
Picking up where we left off last week we found that the Religious Leaders had successfully manipulated the crowd and just when it was needed the most, the voices of the masses were joined with the priests and leaders in their cry, “not this man, but Barabbas.” This takes us to John 19.

John 19:1

Pilate then took Jesus and scourged Him.

We know that Pilate wanted Jesus released but the harder he tried the louder the objections. So he thought, if I scourge this man and spill his blood just maybe it will pacify the Religious Leaders and this unruly crowd. We know this because ***Luke 23:16*** tells us that Pilate had every intention of releasing Jesus after the scourging.

Now you have to understand this was no insignificant punishment. Roman scourging was terribly brutal and the bloodletting effusive. In fact, many victims did not survive the scourging even to make the journey to the cross. So you have to understand some serious blood was about to be spilled and Pilate hoped that it would be enough.

Before we talk about the brutality of scourging itself, I want you to also beware of the fact that on this particular day Jesus’ skin would have been extremely sensitive which would have increased the intensity of the Roman whip. We are told in ***Luke 22:44*** that as Jesus was praying in the Garden His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground. This is actually a rare but known

medical condition called hematidrosis. This condition becomes hyper during times of immense psychological stress. Situations which provoke severe anxiety cause the release of chemicals which break down the capillaries in the sweat glands. As a result there's a small amount of bleeding into these glands which comes out along with the sweat. The effect on the body is that of weakness and mild to moderate dehydration from the severe anxiety and both the blood and sweat loss. So Jesus would have already been in a state of physical weakness even before the scourging began; especially when you consider that He was up all night and has probably had no food or water.

Now, the purpose of Roman scourging was to bring a person as close to death as possible without actually killing them (in that was the art of the Roman whip). As such this punishment was often referred to as the "half death." A team of between 1 and 6 specially trained officers, called lictors, were responsible for dispensing the blows. These lictors had received specific training to know how to wield the whip to both bruise and then to rupture the bruises already created.

The lictors would strip their victim of their clothing, and then stretch their arms around a post, with hands tied above the head, so that the victims back was fully exposed. The whip used by the lictors would have been a short whip made of braided leather thongs of variable lengths. These thongs would have metal balls and pieces of sharp sheep bone woven into them. The metal balls were for bruising and the sharp pieces of bone were for cutting and tearing. Sometimes the whip even had a hook attached at the end of one thong and it was maliciously nicknamed the "Scorpion."

The lictors, with full force, would repeatedly strike the victims back, buttocks and legs causing deep contusions. Lacerations from repeated blows cut into the underlying muscles and rip the overlaying 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 entrails exposed. Even once the victim fainted, if the lictors could feel a pulse and detect sufficient respiration, the beating would continue. Once the centurion in charge determined that the prisoner is near death, the beating would be halted.

Listen closely to the following account I found of Jesus' scourging: Jesus, stripped of his clothing, his back, buttocks and legs exposed, his face against the upright post, hands tied above his head is now considered primed and the flogging can begin. The soldier comes forward, his gaze fixed upon Jesus, who is silent and appears to be in deep contemplation as he awaits the punishment. The soldier takes a step back and raises the whip over his head in preparation for the first blow. A whistling and cracking sound can be heard as the whip with its' metal and bone tips is released with all the force the soldier has. The whip lands upon the naked back, sending waves of pain coursing through the body.

The legionaries having no restraint appear to be in a satanic frenzy, they lash out with the whip full force, again and again across Jesus' shoulders, back, buttocks, and legs. At each stroke of the whip, a painful shudder can be seen as waves of never ending pain shoot through his body. His back is now a mass of livid marks and blue, purple bruises show beneath the skin.

The mass of observers attending the flogging who had condemned Jesus to death stood by cheering, shouting encouragement to the legionaries, taking

pleasure in the spectacle before them. Their delight obvious as the flesh is stripped from the body.

Encouraged by the crowds, the blows continue, cutting deeper and deeper into the tissues, blood begins to ooze from capillaries and veins of the skin until finally arterial bleeding from vessels in the underlying muscles occurs. The blood pours out; shreds of skin become detached, hanging in ribbons. The entire area of Jesus back has become an unrecognizable mass of torn flesh, deep groves caused by the iron balls, exposing a bloody mass of muscle, bone and tissue. Blood flows freely down his body forming a deep red pool at his feet and surrounding area. His whole body trembles with shivers running down his spine as his strength begins to fail. His wrists being tied is the only reason he is still upright because his legs have now lost the strength to hold him. Finally, it is over, Jesus is untied and collapses to ground. Too weak to move he stays there on the pavement which is wet with his own blood.

Imagine, this whole ordeal was prophesied some 700-800 years in advance.

Isaiah 50:6

I gave My back to those who strike Me, and My cheeks to those who pluck out the beard; I did not cover My face from humiliation and spitting.

Isaiah 52:13-14

Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted. As many were astonished at you—his appearance was so marred,

beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind (ESV)

Honestly, I get so annoyed whenever I see depictions of Christ on the cross and He is shown with basically these little cuts and scratches on His back and sides and maybe some ribbons of blood flowing from these wounds. Give me a break; these images may protect our sensibilities but they do nothing to portray for us what really happened and the damage that was done to our Lord. Look what it says: His appearance was so marred that He did not even look human; He must have literally looked like a mass of bloody shredded meat.

John 19:2-3

And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head and arrayed him in a purple robe. They came up to him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and struck him with their hands. (ESV)

This scripture to me is so scary. It reveals the dark, evil depravity of mankind. I cannot even imagine that men could be so dead within their souls. These legionnaires had just beat Jesus within a breath of His life and yet they take the time to mock and ridicule Him. It's entirely unbelievable.

A crown of thorns, a purple robe, strikes to the face, and homage are all symbols of Jesus' humiliating demise. To hit a man who is this broken and disfigured is not just cruel, it is sick and depraved. What joy could be found in

such an atrocity? Can you believe the scorn that can pour forth from the dark heart of humanity?

John makes a point of telling us that they gave Jesus a purple robe—again a detail not to be ignored. Purple was the color of the imperial elite as it was the most expensive of dyes. Princes and regional rulers donned themselves in this color and yet it was given to the one they hailed as the King of the Jews—homage typically reserved for their imperial leader—hail Caesar. It was a way of saying to the crowd and all those who were watching that their so called king (which is a cut down against them as a people group) is nothing compared to the true king of Rome.

