

PILATE'S DILEMMA

John 19:6-11

Last week we covered the first five verses of John chapter nineteen. Let us begin today by reviewing them and picking up on the story continuing through verse 11.

John 19:1-11 (NASB):

¹ *Pilate then took Jesus and **scourged** Him.*

² *And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and put a purple robe on Him;*

³ *and they began to come up to Him and say, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and to give Him slaps in the face.*

⁴ *Pilate came out again and said to them, "Behold, I am bringing Him out to you so that you may know that I find no guilt in Him."*

⁵ *Jesus then came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Behold, the Man!"*

⁶ *So when the chief priests and the officers saw Him, they cried out saying, "**Crucify, crucify!**" 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 by that law He ought to die because He made Himself out to be the Son of God."*

⁸ *Therefore when Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid;*

⁹ *and he entered into the Praetorium again and said to Jesus, "Where are You from?" But Jesus gave him no answer.*

¹⁰ *So 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?"*

¹¹ *Jesus answered, "You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above; for this reason he who delivered Me to you has the greater sin."*

“A Philadelphia woman in her will instructed her executor to take one dollar from her estate, invest it and pay the interest on this investment to her husband, ‘as evidence of her estimate of his worth.’ Another woman—also from Philadelphia—bequeathed her divorced husband one dollar to buy a rope to hang himself.”¹

“John J. Harrington, national president of the Fraternal Order of

¹ Tan, Paul Lee: *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations : A Treasury of Illustrations, Anecdotes, Facts and Quotations for Pastors, Teachers and Christian Workers.* Garland TX : Bible Communications, 1996, c1979.

Police and a 27-year veteran of the Philadelphia police force, says, ‘There is hatred today in this country that’s growing and growing. Near where I live a man was walking to church, and two men came up behind him and cut his throat.’

“Another man was just standing on a street corner when a bunch of kids came along. They said. ‘Let’s give it to him,’ and they killed him. And a little girl was walking up the street from where I live, and a boy just came along and stabbed her. All these things seem to happen for no reason at all—just hatred.”²

We see so much similar senseless violence today, in drive-by shootings and other events we hear about almost daily in the news.

Harry Emerson Fosdick was quoted as saying, “*Hating people is like burning down your own house to get rid of a rat.*”³

We will see how equally self-destructive hatred can be as we continue in this study of Jesus’ trial before Pilate. In verse 6 of this chapter, the Jewish leaders displayed their hatred for Jesus by demanding His death. Crucifixion at this time was a shameful death, usually reserved for criminals, slaves, and especially revolutionaries. Pilate could not find any evidence of Jesus being guilty of any of these things. So in effect he told them that if they wanted Jesus crucified, they should crucify Him themselves, knowing full well that they could not administer the death penalty without his approval. Even though he did not want to anger these Jews, he could not support their demand for crucifixion because according to Roman law, Jesus had not done anything wrong, and certainly not anything that would even approach justifying crucifixion.

When the Jewish leaders saw that they could not nail Jesus to the cross with the argument they were giving Pilate, they switched tactics. They told Pilate that according to their law anyone charged with blasphemy was subject to the death penalty if it could be proven, Leviticus 24:16 NAS: ⁴ “*Moreover, the one who blasphemes the name of the Lord shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall certainly stone him. The alien as well as the native, when he blasphemes the Name, shall be put to death.*” Since Jesus claimed to be God, they demanded that Pilate find Jesus guilty of Jewish law and administer the death penalty.

Now it is very likely that about this time Pilate could have been getting a little worried. This reference to the Jewish law reminded him that it was Rome’s policy to maintain

² Tan, Paul Lee: *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations : A Treasury of Illustrations, Anecdotes, Facts and Quotations for Pastors, Teachers and Christian Workers*. Garland TX : Bible Communications, 1996, c1979. Hatred.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Tan, Paul Lee: *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations : A Treasury of Illustrations, Anecdotes, Facts and Quotations for Pastors, Teachers and Christian Workers*. Garland TX : Bible Communications, 1996, c1979.

local customs and laws in the nations that they occupied. In other words, if the nation of Palestine had a certain law that the officials claimed to have been broken, it was up to the Roman official in charge of that province to see that the appropriate punishment was administered to the guilty party. In this case, the death penalty would be required if Jesus had actually committed blasphemy.

