

## Jesus Before Pilate—The Man In A Pickle

Matthew 27:1-2, 11-26; John 18:28-19:22 [Read John 18:33-38]

In our last message in this series Jesus was accused of blasphemy before the Sanhedrin. This incurred the death penalty. But, because the Jews were under Roman law, they could not execute a criminal. So now the Jews bring Jesus to Pontius Pilate to be crucified, This put Pilate on the horns of a dilemma with eternal consequences:



- Acts 3:13 says Pilate “*was **determined** to let him go.*” John 19:12—“*And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release him.*”
- But Acts 4:26-28 says “*the kings of the earth... were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ... both Herod, AND PONTIUS PILATE... to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel **determined** before to be done.*”

Pilate wanted to release Jesus. But, God determined before the world began that Jesus would be slain (Rev. 13:8). Pilate was “a man in a pickle,” caught “between a rock and a hard place.”

Pilate sought some way to be “politically correct” and remain neutral about Christ. But when it comes to Christ, neutrality is impossible.

### **THE PERPLEXITIES OF PILATE**—Pilate asked TEN questions:

#### ➡Six questions to Jesus:

1. “*Art thou the King of the Jews?*” (Mt. 27:10; Mk. 15:2; John 18:33, 37).
2. “*Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee unto me: what hast thou done?*” (John 18:35).
3. “*Hearest thou not how many thing they witness against thee?*” (Mt. 27:13; Mk. 15:4).
4. “*What is truth?*” (John 18:38).
5. “*Whence art thou?*” (John 19:9).
6. “*Speakest thou not unto me? knows thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?*” (John 19:10).

➡One question to the priests: “*What accusation bring ye against this man?*” (John 18:29).

➡Three questions to the crowd:

1. “Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barbados, or Jesus which is called Christ?” (Mt. 27:17; Mk. 15:9; Luke 23:3; John 18:39). “Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you?” (Mt. 27:21)
2. “What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ?” (Mt. 27:22).
3. “Why, what evil hath he done?” (Mt. 27:23; Mk. 15:14; Luke 23:22).

➡ **Four ways Pilate tried to evade making a decision regarding Christ:**

**I. He tried CARELESSNESS** (John 18:29-31).

- Pilate ASKED, “*What accusation bring ye against this man?*”
  - Priest’s ANSWER, “*If he were not a malefactor, we should not have delivered him up unto you.*”
  - Jews ACCUSE Jesus of “*Perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar*” (Luke 23:1-2). This was a lie (Mt. 17:24-27; 22:21).
- A. Pilate tries to give Jesus the “**brush-off**”—“*Take ye him, and judge him according to your law*” (v. 31). Pilate didn’t want to try Christ, so he told them, “You try Him.”
  - B. The Jews tossed Jesus right back to Pilate saying, “*It is not lawful for us to put any man to death.*” Hypocrites! They had no qualms about stoning Stephen to death (Acts 7).
  - C. Pilate tries to “pass the buck” to Herod (Luke 23:6-11). Pilate probably sighed a breath of relief thinking, “I’m glad Herod was in town. Jesus is his problem now.”
    1. People today try to use the same tactic by thinking Jesus is someone else’s problem. No, you must decide what you will do with Jesus. You cannot give Jesus the “brush-off.”
    2. Herod sends Jesus back to Pilate. Jesus was like the proverbial “a bad penny” that keeps showing up... Like a “hot potato,” Christ kept coming back to him.

**II. He tried CLEVERNESS** (Mt. 27:15-23).

- A. The annual CUSTOM (v. 15)—Being the politician he is, Pilate comes up with a plan that may get him off the hook—He would

let the crowd decide Jesus' fate using an annual custom to release a prisoner.

B. The people's CHOICE (vs. 16-21). Pilate offers them a choice between two prisoners. Pilate cleverly "stacks the deck" to assure the crowd will choose to release Jesus. So he selects as an alternative to Jesus the most notorious criminal he knows—Barabbas.

- A notable prisoner (Mt. 27:16)...
- A robber (John 18:40)...
- A revolutionist (Mk. 15:7—insurrection)...
- A murderer (Acts 3:14).

➡ Surely the crowd would choose Jesus over Barabbas!? NO!