The crown of thorns might just ironically represent the curse of sin—the curse that would soon be placed on Jesus as He would soon become sin itself. The king of kings who has faced unbelievable mocking, humiliation, and degradation was crowned with thorns—the symbol of sin which the Lord chose to be a persistent reminder of man’s fall and exile from the presence of God in the Garden of Eden (**Genesis 3:18**). There is also a twisted irony in the fact that they made for Him a crown. During this time only the highest ruler would wear a crown, all others wore a wreath. Little did they know that this man was the true king of kings and Lord of Lords; the only one worthy of wearing any crown whatsoever.

John 19:4-5

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." So Jesus came out, wearing the

crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Behold the man!" (ESV)

Remember that the Jews refused to enter the judgment hall where all this took place so Pilate once again comes out to address them and brings with him this disfigured man adorned in draping of ridicule. Pilate now for the second time proclaimed Jesus' innocence and in his statement, "behold the man," it's as if he is saying that this misguided martyr has suffered enough and now even mighty Rome must have pity on one who simply does not deserve such treatment. He wanted the Jews to recognize the injustice that, for their sake, he has allowed and agree with him that what Jesus has suffered was enough! Pilate, however, was not ready for what happened next.

John 19:6-9

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." The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has made himself the Son of God." When Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid. (ESV)

Talk about a satanic frenzy. The chief priests and the temple officers cry out "crucify Him." If anyone should have pity it should have been these leaders of one of the most oppressed nations of all time. But their hearts have no room for pity,

they have no room for mercy, they have no room for compassion, and they have no room for the God who has been nothing short of gracious and loving to the Jews who had always turned their hearts from Him. Rather, their hearts are filled with raw evil. Even Pilate, this Gentile who has no history with a God of love, is willing to release Jesus as he is finished with this mess and wants nothing more to do with their wickedness.

Then for the third time, Pilate declares Jesus innocence—"I find no guilt in him." Don't miss the implication of this number. In Biblical numerology the number 3 represents divine completeness and perfection. From the standard of divine perfection, Jesus is perfectly innocent. But when men are determined to do evil they cannot be reasoned with; they shout "crucify Him."

Notice that when he said, "Behold the man" they clearly understood that Pilate was calling them out for their lack of compassion. Thus, they try and convince Pilate that they are there for legitimate legal reasons and not because of hatred or jealousy. "We have a law." Now clearly this was not Roman law but Jewish law. They had come to Pilate accusing Jesus of sedition against Rome but now they are coming clean with their real accusation and the basis for which they condemned Jesus to die—He was a blasphemer. Obviously, this was of absolutely no concern to Rome; so you have to ask yourself, why Pilate would not choose to release Jesus and perhaps provide him protection from the Jews. Clearly he became alarmed and deeply afraid when he heard that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God. So what kept him from letting Jesus go?

I am so intrigued by Pilate. His soul must have been absolutely tortured with this whole affair. As a Roman, Pilate would have worshiped many deities but

there was something about his discussion with Jesus that absolutely unnerved him; he could not shake the uneasy feeling. He remembers that Jesus said that He was a King of an unseen realm and now this claim to be the "Son of God." He knows Jesus is not crazy; but still this is not normal. This is totally messed up and way out of control. Moreover, **Matthew 27:19** tells us that Pilate's wife had previously sent him a message telling him to have nothing to do that "righteous" man for the prior night she had suffered greatly in a dream because of Him. This guy was understandably terrified.

As a side note, I think it is amazing the way God had mercy on Pilate and warned him through a dream about participating in this unholy travesty. This just highlights the justice of God and the reality that no one, no one, will be able to claim innocence in their rejection of the Son of God. Everyone will have had a chance; everyone!

John 19:9-11

He entered his headquarters again and said to Jesus, "Where are you from?" But Jesus gave him no answer. So Pilate said to him, "You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?" Jesus answered him, "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin." (ESV)

Pilate once again retreats into the privacy of his chamber and takes Jesus with him. "Where are you from?" What an intriguing question. Pilate knows that Jesus

was from Galilee (**Luke 23:6**), so he was not asking a practical question but a rhetorical question. Pilate was still musing about Jesus' claim to be both a King and the Son of God and he was absolutely bewildered. Like many Romans, I am sure that Pilate was cynical about the Gods they worshiped, the statues to which they bowed, but in front of him was a man who claimed to rule a kingdom not made of flesh and blood.

And then Jesus did not say a thing, but stood there silent. That must have been so creepy. But as the true King He did not need to defend His position or even repeat what He had said for His words stood, along side of His silence, as a testament to the truth that deep down Pilate suspected might be true.

Notice that Pilate automatically falls back on the pride of his office and position. The "me" is emphatic..."you will not speak to **me!**" Then the next line is quite ironic. Pilate may have the legal authority to release or crucify Jesus, but the power to levy even his own judgment was not really in his hands. If he really had the power he would have never flogged Jesus and would have let Him go when he first declared Him to be innocent. Surely he would have not continued with this debacle and once again be in another intense 1x1 with Jesus. Think about the paradox. This man is a governor of the entire region, a representative of almighty Rome, backed by 4,000 or more soldiers who will follow his orders, and yet 3 times He has declared Jesus innocent and still Jesus remained bound in custody.

You see, Pilate is a man with all the formal authority but little to no power. As Jesus said, Pilate's authority is ultimately being controlled from above and the Father's will in these matters always prevails, for no one can move His hand when He decides to act. And the Father is using these wicked men to effect his will and

right now they have their hands around Pilate's throat and he knows it; he just does not know what to do about it. In fact, they are about to squeeze a bit tighter and pull out their final card in this treacherous game. Pilate is about to understand the full extent to which he had been played.

But before we move, let's stop and consider how in the midst of this horrific process Jesus never wavered. Once He made up His mind in the Garden He was resolute and He did not for a moment trip over the "what" as He fully understood the "why." They tore his body apart, they mocked Him, they ridiculed Him, they spat on Him, hit Him, marched Him around in kingly attire. You would think the scourging would have been enough, but then add to it all the abject humiliation; it was overkill. The "what" was beyond imagination; yet Jesus kept His eyes on the "why" and was not moved by the gravity and ridiculousness of His circumstances. He knew His Father was in control of everything and never for one moment internalized it as if the Father was being mean to Him, or did not love Him. He knew the truth and He fixated on the truth.