Add to this the fact that Jesus did claim to be the Son of God, and as such He would have supernatural powers and authority, and therefore could have caused Pilate some stress. Pilate had heard stories of gods who took human form coming down to earth and punishing men for committing acts that were not pleasing to them. Maybe Jesus' regal stature, demeanor, confidence, and references to His kingdom not being of this world started to get to Pilate. If he thought Jesus was a god from out of this world somewhere, he could have been frightened that Jesus might punish him in some horrible way if he did not release Him.⁵ Then, sometime during all this activity, Pilate received a message from his wife saying, "*Don't have anything to do with that innocent Man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of Him*" (Matthew 27:19).

It is therefore not surprising that Pilate asked Jesus in verse 9, "*Where are you from?*" A question that Jesus met with silence. Pilate became impatient and frustrated by Jesus' silence and told Jesus that He had better realize that he (Pilate) had the power and authority to either send Him to His death or free Him. Jesus still did not answer Pilate's original question regarding where He called home, but made it clear that Pilate would have no authority whatsoever if it had not been given to him by God. Pilate may have figured out from Jesus' response that if Jesus' Father was from above, that meant Jesus was from above. Now Pilate may have begun to feel the vice tightening. He was beginning perhaps to feel he was in danger because of what Jesus might do to him, and he was beginning to sense the trouble the Jewish leaders could cause him with Caesar.

In John 19:11 **Jesus** speaks to Pilate for the final time, revealing His complete faith and trust in God. All authority comes from God (Romans 13:1 ff). Pilate was boasting about his authority (John 19:10), but Jesus reminded him that what he considered to be his authority was only delegated to him by God. One day God would call him to account for the way he had used and abused his responsibilities.

It would do all world leaders today well to remember that whatever power they have comes from God Almighty. The arrogance that many of them have will one day bring them to nothing when they stand before God, the All-Powerful.

Why did Jesus not answer Pilate's question? Because He had already answered it in John 18:33–38 NAS:

³³ *Therefore Pilate entered again into the Praetorium, and summoned Jesus and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?"*

³⁴ *Jesus answered, "Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did*

⁵ Carson, D. A.: *New Bible Commentary : 21st Century Edition*. 4th ed. Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA : Inter-Varsity Press, 1994, S. Jn 19:1.

others tell you about Me?"

³⁵ *Pilate answered, "I am not a Jew, am I? **Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You to me;** what have You done?"*

³⁶ *Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm."*

³⁷ *Therefore Pilate said to Him, "So You are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say correctly that **I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world,** to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."*

³⁸ *Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?" And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews and said to them, "I find no guilt in Him."*

“It is a basic spiritual principle that God does not reveal new truth to us if we fail to act on the truth we already know. Furthermore, Pilate had already made it clear that he was not personally interested in spiritual truth. All he was concerned about was maintaining peace in Jerusalem as he tried to expedite the trial of Jesus of Nazareth. Pilate did not deserve an answer!”⁶

Jesus’ silence before both Herod and Pilate fulfilled Isaiah’s prophecy in Isaiah 53:7: “*He was oppressed and treated harshly, yet he never said a word. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter. And as a sheep is silent before the shearers, he did not open his mouth (NLT).*” Peter later used Jesus as the example for suffering Christians to follow.

1 Peter 2:18–23 NLT:

¹⁸ *You who are slaves must accept the authority of your masters with all respect. Do what they tell you—not only if they are kind and reasonable, but even if they are cruel.*

¹⁹ *For God is pleased with you when you do what you know is right and patiently endure unfair treatment.*

²⁰ *Of course, you get no credit for being patient if you are beaten for doing wrong. But if you suffer for doing good and endure it patiently, God is pleased with you.*

²¹ *For God called you to do good, even if it means suffering, just as Christ suffered for you. He is your example, and you must follow in his steps.*

²² *He never sinned, nor ever deceived anyone.*

²³ *He did not retaliate when he was insulted, nor threaten revenge when he suffered. He left his case in the hands of God, who always judges fairly.*

To whom was Jesus referring when He said, “*he who delivered Me to you has the greater sin*”? Most likely, Jesus was referring to **Caiaphas**, the high priest. Pilate said to Jesus earlier, it was “*your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me*” (John 18:35). Caiaphas had been trying to have Jesus killed for quite some time. Let us go back

⁶ Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Jn 19:8.

for just a moment to remember what had happened perhaps a week or so earlier at the time Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead.

