

Pilate's Path to Compromise

Luke 23:20-25

June 8, 2025

Well, you can turn your Bibles to, you guessed it, Luke 23. Luke 23. This week we are witnessing the final adjudication of the case against Jesus Christ before Pilate, the Roman governor. Pontius Pilate was, as we know, governor of the most powerful nation on earth. He was an emissary of the Empire in Judea. And though he was a powerful man, skilled ruler, we have to remember, and we should remember this about our all our political rulers, kings, everybody in authority. He is a man, first and foremost. He's a human being.

And like all of us, as Paul says in Romans 1:21, he has a sense of God. He has a sense of the divine. Calvin called it a *sensus divinitatis*, according to Romans 2:14, says he has God's law written on his heart. He knows you could say the ten commandments and the principles there are stamped upon his soul. He has a conscience, according to Romans 2:15, that bears witness to the truth, that bears witness to the truth written on

his heart, bears truth to the witness, or the truth that is spoken to him in his presence.

He understands, he can sense the truth. He senses right from wrong, senses, shares with all humanity a religious sense, because man is at his essence a religious being. We could say that Pilate, there's a sense in which he fears God, fears God in a in a natural way, not in a saving way, but he fears him in a natural. He's got a natural instinct to fear God. Everybody has these things. Everybody shares them in common as human beings created in the image of God. This is our natural native condition.

Even in our fallen state, we can see that we still, we see scriptural evidence abounds in showing us even in our natural, in our fallen condition. Our natural native state is to sense God, sense right and wrong, to sense the presence of the Holy. We see that at Sinai. As we know, most of those children of Israel that stood at Sinai, their bodies were strewn in the wilderness because they were not believers. They rebelled

against Moses. They rebelled against God. They wanted to return to Egypt of all places.

It wasn't them who escaped Egypt who entered into the Promised Land. It was their children. They received the promise, but those who were at Sinai sensed the holiness of God. They knew right and wrong. They knew truth. They recognized truth. They said, we'll obey, we'll enter into covenant with this God. You could say that Pilate has those same sensations, those same senses, religious senses, and here he has Jesus before him. When Pilate woke up this morning, on this Friday morning, to face the demands of the day when he went outside to the western wall of his palace, of his praetorium, he thought his day's work would be to render a decision on which prisoner that the Jews would ask for him to release to them at this year's Passover. A customary practice.

He thought his day's work was cut and dried. Pretty much. He'd done it before, he'd do it again, and then he'd be on to whatever festivities he had planned for that day. He had no way to tell that this would be the most difficult day of his life.

He had no way to tell that this would be the most consequential day, not only for himself, but for all human history, and that this would become the defining day of his life. All of his political experience and savvy, all of his training, all his exposure, all his skill, all his natural intuition, his cleverness, they were no match whatsoever for this hour, which Jesus called the hour of darkness and the power of darkness.

And so the unwitting Pilate, in a sense, you could see that the power of darkness really recruited this governor to commit a terrible crime. He's standing for Roman rule and law and justice and spreading the Pax Romana, the peace of Rome throughout the earth. He had no idea that he was killing the Prince of Peace. He would take place in this cosmic level of injustice, that he would join a satanic plot to murder the author of life that was not on his plan when he woke up.

And I wonder for you, as you come into this local church, as you hear the things proclaimed, as you hear us sing, as you hear us pray, read scripture together, I wonder how you think about the impact of the truth in your life. I wonder how you think about

what you're hearing from the Word. Does it affect you? Does it change you? Does it govern your life? It didn't for Pilate. And I'd have you learn from that warning and don't let another day go by where you don't do clear, deep, profound soul searching and say business before God because his truth and the consequences of what you do with his truth, it matters for eternity. And whatever you have going on today or this week, whatever's on your schedule, it is nothing compared to what we're reading here, what we're doing here.

Like to take you into the text so we can see Pilate on this most momentous day, this defining day. One that exposed his character, one that gives a warning to us all, but for us as Christians, one that really encourages us by way of contrast. And I'd like you to listen as we read again this text, Luke 23:13 to 25, and just listen out for the things you see or hear about Pilate. Consider yourself, consider the warning that's there lest you be like him. And as a Christian, consider how that's not true of you. That being in the grace of God, that if you were there, you would not do what Pilate did.

By God's grace you would have worshipped Christ falling at his feet, and you would have certainly tried to set him free.

Interestingly against the decree of God. Luke 23:13 to 25, "And Pilate summoned the chief priests and the rulers of the people, and said to them, 'You brought this man to me as one who incites the people to rebellion, and behold, having examined him before you, I have found this man in this man no guilt of what you're accusing him. No, nor has Herod, for he sent him back to us; and behold, nothing deserving death has been done by him. Therefore I will punish him and release him.' [Now he was obliged to release to them at the feast one prisoner.] 'But they cried out all together, saying, 'Away with this man, and release for us Barabbas!' (He'd been thrown into prison for an insurrection made in the city and for murder.) 'But again Pilate addressed them, wanting to release Jesus, but they kept on calling out saying, 'Crucify, crucify him!' He said to them a third time, 'Why, what evil is this man done? I found in him no guilt *worthy of death*; therefore I will punish him and release him.' But they were insistent with loud voices asking that he be crucified. And their voices were prevailing. And Pilate pronounced sentence that their demand be granted. He released the man they were asking for who'd been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, but he delivered Jesus to their will."

As you read that text, notice the prominence of the verb release, *apolyo*. Release, set free. There's a theme about release, and the release is predicated on the innocence of Jesus because this is what the release and Pilates desire to release Jesus all about. He is innocent. That verb release also gives us insight into Pilate's conscience here. His conscience is troubled over this thing. It also, by the end of the text, we see it charts the path of Pilate's compromise.

In verses 13 to 16, Pilate makes his case for releasing Jesus and he's strategically, as we said this last time, I'm not going to go over all of it again, but he strategically involved the people because he believes the people are going to be sympathetic with his plan to release Jesus. He thinks that this is the people's teacher. He's a popular rabbi. He's been besting all the leaders of Jerusalem for three years now. He thinks they're going to agree with me.