This is a powerful lesson for us. God has told us that He is our Gatekeeper and our Good Shepherd; thus, He manages every aspect and detail of our lives and it is all for the good. But as we try and navigate the difficulties of life we tend to take our eyes off Jesus and off the "why" (the "why" being that He loves us and wants us to learn how to trust ourselves to His love) and get so misdirected by the "what."

I am afraid that what happens in our life still has too much power and control over how we live. When our circumstances are ridiculous our emotions get all out of whack, our expectations of God get all distorted, and before we know it we

have lost sight of His love. We believe He is mean, uncaring, and even unloving. This wrong belief leads to times of dark confusion, sadness, depression, and spiritual death. We need to follow Jesus' example and remember that if anything comes against us (whether circumstances or people) it is because the authority has been granted from above; and, if our Father allowed it we can rest in His love.

Besides, He will also hold all those who are involved in hurting us responsible for their choices. Jesus told Pilate that although he is guilty of punishing an innocent man, and will be held to account, the Religious Leaders who saw the miracles, heard the teachings, and personally encountered Him will be accountable for a far greater sin—with greater knowledge comes greater accountability. And believe me; they will get their comeuppance. This gives us another glimpse into the perfect justice of God.

Besides, whenever I think I have it bad, I try to remember the words of the writer of Hebrews.

Hebrews 12:4-6

You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, "MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM; FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES."

We have to try and encourage each other to remember that, like Jesus, we are Sons of God. We belong to the ultimate authority; the One to whom all creation bows. He does not forget us, He never takes His eyes off of us, and His love for us is perfect. Thus, He allows circumstances in our life to help train us how to believe Him and how to trust His love. Again, we need to encourage each other to be resolute in this beautiful and comforting truth.

John 19:12

From then on Pilate sought to release him, but the Jews cried out, "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar." (ESV)

Pilate is desperately trying to find a way out but the Religious Leaders lay down their final card. Their cunning is fully exposed and Pilate knows that he must yield to their wicked game. For all Pilate's power and might he is just a conquered foe. What is fascinating, however, is that the weapon used to conquer this lifelong politician and political strategist was of all things Roman politics.

To understand this we have to understand a little bit of the political history. Even though Pilate was perhaps moved by Jesus and this notion of an unseen kingdom was fascinating, the reality of his life, his obligations, and the threat of political demise ultimately outweighed any thoughts of eternity.

And, now, here is the rest of the story. Next to collecting taxes, perhaps the most critical job of the Roman governor was to establish and maintain Roman

peace. This was paramount for successful occupation of foreign lands. By this time, however, Pilate already had a few strikes against him in the eyes of Rome and he knew that all it would take is one more crisis, one more outburst, one more riot, and he would likely be called to account by Caesar and could lose both his power and position.

Pilate reigned in Judea for 10 years from 26 to 36 B.C. and he was known to be a brutal, cold hearted ruler. A 1st century author, Philo of Alexandria, described him this way: He was "naturally inflexible, a blend of self-will and relentlessness, given to briberies, insults, robberies, outrages and wanton injuries, executions without trial constantly repeated, ceaseless and supremely grievous cruelty." Given this description, it should not surprise you to know that during the first year of his administration Pilate brought Roman images into Jerusalem from his main headquarters in Caesarea. This created total pandemonium amongst the Jews.

His troops marched into Jerusalem, at night, with their regimental standards bearing medallions with the emperor's image. Because the emperor was worshiped as a god, the medallions were seen as graven images, expressly forbidden by Jewish law. Don't think for a minute however that Pilate was being naïve; he knew exactly what he was doing. He wanted to firmly establish his rule and in so doing risked something which none of his predecessors dared risk. They all had given great deference to the religious beliefs of the Jews for they knew how crazy the Jews could become in matters of their religion.

This move by Pilate resulted in a huge uproar and rioting. At one point the Jews laid on the floor with necks exposed claiming that they would rather die than have Jerusalem corrupted with idols. After a lot of turbulence and dirty

diplomacy, Pilate relented and removed the images and returned them back to Caesarea.

Strike two occurred when Pilate built an aqueduct to carry water to Jerusalem. His intent was to improve the city's water supply. But this also led to an uproar for Pilate had raided the sacred coffers to fund this building project. Since the aqueduct he was building fed cisterns below the Temple, and the Temple would benefit from the increased water supply, Pilate felt completely justified in taking money from the Temple treasury to pay for the construction. Jewish law permitted the use of excess revenue for civic projects, so that was not the problem, but it did not permit Gentiles to come in to the inner Temple courts where the treasury was kept and take the sacred money.

Some accounts say that the Religious Leaders secretly gave the money to Pilate but warned him that the people might protest the use of sacred money; and that is exactly what happened. The people freaked. This time, however, Pilate did not relent. Pilate had his soldiers circulate among the riotous crowds disguised in civilian clothes carrying daggers and upon receiving the signal from Pilate they began killing, wounding, and beating the Jews. The soldiers lost control and went way over board and were totally indiscriminate in their actions. They just attacked and attacked until the Jews relented. Once the protest was squelched Pilate went ahead with his construction plans believing he was the victor.

Then in 31 A.D. (a couple of years before Jesus stood before Pilate for judgment) Pilate placed some golden shields on the walls of the Praetorium in Jerusalem. They had no images, only dedicatory inscriptions to the emperor Tiberius and it was done to flatter the emperor and display his loyalty after some

failed coup. Nevertheless, all levels of Jewish society united in protest. Unlike the earlier incident with the standards, Pilate refused to remove them. Although the shields bore no images, they offended the Jews because they mentioned a man who was honored as a god.

The Jews threatened to send a delegation to Caesar and Pilate knew that if an embassy did embark to Rome they would also bring accusation against his abusive, savage, violent and completely anti-Semitic administration. This was something he wanted Caesar to know nothing about. Now the Jews never sent the delegation but they instead wrote a letter appealing their cause to Caesar and it is said that Tiberius freaked out on Pilate when he read the letter. Tiberius was known as a very tempered man not easily moved to anger, but he full-on-reacted to this letter from the Jews. It is said that Tiberius did not even wait until the next day but immediately wrote Pilate a letter rebuking him for his audacity and insolence. He commanded Pilate to remove the images and return them to Caesarea. Pilate did as directed.

With these strikes against him and the Jews success at moving Caesar's hand against him, Pilate knew that if the Jews would once again appeal to Rome saying that someone had claimed to be king and ordered others to not pay taxes and Pilate did nothing about it that it would likely be his head. It does not matter if the charges were true or not, he knew that Tiberius was more than annoyed with his inability to effectively rule the Jews and preserve Roman peace. This is the reason why Pilate succumbed to their political ploy to coerce him to kill Jesus. He was trapped; it was literally Jesus' life or his own. He chose his own.