John 11:45-57, The Message:

⁴⁵ *That was a turnaround for many of the Jews who were with Mary. They saw what Jesus did, and believed in him.*

⁴⁶ *But some went back to the Pharisees and told on Jesus.*

⁴⁷ ***The high priests and Pharisees called a meeting of the Jewish ruling body.** "What do we do now?" they asked. "This man keeps on doing things, creating God-signs.*

⁴⁸ *If we let him go on, pretty soon everyone will be believing in him and the Romans will come and remove what little power and privilege we still have."*

⁴⁹ *Then one of them—it was **Caiaphas**, the designated Chief Priest that year—spoke up, "Don't you know anything?*

⁵⁰ *Can't you see that it's to our advantage that one man dies for the people rather than the whole nation be destroyed?"*

⁵¹ *He didn't say this of his own accord, but as Chief Priest that year he unwittingly prophesied that Jesus was about to die sacrificially for the nation,*

⁵² *and not only for the nation but so that all God's exile-scattered children might be gathered together into one people.*

⁵³ *From that day on, they plotted to kill him.*

⁵⁴ *So Jesus no longer went out in public among the Jews. He withdrew into the country bordering the desert to a town called Ephraim and secluded himself there with his disciples.*

⁵⁵ *The Jewish Passover was coming up. Crowds of people were making their way from the country up to Jerusalem to get themselves ready for the Feast.*

⁵⁶ *They were curious about Jesus. There was a lot of talk of him among those standing around in the Temple: "What do you think? Do you think he'll show up at the Feast or not?"*

⁵⁷ *Meanwhile, the high priests and Pharisees gave out the word that anyone getting wind of him should inform them. **They were all set to arrest him.***

So it was Caiaphas who set the plan for Jesus' trial and execution in motion. Now it is clear to those who are familiar with scripture that all things have been given from God above, therefore there are degrees of sin depending on the gifts a person has been given. Pilate's sin, even though he is not familiar with the scripture, is not having provided justice to a man he knows is innocent. How much more then is the sin of the chief priest, Caiaphas, and the other leaders of God's people who have received God's Law and message through the prophets of the Old Testament?

Luke 12:47-48 NAS:

⁴⁷ *"And that slave who knew his master's will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, will receive many lashes,*

⁴⁸ *but the one who did not know it, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few. From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more.*

Both Jew and Gentile share in the sin, and therefore the guilt, of Jesus' death. In

fact, the truth is that "each of us is as guilty of putting Jesus on the cross as was Caiaphas" or Pilate. But John clearly tells us that the Jews' sin is greater because of the greater gifts of God within Judaism. The problem is not Judaism as such but the rejection of their own Messiah by these particular leaders and their followers, despite the knowledge available within Judaism. Thus, these Jews who were demanding that Jesus be crucified were of this world, not of God (John 8:23).⁷

The Jews had a greater knowledge of the Light, which appeared in the person of Jesus, so they should have embraced the Light more readily when He came. Rodney Whitacre writes:

"Accordingly their sin was greater than that of the Gentile, Pilate. But from this perspective there is now a group whose sin is much greater yet. A great many **Christians** from the time of Christ right up to the present day have been of the world as much as these Jews were, and we Christians have even far more knowledge than the Jews had. We not only have the **Old Testament** which they had, but we also have the **Holy Spirit**, the **New Testament**, and the witness of the saints throughout the ages. Anyone who does not accept Jesus Christ as their personal savior is of the world and is allied with Satan against the Son of God.⁸ Listen to what John writes in John 8:44 NAS:

⁴⁴ *"You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.*

Stop for a moment and just imagine what was going on here. Caiaphas is the high priest, which means he has the most powerful position in the Sanhedrin, the Jewish governing authority. So he had to have a thorough knowledge of the Old Testament writings in the Bible. He would have known the teachings and the commands of God. So we have no alternative but to come to the conclusion that Caiaphas intentionally ignored God's truth

⁷ Rodney A. Whitacre, *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series – John*, ed. Grant R. Osborne (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 448-453. (Carson 1991:575).

