**The Worldly Skeptic: Pilate**

**John 19:1-16**

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We have been doing a series called *Close Encounters with Christ*, surrounding the Passion narrative. We discussed the religious leaders and Judas. Both of these are very religious people who knew the Word of God, who proclaimed to worship Him, and yet they missed seeing God’s glory in the face of Jesus. Today, we’re going to specifically focus on a secular man; a man who has no interest in the Bible, no interest in the God of the Bible, and yet, he has a close encounter with Jesus and he is shaken by it. His name is Pilate. So we’re going to consider that today.

***1*** *Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged him.* ***2*** *And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head and arrayed him in a purple robe.* ***3*** *They came up to him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” and struck him with their hands.* ***4*** *Pilate went out again and said to them, “See, I am bringing him out to you that you may know that I find no guilt in him.”* ***5*** *So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, “Behold the man!”* ***6*** *When the chief priests and the officers saw him, they cried out, “Crucify him, crucify him!” Pilate said to them, “Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no guilt in him.”* ***7*** *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.”* ***8*** *When Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid.* ***9*** *He entered his headquarters again and said to Jesus, “Where are you from?” But Jesus gave him no answer.* ***10*** *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?”* ***11*** *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.”*

***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.”* ***13*** *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.* ***14*** *Now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover. It was about the sixth hour. He said to the Jews, “Behold your King!”* ***15*** *They cried out, “Away with him, away with him, crucify him!” Pilate said to them, “Shall I crucify your King?” The chief priests answered, “We have no king but Caesar.”* ***16*** *So he delivered him over to them to be crucified.*

May God encourage us through His Word today!

This past Wednesday, our precious Siebenthal family and our whole church family suffered a loss so great that I really can’t adequately measure it. God, in His providence, saw fit to bring Ryan and Rosie’s little 5 year old Levi, home to heaven through an accident.Little else has entered my mind since learning of this heavy heartache that painfully falls upon Ryan, Rosie, Caleb and Benjamin and Jeremiah and Taliah. When I arrived at their home last Wednesday afternoon, I really didn’t know what to expect. What do you expect to find when you enter a home that has just lost a precious little boy? I have to tell you that what I found humbled me. I found a mom and dad shaking in tears as we embraced. And then as we made our way to the living room, I found a mom and dad expressing their anguish and their trust in God; expressing their pain and their need for the Lord.

They talked of their love for little Levi and how every day that God gave them with him was an amazing gift. They talked about how God used Levi’s amazing birth and the circumstances behind that to deepen their faith and their joy five years ago. They talked about the comfort of knowing that Levi is safe in Jesus’ arms now and that he’s not alone. Levi’s 13 year old brother, Caleb, chimed in. He said, “I’m always going to say that I have three brothers, not just two, because Levi is with Jesus now. He’s having a great time there. He’s just not here with us.” They lamented their searing loss. Their lament was deep. It was honest. It was hope-filled. It was upward.

I shared with them at the end of our time together that there are many circumstances in which we can put our “Christian clothes” on and we can appear that we have faith. You drive to church on a Sunday morning and things have not gone well. There are arguments in the car. There’s grumbling. There’s complaining. Things just have not been easy on that Sunday morning. And then you close the car doors and enter the church and you have a smile. Someone asks you, “How are things going?” “Great! I’m ready to praise the Lord!” There are circumstances in which we can put our Christian clothes on even when underneath, our souls are not what our clothes appear. But there are other circumstances in which we are just laid bare. Whatever is, is real. It is true. There is no possibility in certain hours of our thinking and ability to even put on clothes. Such is the depth of the intensity and severity of this trial. And I shared with them that this moment in which they are enduring is one of those. And I have to tell you that what I saw is a real-world faith. It’s a faith ready for the worst in this broken world. It’s a faith that holds onto God. And I saw God in His grace, holding onto them. It is a faith that bends low in grief, but looks upward in trust. Again, I’m just thankful because as I sat there with that family, my faith was strengthened. I was ministered to.