By the way, Pilate's fears were accurate. 3-years later there was another matter of great turbulence in Samaria regarding some messianic hopeful and after Pilate violently squelched that matter the Samaritans appealed to his boss, the prefect of Syria, and sure enough Pilate was ordered back to Rome. There are many rumors about what actually happened after that. Some stories say that in his disgrace and humiliation he committed suicide. Others say that he became a Christian and was ultimately martyred for his faith. We don't really know what happened but we do know that the power and cunning of the Religious Leaders was more than he had hoped. Oh, and in that same year that he was sent to Rome, the prefect of Syria also deposed Caiaphas and removed him from office.

John 19:13-16

So when Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Stone Pavement, and in Aramaic Gabbatha. Now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover. It was about the sixth hour. He said to the Jews, "Behold your King!" 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." So he delivered him over to them to be crucified. (ESV)

We will pick up with this passage next week.

Let's Pray

Before we leave this passage, let's not miss the detail. Pilate sat down on the judgment seat, Gabbatha. This name is not used anywhere else but it is traditionally believed to refer to a place of elevation. In other words, a symbol of the Roman authority over those it rules. It was the day of preparation of the Passover which is the day that the lambs would be slaughtered to be eaten that evening. It is rumored that the slaughtering of lambs always began at noon—or at the 6th hour and was finished around 3:00 (around the time that Jesus died) in order to be completed prepared to feast when the Sabbath began which w

If Pilate really believed that the Galileans had stormed the Temple and wanted to establish the kingdom of God by violent means, this was almost irresponsible. This fact -Mark, John and Flavius Josephus confirm that Jesus was the only Galilean executed- almost proves that Pilate did not believe that Jesus was a political Messiah. In an age when executions were used as deterrents, his behavior suggests dislike for excessive violence.

The latter story is very remarkable: the emperor Augustus' directive that those who had suffered the death penalty were allowed a decent burial, did not pertain to those executed on a charge of high treason. As a matter of fact, it was almost proverbial that the crucified were the prey of dogs and a feast for birds. Pilate's permission to have Jesus buried and -according to *John* 19.39- regally embalmed, is the act of a governor anxious to respect the religious feelings of the Jews.

Pilate's name provides us with two hints as to his background and ancestry. His family name, Pontius, is derived from the Pontii, a prominent clan among the Samnites, mountain men from Samnium in the Apennine Mountains southeast of Rome. The Samnites fought the Romans for years and almost conquered Rome in several wars, but were defeated in 290 BC. Although the Pontii were of noble birth, they were demoted to the Equestrian order, the Roman middle-class, when Rome finally absorbed the Samnites.

Pilate's personal name, Pilatus, means "skilled with a javelin." The javelin or *pilum* was five feet of wooden handle and two feet of pointed iron shaft. It was hurled by Samnite warriors at their enemies with devastating effect. When the point, which was soft and untempered, stuck in a shield, the shaft would bend and hang down, making it impossible for an enemy to throw back. The Romans copied the weapon, and it was the *pilum* that, in fact, made the Roman Empire possible.

Pilate was born a few years before Jesus. What did he look like? Only two things can be said for certain about his appearance: according to imperial fashion of the day, he was short-haired and clean-shaven. Each morning,, after a cursory breakfast of bread and water, he would submit himself to a barber or tonsor. When Jesus was brought before him in the early morning hours of that April Friday, he was probably still hurting from his morning shave.

Pilate held office from 26 to 36 BC, second in length of tenure only to his predecessor, Valerius Gratus, who served eleven years, contradicting the normal impression that he was incompetent. His administration, however, was described in a character sketch by 1st century AD author Philo of Alexandria: He was "naturally inflexible, a blend of self-will and relentlessness," given to "briberies, insults, robberies, outrages and wanton injuries,,executions without trial constantly repeated, ceaseless and supremely grievous cruelty" (*Embassy* 301-302). Some allowance should be made for Philo's bias, as he was writing for the benefit of the emperor Claudius and was clearly endorsing the later kingship of Herod Agrippa I who he wished to portray in the best possible light against previous Roman prefects. In the PBS documentary, "From Jesus to Christ," Pilate is described as a "thug," and up to 31 AD he was supported by Sejanus, the anti-Semitic commander of the Pretorian Guard in Rome, who wielded great authority after 26 AD, when Tiberius retired from active governing to the island of Capri. In all fairness, Judea proved a difficult province to govern and tensions had been rising among the Jewish people during the rule of Pilate's predecessor, made worse by bad government. Also, the first five years of Pilate's reign, he had no one on hand to advise or restrain him. He had some 4,000 men at his command. Only his senior officers (and perhaps not all) were Romans and they seemed more anti-Jewish than he himself; in Caesarea they sometimes amused themselves by insulting the local Jews and throwing stones at them. The Romans were present in Judea simply to collect taxes and maintain the Pax Romana ("Roman Peace").

Aside from his familiar role on Good Friday, both Josephus and Philo recorded a number of incidents involving Pilate, and they show that he was neither able nor fair-minded, and that he was, in fact, devious, anti-semitic and brutal:

Josephus' description of this incident: "So he introduced Caesar's effigies, which were upon the ensigns, and brought them into the city; whereas our law forbids us the very making of images; on which account the former

procurators were wont to make their entry into the city with such ensigns as had not those ornaments. Pilate was the first who brought those images to Jerusalem, and set them up there; which was done without the knowledge of the people, because it was done in the night time" (*Antiquities of the Jews*, book 18, chapter 3:1).

- Later, Pilate built an aqueduct to carry water to Jerusalem from three large rectangular cisterns—called "Solomon's Pools"—located just south of Bethlehem. His intent was to improve the city's water supply. But even this action led to trouble between the prefect and the Jewish authorities. No Jerusalem institution benefited more from the increased water-supply as the Temple did, and Pilate thought he was fully justified in demanding funds from the Temple treasury. Jewish law permitted the use of surplus funds from the mandatory annual Temple tax for civic projects, but Gentiles were not permitted to enter the inner Temple courts where the treasury was kept. Since the aqueduct fed cisterns below the Temple, construction had to be approved by religious authorities. The leadership probably gave Pilate the funds, while warning him that the people might protest the use of monies they saw as pledged to God, which is exactly what happened. This time, however, Pilate did not relent. He had his soldiers circulate among the people disguised in civilian clothes, killing or wounding many of them. He proceeded with construction leaving himself the cruel victor.