So he tries to strategically involve them, thinking they'll be sympathetic. He's also worked out a compromise with the

religious leaders to satisfy them. Look, I'll give him a good whipping, give him a good beating, teach him a lesson, then we'll set him free. So at least they can save face a little bit too, saying, yeah, see, he was dangerous. Pilate ended up punishing him, as he should be. That'll teach him a lesson. They can save face.

But there is an unexpected reversal that takes place here. The, the people on Barabbas released. Again note the word release, a guilty man released. A convicted felon, a murderer, an insurrectionist. We said on the level of a terrorist. They want him released verses 17 to 18 and then in verse 20 Pilate makes another run at releasing Jesus. He tries to negotiate a, his release in verse 22. Look all, I'll punish him, then we'll release him. In the end, as we get to verse 25, we find Pilate has not only failed what we see in tracing this all the way through, he's acted against his conscience, he's acted against all reason, he's acted against righteousness, he's defied and hardened himself against a natural sense of fearing God.

So against all that is true and right, against honestly basic common sense, why would you release Osama Bin Laden into the population? He releases Barabbas, that's his job, is to protect the peace in Jerusalem, keep the taxes flowing. He does contrary according to his job, releases a violent murderer back into the population, let's him go, and he delivers the innocent man Jesus into the will of an irrational, implacable mob. He's pragmatic. I mean, none of this stuff about punishing, none of this stuff about blood makes him squeamish in the slightest, but he knows, and we can see that he knows. We know that he knows.

He's acting against conscience, reason, righteousness, the fear of God. He knows what's true and right, and he is tortured by it. That's what we're going to see today. He is bothered. He's got a tormented soul. He's experiencing an increasing level in levels of, of stress from a severe cognitive dissonance. He's trying to hold things together that do not come together. He knows what's true and right, even as an unconverted, unbelieving man. But as an unconverted and an unbelieving man, he's utterly unable on his own to execute on the truth, to do what is obviously right.

Pilate does represent every single fallen sinner out there, knowing the truth, knowing right from wrong, having a general sense of the fear of God, knowing what duty requires, knowing what is right. And yet, in the hardest of moment, in the stress, they cave, they can't execute. In the end, it's not his intentions but his deeds that define him. It's not his good heart that matters. It's what he's done here. That's what characterizes him. That's how history records him. That's how we remember him, and rightly so. And this is how he'll be judged according to his deeds.

As we trace the path of Pilate's compromise, we're going to see, as Paul says, Galatians 6:15, the only thing that matters really at the end of the day and the final analysis is a new creation. Are you a new creation or are you not? Because if you're not a new creation, what Pilate does here, it's going to characterize your life at very important moments all through the all through your life. And then you're going to stand before God in the end to give an account based on your deeds.

GRACE CHURCH



Grace

If you're a new creation, that's what we've been proclaiming all through the service. Jesus died for your sins. If you're a new creation, it means that he has died for your sins, forgiven you, cleanse you. He's reconciled you to God. He's given you a new nature. He's covered you with his righteousness. You stand in him. You're justified, declared righteous. And as you meet God, you stand before him. He says, Why should I let you into my heaven? And you point to Jesus, because of him. Right answer.

Tragically, Pilate has unprecedented access to the one who can grant him this gift of new life. But he's neither willing nor able to believe. He's neither willing nor able to receive, to see Jesus for who he is, to fall at his feet as he ought to do and worship him, to give himself to him just for a lifetime of obedience and following him. Apart from the saving grace of God we'd suffer the exact same thing. We do the exact same thing, but by grace through faith, beloved, we have been given new natures as new creatures in Christ, 2 Corinthians 5:17. And so for us as Christians who are here this morning, Pilate's path to compromise is for us a reminder of what we once were. This, he's a reminder of how we would have act, how, how we used to be. We never want to forget that.

He's also then a caution to us to put no confidence in the flesh, to not just rely on our native senses of senses of truth and right and wrong and even a fear of God, but actually to look to Christ, to look at the indwelling work of his Spirit, to be attentive to his regular means of grace, the word, and prayer, of fellowship and, and the breaking of bread, and the sacraments, and the communion and baptism ordinances. We're to give ourselves holy to those things so he can keep us and hold us fast.

Pilate is his compromise, his path to compromise, which is what we're looking at this morning, is a reminder of what we once were. It's a caution to put no confidence in the flesh, but it's also a cause for our rejoicing because beloved, we stand in the grace of God and we will never fall. We will never cave like Pilate did because of him.

So I want to give you five brief points this morning as we trace Pilate's path to compromise. Five brief points tracing the path so that we will again remember what we were. Be, be cautioned

about putting any confidence in the flesh, look wholly to Christ and what he's accomplished, what he's done for us, and rejoice because we will never fall. We will never fail because he's given us a faith that will continue to grow and stand firm and stand strong. Five brief points number one, number one, Pilate knows the truth, but that's not enough. Pilate knows the truth, but that is not enough.

We have been seeing, I hope you've been seeing this, that Pilate is no empty suit. He's not like a typical politician. He's a politician, sure enough, compromiser, all that, but he is not a typical politician. He has climbed the ranks and he has paid his dues. He's gone through the system. He's quite the clever man. He's an informed leader. He's a shrewd ruler, and he knows, according to Matthew 27:18, Mark 15:10, he knows that the chief priest delivered Jesus up because of envy. Part of being a good ruler leader is to know what's motivating other people. If you know what's motivating and driving other people, well, that can be useful to your advantage.

Certainly he thought he had these guys figured out, he delivered him up because of envy and he thought it was just the leaders who were, who he had to deal with, who had to he had to confront and overturn. He knows the truth. They have delivered him up because of envy had been in truth. Jesus is innocent, completely innocent, not guilty. Verse 13, "Pilate summoned the chief priests and the rulers and the people, and he said to them, 'You brought this man to me as one who incites the people to rebellion, and behold, having examined him before you, I have found in this man no guilt of what you're accusing him, nor, nor has Herod, for he sent him back to us; and behold, nothing deserving death has been done by him.'"

So Pilate knows the truth. He has rightly figured out the situation before him. Nothing wrong with his faculties of discernment, his ability to see what is just and unjust, deserved and undeserved, perfectly intact, his lied and truth detector, his justice injustice detector working just fine. However, even though Pilate knows the truth, we can see clearly here. He does not revere the truth. He does not love the truth. He doesn't submit to the truth.