On Thursday night, a friend who lives out of state stayed at our house and we prayed over the Siebenthal family together. My friend asked me, “Ritch, what are you going to do on Sunday? In light of what happened, what are you going to preach on?” It was a good question. Frankly, I realized that I hadn’t even thought about that. I grew silent for a moment and finally answered that my plan prior was to consider the cross of Jesus. The cross is our anchor. It’s our real-world hope. In any circumstance, it is the cross that shines this great light of hope and peace and life and help and strength, of grace. I can think of nothing that prepares us more for every sorrow than the contemplation of the cross of Jesus. I pray that we will find that true today as we think about this amazing cross. What a wonder in God’s plan! May God give us eyes to see His glory in the face of Jesus as we just reflect upon His death this morning!

So we look at this completely secular man by the name of Pontius Pilate. He doesn’t appear to have any interest in the true God. He doesn’t appear to have any knowledge of God’s Word. And yet, God allows Pilate to have a super close encounter with His Son, with Jesus the King. And what we’re going to find is Pilate is troubled. He is stirred. But he remains blind. He remains hardened to the offer of grace, the offer of life. He desires the approval of man so much that he can’t see that right now he has access to the approval of God. And if he has the approval of God, then nothing else matters. The central idea we’re going to trace through this story is that if we seek man’s approval, we will never find God. The desire to please people will keep us from God’s grace offered in Jesus. We have to ask ourselves the question: How much of my life am I living in order for other people to think some thoughts about me? And can I ditch that in order to follow Jesus?

So, who is this man called Pilate?Luke’s gospel tells us that Pilate was the governor over Judea when John the Baptist was ministering and preaching. His official title given by Rome was that of “prefect.” In the Roman system, prefects typically came from the middle class. They were assigned small territories in foreign lands to watch over. When Rome sent a governor or a prefect to a place, he had really, two main goals. First, he said, “Just collect taxes.” And secondly, “Try to keep the peace. Let them keep their customs, but I don’t want to send expensive armies into the distant reaches of the Roman Empire. We wouldn’t be able to maintain the empire if we did that. So your job is to collect taxes and make sure the money keeps flowing. But also, keep the peace. That’s it!” So the prefects walked a fine line of keeping the locals reasonably happy and yet also, keeping them in quiet subjection to Rome. They did this by allowing certain economic and religious freedoms.

Now, Pilate has been failing as a governor by the time that we find Jesus standing before him. His job is actually in jeopardy because of his willfulness, because of his pride, his cruelty. He is a cruel man and he has exercised his cruelty upon the Jewish people on a number of occasions. Pilate became a governor because he married the granddaughter of Emperor Augustus. It helps to marry someone who is close to the emperor. And that’s how Pilate got his job. He got his job in 26 A.D. Now it’s 33 A.D., when Jesus stands before him. He lived in this beautiful port city of Caesarea. Herod had built this luxurious palace there. He had the good life and he knew it. He was living in one of the most beautiful places in all of the world. He had a cushy job, if he just could simply treat the Jews well. And he didn’t want to lose his job. That was a really important factor for him. In fact, it was a driving, motivating factor. Luke 13 records one action of Pilate’s cruelty as a for instance.

**Luke 13:1** There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.

There is something that stirred Pilate up against these Galileans, and they were making sacrifices to Yahweh, and he placed his soldiers in there and slaughtered these guys who were innocent, according at least to the Jewish people, while they’re making sacrifices. And their blood intermingled with the blood of the sacrifices. So this of course outraged the Jews! It outraged them first because it was a slaughter of innocents, but secondly, because it defiled their holy place. It defiled their religion. Pilate seemed to be a man that was completely ignorant of the religious customs of the people over whom he ruled. If he wasn’t ignorant, he was callous to them. And this sensitivity was absolutely necessary for a governor to be able to govern well.

There was a series of missteps by Pilate that increasingly got him in trouble with Caesar. The last of this series of missteps was that Pilate had set up some golden shields in Jerusalem at his headquarters. And these golden shields contained an inscription of Tiberias being the emperor, being the ruler, being the Lord. Jerusalem is the Holy City, and they were really sensitive to anything that would proclaim someone else as a higher authority than God. And so, when these shields went up, the people protested. It was a sacrilege! Pilate was proud and had the attitude of, “Hey, I’m in charge, here,” and he refused to back down. The people became more restless, more riotous. There was another ruler by the name of Herod Antipas, who didn’t like Pilate. They were at odds with each other. And Herod Antipas thought, “This is the opportunity for me to get back at Pilate because he’s making another riot, and he’s already gotten in trouble with the emperor on a number of occasions.” So Herod wrote a letter to Caesar and he tattled on him. He said, “Do you know what Pilate is doing down there? It’s just a big mess!” And so Caesar was enraged by this and he told Pilate, “This is your last warning. You better set this right, and if anything else happens, you’re done! You’re gone!” That is the context of Jesus standing before Pilate. Pilate is on thin ice.

