

Theme: “The People of the Passion” – Pilate

John 19:10-16 (NKJV)

¹⁰ Then 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?" ¹¹ Jesus 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." ¹² From 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." ¹³ When 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. ¹⁴ Now it was the Preparation Day of the Passover, and about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, "Behold your King!" ¹⁵ But 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!" ¹⁶ Then he delivered Him to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus and led Him away.

Pilate may be one of the more confusing “*People of the Passion*” we will come across during this Lenten season. Why does he do what he does in regards to Jesus? It seems at times that he wants to do the right thing and release Jesus, like it says in v. 12 of our text, **“From then on Pilate sought to release Him” (John 19:12).**

But we also see him doing terrible things to this Man who stands before him—a Man that he himself declared innocent. Listen to these words that come just before our sermon text:

Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged him. ² And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head and arrayed him in a purple robe. ³ They came up to him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” and struck him with their hands. ⁴ Pilate went out again and said to them, “See, I am bringing him out to you that you may know that I find no guilt in him.” ⁵ So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, “Behold the man!” ⁶ When the chief priests and the officers saw him, they cried out, “Crucify him, crucify him!” Pilate said to them, “Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no guilt in him.” (John 19:1-6 ESV)

So this travesty of “justice” that Jesus has been experiencing at the hands of Caiaphas and the religious leaders is now being furthered along—and even taken to the next level—by the Roman governor, Pilate. The flogging that Pilate ordered for Jesus (again, a man that he himself has declared innocent) was a brutal whipping with tips of lead or bone that tore into the prisoner’s skin. These floggings that the Romans inflicted on their prisoners were so brutal, in fact, that some of them didn’t even survive it! Pilate did not let the travesty of justice end there, however, as we read in the last verse of our sermon text, **“Then he [Pilate] delivered Him [Jesus] to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus and led Him away.” (John 19:16)**

Who is this man, Pilate? Why did he do what he did with the Savior of the world, Jesus Christ?

When we look at what the Bible and even other historical accounts from this time say about Pontius Pilate the picture that is painted is not a pretty one, but it is insightful. Pilate ruled as governor of this region for approximately 10 years (26-36 A.D.), which means he would have been the governor during the entire ministries of both John the Baptist and Jesus. Pilate is described by historians as “pleasure-loving, imperious, and corrupt. He hated the Jews whom he ruled, and in times of irritation freely shed their blood...[the Jewish people he ruled] accused him of every crime, maladministration, cruelty, and robbery. He visited Jerusalem as seldom as possible; for, indeed, to one accustomed to

the pleasures of Rome...Jerusalem, with its religiousness and ever-smouldering revolt, was a dreary residence" (Easton' Bible Dictionary, *Bible Works 4.0*)

We can see some of these things play out in the Gospel accounts as well. **Luke 13** refers to an incident where Pilate had some Galileans killed while they were offering their sacrifices during worship (**see Luke 13:1-2**). You get a sense of his animosity and disdain for the Jewish people and their religious leaders even in our text. Pilate presents to them the beaten and bloodied Jesus still wearing the crown of thorns and purple robe the soldiers had mockingly put on him and **"said to the Jews, 'Behold your King!'** ¹⁵ **But they cried out, "Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" (John 19:14-15).** You can hear his words drip with disdain and mocking sarcasm.

In the end Pilate hands Jesus over to be crucified—not because it was the right thing to do, or out of any sense of "justice"—clearly that is not the case at all. Instead, he hands Jesus over because in Pilate's eyes it was the "right thing" and "best thing" for Pilate. He was not thinking of Jesus, or of the Jewish people he was in charge of governing. He was thinking only of himself. He did what made the most sense for him and his interests. He did not want to put Jesus to death, but He also wanted to please the crowds and avoid a riot. He wanted to keep his position of power as governor so if he doesn't make the Jewish people and their leaders happy they could stir up trouble for him and cause his political future to be at risk. He feared people, not God. The choice for Pilate regarding Jesus became very clear in the end and **"he delivered Him [Jesus] to them to be crucified" (John 19:16).**

Pilate thought he was the one in control of this situation; he was the one "calling the shots." Jesus knew otherwise. Listen again to their conversation from the first verses of our text: **Then 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?"** ¹¹ **Jesus answered, "You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above."**

Ultimately, the reason things played out the way they did was not because of Pilate or any of the other *"People of the Passion,"* but because God the Father had ordained it this way from before time began. He had determined and decreed that His Son would die on a cross to pay the punishment for the world's sins—not by stoning (which was the Jewish method of execution), or any other form of death—but by the cross! That is why Jesus stayed silent when His enemies accused Him. That is why Jesus responded the way He did when Pilate questioned Him. He didn't beg for His release or plead His innocence. He knew that although this way led to the unimaginable pain of the suffering of death and hell He would endure there on that cross, His death would be the satisfactory payment for the sins **"of the whole world" (1 John 2:2).**

It's sad to think that Pilate was so close to Jesus—and yet so far away from Him. He was even able to have a lengthy conversation with Him about who He was and what kind of Kingdom Jesus ruled. Yet Pilate was too interested in what he felt was best for him and his own interests to *really* listen to the Savior who was standing right in front of him, talking to Him.

Sadly, history tells us that just a few years later Pilate would meet a tragic end: "In A.D. 36 the governor of Syria brought serious accusations against Pilate, and he was banished to Vienne in Gaul, where, according to tradition, he committed suicide" (Easton's Bible Dictionary, *Bible Works 4.0*).

There are some obvious applications for us when we consider Pilate's attitudes and actions. Jesus is very close to each one of us. His Word is in our homes. It is readily available in more types of media

today than at any point in history. Do we listen to Him and let His Words sink in when He speaks to us—whenever and wherever that is (in church, at home, in the car, online, etc.)? Or are we too wrapped up in our own self-interests, like Pilate to take the time to listen and really hear what Jesus has to say to us and what He has to say about our lives, both in this world and the next? “I don’t have time for that, Jesus.” “I have too much work to do.” “I’m too busy.” “I have family issues to take care of.” “When life slows down, I will.” “When I’m older, I will.” “When I’m healthier, I will.” etc., etc. There is a reason He says to us in His Word, **“If anyone wants to follow me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. In fact whoever wants to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. After all, what will it benefit a person if he gains the whole world, but forfeits his soul? Or what can a person give in exchange for his soul?” (Matthew 16:24-26 EHV)**. There is a reason Jesus told His hearers repeatedly during His ministry, **“He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” (Matthew 11:15 - and seven other references in the Gospels)**. Let’s listen to Jesus, not to “self!” With the Spirit’s help let’s live for Jesus and not for “self!”

Thank God that Jesus didn’t only think of what was best for Himself at the moment, but instead thought of what was best for others—what was best for the entire human race forever! Yes, let’s thank Jesus, and as the writer of Hebrews encourages us, **“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Hebrews 12:2 NIV)**. Amen.