He doesn't make that the only consideration. There are other things to consider it. It's just it's not the truth is not determinative in his decision making. It's just one factor among many, one consideration. So he feels no accountability to the truth. He feels no moral weight from the truth. Still, since he knows that the charges here are spurious, that they're false, that they're unjustifiable, he hopes to recruit the people to his cause. That's the use of the people here in the text. He's using the people to leverage them against their leadership so that he's not in the position of going along with an unpopular decision and risking an uprising, a riot among the people or risking his political future, his career.

So to satisfy the people, Pilate assumes that they want Jesus released and also then to give the leadership a face saving way to get out of their settled judgement. He's gonna offer the solution. He'll punish Jesus, teaching him a lesson, humiliate him with a whipping so that he'll never, ever lead a revolt against Rome. That satisfies the leaders and then he'll let him go. That satisfies the people. Punish him and I'll let him go. I'll release him, verse 16. Now we've talked about this last

time, but the customary Passover prisoner release presented Pilate with the perfect opportunity for a way out.

We read in Matthew 27:15 to 17, "Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release for the crowd any one prisoner whom they wanted. And at that time they were holding a notorious prisoner, called Barabbas." Luke repeats twice in our text. I mean, it's a Luke's account is abbreviated, isn't it? But he repeats twice, he uses up space to remind us that this man is an insurrectionist and a murderer. Luke wants to emphasize the wickedness of this decision to release Barabbas.

So they were holding this notorious prisoner, Barabbas and when the people were gathered together, Pilate said to them, whom do you want me to release for you? Barabbas or Jesus, who is called the Christ? This is the art of the deal before Trump ever wrote the book. Let's make a prisoner swap. Let me give you a offer you can't refuse. Would you like a notoriously violent felon, a murderous insurrectionist, a dangerous terrorist? No one's safe with him on the loose or would you like the innocent, harmless dove? This Jesus, this one called the Christ? Yeah, he's got

some religious hang ups with your leaders, but who do you want? Luke 23:18, "They all cried out together, saying, 'Away with this man and release for us Barabbas!'"

What Pilate is not expecting this? And when the unexpected happens, when the people choose a murderer over the Messiah, they kind of call his bluff, don't they? And when that happens, what should Pilate do, knowing the truth? Release Jesus and not Barabbas, right? The truth should compel him to action. Simple. What this demonstrates is that though Pilate knows the truth, though he has an intact sense of legality, of right jurisprudence, though he knows he's there to uphold and stand for Roman law and demonstrate its superiority over every other law code on the planet, he can't do it.

So him knowing the truth in and of itself is not enough, since he does not love the truth, since he does not revere the truth or the God of the truth, the giver of truth. Pilate is unable to stand on the truth. He cannot release Jesus on principle because it's not anchored into his heart, which is anchored into God and a fear of God. He waffles. Pilate knows enough truth about Jesus

to know he's innocent of all charges. As we said, enough truth to see innocence, to make the correct legal judgement, to render a correct judicial call and declare him not guilty. But that is not enough. This takes us to a second step down Pilate's path toward compromise. Number two so Pilate not only knows the truth, and it's not enough. Pilate number two knows right from wrong. But that's not enough either. Pilate knows right from wrong. That is not enough.

He is an unprincipled, pragmatic politician. But as such, we may wonder, after he's discovered how eager the people were to side with the religious leaders, we may wonder why he simply didn't give in at this point, say, okay, I guess my political future is intact and safe. So why doesn't he just release Jesus now? Why don't we read after verse 19 in Luke 23, why don't we read Pilate decreed the death sentence and handed him over? End of story.

Jesus moves to the cross because there's something that happened in the white spaces between verse 19 and verse 20. Luke does not record it for us. He's got a different purpose in making his

account streamlined as we've talked about, but we can read about this. What happens in the white spaces over in Matthew's Gospel. You turn there if you like to Matthew 27. Pilate is a consummate pragmatic politician and unexpectedly, even though the people have turned against him, done what he didn't expect, and now the people and the leaders are in line with one another, so he could pragmatically just release Barabbas, let him go, condemn Jesus. He could do that and save his political future.

Unexpectedly, there's another consideration that enters into his conscience at this moment. Very common experience for many married men that while at work at a very important meeting, Pilate gets an urgent text from his wife. So he calls for a 15 minute comfort break, releases everybody so we can go check his messages. Matthew 27:19, "Now while he was sitting on the judgement seat, his wife sent him a message." I like to think by text. That's how I get mine. "Saying, 'Have nothing to do with that righteous man; for today I suffered greatly in a dream because of him.'"

She's unnamed in scripture, but according to tradition the name of Pilate's wife is Claudia Procula, or simply the Greek term would be Procula, Procula. Since the earliest days of the Roman Senate and all through the reign of Caesar Augustus, wives were not allowed to accompany their husbands, who were governors into their posts, go into foreign lands. The current emperor, Caesar Tiberius, he changed that rule just in time for God to have a role for Procula here in our text, to play a part in the passion of Christ. See, God put her here to be a voice. I'll be it an imperfect voice, but a very clear voice of moral conscience.

Women often play the part of moral conscience. Men who are busy and often oriented toward being pragmatic. Often times our wives can give us the better judgement. Say, what are you doing? Don't, don't you see how that guy is? Don't you see what's going on there? Don't you see what, what are, what are you doing? We stop and say good point. Moral conscience enters into the picture. Procula had obviously known about Jesus along with her husband.

First, through the widely popular ministry of John the Baptist, he was known all over the world. In fact, in Acts 19, Paul runs into disciples of John the Baptist who never heard about the baptism of the Holy Spirit. They knew of John's baptism and they run into disciples of John there in Ephesus, in Asia Minor, modern day Turkey, far from the place where all these things took place. John the Baptist' ministry was very, very popular. And so she knew about John the Baptist and she knew the one whom he heralded. She knew about Jesus and his ministry as well, the last three years as Jesus became a known and a celebrated figure all through the land of Galilee and all through Judea. He's, now he's come to Jerusalem.