Pilate leaves Caesarea to stay in Jerusalem. It’s the time of the Passover. He wants to make sure that with hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people coming to Jerusalem, if anything wrong happens, he wants to be on the ground. He is at least now focused. He is awakened to his responsibilities. Very early on this Friday morning, the day before the preparation of the Passover, Pilate is awakened. The Jewish leaders appear at his home in these early hours of 6:00 or 7:00 in the morning. And they’re too spiritual to enter this Gentile’s house. They make Pilate come out to them. So you can imagine, here is this proud guy. “Boy, I’m already conflicted. I don’t want to do anything for these guys, but now Caesar is pressuring me. I guess I have to go out there. It’s early in the morning.” And there, he sees Jesus perhaps for the first time. Jesus is bound. He’s been punched and slapped. Undoubtedly, there are welts and swelling on Jesus’ face.

Now, the religious leaders know that the position they have Pilate in, they expect Pilate to make a quick rubber stamp. But again, Pilate is still a proud person and his response surprises them. Look at John 18 now if your Bible is open. We’re going to mostly look at John’s account, but we’re going to look at some of the other gospel accounts too as we talk about this story.

**John 18:29** So Pilate went outside to them and said, “What accusation do you bring against this man?”

The religious leaders believe that Jesus is guilty of blasphemy, claiming to be the Son of God, but they also know that Pilate doesn’t care anything about that. So it’s almost as though they hadn’t even thought about this question, “What are we going to say?” And the first thing they say is kind of ridiculous isn’t it?

**John 18:30** They answered him, “If this man were not doing evil, we would not have delivered him over to you.”

So here, Pilate is supposed to act as judge, so he says, “What charge are you bringing?” They say, “You should just trust us. He is worthy of death. You just need to trust us.” And they think that’s going to fly. They think they have Pilate pushed into such a corner that he will say, “Okay, I’m going to trust you guys. You don’t even have to tell me what this man did.” But Pilate presses. He understands that they’re bringing Jesus out of envy. He undoubtedly has heard of Jesus and His popularity. And so as he presses them, Luke’s gospel tells us that they finally say to Pilate

**Luke 23:2** “We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king.”

Forbidding them to give tribute to Caesar is a big lie! That’s what they say first. Then they say He says that He is the Messiah, He is king. Now this perks up Pilate’s ears. He doesn’t care about the charge about taxes. He knows that’s not true, evidently. But what perks up his mind are Jesus’ claims to be king. And so he takes Jesus into his private quarters.

**John 8:33-34** So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus answered, “Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?”

Jesus, right here, cuts into Pilate’s heart with this question. “Pilate, are you personally interested in whether God sent me as the Messiah, as the Christ? Is that why you’re asking this, Pilate? Is it because you have a personal interest, a personal need? Or are you asking me just because others want you to execute me?” Now, I think Jesus is showing Pilate great grace, here. God, when He convicts us with questions, sometimes inwardly, sometimes through His Word, sometimes through servants, whether it be teachers or friends, it’s never to bash us. It’s never to put us down. It’s always to awaken us. And so Jesus is asking this question to awaken Pilate, this cold-hearted man, to his need for a God who can save his soul. He says, “Pilate, are you interested? Everybody thinks about their soul; even you, Pilate. And perhaps you haven’t thought about your soul for a long time. Are you asking this because now you’re thinking about your soul and thinking about what is going to happen when you face God who is the Judge? Pilate, is it possible that you need a Messiah? Or are you still just on this level of ‘I have a problem and these guys want me to execute him. What am I going to do? That’s the only reason why I’m asking the question.’”

Well, Pilate is stirred now. We know he’s stirred because of what continues to play out. He likely is frustrated. He doesn’t like being pushed around by these religious leaders, but he’s a bit offended by this question. He answers this question this way.