Again, from the writings of Josephus: "But Pilate undertook to bring a current of water to Jerusalem, and did it with the sacred money, and derived the origin of the stream from the distance of two hundred furlongs. However, the Jews were not pleased with what had been done about this water; and many ten thousands of the people got together, and made a clamor against him, and insisted that he should leave off that design. Some of them also used reproaches, and abused the man, as crowds of such people usually do. So he habited a great number of his soldiers in their habit, who carried daggers under their garments, and sent them to a place where they might surround them. So he bid the Jews himself go away; but they boldly casting reproaches upon him, he gave the soldiers that signal which had been beforehand agreed on; who laid upon them much greater blows than Pilate had commanded them, and equally punished those that

were tumultuous, and those that were not; nor did they spare them in the least: and since the people were unarmed, and were caught by men prepared for what they were about, there were a great number of them slain by this means, and others of them ran away wounded. And thus an end was put to this sedition" (*Antiquities of the Jews*, book 18, chapter 3:2).

- Pilate exhibited this same disregard for Jewish sensibilities in his policy of minting coins decorated with symbols connected with pagan worship. This matter is clear testimony to his personality and invalidates any recent attempts to whitewash him.
- Yet another act of violence involving Pontius Pilate is referred to in Luke 13:1, where he was said to have mixed the blood of certain "Galileans with that of their animal sacrifices." This incident is not reference in sources outside the Bible, but we can safely assume it took place during one of the major festivals, such as Tabernacles, Passover or Pentecost, since they provided an opportunity for messianic or social demonstrations. The Galileans probably broke an important Roman regulation, which led to the their bloody punishment.
- In 31 AD, Pilate placed some golden shields on the walls of his praetorium, or headquarters, in Jerusalem. They had no images, only dedicatory inscriptions to the emperor Tiberius and it was done to flatter the emperor and display his loyalty following the overthrow of Sejanus, the prefect of the Praetorian Guard, after an attempted coup. Nevertheless, all levels of Jewish society, including Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee and Perea, united in protest against the act. Unlike the earlier incident with the standards, Pilate refused to remove them. Although the shields bore no images, they offended Jewish feelings because they mentioned a man who was honored as a god. The Jews sent a letter to the aged emperor living on the island of Capri who responded with his own letter in very nasty Latin ordering Pilate to remove the shields to a temple in Caesarea, the official Roman seat of government. Several months later, Pilate was asked to judge Jesus of Nazareth, and his incident is particularly important in understanding Pilate's conduct of the trial, as well as its final outcome.
- **Pilate's final act as prefect**
- Anxious
-

-
- -
 - to avoid disturbances or riots by his subjects, Pilate saw himself bound to suppress all demonstrations. Three years after he condemned Jesus to death, an obscure prophet with Messianic pretensions promised the Samaritans that he would uncover some sacred Temple vessels believed to have been buried on Mount Gerizim (right, with buildings of modern Nablus) since the time of Moses. A host of Samaritans actually gathered to witness the event, but Pilate ordered his troops to block the route to the summit. In a pitched battle with the armed Samaritans, the Roman forces were victorious, and the uprising's leaders were executed. The Samaritans complained to Vitellius, the Roman legate in Syria, and Pilate's superior, who placed an otherwise unknown man named Marcellus in charge as acting prefect and ordered Pilate to Rome for a hearing before the emperor Tiberius. The final outcome of the affair is unknown, because all information about Pilate ceases. The record of Josephus Flavius, our main source, ends with: "but before he could get to Rome Tiberius was dead." His successor, Gaius Calligula, probably quashed the case, as he did with most of those carried over from Tiberius' rule.
 - ---

Josephus' record of this incident: "But the nation of the Samaritans did not escape without tumults. The man who excited them to it was one who thought lying a thing of little consequence, and who contrived every thing so that the multitude might be pleased; so he bid them to get together upon Mount Gerizim, which is by them looked upon as the most holy of all mountains, and assured them, that when they were come thither, he would show them those sacred vessels which were laid under that place, because Moses put them there. So they came thither armed, and thought the discourse of the man probable; and as they abode at a certain village, which was called Tirathaba, they got the rest together to them, and desired to go up the mountain in a great multitude together; but Pilate prevented their going up, by seizing upon file roads with a great band of horsemen and foot-men, who fell upon those that were gotten together in the village; and when it came to an action, some of them they slew, and others of them they put to flight, and took a great many alive, the principal of which, and also the most potent of those that fled away, Pilate ordered to be slain.

-
- "But when this tumult was appeased, the Samaritan senate sent an embassy to Vitellius, a man that had been consul, and who was now president of Syria, and accused Pilate of the murder of those that were killed; for that they did not go to Tirathaba in order to revolt from the Romans, but to escape the violence of Pilate. So Vitellius sent Marcellus, a friend of his, to take care of the affairs of Judea, and ordered Pilate to go to Rome, to answer before the emperor to the accusations of the Jews. So Pilate, when he had tarried ten years in Judea, made haste to Rome, and this in obedience to the orders of Vitellius, which he durst not contradict; but before he could get to Rome Tiberius was dead" (*Antiquities of the Jews*, book 18, chapter 4:1-2).
 - ---

Note: The same year (36 AD) he ordered Pilate to Rome to answer for his actions against the Samaritans, Vitellius remitted Jerusalem's taxes, restored the high priestly vestments to Jewish control and deposed Joseph Caiaphas, who had served as high priest during Pilate's entire tenure in office. One explanation for the long length Caiaphas held office—18 years (18-36 AD)—is that he was a loyal ally to Pilate and knew how to act in complete accord with him. The two stood together but, in the end, they fell together. Vitellius was warmly received by the people when he came to the Passover celebration, so Josephus says, therefore his actions must have met with their approval.

As we continue in this story, I want to quickly reiterate that the methods employed by the religious leaders were in accordance with a well thought out and carefully designed plan to ensure both that Jesus was killed and they retained their *power* over the people, their *politics* in terms of their relationship with Rome, and their *positions* in terms of individual leadership in the community. They wanted no one to threaten what they had worked so hard to secure. All their conspiring was actually fulfillment of ancient prophecy spoken by David almost 2,000 years in advance.

Psalm 59:3-4

For behold, they have set an ambush for my life; fierce men launch an attack against me, not for my transgression nor for my sin, O Lord, for no guilt of mine, they run and set themselves against me.