She's also got to be aware of the Sanhedrin because the previous day they sought authorization from her husband to get a cohort of soldiers from the Antonia Fortress to go out and arrest Jesus. So she's troubled by this case. It's gripped her heart and her conscience. It's occupying her thoughts. It's haunting even her dreams. So much so text says she'd been suffering. Now, this could have been an ordinary dream, like ones you and I have times our dreams could be very vivid, very realistic, kind of dealing with whatever we're dealing with, a stress and in the

moment. So much so we wonder if there's some kind of a meaning attached to them.

For the Romans, for many among the nations of the ancient world, including the Jews, dreams had a deeper significance than what we account to them, especially in predicting political fortunes, personal destiny, omens. They read their dreams. They had people who were experts in reading dreams. So we got people like that in our culture and most common people like us just say that's kooky. We don't do that. They actually practiced that they saw dreams as a very important communication voice for the divine, giving predictive prophecy, predictions for the future omens. It's notable that this word dream *onar*. Of the six uses in the New Testament, they're all in Matthew and the other five uses of the, the word *onar*, the word for dream, other five uses refer to explicitly God given dreams, two of them providing immediate instructions into providing immediate warnings.

So it was none other than John Calvin who sees this as evidence, as this dream is no ordinary dream such as happens to us every day, but a dream that was by extraordinary inspiration of God.

Calvin thought she's getting something from God. This is this is something extraordinary that's happening to her at this moment, whether it's through remarkable providence or by more extraordinary intervention on God's part. However it came to her, it came to her. The effect is the same.

God chose to route a message to Pilate through Pilate's most trusted advisor, his dear wife; have nothing to do with that righteous man. Her judgement is sound here, calling Jesus righteous. Her counsel to her husband is not. Her advice comes from a, a feminine fear. She is basically telling her husband not to stand strong, not to do what is just and right, even if it's unpopular. Instead she advises him look at basically look out for yourself. Take pity on my nerves too. I've been suffering in torment over this guy. Have nothing to do with that man.

Wait a minute, isn't that his job to do something with that man who's come before him? Isn't that his job to stand for justice? If he's a righteous man, then certainly his job is to do the right thing and do what's righteous. Set him free, by the way,

and no whipping required. How many wives lead husbands astray by ungodly, self protective, fear driven counsel? Happens all the time. How many men, even apart from the influence of their wives, act according to self protective, ungodly, fear driven concerns?

Whatever the case, something morally significant is at work here. Procola's message comes through to Pilate loud and clear, and her message motivates him and convicts him and strengthens him to put up some more resistance. He could have just pragmatically let this thing go, but he doesn't. It's based on a moral sense and his moral sense about Jesus and, his not, just his innocence, but his righteousness, it's just injected more strength from his wife's message. He's not merely innocent of these charges, not guilty, this man is positively righteous. Pilate can see that for himself.

So while Pilate, in the meantime, back at the ranch, while Pilate is considering the message from his wife, the leaders use this intermission here to persuade the people they didn't take a comfort break. They kept right on influencing so that when

Pilate gets back to his judgment seat to negotiate Jesus' release, the people are really stirred up now and they respond with a strength and a zeal he did not expect. They demand Jesus be crucified.

If you're in Matthew 27, let's keep reading in verse 20, "The chief priest and the elders, they persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to put Jesus to death. The governor answered and said to them, 'Which of the two do you want me to release for you?' They said, 'Barabbas.' Pilate said to them, 'Then what? What shall I do with this Jesus who's called the Christ?' They all said, 'Let him be crucified!' He said, 'Why, what evil has he done?' But they were crying out all the more, saying, 'Let him be crucified!'"

And now we're connected up again with Luke 22, 23:20, which is demonstrating our point. Though Pilate has a moral sense, he knows right from wrong, and all be it, maybe borrowed somewhat or strengthened from his wife since his, this moral sense, this right and wrong, is not deeply owned by him. It's not a matter of his new nature. He's not a spiritual man. He is not

regenerate. He does not have a new nature. This is not coming from the exercise of faith. Merely knowing right from wrong in a natural sense is not enough. People are unmoved here by Pilate's moral sense, his sense of right and wrong, his concern for innocence.

He uses an interesting word, the word evil. Pilate uses the word evil to bring this into a moral sphere and to confront their conscience. What evil has he done? They're unmoved by it. So unable to stand by faith, Pilate moves toward the people. He reasons with them. Go back to Luke 23 verse 20, "Again Pilate addressed them, wanting to release Jesus, but they kept calling out, saying, 'Crucify, crucify him!' And he said to them the third time, 'Why, what evil has this man done? I found in him no guilt worthy of death; therefore,'" he tries it again, "I'll punish him and release him.'"

It's at this point, having made this suggestion twice now, once in verse 16 and here again in verse 22, Pilate turns Jesus over to the cruelty in the mockery of his soldiers. He's not going to get agreement from the people. So he says, look, I'll show them

what I'm talking about. If his moral sense had come from a new and regenerate new nature, Pilate would have never done this. But it doesn't, and so he does. John 19 verse 1, we mentioned this last time, I'll read it again, "Pilate then took Jesus and flogged him." That's the verb *mastigoo*. It's a synonym really of *paideuo* in verse 16, verse 22. So it's talking about a, a flogging or a whipping, a punishment. So Pilate took Jesus, flogged him, and when the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns, they put it on his head and they put a purple robe on him. And they were coming to him saying Hail king of the Jews, and they're giving him slaps in the face.

Romans had three levels of flogging. There's the *fustigatio* Romans had three levels of flogging. There's the *fustigatio*, which was the least severe, kind of, it's like whipping a, a disobedient schoolboy. Teach him a lesson. There's a, a step up called *flagellatio* that's increased severity, a punishment still, but usually not life threatening. Of course you could beat someone within an inch of his life, so there's a wide range there.

The worst was *verberatio*, a scourging which was extremely severe just prior to execution. It was meant to take the life out of

somebody and take the blood out of somebody so much that when they ascended to the cross, you didn't have to pay the soldiers overtime for standing there and watching him. Let him die quickly. Let the victim die quickly. What John is describing in John 19:1 is the very first one, *fustigatio*.