⁸ Ibid.

and was willing to deny what God had said about the coming of a Messiah, and intentionally disobeyed God so that he might get his own way. He first made certain that Jesus would not have a fair trial. Next, he made certain that other members of the Sanhedrin would stir up the crowd to demand that Jesus be crucified. Pilate was a pagan who knew nothing about the Bible, but Caiaphas was a Jew who had a working knowledge of Scripture. Therefore, it was Caiaphas, not Pilate, who had committed the greater sin.

Kind of looks like Pilate found himself in quite a dilemma, don't you think? How would anyone gather evidence to determine if Jesus was who He claimed to be? The prophecies of His birth and the miracles He performed were ample evidence. But everyone seemed to be ignoring them. Yet there was no evidence that He had even committed the most minor of offenses. Pilate made repeated attempts to release Jesus so he could get off the hook and not have to make the more difficult decision. But then the crowd got it into their heads to accuse Pilate of being a traitor to Caesar. Pilate must have thought at this point that things were going too far. He could not risk an already shaky relationship with Caesar that might make Caesar question his loyalty. He therefore made the decision to have Jesus crucified.

As a gesture of frustration Pilate went out and washed his hands in front of the crowd, *"Pilate saw that he wasn't getting anywhere and that a riot was developing. So he sent for a bowl of water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, 'I am innocent of this man's blood. The responsibility is yours (Matthew 27:24 NLT)!"*

The trial of Jesus had to be the biggest miscarriage of justice in all of history. Or was it? In spite of all the terrible things that were done to Christ in regard to this earthly trial, God had planned all of this and nothing was going to interfere with Jesus accomplishing His purpose for coming. This event had been predicted throughout the Old Testament and God's will is always fulfilled. Does that absolve the participants in this trial from any responsibility for their many sins? Not on your life. Luke writes the following in Acts 2:22-24 NLT:

²² **"People of Israel, listen! God publicly endorsed Jesus the Nazarene by doing powerful miracles, wonders, and signs through him, as you well know.**

²³ **But God knew what would happen, and his prearranged plan was carried out when Jesus was betrayed. With the help of lawless Gentiles, you nailed him to a cross and killed him.**

²⁴ **But God released him from the horrors of death and raised him back to life, for death could not keep him in its grip.**

Everyone is responsible for his or her own actions, no matter what the circumstances. God worked His will in spite of the sinful behavior of all involved in Christ's crucifixion, and one day they will all answer for what they did.

What do you think the Church's response would be if Christ came again today under

similar circumstances to His first coming? We are sorry to say that we believe many of the church leaders might do the same thing the Jewish leaders did for similar reasons. No wonder our nation is in the condition it is in. May God be merciful to those who still truly love Him.

But what about you? Are you in a dilemma over what to do with Christ? If you are not a Christian, your dilemma may be: “Shall I accept Him as my Savior and follow Him? Shall I walk down the narrow road that leads to heaven and glory? Or shall I walk down the wide, easy road that is full of parties, selfishness, materialism, and being like the world that will eventually take me to destruction?”

If you are already a Christian you may still be facing a dilemma. God wants all of you and all of your life. Perhaps He is calling you to let go of something, or to be obedient in some way, and you are struggling with the choice. **Remember that the path of obedience to God is the key to real happiness, peace, and fulfillment.** Recall the words of Jim Elliot, a missionary who lost his life so that a tribe of Indians could eventually come to Christ, “*He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.*” Christ said it first when He said, “*what does it profit a man if he gain the whole world but loses his own soul?*” (Matthew 16:26).