So far things were going fairly well and according to plan. They had their traitor, they had their victim in hand, and in the trial of Jesus before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin they overcame the issue of no witnesses when Jesus admitted that He is the Son of God (***Luke 22:70***). But the plan was not quite complete. There were two more key players that were critical to their success: the crowd and Pilate. These two were not going to be easy and required a very clever hand to get out of them exactly what they needed. This required cunning and deception.

As we stated last week, this is why the Religious Leaders were so concerned with not being publically “defiled” so they would be able to officiate and participate in the Passover. They needed the semblance of order and control. Remember, they were not all that concerned with personal defilement as they broke practically every rule of law and justice on the books when it came to how they handled Jesus. So personal purity was not even an issue—this was not about religion it was about politics.

Therefore, it was their appearance of purity before the crowds that they wanted to maintain. You see, they knew that they would soon need the total backing of the crowd as they made their case before Pilate. Their plan depended upon a credible threat of a riot to effectively coerce Pilate to take action on their behalf. Again, this is why they refused to enter the Praetorium. Let’s pick up the story there.

John 18:29-32

Therefore Pilate went out to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this Man?" They answered and said to him, "If this Man were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him to you." So Pilate said to them, "Take Him yourselves, and judge Him according to your law." The Jews said to him, "We are not permitted to put anyone to death," to fulfill the word of Jesus which He spoke, signifying by what kind of death He was about to die.

What John communicates to us in this passage is more than remarkable. Look at their bravado. They have not come to their governor asking for a favor, they do

not suck up to his position, and they do not in any way ingratiate themselves to Pilate as would be appropriate for a man of such authority; rather, they make demands—this man must die and we have brought Him to you to merely to do the dirty deed. They had already tried, convicted and condemned Jesus and they came to Pilate merely for the execution orders. Pilate asks what Jesus has been accused of and they antagonize him by their answer saying only that He was an evildoer; they exhibit no respect for this man. But understand this is all part parcel of their strategy.

Look at the position they are purposefully putting Pilate in? This is a power play. They are hoping that his pride will kick in and his disdain for the Jews and annoyance with their disrespect would result in his resistance. They knew that Jesus saying that He is the Son of God was not actionable offence under Roman criminal law so they were not going to take their chances with Pilate; they were going to manipulate him to ensure their will would prevail. They would use his resistance to incite an emotional fervor in order to rile up the crowd against him.

It seems that Pilate knew that they were up to no good and were there simply to provoke him so he told them to take Jesus and judge Him according to their own law—in other words, this is not a Roman affair. But their reply is that they are not permitted to put anyone to death.

This has been a statement that has troubled many Bible students. Clearly, if we skip forward to the book of Acts and the stories of the disciples first learning to live out their faith, we see that the Religious Leaders officiated over the stoning of Stephen. Stephen stood before the Sanhedrin and gave his testimony of belief that Jesus is the Messiah and they absolutely flipped out in rage, dragged him out

of the city, and the official witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul (Paul) and then they stoned Stephen and killed him. They then gave letters of authority to Saul to arrest and start a massive persecution of those who belonged to the Way (which is what Christianity was first known as). See **Acts 6:8-8:1; 9:1-2**).

So clearly this statement that they do not have the right to put a man to death does not mean what it seems in the absolute sense. So what is going on here? I believe this is part of the wiliness of their plan. I don't want to lose you so try and follow closely me down their line of thinking.

The Jewish leadership knew that many believed Jesus was at a minimum a great prophet and some even believed He was the Messiah; but nevertheless, He had a significant following. Thus, they were anticipating some serious backlash to Jesus death and they did not want to take the blame. They wanted to pin it all on the Romans and walk away with clean hands. They did not want anyone coming after them and even remotely damaging their reputation. This is why they wanted everything done fast, before the Passover and before those who were followers of Jesus even knew what was happening. **Matthew 26:3-5, 16** tells us that they purposefully planned to arrest Jesus in secret and quickly put Him to death lest there be a riot. Even after Judas had said that he would betray Jesus, they waited and waited until just the right time when Jesus would be alone with only His disciples—they thought, with no crowd around Him then we can't fail.

They realized that immediately before the Passover would be the perfect timing for a couple of reasons. First, everyone would be busy with their own families preparing and making all the arrangements for this grand festival and if

things went well, Jesus would be dead before any of his followers would even realize what happened. Second, there would be millions of people in Jerusalem who had made the required pilgrimage for Passover. There was a good chance that many of these people were not even familiar with Jesus and could be used and manipulated to turn against some rogue blasphemer who claimed to be the Son of God.

But still they could take no chances; they had to make the whole thing a Roman affair. Just in case anyone did get wind of their scheming they could always point the finger at Pilate. And if there was any blow back it would now be a Roman issue and the Romans would have to play the heavy as they would then be forced to step up and snuff out any rioting. The blood would be on their hands.

So the trick was in how they could make this a Roman affair. Clearly, crimes of purely a religious nature were of no concern to the Romans; hence, Pilate's directive to go and take care of it themselves. So they had to up the ante and package this as a crime against the state. Sure, they could stone a religious blasphemer, but that would put everything in jeopardy. They could not risk the crowd turning against them. They therefore trumped up charges to paint Jesus as a traitor to Rome for this would be a capital crime that fell within the exclusive jurisdiction of Rome. In this context, their statement was true. They have no power to put a man to death who is convicted of a capital crime against the state; that power belonged to Rome alone.

Now we know that the Sanhedrin had convicted Jesus because He said that He is the Son of God, but we are told in **Luke 23:2, 14** that to Pilate they ultimately accused Jesus of treason: leading a revolt, claiming to be a king, and telling the

Jews to not pay taxes to the Roman government. Treason was a capital offense and if Jesus was found guilty the Romans would have to act. Pilate was being squeezed into a corner and he could feel their plan wrapping around his throat.

Just by way of historical reference, there is a big debate about the exact timing of when the Jews lost, in the absolute sense, their power to legally put a man to death. Everyone agrees that when the Romans tore Jerusalem to shreds in 70 A.D. that the remaining survivors had no authority to govern and no legal authority to take life. But some argue that this right was taken away 40 year earlier in 30 A.D. just a few years before Jesus was tried. Still there are others who argue that by the time Jesus was before Pilate that this power has been abdicated to the Romans but not technically revoked. They say this because there is no formal record of any law being passed to ban the Jews from self rule in matters that did not affect the state. Their argument makes a lot of sense for as we have discussed the Jewish leadership were so corrupt and complicit in evil that no one could honestly sit in the seat of justice and be held to the standard of the Law set forth in ***Deuteronomy 16:18-21***. Thus, over time they tended to cede this power to their Roman occupiers.