Whip him, teach him a lesson, but then we're going to let him go. He's just following through on what he suggested in Luke 23, verse 16, verse 22, I'll punish him and then I'll release him. So having done that, if you're in John 19, look at verse 4. Pilate came out again. So it goes in does that as Jesus whipped, flogged, soldiers mock him, he comes out of the praetorium again and he says to them, "Behold, I am bringing him out to you so that you may know that I find no guilt in him."

Jesus therefore came out, he parades him before them, he's wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe and Pilate said to them, Behold the man, look at him. Brings Jesus outside the praetorium to humiliate him, make a mockery of him, demonstrate this Jesus is no threat at all; his end, set Jesus free, but

notice this is an absolutely, utterly unforgivable, unrighteous means to accomplish his end.

How dare he lay a finger on the innocent, righteous Son of God? How dare he? Once again, we find that Pilate fails to persuade the crowd; verse 23 says they were insistent. Luke 23:23, they were insistent with their loud voices asking, really demanding, as a better translation there, they were demanding that he be crucified. Again, Pilate knows the truth. He knows right from wrong, but without any of that grounded in a new regenerate nature, his commitment to truth and righteousness is not of the Spirit, but of the flesh. Being of the flesh, it will fail. Since it's not the result of divine grace, it's insufficient to accomplish any good end.

Brings us to a third point which we find in John 19:6 and following. If you haven't turned there, you might want to turn over to John 19. Find your way to verse 6 and here's the third point, number three Pilate fears God. You want to put in parentheses, sort of. Pilate fears God, sort of, but it's not enough. Pilate fears God, he's got a natural sense of fearing

God, but it is not enough. Pilate's not yet accomplished the release of Jesus, and since he has compromised his moral standing by the immoral act of administering an unjust beating to a holy innocent, perfectly righteous victim, Pilate again, tries to give the case back to the Jews.

They claim to have the moral case against Jesus, so let them put him to death. So says in John 19:6, "So when the chief priest and the officers saw him, they cried out, "'Crucify, crucify!' And Pilate said to them, 'Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no guilt in him.'" Second time, Pilate's tried to kick this case back down to the lower court, back down to the Jews. First time he tried to avoid it, this time, this time I think he's actually irritated. He's fed up with them. He's done with this whole thing.

Take him yourself. You got the moral case. You got the moral high ground on this Jesus, you do the dirty work, don't make me do it. I find no guilt in him. If you do, you do your own crucifying. Now he knows they can't do it. They're not lawfully allowed. What's more, though, the Sanhedrin not gonna settle for

this. They did not prosecute this case toward the end of having Jesus merely put to death in, in what they were allowed to do in their temple environment. They could have dragged him right over to the temple and stoned him, but stoning him to death was not their aim, not their end. Why? His followers could later spin that as a vendetta, make him look like a martyr, turn Jesus into a myth, and follow the myth of the man.

No, the Sanhedrin, they don't want death by any means. They want death by crucifixion. They demand crucifixion, which they're not allowed to authorize, they're not allowed to execute. Why do they want crucifixion? Deuteronomy 21:23 says the one hanged on a tree is cursed by God. So they intend to make sure that all Israel knows, and it's recorded for all history to be sure, that this Jesus being a crucified one hanged on a cross without dispute, he's hanged on a tree and therefore cursed of God.

They've got a theological end in mind. Not totally wrong, are they? They've come to the right conclusion by the wrong means, certainly not by faith. They come to this by sin, by the works of the law, and by judgement of the law and sinning all the way.

They pervert the law to do a wicked thing, a wicked end. Pilate said, "Take him yourselves, crucify him, for I find no guilt in him." The Jews answered and said, 'we have a law, and by that law he ought to die because he made himself out to be the Son of God.'"

Okay, Pilate knows the truth, knows Jesus is innocent, he's compelled to declare not guilty. Pilate knows right from wrong, his conscience testifies this. Jesus is not merely innocent of Jewish charges, he's righteous, positively, positively so. Not only is he undeserving of any death sentence, this Jesus alone as king, which he is acting in a very kingly way according to royal bearing such dignity as he's never seen, this king, if he is such, is in a position to judge all this. Pilate's met him face to face. He's standing before him several times, he's interacted with him, his moral sense is awakened to see that this Jesus is truly a righteous man, one with royal bearing, kingly in his demeanor, in his dignity.

He is the only one of any of these people, any of these clowns, who's qualified to judge. But now Pilate hears something. But

man, it stands out to him. It smacks him like a two by four upside the head. It strikes fear into his heart, awakens this terrifying possibility. We find him guilty of being the Son of God. What if he's not dealing with a mere man, here? Pilate thinks, is this Jesus of God? The fright of the supernatural in a political ruler hits the modern mind as naive, if any of our political rulers, as some of our political rulers have been doing, they've been invoking the name of Jesus in office. They've been having prayers in some of their cabinet meetings and you know what the press is doing: church and state! Violation!

They think it's craziness that anybody would have a religious sense in office. Obviously that's folly, because even the secularists are very religious about their secularism, aren't they? But this may sound to the scientifically minded people of our day, to those who believe in matter and chemicals and none of the spiritual stuff exists. The man is just a conglomeration of a conveniently arranged atoms allowing us to be ambulant and have appendages that function to feed our faces instead of amoebas that just eat other amoebas.

It's very convenient that we've evolved at this point. We have no spiritual nature about us and so to the modern mind that's been weaned and groomed to think evolutionarily about everything, this sounds so naive of Pilate to have any superstition, to have any sense of religion, but this is a common mindset in the pre-modern world. Popular Roman mythology was undergirded conceptually by Greek philosophy and it taught that gods could indeed, and that they occasionally did, come down to earth as men. New Testament corroborates this. We read over in Acts 14:11, the Laconians, remember they witnessed Paul and Barnabas there. Paul commanded a crippled man to stand. He'd, he'd been crippled from birth. He stood, stood up. He began walking around. The Laconians started saying, the gods have come down to us in the likeness of men; called Paul, Hermes the talkative one, the mouthpiece; called Barnabas, the quiet one, he's Zeus.