C. The governor's CHAGRIN (Mt. 27:22-23).

- He asks the crowd to decide for him—"What shall I do..."—What business does a Roman governor have in asking a mob what he is to do? "Hey Pilate... Are you the governor or the janitor?"
  - Woe to these noodle boned politicians who must constantly check the opinion polls before making a decision. Decisions must be made on the basis of what is right and what is wrong, NOT on the basis of popular opinion!
  - This question sums up the eternal choice facing all of us. What you do with Jesus determines where you spend your eternity!
1. **Personal** question: "What shall I do?" The choice is totally yours!
  2. **Plain** question—concerns Christ. Not a trick question. Not a church or sacrament.
  3. **Practical** question: You must DO something with Christ.
    - a. Some try to evade Him (like Pilate).
    - b. Some try to ignore Him.
    - c. Some pretend He doesn't exist.
    - d. But, some trust Him as Savior and serve Him.

4. **Pressing** question: You cannot be neutral. You must decide: What will YOU do with Jesus? You WILL answer it whether you want to or not.

- You either **receive** Him or reject Him.
- You will either **follow** Him or turn from Him.
- You either **love** Him or hate Him.
- You will either **confess** Him or deny Him.
- You are either **for Him or against Him**.
- You will either **crown** Him or crucify Him—*“We will not have this man to reign over us.”*

D. The futile CLEANSING (Mt. 27:24). In a vain attempt to escape his responsibility to decide, Pilate tries to wash his hands of Christ. He doesn't have the courage to face up to his own guilt!

- You cannot wash your hands of the guilt of Christ's crucifixion. We are all guilty of His death since it was our sin that put Him on the Cross.

### III. He tried **COMPROMISE** (John 19:1-5).

A. Pilate's PRONOUNCEMENT—*“I find no fault in this man!”* (John 18:38; 19:4, 6). He could not condemn an innocent man to death. So he tries to compromise and take a middle of the road approach—Pilate won't kill Jesus. He would only *half-kill* Him by scourging Him within an inch of His life hoping that will satisfy the crowd's bloodlust.

➡ Strange justice for One who has just been pronounced “no guilty” three times!

B. Christ PRESENTED—After Jesus is severely scourged, Pilate presented the bloody Jesus to the people in hopes the sight of Jesus bleeding will satisfy them—*“Behold the man!”* (John 19:5). Look at Him! Hasn't He suffered enough? But they cry—*“Crucify Him!”*

➡ But, Pilate's compromise fails to work.

### IV. He tried **COWARDICE** (John 19:6-8). Pilate was a coward.

- A. Pilate's FEAR. Pilate was afraid from the start. But, the longer His predicament went on, the more fearful he became. His wife has informed him of a troubling dream / nightmare (Mt. 27:19—*"Have thou nothing to do with that JUST MAN..."*).
- Now Pilate is told Jesus may be more than just a man—*"the Son of God."* This made him even more afraid (vs. 7-9).
  - Pilate asks Christ, ***"Whence art thou?"*** Pilate wasn't referring to any place on earth (cf. Luke 23:6). This was an "outer space" question—Jesus was *"from above"* (John 19:11).
- B. Pilate's FRIEND. Pilate sought to release Jesus, BUT his **fear got the best of him.** (v. 12—*And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release him: but the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend...*).
- *"The fear of man bringeth a snare"* (Prov. 29:25).
  - Pilate chose friendship with Caesar over friendship with Christ (James 4:4).
- C. Pilate FOLDS—He **caved in** to their demands (vs. 13-18; Mark 15:15—*And so Pilate, WILLING TO CONTENT THE PEOPLE, released Barabbas unto them, and delivered Jesus, when he had scourged him, to be crucified.*)

**SUMMATION:** Just like Pilate 2,000 years ago, you must decide what you will do with Jesus. Like Pilate, you cannot evade this decision.

What you do with JESUS is exactly what GOD will do with you! If you **reject** JESUS CHRIST, GOD will reject you! If you **accept** JESUS CHRIST, GOD will accept you! If you are **ashamed** of JESUS CHRIST, GOD will be ashamed of you!

D. L. Moody said his "greatest mistake" occurred on October 8, 1871. On that night he preached about Pilate's question, *"What shall I do then with Jesus?"* As Moody concluded, he said, "I wish you would seriously consider this subject, for next Sunday we will speak about the cross, and at that time I'll inquire, 'What will YOU do with Jesus?'" Ira Sankey then sang the closing hymn, which included the lines, "Today the Savior calls; for refuge fly. The storm of justice falls, and death is nigh."

Those were the last words ever sung in that auditorium. A few hours later that auditorium was destroyed in the great Chicago fire. Several people who heard Moody's sermon that night were killed in the fire.

Moody was greatly grieved by his mistake for not urging people to receive Christ that evening. Moody said, "Now, whenever I preach, I press for a definite decision. I would rather lose my right hand than give people even a day to decide for Christ."

- Can you give one good reason not to receive Christ as your Savior?
- Can you give one good reason not to live for Christ who died for you?

What will you do with Jesus, TODAY?