Do you know that the timing of the Jews losing the power of self-rule, the power to put a man to death, was prophesied way back in Genesis?

Genesis 49:10

The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes

In this prophecy, we find that Judah's descendents (the meaning of "from between his feet") would not lose the power and authority to rule and govern the people (which would include the power to prosecute capital and religious crimes) until Shiloh comes. Shiloh is an epithet for the Messiah and literally means tranquility. Thus, according to this prophecy the Messiah would have to come first before the power of self-governance was lost and before any descendent of Judah had no representation in the power structure, which is symbolized by the scepter or ruler's staff.

Now let's trace the history. It is believed there has always been a remnant of leadership from the tribe of Judah that was preserved from the time of exile in Babylon through the time of Jesus. This leadership, however, was not administered as an exclusive sovereign as it was in the times of the king but was administered via a counsel. We first see this in ***Nehemiah 7:7*** where there is a list of 12 men who returned from Babylon and helped govern the exiles. It is believed that these were leaders from each tribe, including the tribe of Judah. However, tradition has it that although they ruled by counsel consensus, preference was still given to the descendents of Judah. Over time this counsel mutated and more and more priests took seats and the power of the royals and the elders was weakened but not entirely stripped away. Eventually this governing body became known as the Sanhedrin.

Now it was King Herod who reigned in Judea from 73 BC to 4 BC who caused a big change in the composition of the Sanhedrin. Herod was extremely hostile to the nobility which led to the substantial increase in influence of the Pharisees in the Sanhedrin. From the time of Herod the composition of the Sanhedrin was

permanently changed from a body ruled solely by the aristocracy to one which was a mixture of nobility and Pharisees. The point to be made, however, is the power of Judah was still preserved (though extremely marginalized) through the time of Jesus' coming.

Now the Sanhedrin remained as the governing body of the Jews until 70 A. D. when it was completely abolished by the Romans who stripped all self-rule from the Jews. And even if they officially lost the power to take life in 30 A.D., as some say, it was still after Shiloh came (after Jesus was born).

Can you imagine, this was predicted almost 1,400 years in advance? Fulfilled prophecy is just one of the reasons we can have absolute confidence in the infallibility of the Word of God. The precision and detail is mind blowing. 1,400 years in advance of the event happening. There is no other book on the face of this planet, and no other book that has ever been written, that provides such self validating predictions.

Now in that vein, I don't want you to miss something absolutely spectacular—the fulfillment of other prophecies and a statement which screams of the absolute sovereignty of God. The Jews were busy concocting this complex, cunning and totally brilliant plan to get rid of Jesus, blame it on the Romans, preserve their power and position, and walk away looking as if they did Israel a favor. But take note, they were just puppets in the hands of a sovereign God. They were just tools which the Father used to accomplish His own purposes. I think it is pathetic how much control we think we have; the reality is that He does what He wants and His will always prevails.

In **verse 32** we are told that when the Jews said that they did not have the power to put Jesus to death that this fulfilled the Word of Jesus which He spoke, signifying by what kind of death He was about to die. He would be lifted up on a Roman cross.

John 3:14

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up;

John 8:28

So Jesus said, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me.

John 12:32, 34

"And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself." The Son of Man must be lifted up'?

So it was all happening exactly according to the Father's plan. Being delivered over to the Romans was in actuality the Father's plan and for all their scheming and conniving, the Religious Leaders were actually just there to fulfill prophecy some of which was spoken about 2,000-3,000 years in advance of the events

occurring. Let's just look at a few prophecies that would be fulfilled by Jesus being delivered to the Romans and crucified rather than killed in any other manner.

- David Prophesied in ***Psalm 2*** and ***Psalm 83*** that a combination of Jews and Gentiles (a.k.a. the Romans) were going to come against the Messiah. In ***Acts 4:25-28*** Peter gave us understanding of the ancient prophecy when he said: "You spoke long ago by the Holy Spirit through our ancestor David, your servant, saying, 'Why were the nations so angry? Why did they waste their time with futile plans? (***Psalm 2***). The kings of the earth prepared for battle; the rulers gathered together against the Lord and against his Messiah' (***Psalm 83***). "In fact, this has happened here in this very city! For Herod Antipas, Pontius Pilate the governor, the Gentiles, and the people of Israel were all united against Jesus, your holy servant, whom you anointed. But everything they did was determined beforehand according to your will."
- ***Psalm 34:20*** says: "He keeps all His bones, not one of them is broken." If Jesus were to have been stoned, as was the method of capital punishment by the Jews, His bones would certainly have been broken but He was crucified and not one bone was broken.
- By crucifixion Jesus was lifted up like the snake on the bronze staff that Moses lifted up in the wilderness and thereby brought healing to everyone who chooses to look to Him for life. This was the entire meaning behind the prophetic events of ***Exodus 4:1-12***.

- **Deuteronomy 21:23** says that he who is hanged is accursed of God and **Galatians 3:13-14** explains that when Jesus was crucified He became accursed of God as He took upon Himself the curse for the wrongdoing of every man, woman, and child.

So it should be clear who is really in control. Yes, the Romans were critical to the success of the religious leaders' devious plan, but their involvement and their bloody cross were all part of the Father's plan.

John 18:33-38

Therefore Pilate 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 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 so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm." Therefore Pilate 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 testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?"

Pilate must be getting really freaked out about now. Who is this guy and why do they disdain Him so much? He then takes Jesus back for a private discussion to get away from those he knew were trying to manipulate him. Hum and evildoer? How so? By his question, asking if Jesus was the king of the Jews, we can tell that he knew Jesus was standing before him because of Jewish politics and not because a crime against the Roman state had actually occurred.

Jesus answer must have frightened Pilate a bit. Jesus was not afraid, He did not lose His composure, He also was not arrogant or defiant; rather, He was standing there in confidence. This is why I think that Jesus' answer was unsettling. Jesus wanted to know if Pilate wanted to know the truth or if he was just reacting to the lies of the Jews—with the implication that He was actually in the position, with the legitimate authority, to give Pilate the truth.

Disturbed with the implication, Pilate just reacted and tried to reestablish his own authority: "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered **You to me**; what have You done?" He knew the claim of treason was false, but he wanted to know what was behind all this tumult. Why did the Jews want Him dead?