Pilate comes from this exact same conceptual, philosophical, mythological background. He's got the same framework in his mind. He's actually probably, even though it's a distorted perverted sense, probably got a better read on situations like this than the modern mind. That's another sermon for another

time, maybe our conference on creation and the cosmos, which will deal with all these evolutionary things head on.

Nevertheless, Pilate is predisposed to entertain this possibility. He's predisposed to examine the man before him, reexamine him as potentially something quite different. Some say Pilate sees Son of God as a political claim since the emperor was considered to be Phileas a son of God. It's not likely that Pilate thinks that about Jesus, because Pilate knows that no Jew would claim to be, to claim divinity like a Roman might. No Jew would claim divinity to curry any favor or bolster his standing, his political standing, especially in trying to win over other Jews, because that's total violation of their monotheism. Didn't win Jesus any friends.

Why would Pilate think that this is just a political claim? No, as we look at verse 8, John 19, Pilate's reaction here is one of fear. It's what one author calls, quote, "the numinous terror before the divine," which falls upon Pilate, the representative of earthly power, that is, of the power of Rome. It falls upon him because he thinks he's seeing a representative of heavenly

power, divine power, standing before him and robed in flesh. So verse 8, when Pilate therefore heard the statement, became more afraid, more means he'd already become unsettled, ill at ease with this case. He sees the caliber of Jesus, the dignity of this man. He's becoming more afraid here, because he's in the presence of a holy one.

Remember what happened when Peter recognized his own sin before the holy Son of God? Why depart from me, Lord, For I'm a sinful man. You're holy. I'm not. I'm wretched, poor, miserable, blind, naked; Pilates feeling the same thing. He's becoming more afraid because he's recognizing it's not just that this guy's innocent, it's not just that this guy is positively righteous, he may be of a different essence altogether. Maybe this God has come down in the likeness of man. And if so, Pilate now realizes he has made a critical, unrectifiable, error by whipping him.

When Pilate therefore heard the statement, John 19:8, "When he heard the statement, he became more afraid. He entered into the praetorium again and said to Jesus, 'where are you from?' Jesus gave him no answer." What's he asking? He's asking, are you from

earth or from heaven? Why doesn't Jesus answer him? Because for a man who's already scoffed at the very concept of truth, John 18:38, Pilates, "what is truth?" He's already cynical about truth as a concept. So why give him an answer about where he comes from, things that he's never going to get his mind around.

The answers, obviously, any answer he gives is going to be wrongly interpreted, badly distorted, lead to any further, lead to further error; so Jesus remains silent. Wisely, he gives no answer at all. Now by this time with the silence from Jesus, Pilate is getting really fed up with these Jews. Their strange ways, they're reversing course on him. They're not being predictable. They're not doing the common sense thing. They're not taking the out. And this Jesus, he's standing before the governor. His life is on the line and he won't talk to him. He's really irritated. Verse 10, "Pilate said to him, you do not speak to me. Do you not know that I have authority to release you and I have authority to crucify you?"

Notice, whatever fearful sense that Pilate had, went away in a heartbeat when Jesus refused to answer his question. A little

bit of offence, the fear is gone. Now he's mad. Again, he had a fearful sense, but apart from faith, not enough. Natural fear evaporates in a moment at the first sign of offence and turns again to irritation, frustration, and appeal to his own authority. Now Jesus does speak, now that he's addressing the issue of authority and where it comes from. Now he's got something he can talk about and he can answer on his own terms.

And Pilate's prepared to have to think about this verse 11.

"Jesus answered, 'You'd have no authority over me unless it been given you from above; for this reason he who delivered me to you has the greater sin.'" And now Pilate knows not only that Jesus is acquainted with the ways and decrees of heaven, making him a heavenly Godlike figure, perhaps even as the Jews put it, the Son of God. Now, he's used that to tell him about his own accountability to that truth. Who is, by the way, he who delivered me to you, he who singular, that's Caiaphas.

And now Jesus is citing Pilate's role as an accomplice of the man who bears the greatest guilt. But Pilate being the governor over the Jews, he's finding himself as a subservient to this

Caiaphas. He despises these Jews. He's irritated with this case. He wants to kick it down the road, not have to deal with it, and he resents them for it. And now Jesus tells him Caiaphas has the greater guilt, but you're guilty too. You're serving his purpose. You're in league with him. His conscience is stricken again. The fear returns and irritation at this reality, this realization. Verse 12, "As a result of this, Pilate kept seeking to release him." Again, he knows the truth. He knows right from wrong. He fears God in some sense, all be it in a natural religious sense. But Pilate now knows he's in the presence of holiness has shaken him.

Jesus, no mere man. Why not release him? Let's go further. Why not bow down and worship him? Because we'll answer this in a fourth point. At the end of the day, the bottom-line fundamentals of all of this, number four, Pilate is a natural man and he's unable to stand firm. Pilate's a natural man unable to stand firm. This is what we read earlier from 1 Corinthians chapter 2. The natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, verse 14 for their foolishness to him. He cannot understand them because they're spiritually appraised.

This is Pilate's fundamental problem, being in a merely natural state. Truth, righteousness, fear of God, none of that is enough to grip his affections, determine his will, or change his behavior. In the end, he caves. John 19, "As a result of this, Pilate kept seeking to release him, but the Jews cried out saying, 'If you release this man, you are no friend of Caesar; everyone who makes himself out to be a king opposes Caesar.'" Friend of Caesar is a title, honorific title awarded to men who are to be honored by Rome. All senators, senatorial rank, they bore the friend of Caesar title or honor. We see select individuals who also distinguish themselves that way. And whether Pontius Pilate had that honor or title already, a friend of Caesar, or whether he's just aspiring to that honor by his good and wise adjudication of the issues in Judea.

In either case, the Jews had him. They touched on one of the deepest nerves of the governor's idolatry, his covetous desire, his cherished ambition. They were able to needle their way down to the very heart of the matter and see, he wants more than anything else in the world the favor and the approval of Rome. The favor, favor and approval of Tiberius Caesar, another mere man, which means he feared more than anything else, Rome's

disfavor, disapproval. What does this tell us? Tells us that whatever fear of God he had was subservient to the fear of man. He feared man more than God.

That's the summation that Paul has in Romans chapter 3, after he has a litany of all of the sins of mankind, condemning us all, holding us all under the law, and saying we've, "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." How does he summarize it? "There is no fear of God before their eyes." That's Pilate.