**John 8:35** Pilate answered, “Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?”

You can imagine Jesus’ convicting gaze, His peaceable visage even as He is on trial. And Pilate says, “Am I a Jew?” So again, he’s trying to wriggle out from the personal nature. And that’s what pride will do. When God brings convicting questions, we try to find some hiding place, some way to get outside of the personal nature of God’s communication to us. “Am I a Jew? This is a question only the Jews are interested in.” It’s not! It’s a question everybody in the world has upon their hearts. What happens after I die? What will God think of me? Jesus presses Pilate more.

**John 18:36** Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.”

He says, “Do you see my servants fighting? What kind of king doesn’t have an army? It’s a king that is not a physical king. That’s not why I’m here this time. It’s not in this advent, not in this coming.” Now undoubtedly, Pilate has never heard anybody speak this way before. Jesus is claiming to be a king over the spiritual realm, not the physical one. This claim pushes now upon Pilate’s heart more as he begins to think that Jesus is not concerned with tax money. He’s not concerned with sitting on a physical throne and making the rules for the people of the city. He’s not concerned with armies. He’s not concerned with uprisings. Jesus is concerned about this invisible, internal realm. And Pilate now begins, I believe, to think about that internal realm, the realm that is real. It’s the invisible world of that which is eternal, that which is true.

If Jesus had claimed to be a physical king, Pilate’s life would have been easy at this point. “Okay, let’s execute Him. Let’s go, because He’s standing up against Caesar.” But now, what is Pilate to do with this claim? He knows Jesus’ reputation as a miracle worker. Is it possible that this Jesus is a spiritual king? Here’s the truth. The kings of this earth all die and lose their kingdoms. But Jesus is a King who lives eternally and whose kingdom never ends. Let me read to you from Revelation 19 about this King because we see this King when He returns in glory. This is a vision.

**Revelation 19:11-16** Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

Where did He get the robe dipped in blood? It’s way back here. John is referencing the story that he wrote about in John 19. Imagine the majesty of this kingdom! Put all the kings in one place and there is one king that is above all those kings. And it is the King who is the spiritual eternal King of the kingdom of God. It’s a kingdom that is true, that is lasting. That’s what Jesus is claiming.

Pilate, I think, begins to understand some of the weight of Jesus’ claim. Pilate has seen emperors come and emperors go. But here is one who claims to be an eternal spiritual king, a king over the kingdom that really matters, because everybody dies. What happens then? And Jesus says, “What happens then is you’ll be in My realm. You’ll be under My authority.” Pilate knows what a king does. Pilate knows the authority of a king. He knows that the king has authority to make a person a citizen or to banish them forever. Pilate knows that a king has the authority to take a life or to release a life, to free it. And here, he recognizes, or at least I believe this is what Jesus is saying, “Pilate, I have the authority to open the doors into the spiritual kingdom, the kingdom of God, for you or to close you out of it forever! I have the authority to judge you and to bring death to your soul, or I have the authority to liberate you and bring life.” That’s the authority of Jesus, and Pilate is frightened by Jesus’ words.

**John 8:37** Then Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.”

If you have a Bible, underline that phrase. What a great phrase! “Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.” Jesus is saying, “Right you are that I am the King!” So you are a king? “You say that I am. You’re right! You said it. It came from your mouth. I was born for this purpose. This purpose is why I am here in front of you. It’s to bear witness to this truth. And everyone who is of the truth listens to My voice.” Jesus really has Pilate’s attention at this point. But He doesn’t have his heart. He will never have his heart. Pilate refuses to yield his heart.

But again, Pilate is looking for some way to get out of the conviction, out of the heaviness that Jesus is bringing to him with His claims about who He is. You see, the day began with Pilate thinking that Jesus is on trial, and now Pilate knows that Jesus is not the one on trial. He is! And he’s looking for a place to get out from underneath the conviction of this righteous One before whom he stands. And so he says

**John 18:38a** Pilate said to him, “What is truth?”

He is evading Jesus even in asking the question, “What is truth?” Pilate, didn’t you listen to what Jesus just said? Jesus just said that everyone who is of the truth, everyone who knows the truth, everyone who is interested in the truth, listens to My voice. If you want to know the answer to your question, “What is truth?” just stop talking for a moment and listen to what Jesus has just said. He has just said that he is king over the eternal, invisible spiritual kingdom, the kingdom of God. He just said that He is the Christ. So if you listen to Him, then you will find the truth for you.

