk about Jesus' trial. And to be technical, the trial of Jesus was really the *trials* of Jesus. There were six parts to Jesus' trial: three stages in a religious court and three stages before a Roman court. Jesus was tried before Annas, the former high priest; Caiaphas, the current high priest; and the Sanhedrin. He was charged in these "ecclesiastical" trials with blasphemy, claiming to be the Son of God.

What you need to know about these trials:

1. His Jewish trials were rigged to produce a guilty verdict.

The greatest miracle of Jesus, outside His own resurrection, was the resurrection of Lazarus (John chapter 11). As a result of the resurrection of Lazarus, the Jewish religious leaders determined that Jesus must die. It's a strange reaction to a great miracle that shows that Jesus is the Messiah.

They had been planning and plotting for months. They knew they wanted Him dead, so they said, "We're going to arrest Him, and we're going to figure out some way to say He is guilty."

First, He was arrested without cause. In Mark chapter 14:8-9 says, when they came to arrest Him, Jesus says, ***8 "Am I leading a rebellion," said Jesus, "that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? 9 Every day I was with you, teaching in the temple courts, and you did not arrest me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled."*** (NIV)

There's no cause other than, "We hate You, and we want to kill You."

Secondly, Jesus was tried at night without evidence.

John 18, beginning with verse 19 says, "Meanwhile, the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. 20 "I have spoken openly to the world," Jesus replied. "I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret. 21 Why question me? Ask those who heard me. Surely, they know what I said."

22 When Jesus said this, one of the officials nearby slapped him in the face. "Is this the way you answer the high priest?" he demanded.

23 "If I said something wrong," Jesus replied, "testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?" 24 Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest."

Annas is on a fishing expedition. They don't have any evidence because Jesus hasn't committed any crime. So, he's trying to get Jesus to incriminate Himself.

From Annas Jesus goes to Caiaphas. It says in Mark 14:55, "***The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death, but they did not find any.***"

Verse 56 goes on to say, "***Many testified falsely against him, but their statements did not agree.***"

So, finally this is what Caiaphas does in Matthew 26:62 "***Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, "Well, aren't you going to answer these charges? What do you have to say for yourself?" 63 But Jesus remained silent. Then the high priest said to him, "I demand in the name of the living God—tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God." 64 Jesus replied, "You have said it. And in the future you will see the Son of Man seated in the place of power at God's right hand[i] and coming on the clouds of heaven." (NIV)***

65 Then the high priest tore his clothing to show his horror and said, "Blasphemy! Why do we need other witnesses? You have all heard his blasphemy. 66 What is your verdict?" "Guilty!" they shouted. "He deserves to die!"

He was declared to be deserving of death. Now this is in the middle of the night. Just so you know Jewish law said you couldn't try anybody in the middle of the night. Things have to be out in the open where people can see and hear what's going on. They're trying Jesus at night with Annas and with Caiaphas and the Council, the Sanhedrin. So, they must get back together early at daybreak so that they can have a "legal trial" in the light, and they can just say, "He's guilty! Deserving of death, His Jewish trials were rigged to produce a guilty verdict.

2. His Gentile trials were coerced to crucify Him.

So, Pilate is a Roman governor, and he hates those Jews, especially the religious leaders, and they hate him, and there is tremendous tension there.

And they're going to strongarm Pilate into doing their will. Verse 28. ***"They led Jesus, therefore, from Caiaphas into the Praetorium...."*** That is the governor's official residence.

If the Jews would put you to death, as they put Stephen to death in Acts chapter 7, they stoned him. Jesus said, ***"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself."*** Jesus was not going to be stoned; He was going to be crucified, and He told His disciples He was going to be crucified. The Jews couldn't crucify. They could stone, but they couldn't crucify. And so, the Jews told Pilate, *'You're going to have to do this. We are not allowed to do this.'*

Why did the Jews not just kill Jesus themselves? They hated Him. They wanted Him dead. They feared the people, and they knew that Jesus was incredibly popular. You got to remember, Palm Sunday had just happened a few days before this, and people were saying, "Hosanna to the King."

One of the reasons they hated Jesus is because Jesus was so popular. He had way more Facebook likes than they had and knew that if they did something to Jesus directly, it would come back on them. They feared the people.

The Scriptures says that it was for envy that they had delivered Him up to Pilate. And Luke 23:4 says, ***"...I find no guilt in this man."***

Interestingly, that statement, "*I find no guilt in this Him,*" is recorded coming out of Pilate's mouth six times in the gospel accounts: three times in Luke, three times in John.