That's every fallen person. It's every unbeliever. No Fear of God. Isn't it interesting that Pilate, he took the measure of the Jews by saying they only deliver this guy up because of envy and based on his right judgement of their motivations, he tries to prosecute the situation to his favor.

The Jews are doing the same thing to him. They know what's got his heart. They know that he's an idolater at heart. It's just figuring out what kind of idolatry has really grabbed a hold of him. What is it? Loves the praise of men. He fears the disapproval of men. They use it against him. Pilate's deepest

loyalty is to Tiberius Caesar, not Jesus the Christ, the Messiah.

So he chooses man over God. Tiberius is his king, not Jesus. Jesus who is the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords. And so he's the ruler over Tiberius. No, he doesn't seem that way. Turns out the Roman Pilate is a lot more like the Jewish Caiaphas and all the other Jew Jewish leaders than anyone ever knew. These guys are all the same, all of them. John 12:43, "love the approval of men rather than the approval of God." And since they stand together here in this trial against Jesus, they will also fall together. They will spend eternity together.

On the other hand, we'd say that at Caiaphas, the rest of the Jews, they're really more like the pagans than they ever knew. They're in perfect harmony with each other. They share ultimate loyalty to man over God. Look at verse 13, "Therefore, when Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out, sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Stone Pavement, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha. It was the day of the preparation for Passover and 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!' And Pilate said to them, 'Shall I crucify your king? The chief Prince answered, 'We have no king.'"

But you expect him to say God, we're Jews, God is our king. What do they say? "We have no king but Caesar." So he then delivered him over to them to be crucified. The Jews think they have Pilate trapped and they do. He's forced to crucify. But as they represent the people and speak for the people, the people, through the chief priests, make their choice. They willingly put the neck of the nation in the yoke of the Pagan Roman Empire. Do the chief priests really represent the wishes of the people? Let's go back to Luke 23. If you've turned to John 19, go back to the Luke 23. We'll wrap this up. Luke 23:23 to 25, we come to the conclusion of the matter here, since they were insistent with loud voices asking that he be crucified, Their voices were prevailing. So we talk about a, we're looking at a plural subject here. They were insistent, they had loud voices. Their voices are prevailing.

It's not just the chief priests acting apart from the people, it's all of them together. Pilate pronounced the sentence that their demand be granted, and he released the man that they were asking for who'd been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, but he delivered Jesus to their will. Note the emphasis on voices which are loud. Verse 23 and prevailing. Note the voices that are heard in their demand, verse 24. Verse 25, voices heard and what they're asking for, the full expression of the heart that reveals the will. It's "out of the overflow of the heart that the mouse speaks."

Any doubt that the people shared the will of their leaders is answered over in Matthew 27:24. Don't turn there. I'll just read it to you. "When Pilates saw he's accomplishing nothing, but rather than a riot starting," that's how loud, loud their voices are getting. It's getting dangerous. It's getting aggressive, turbulent. He's seen riots start before. That's why he has a praetorium and a wall, guards. So as he sees a riot starting, "he takes water and washes his hands in front of the crowd saying I am innocent of this man's blood. See to that yourselves and all the people answered and said his blood be on us and on our children." Chilling isn't it.

Also prescient, prophetic as we look down the text in Luke 23 and see Jesus' warning in verses 28 and following to the weeping women on the road to Golgotha, he says don't weep for me, your judgements' coming and coming soon. For the superstitious Pilate, it's the chief priests and the rulers of the people and the people themselves who give him the cover that he's needed. He sees now that the Jewish people have willingly lined up with the religious and political leadership.

And so Pilate secures the political cover he's looking for. He's checked that box. He's got the get out of jail free card before human authority, the mob being the authority now. And now as the Jewish nation takes moral responsibility for killing Jesus for this bloodshed, Pilate secures the religious cover that he feels like he needs before heaven, before the gods. Certainly the gods can't hold him accountable for this, and that's why he washes his hands of this whole situation, which he wanted to do from the very beginning. But now he does it dramatically, theatrically, showing them in full view of the public at The Stone Pavement, the official seated on the judgement seat position.

In the sight of gods and men before heaven and earth, the people take the blood guilt upon themselves. The Pilate feels that he can squirrel away, creep away, shrink away. Wanting to justify the crowd, Mark 15:15 says, "He released Barabbas for them and having Jesus scourged." Not the less severe *fustigatio*, the one that he just went through. Not even the *flagellatio*. The Greek verb *fragilato* is the most brutal form of flogging. It's the Latin *verberatio* to prepare Jesus for execution. We'll talk more about that next time. But it was a leather straps, at the end with bone and nails, shards of glass woven into it, whipped down and, brought back on the, brought down the back of the victim, tearing his flesh to shreds, rivers of blood flowing out of him.

After having Jesus' scourge Pilate delivers him over to be crucified. He makes the decree from the official seat of the Prefects judgement seat and Jesus is beaten so badly that again, as we'll see next time, he didn't even have the strength to carry his own cross up the hill to Golgotha. His flesh is torn, blood is flowing, body broken. You need someone to stand in for him. And yet it's at this very moment of weakness, what the Gentiles call foolishness, that Jesus secures the greatest

victory ever over sin, over eternal death, satisfies the wrath of God by dying on the cross.

No one but God and his Christ saw this coming. But in this we see the wisdom of God and the power of God. 'God made him who knew no sin,' not just innocent one but a righteous one, 'to be sin on our behalf.' And all the sins that take place in this passage, beloved, sins that you and I commit, maybe not in the exact form, but in kind, coming from the same motivations. Who among you been has not, to protect your own standing, or your reputation, your job, maybe shaded some things a little bit. Maybe you didn't tell all the truth that you should have.

How many of you women have counseled your husband or influenced him or pressured him out of your own, your own fears? And we could go on and on through every single sin that's committed here. There are a lot of them, too many to trace and track. But how many of us are not guilty? How many of us are righteous? Not one, not one. 'God made him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf,' for us, "that we might become," not just forgiven, not



just cleansed of all fault, but righteous," the righteousness of God," that was visible manifest in him.