So Jesus takes this discussion and once again turns it over and re-establishes His authority and says that His kingdom is not of this realm—He pulls a trump card. First of all, My kingdom is a higher kingdom than yours—it is not of this world—as such it is not the kind of kingdom that you need to be worried about in terms of your little fiefdom here on earth. This is evidenced by the fact that I have asked no one to fight for me and no one is causing, or going to cause, any sort of

rebellion to establish My kingdom unlike the Jews would otherwise want you to believe.

Take note of the possessory claims: “My Kingdom” which is mentioned 3 times and “My servants” which is mentioned once. He is letting Pilate know that He is supreme over this supernatural Kingdom and neither the Jews nor Pilate have any authority in His realm.

You know that Jesus’ reply must have, again, totally freaked Pilate out. He replied: "So **You are** a king?" In the Greek the emphasis on this statement is on the “**You are**” and not on “king.” In other words, Pilate was not being sarcastic saying, “oh so you think you are a King, do you.” Rather, with surprise and a bit of unease he all of a sudden starts to understand, "So **You are** a king?"

Jesus affirmed Pilate in his sudden epiphany. Our translation says: "You say correctly that I am a king” but in the Greek He once again merely speaks His Father’s name which He in turn had given to Jesus: “Egoo Eimi”—“I Am.” You say that I am a king, I Am. Pilate you don’t even know who you are dealing with. I am more than a man (as My Kingdom is not of this world), I am more than a king (I am entirely supreme); I Am.

Then Jesus puts the exclamation mark on this statement by saying: “For this I have been born (indicating that, yes, I am 100% man), and for this I have come into the world (indicating that, yes, I Am not from this world, I preexisted and therefore came to this world, I Am 100% God), to testify to the truth. In other words, Pilate, don’t worry I have not come to claim right and title to a throne here and now, but merely to testify to the truth, that “I Am.” I came to give witness to the fact that I, the Lord God and creator of the universe, emptied myself and

came in the form of man, so that I would be lifted up on the cross in order that those who are of the truth would know and believe the truth—I came from the Father; I Am.

The Jesus says something that is very profound: “Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.” Jesus strips the notion of truth away from merely a philosophical concept or away from some frozen standard to be memorized and gives it life and even an element of possession and self-awareness. He does not say: “everyone who knows the truth” but everyone who is of the truth. There are those who ***presently and actively*** have awareness of the truth or even belong to the truth and as such they can ***presently and actively*** hear My voice.

This brings me back to John 10 when the religious leaders told Jesus to stop keeping them in suspense and answer the question, “are you the Christ.” Jesus said:

John 10:25-28

"I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father's name, these testify of Me." But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep. "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand."

In other words, just look around, the truth is evident and has been displayed in your midst. But you don't believe because you can't believe because you don't

belong to me. If you belonged to me you would not only hear, or be fully aware of the truth that I am the Christ, but you would also follow.

You see, even truth is all about Jesus; it's all about knowing what He came to manifest to the world, that He is the Christ—the true King, the only King, that sits or rules over all of creation. Pilate then said to Him, "What is truth?"

It would be easy to just write this off as some sarcastic saying and move on, but I think this reply says so much more and gives us some insight into the weariness of Pilate's life. We know that from Pilate's position as a regional governor that he was probably born into a middle class Italian family and had some military experience, but for the most part his life and his profession has been about politics. His world has been about variations on the truth, declinations of the truth, changing truths, and even downright perversion of the truth. He really could not connect to what Jesus had said; His worldview—or his filter—had no frame of reference for something so absolute, self-aware, and possessory. In his world truth was pretty much always obfuscated by the practical realities of surviving this life.

John 18:38-40

And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews and said to them, "I find no guilt in Him." 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 they cried out again, saying, "Not this Man, but Barabbas." Now Barabbas was a robber.

Pilate finds Jesus innocent of any treason against the state but he knows that it will not be so easy to get the Jews to let go of this bone that they are feverishly grinding. But after that conversation which probably turned his stomach inside out and upside down, he wants to free Jesus. So he comes out and announces his verdict and in accordance with the custom at Passover to release someone who is imprisoned, he gives them an alternative that he believed would have been a no brainer. **Matthew 27:17** says that Pilate gave them the choice between Barabbas and Jesus.

You see, in addition to being a robber, we find out in **Luke 23:18-19** that Barabbas was a very bad man. He had been imprisoned for insurrection and murder, both of which were capital crimes against the state. And it is in this fact that I find Pilates actions so intriguing. Barabbas had committed serious crimes against the state; and as one who was charged with protecting the state, it would not be in his best interest to let this man go. Therefore, even in offering this up as an alternative, Pilate is emphatically making a statement of the absolute innocence of Jesus and the travesty of having him killed. But honestly, I don't think Pilate was really all that concerned with justice for justice sake as "truth" to him was clearly not something that was in any way tangible. I think it revealed the fear that began to grow in his heart after his discussion with Jesus. What if this man is truly a king of this unseen world? What if He is not from here?

He also probably picked Barabbas thinking that there would be no way that the Jews would want this terrible man released knowing that if he was set free he would undoubtedly cause the religious leaders more trouble. I don't think Pilate could imagine for a moment that they would choose Barabbas over Jesus who

had done nothing, which is why he could not even hold back his disdain for these religious leaders by calling Jesus the King of the Jews (knowing that it would definitely provoke them). He must have thought they would be somewhat rational in their decision. But what Pilate did not know is that these religious leaders were not acting only on their own accord, but they were following the instructions of their father the devil who, by the way, was merely a tool to accomplish the Father's purposes. Remember in **John 8:38-47** Jesus made it clear whose voice they follow. Thus, they only wanted Jesus dead and would stop at nothing until they saw him hanging on a cross!

In **Matthew 27:20-23**, we are told that the leading priests and other leaders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and they started the chant that Jesus must be crucified. **Mark 15:11** says that they stirred up the crowd. Luke tells us that this cry mentioned by John became a mighty roar and with one voice they shouted, "Kill Him" (**Luke 23:18-23**). Ah, the power of the mob. I am sure that these people had no idea who Jesus was but they saw their leaders being mocked by Pilate and the state of Rome being resistant to what their leaders thought was best for Israel so they followed their provocation and joined the priests and leaders in their cry, "not this man, but Barabbas."

Once again, we must stop and we will continue this tale next week.

Let's pray