Like Pilate, that unexpected intrusion of Jesus into your life is your molten moment. As Matthew relates this story in verses 11–26, the striking thing about Pilate is that everything he says, until he renders his verdict, is a question. I counted seven questions.

Here is a man trying to figure out the truth, and then trying to figure out a solution to his terrible dilemma. His encounter with Christ is an encounter with truth and truth always demands a response.

To know what is true and not to stand for it is a cowardly act. Pilate believes that Jesus is not guilty. So, what does he do:

FIRST: PILATE DECLARES THE TRIAL IRREVELENT.

Luke and John tell us that Jesus admits to Pilate that he is the King of the Jews, but that His Kingdom is a spiritual kingdom and not a physical kingdom. Therefore, He is not a danger to Rome as the Jews charge. This did not satisfy the crowd as they claimed He was leading a rebellion against Rome.

SECOND: PILATE TRIES TO CHANGE THE VENUE.

First Gentile trial before Pilate. When the Jews mentioned Galilee, he saw an opportunity to rid himself of the trial by declaring it was Herod responsibility. LUKE 23:7 says, "*When he learned that Jesus was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at the time.*"

He goes to Herod. Herod is excited to see Him because Herod heard about all His miracles. Herod thought that Jesus was John the Baptist raised from the dead. Herod is the one who put John the Baptist to death. And the Bible says he questions Jesus at length, and Jesus does not speak to him.

HEROD mocks Jesus to look good in the eyes of the Jewish religious leaders, and then passes the responsibility back to Pilate.

THIRD: PILATE TRIES A PRISONER EXCHANGE.

So, He has His first Gentile trial with Pilate. Pilate sends Him to Herod. Now he's back on Pilate's doorstep. The Jewish religious leaders and chief priests are pressuring him. "What do we want to do here?" "Crucify Him, crucify Him." "Why? What evil has He done?"

And so, Pilate thinks, "Okay, I have some other cards to play here." So, in verse 33, he says, "Pilate, therefore, entered again into the Praetorium and summoned Jesus, and said to Him, 'Are You the King of the Jews?' Jesus answered, 'Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about Me?' Pilate answered, 'I am not a Jew, am I? your own nation and the chief priests delivered You up to me. What have You done?'

Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting that I might not be delivered up to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not of this realm.' Pilate, therefore, said to Him, 'So You are a king?' Jesus answered, 'You say correctly that I am a king.

For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.' Pilate said to Him, 'What is truth?'"

"And when he had said this, he went out against to the Jews and said to them, 'I find no guilt in Him.' But you have a custom that I should release someone for you at the Passover. Do you wish then that I release for you the King of the Jews?' Therefore, they cried out again, saying, 'Not this Man, but Barabbas.'

Now Barabbas was a robber and a murderer. Pilate thinks if you put the worst guy up against Jesus, it's a no-brainer. They will choose Jesus.

The interesting thing is the name Barabbas, Bar-abba, Bar means "son;" Abba means "daddy." His name was the son of the father, the son of daddy.

And here you have two men. "Who do you want me to release to you? Jesus, who is the Son of the Father, or Barabbas, whose name means son of the father." And they say, "Not this man, but Barabbas." And Barabbas goes free, and Jesus dies in his place.

It's a picture to you and to me, that if we receive Christ, He died in our place, and if we'll receive Him, then we can become a son, a daughter of the Father.

WE ARE ALL GUILTY OF SIN, JUST AS BARABAAS WAS, AND JESUS WAS SACRIFICED IN OUR PLACE.

ISAIAH 53:4-6: *"Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. 5But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. 6We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

FOURTH: PILATE TRIES NON-CAPTIAL PUNISHMENT.

And so, then he says, "Okay, I have to do something else. It didn't work sending Him to Herod because He came back to me. It didn't work giving them a choice. So, plan number four: Let's have Jesus scourged. And if I have Jesus scourged, and if He is beaten, then I can satisfy the blood lust, and then I can let Jesus go."

Pilate is going to beat Jesus within an inch of His life, knowing that He's innocent, knowing that this man is not guilty, knowing that it was for envy they had delivered Him up. You know, it says in John 19:1, ***"Therefore, they took Jesus and scourged Him."***

The person to be scourged is stripped of all clothing and tied to a post. Roman soldiers repeatedly strike the victim over his entire body from neck to ankles with their full force causing deep bruises and cuts. Lacerations from repeated blows cut into the underlying muscles and rip the overlying skin of the back to a point where it hangs in ribbons of bleeding flesh. The capillaries and veins were often torn causing intense bleeding and at times leaving the intestines exposed.