He’s standing right next to the person who is the Truth, and he’s not listening to Him. He’s not listening with a humble heart to receive. He’s hearing and processing, but he’s not listening. He’s not saying, “You have the truth. I need what You’re telling me and I’m humbly submitting my life to You. So he misses the truth. Here’s the principle. We can only know truth about life if we listen to Jesus. We think we can make life for ourselves. We think we can find what is true, what is right, what is good, what is noble. But the only way we have any access to that which is truth is by listening to Jesus. So after this, John’s gospel tells us

**John 8:38b** After he had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, “I find no guilt in him.”

God the Father is using this egotistical, unbelieving, cruel Roman governor to tell the whole world that Jesus, God’s Son, is a righteous man. And Pilate seems to be driven by fear. He’s troubled about sending Jesus, who claims to be God’s spiritual king, to execution by way of the cross, to an unjust death.Furthermore, to make matters worse for Pilate, somewhere in this story, Matthew tells us that Pilate’s wife sends a message to Pilate saying, “I hear that you are trying Jesus. I have an interesting story. Last night, I had a dream about Jesus and in that dream, I was told to tell you, don’t have anything to do with anything bad that happens to him.” And she says, “I’ve suffered. I’ve been tossing and turning. I am torn up inside about this because of this dream.

**Matthew 27:19b** “Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much because of him today in a dream.”

She doesn’t even use the word “innocent.” She says, “Don’t have anything to do with that *righteous* man.” Do you see what God is doing? He takes Pilate and Pilate declares this is a righteous man. He takes Pilate’s wife, another pagan woman, and she says, “This is a righteous man.” What is God the Father doing? God the Father is announcing the righteousness of His Son and using the most crazy kind of unexpected witnesses to declare His Son’s righteousness. Do you believe that Jesus is righteous? That’s a key question. You see, God says that He is the only one who is righteous, and that’s why we need Him. We need His righteousness and we will never produce a righteousness of our own that will be accepted by Him.

So Pilate already has been deeply troubled about his interaction with Jesus. And now, you can imagine the spike of fear just rushes through his spine. The Father secures the glory of His Son for all of eternity. That’s what is happening here. The Father says, “I have ordained glory for My Son even in His darkest hour, even when He is taking on the curse of sin. I’ve ordained Him to have glory and I will see that He receives it even now.

So Pilate has an idea that might resolve the problem. He knows the custom of turning over one Jewish prisoner back to the people on the Passover. He thinks, “I’m going to choose the most despicable criminal we have in all of our prison system. He’s a guy by the name of Barabbas. He’s a terrorist. Nobody likes him. Everybody knows that he’s worthy to die. I’m going to set him next to Jesus and say, ‘Which one of these two do you want me to release to you? You have a choice.’” Pilate is looking for a way to appease the Jews. “I have listened to the case. I can still declare Jesus guilty, but still not have Him executed. My conscience will be clear about that and then the whole mess will be over.” But the religious leaders then begin working on the crowd and they persuade the crowd to choose Barabbas over Jesus. The crowd chose the menace over the Messiah!

**Matthew 27:20-23** Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus. The governor again said to them, “Which of the two do you want me to release for you?” And they said, “Barabbas.” Pilate said to them, “Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?” They all said, “Let him be crucified!” And he said, “Why, What evil has he done?” But they shouted all the more, “Let him be crucified!”

Pilate is bewildered. He thought his plan was going to work. Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere. He was pleading with the crowd, hoping to get them back to choose Jesus and not this terrible murderer. And realizing that things are totally out of control, fear is just raking over his body.

**Matthew 27:24-25** So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, “I am innocent of this man’s blood; see to it yourselves.” And all the people answered, “His blood be on us and on our children!”

Pilate is guilty of condemning an innocent man because he wanted to save his job. Sin is soul damning. It can’t be washed with all the water in the oceans. Pilate is guilty of setting aside the Son of God. We ask the question:What can wash away our sins? What can remove our guilt from our unjust actions and attitudes? Can a basin of water do that? No. Pilate did what man does when he recognizes his own guilt. He looked for a human way to resolve it. And through a symbolic act, he thought he could resolve his guilt. But no amount of water could resolve his guilt.