In closing, just very short few words, let me help us derive some encouragement by the contrast we see between Pilate and true Christians, between the compromising Pilate who failed, who caved, and all of us who by God's grace, because of the faith that's in us, will stand firm. So here, if you want to write down a final point, but put this under that number five Christian, you're spiritual and you will stand firm. Christian, you are spiritual and you will stand firm.

By God's grace because of his choice, by the Holy Spirit's regeneration, by Christ's perfect redemption, which is just about to be accomplished on this cross, as Christians, you are no longer natural, you're spiritual, you're born again, you have a new nature, you are new creation in Christ. So as Christians, you know the truth. And that means you not only know the truth like Pilate did, but you know the truth and love the truth. You seek the truth, you submit to the truth, you obey the truth. Whatever pet positions or preferences or things that you hold to

be dear to you, all of them, if you find them to be wrong, you'll abandoned them because what you care about most is not what you want to be true, not what you assume to be true, not what you've experienced all your life, but it's God's revealed Word and his truth that is determinative for you and you'll love that, you obey the truth. Jesus says you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.

So you're partakers of the ministry of Christ and his Word, you're partakers of the Apostolic ministry as well. As we read about in 1 Corinthians 1 and 2. You receive willingly, eagerly the things that they spoke not in words taught by human wisdom, but those taught by the Spirit combining. And you can translate it this way, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words, teaching spiritual truth in the spiritual words in which they were revealed to us. God's definitions, God's words delivering spiritual truth.

You walk in the freedom of that truth. Your eyes are open to reality. You're no longer living in shades of grey, but you step out of the darkness to walk in his marvelous light. You who are

spiritual, you appraise all things. You yourself are appraised by no man and under no man's judgement. But you have the mind of Christ, and you grow, and work that out, and walk in the wisdom of it. As Christians, you know right and wrong. Not in the Pilate's sense, there that's a negotiable thing, no, it means you love righteousness. In fact, you hunger for it, thirst for it.

You recognize righteousness, seek righteousness. You're drawn to it. You gravitate toward it. You can't understand when other people, who see the same thing you do judge it exactly opposite of you do. They call evil good and good evil. What is up with that? You're like, this is righteous. This is true. Let's run toward that. You stand for righteousness, you live for righteousness, and if necessary, you'd die for it too. You don't see yourselves as righteous, but you do see Jesus as righteous. You see yourself counted as righteous in Christ. You see his righteousness covering you.

And so when God looks down on your life, even though you know the sins you've committed, you know they've been judged finally,

perfectly, fully, forever in him, and his righteousness now covers you, so that when you stand before God, you're accepted in the beloved. By God's grace through faith, his righteousness is your righteousness and in his perfect righteousness you stand, and you will never fall, you will never fail, you'll never depart, because he holds you. As Christians, you fear God not like a Pilate natural religious sense of being struck by the numinous terror of the holy, but when the fearful presence of God came down on Mount Sinai in in fire and thunder and fearful trembling and shaking and blowing of trumpets and the people recognize the holiness. But they said you go near in Moses, but don't let make us go near.

They cowered. They fell away. No, no, we don't fear God in that sense. Our fear of God is like the Moses fear of God, to be obedient and drawn to him and compelled by him. We're drawn to all that's holy and righteous and good. You fear God, you long for what's holy. And so you love God, revere him, order your lives from the inside out according to holiness. You're very unlike Pontius Pilate, you're unlike Caiaphas and the unbelieving Jews.

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Because Christian, you know and love what is true and right and holy. You stand for those things and because of the grace of God, you will not fail like Pilate to stand firm when it counts because you're no longer in a natural state. You're spiritual, you're born from above. You're born, born of God, united by the Spirit to Jesus himself and the suffering that he endured. He endured for you and the death that he died. He died once for all, the just, for the unjust that he might bring you to God.

So you're covered in his perfect righteousness. You're immersed by the Spirit into him, and you partake of his resurrection life. So yes, beloved, it is very hard for us, isn't it, to see the Lord, our beloved Lord Jesus Christ endure the cruel brutality of sinners. The mocking and the scorn and the disdain, we're like, how could they do that combined with the callousness of their mocking and their scoffing. Very hard to see that as, as Christians who love this, this one, this God, man as our Savior and our Lord.

The humiliation on the cross is hard to bear, but beloved, keep your eyes focused on the prize, the goal of God, to save

sinner, to magnify the beauty and the glory of Christ. And you know why you should do that? Keep your focus on the end in mind, because that's what Jesus did. That's what took him through all this. Hebrews 12, "Who for the joy set before him, endured the cross, and despised in the shame." He's now sat down at the right hand of God, glorified. You do the same and find the joy even in the midst of this dark, dark hour.

Let's pray, Our Father there is by every measure and from every angle of our examination, and to a depth that will never comprehend, because it's infinite, but by every measure, from every angle, we see your wisdom at work here, we see your power at work here, and we marvel. We see the bearing of our Lord Jesus Christ that he was royal in every way. He's prophetic, he's teaching, he's confronting, he's kingly in his demeanor. But as he looks at the cross, through the cross, past the cross, to his place where he is now at your right hand, resurrected in a resurrected body, glorified with you, he looked to his high priestly ministry. Intercede for all of us to pray for us and help us in our time and need. He watches over us. He rules and reigns from on high. And we delight in all of the ministries of Christ.

We delight to follow him and call him our Lord and Savior. And the more we learn, the more we understand, the more we love and appreciate him. Fall down before him, worship him, and we've give glory and thanks to you. May you be honored and glorified as we continue our journey through these last chapters of Luke and see even as we get into Acts and see what happened in the early church, Father, we see and trace our own lineage back to that time. We trace our lineage back to the cross. That's our origin. That's our starting point.

We pray that if there are any here who do not yet know you, that you would send your Spirit. Be pleased to send the Spirit to convict them of sin and righteousness and judgement. That you would cause them to be born again, to have a living hope, to have eyes to see, ears to hear, hearts to understand, and believe and receive the glory of this gospel and pray that you would forgive many. That as more and more voices are added to the chorus in the choir of the redeemed, that you would receive the glory due to you as we praise you and give you thanks. Thank you even now in Jesus' name, Amen.