According to Jewish law the prisoner was to receive no more than forty lashes. The Pharisees, always making sure that the law was strictly kept, insisted that only thirty-nine lashes be given in case they mis-counted.

The purpose of the scourging was to weaken the victim to a state of collapse and bring them as near to death as possible without killing them. Many did not survive this punishment. In His own body Jesus bore the beating that we deserved; He felt the pain and agony of all our sickness and weakness.

And Pilate brings Him before the crowd, and he says, "Behold, the Man! Look at Him. He is totally beaten. This is the King of the Jews. I mean, surely your lust for blood is satisfied. Because if you have any degree of compassion, you will feel horrible for how badly this one has been beaten and scourged."

"Well, Pilate seems like a good guy. He's trying to get Jesus off." What kind of a judge takes a guy whom he says is innocent and whips Him to where he's almost dead? Pilate is not a good guy. He is trying to save his own skin. And so, "If Herod didn't do it, and if the choice between Jesus and Barabbas didn't do it, maybe I'll just scourge Him to the point where the people feel sorry for Him." But that didn't work, either. They cried out, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!"

LASTLY: PILATE TRIED TO REASON WITH THE CROWD.

John 19:5-16 says, ***"Then Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. And Pilate said to them, "Behold the Man!"***

6Therefore, when the chief priests and officers saw Him, they cried out, saying, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!"

Pilate said to them, "You take Him and crucify Him, for I find no fault in Him."

7The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and according to our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God."

8Therefore, when Pilate heard that saying, he was the more afraid, 9and went again into the Praetorium, and said to Jesus, "Where are You from?" But Jesus gave him no answer.

10Then Pilate said to Him, "Are You not speaking to me? Do You not know that I have power to crucify You, and power to release You?"

11Jesus answered, "You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin."

12From then on Pilate sought to release Him, but the Jews cried out, saying, "If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar's friend. Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar."

13When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus out and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called The Pavement, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha. 14Now it was the Preparation Day of the Passover, and about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, "Behold your King!"

15But they cried out, "Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him!"

Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?"

The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar!"

16Then he delivered Him to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus and led Him away."

He brings Jesus battered and bleeding before them and asks, "Isn't this enough. He is your king."

Pilate made efforts to release Him, but the Jews cried out, saying, 'If you release this Man, you are no friend of Caesar. "If you release Him, we're going straight to Caesar, and we're going to cause trouble for you."

Pilate in an act of ultimate cowardice, since he cannot hide the truth, gave into the pressure by denying the truth and his responsibility for the death of Jesus.

It is surprising, and sad, that the only testimony (in effect) on Jesus' behalf during the trial was made, not by any of Jesus' disciples, nor apostles, nor followers, but by Pilate's wife.

There is not much known about the wife of Pilate. From most accounts that I have studied, her name was Claudia Procula. She was the last advocate for Jesus before His crucifixion.

We often hear messages preached concerning the trial and condemnation of Jesus Christ to die upon the cross. But one small, seemingly insignificant part of this story is often overlooked. You will rarely hear anyone mention the fact that Pilate's wife tried to stop him from condemning Jesus to death.

Matt 27:19 "While Pilate was sitting on the judge's seat, his wife sent him this message: "Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him."

There is Pilate struggling with his own conscience. Everything within him is saying that Jesus is innocent. There is obviously something unusual about Jesus that may very well be supernatural. Then comes this message from his wife, "Don't have anything to do with that innocent man..."

All the logic in the world could not make this murder of an innocent man right. Like Pilate's wife, there are a lot of women who carry their faith alone even in their own home. Sometimes their husband ridicules them, laughs at them, rejects their faith, and does not care to understand.

CONCLUSION:

Pilate did one other thing to appease his conscience. He had a sign fastened to Jesus' cross, which said, "**Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.**" John 19:21-22 tells us that when the chief priests complained about the sign and wanted it changed to simply say that Jesus claimed to be King of the Jews, Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written."

Ultimately, Jesus' crime was being the Messiah. John MacArthur says, concerning the trials of Jesus, "There are seven separate indictments in the gospel accounts that they tried to pin on Jesus.

1. He threatened to destroy the temple.
2. He's an evildoer.
3. He's perverting the nation.
4. They said, 'He's forbidding us to pay taxes to Caesar.' No, He didn't. He said, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesars and render to Gods, God the things that are Gods."
5. They said, He's stirring up the people.' No, He's not.
6. And then they said, 'Well, He's presenting Himself as a King, a rival to Caesar.'