You see, when we find ourselves guilty and God strikes us with the guilt of our sin, we often use human means. Instead of taking our guilt and our sin to Jesus for forgiveness and cleansing, we seek other methods. We may minimize it. We may hide it. We may do other good things to try to make up for it. We may find refuge in the circumstances of our sin. “Well, I really didn’t have a choice.” Or “This is what happened in the past, so this is why I did this.” And we begin to rationalize and begin to make reasons on why our sin was reasonable. Some go to religious leaders for absolution. Remember, that’s what Judas did. He took his money back. Some just think, “Well maybe, if I can put enough time between this sin and myself, then that sin will fade like an old photograph.” All these are human means and none of these things will resolve the guilt of our sin. What can resolve the guilt of our sin? God’s method to wash away guilt is for us to come before Him and say, “Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner.” God requires an honest, humble, broken cry to Jesus whose atoning blood was shed in order to wash our sins away.

After washing his hands, Pilate is still looking for a way to release Jesus. So he has Him flogged. And it’s a terrible thing! It’s a cat of nine tails. It makes a man look less than a man. It’s a whip filled with bone and metal. And by the end of it, Jesus is a bloody mess. Pilate is thinking, “If I hurt Jesus really, really bad and then set Him before them, maybe they’ll have pity. I’ll make Him look so pitiful that then they’ll say, “Okay, I guess that’s enough! We don’t need Him crucified.” And that’s why I believe he had Him flogged. Is he still looking for a way to get out from under the guilt of the sin he is about to commit?

***2*** *And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head and arrayed him in a purple robe.* ***3*** *They came up to him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” and struck him with their hands.* ***4*** *Pilate went out again and said to them, “See, I am bringing him out to you that you may know that I find no guilt in him.”*

Again, he is declaring Jesus’ innocence!

***5*** *So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe.*

He hardly looked like a man, and yet

*Pilate said to them, “Behold the man!”* ***6*** *When the chief priests and the officers saw him, they cried out, “Crucify him, crucify him!”*

Pilate is still looking for a way out of this. He knows the weight of this guilt. Somehow the Holy Spirit is just driving home the guilt and conviction.

*Pilate said to them, “Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no guilt in him.”*

“Just let me be free of this. Go ahead! I’ll give you permission. You guys can execute Him.”

***7*** *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.”* ***8*** *When Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid.*

It was troubling to hear Him being called the Christ, the Messiah. It was troubling to hear Him calling Himself a king; but not the king of this world, the king of another world. “But you’re telling me He is the Son of God? He’s claiming to be the Son of God?” At this I believe that Pilate is dizzy from the weight of this moment. His belief in God’s eternal justice is resting upon him. He thought he was just mediating between some disputes of some religious leaders, these Jews that he didn’t care about. And now it’s pressing home right here to his own heart.

***9*** *He entered his headquarters again and said to Jesus, “Where are you from?” But Jesus gave him no answer.*

Pilate now is frustrated. Jesus has already told him enough for him to repent of his sin and to believe, and Pilate says, “You’re not going to speak to me?” Again, his pride is right on display.

***10*** *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?”*

Pilate hoped to unnerve Jesus, but Jesus now responds and unnerved him.

***11*** *Jesus answered him, “You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above.*

He spoke as the Son of the Father. “My Father is in complete control!” Here’s the truth. God is in charge of our every pain and difficulty. No one and nothing can bring anything to us that does not first pass through His loving hands. That’s what Jesus is saying.Jesus doesn’t act like an enslaved man. He doesn’t act like a bound man. Not even here! He is a free man. Pilate is the one who is bound. Pilate is the one who is in chains. He is bound up by his own fears and his own failures and he sees no way of escape.

***12*** *From then on Pilate sought to release him,*

He sought more ways to release Jesus; to keep Him from execution. And finally, the Jews know that they can press Pilate into the corner.

*but the Jews cried out, “If you release this man, you are not Caesar’s friend.*

Bam! That hit Pilate right at the deepest moment of his fear. He didn’t fear God, he feared man. He feared Caesar.

*Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar.”*

All of his hopes, all of his dreams depended upon Caesar being his friend. Here’s the issue. Friendship with the world results in our losing our integrity, our conscience, our inner peace and our eternal souls. It doesn’t appear that way for a long time, but in the end, this is where it always results. It results in losing integrity, conscience, peace, souls. Friendship with Christ results in having a friend who will never leave us or forsake us. He is the King of all kings. It’s a friendship where we can live in true freedom and wholeness now and forever and ever. What friendship will we choose? That’s the issue. What friendship will we choose?

We’re going to close with some lessons from Pilate. Tongue in cheek, the first lesson I would say is always listen to your wife. (Laughter!) That’s a great lesson, right? Always listen to your wife. Pilate didn’t listen to his wife. But now, let’s get more serious about things.

**Lesson #1: “The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is safe.” (Proverbs 29:25 ESV)**

If we love the approval of the world, we will miss the approval of God. If we love the applause of man, we will live in fear and uncertainty because man’s approval is fickle. His applause is ever changing. Poor Pilate! He was never free to live as he wanted to live because he placed himself under man as his sovereign ruler. He had to perform in order to please. His past performance wasn’t good enough and he knew that he would ultimately lose it. And history tells us that he actually did. He lost Caesar’s approval. If we seek man’s approval, we will never find God. If we don’t ever find God, we won’t ever find life.

**Lesson #2: Nothing but Jesus’ blood can wash away our sins.**

It’s futile to look for some other way to remove our guilt. We’re all guilty. We’re all condemned. There is stuff about all of our lives that would undo us and bring us to eternal shame, eternal condemnation, eternal separation. Let’s take that and not place it anywhere else to find refuge. Let’s not try to hide it. Let’s not try to make excuses for it. Let’s not try to absolve it through good works or religious deeds. Let’s take it to the cross of Jesus. There is cleansing in Jesus. Let’s take it to Him.

**Lesson #3: God is sovereign over all things, particularly the death of His Son.**

Pilate didn’t have any power over Jesus. The religious rulers didn’t have any power over Jesus. Judas didn’t have any power over Jesus. God alone, the Father alone is ruling this world with Kingly authority. He does not allow one atom in this world to rebel against His eternal wisdom without using that rebellious atom to produce glory for His Son. I know there’s a lot of sin, a lot of mess and a lot of pain and suffering in this world, but I want you to know that this is our Father’s world. And lest we forget that though the wrong seems oft so strong, He is ruler yet. And this whole story is pointing to that. The greatest sin, the greatest tragedy, the greatest sorrow in all of the world is the death of God’s Son. And yet, the Father is showing Himself sovereign. He has a purpose that He’s moving towards. That purpose is glory. That purpose is life.

**Lesson #4: God loves you so much that He gave His only Son to die upon a cross for your sins so that whoever would believe in Him would not perish, but have eternal life.**

We would never be bound up with guilt, shame and enslavement, but we would have eternal life with God now and forever. That’s how much God loves us. Can you imagine delivering your son into the hands of a man like Pilate? Can you imagine that? “I’m going to take my son and I’m going to deliver him into the hands of this wicked, cruel, unbelieving, rebellious, self-centered man, to do whatever that man wants.” And that’s what God did. He brought His Son into the very realm of evil, allowing His Son, who voluntarily laid down His life, voluntarily received this mission, to be flogged, to be crowned with thorns, and to be crucified.

**Romans 5:8** God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Friend, do you know that God loves you? Do you know that He loves you so much He gave His only Son to take your sins and my sins upon Himself so that we can be freed from them? Do you know that He calls you to believe in His Son? Just like Pilate, we have to make a decision regarding Jesus. Pilate didn’t want to have to make a decision regarding Jesus. He did everything to get away from it. But ultimately, God says, “You have to make a decision about My Son.” Pilate chose this world, and he lost eternity because he walked away from the Son who could offer him life. So I would ask: What about you? What are you choosing? And you have to make a choice. It’s a choice between this and that; this world or Jesus as King. What will you choose? And be honest with yourself. Be honest with what you’re choosing to lead your life, to submit to, and to worship. God loves you. He sent His Son, Jesus. He says, “Believe! Choose My Son, and you’ll have life!”