Six lies, none of them stuck. But then, the reason that Jesus was delivered up to be crucified, was the truth.

Verse 7, "We have a law, and by that law He ought to die because He made Himself out to be the Son of God."

What was the real reason Jesus was crucified? Because He was the Son of God. He was ultimately crucified for the truth of who He was.

In closing, one of the things that we see that's recorded in Matthew's gospel is that when Pilate saw that a riot was about to start, he took a basin of water - and he poured it over his hands, and he said, "***I am innocent of the blood of this just man.***"

Let me say that Pilate's gesture of washing his hands was supposed to show the world that it was not his choice to have Jesus executed, but just washing the hands, or claiming that it wasn't his fault didn't make it true. You can't wash your hands from your responsibility.

What mistakes did Pilate make?

1. He valued the wrong things.

2. He feared the wrong things. "*The fear of man brings a snare.*" In Matt 10:28 Jesus said, "***Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.***"

3. He failed to heed God's warning. God mercifully sent a dream to Pilate's wife. Guys, if God speaks to your wife listen to her. Pilate was not turned by a supernatural warning even though it had come from someone he could trust.

4. He failed to take a firm stand for what he knew was right. On the one hand, he wanted to do the right thing. But more than that he was unwilling to risk his personal desires to do it.

Pilate chose to save his position rather than stand up for the Prince of Peace, and he tried to pass it off as, "I am innocent of the blood of this just man." Adrian Rogers used to say, "Oceans of water could not wash the guilt from Pilate's hands."

Like Pilate, people are entitled to ask the tough questions about Jesus. Before someone can make a wise decision about Jesus, they must find out if He is the King, if He is faultless, if He is someone who must be reckoned with.

When someone is forced to make a decision about Jesus, there are always powerful pressures in play. It *isn't* easy to decide for Jesus. Satan is whispering lies in your ear. The things and people of this world pull hard. Yet the one thing you cannot do when faced with Jesus is cop out. That is failure.

No one who is confronted with a decision about Jesus Christ can wash their responsibilities away. No one can get away with saying what Pilate said, "***I am innocent of this man's blood. It is your responsibility, not mine.***" To wash one's hands of Jesus is a failure of eternal consequence.

STORY: I heard about a pastor who was telling about a prayer walk his church put together last year using a kind of evangelical variations on the Stations of the Cross. At one station, people read Pilate's story and then were to wash their hands in a basin of water and dry them with a towel. What they didn't know was that the water was treated with a chemical that would turn their hands—and the towel—red. Again, and again startled participants broke into tears to realize that we cannot wash our hands of Jesus without being guilty of his death.

We know more about Pilate than we do about anyone else involved in the crucifixion. Why? Because each time we look in the mirror it might be Pilate looking back at us. The questions he was forced to answer, we are forced to deal with? Is Jesus YOUR King?

1. IF WE MAKE JESUS OUR KING, THEN WE MUST ALSO SACRIFICE SELF. WE MUST CHOOSE BETWEEN COMPROMISE WITH THE WORLD AS PILATE DID AND SACRIFICE OUR STANDING IN THE WORLD AND CHOOSE CHRIST.

2. IF WE MAKE JESUS OUR KING, THEN WE MUST GIVE TOTAL ALLEGIANCE TO HIM. PILATE COULDN'T PLEASE BOTH THE CROWD AND JESUS, AND NEITHER CAN WE. WE CANNOT SERVE TWO MASTERS WHEN IT COMES TO WHAT IS RIGHT. EITHER THE BIBLE IS RIGHT OR THE WORLD IS, YOU CANNOT PICK AND CHOOSE.

3. IF WE MAKE JESUS OUR KING, OUR DECISION WILL BECOME A REWARD. A DECISION FOR CHRIST MEANS A FRESH START AND ETERNAL SATISFACTION.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:17: THEREFORE, IF ANYONE IS IN CHRIST, THE NEW CREATION HAS COME: THE OLD HAS GONE, THE NEW IS HERE!

PILATES FINAL VERDICT REGARDING JESUS CAME AT THE TIME OF THE CRUCIFIXION. HE FOLLOWED A COMMON TRADITION AND POSTED THE CRIME THE CONDEMNED MAN WAS FOUND GUILTY OF.

The truth is that JESUS is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. But you must decide for yourself if He is YOUR King.