

THAT YOU MAY HAVE LIFE

(A Study of the Gospel of John)

What Went Wrong With Pilate?

INTRODUCTION: The man known in history as Pontius Pilate, and the judge who stands at center stage in John's gospel in chapters 18 and 19 in the Roman trial of Jesus, must have been a person who demonstrated great administrative ability and political skill to have been named by the Emperor to be the procurator of the province of Judea in ancient Palestine.

But we know nothing of greatness about him. We know zero that commends him or that would cause his descendants to boast. What we know about him comes from the Sacred Scriptures, but even when you mix that with the small amount that secular history could add, everyone who considers this individual is confronted with a question?

- What went wrong?
- What happened?
- What went wrong with Pilate?

We are given the answers in John 18:28–19:16 and the other parallel gospel passages. In those inspired descriptions of these events, I found six things that went wrong to cause a man whose very word was law over the Jews that he ruled, to negate his own considered judgment and yield his power to be a servant to the slaves that live under his thumb.

It is a long passage, and we will read it all; but we will do so in parts, and pause every time we discover something else that caused Pilate to be so wrong. I noticed, as I discovered these things in study this week, how much of a present danger these things are to each of us, mothers and fathers alike, men and women, teens, boys and girls.

Each of us have decisions to make and some of those decisions are critically important for our lives, and some for the lives of others also. The devil would love to steer us down the wrong path as most certainly he did with his willing follower Pontius Pilate. If we will be attentive to what the Holy Spirit has revealed in His Word, we will at the least be forewarned of tactics the evil one uses to make things go terribly, terribly wrong.

John 18:28 28 Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas to the Praetorium, and it was early morning. But they themselves did not go into the Praetorium, lest they should be defiled, but that they might eat the Passover. 29 Pilate then went out to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this Man?"

30 They answered and said to him, "If He were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him up to you."

31 Then Pilate said to them, "You take Him and judge Him according to your law."

I. PILATE SHIRKED HIS RESPONSIBILITY.

- Pilate was the procurator. He was the judge in matters such as this.
- But even from the beginning, Pilate did not want to do his job.
"You take Him and judge Him according to your law."
- Leave me out of this

Pilate was not the first to evade responsibility.

- Adam said, "The woman you made for me gave me the fruit and I ate."
- Eve said, "The serpent deceived me and I ate."

A great deal of what is wrong in America today is because people will not take up their own rightful responsibilities.

- Men would rather play the field like a bull in a pasture full of heifers rather than
 - take care of a wife and raise a family for whom they provide with the labor of their hands and
 - whom they teach with the learning of a disciplined mind and
 - who they love from the depths of their heart.
- Women also prefer to spend time on Facebook or Pinterest or playing silly little games on phone or iPad or laptop than
 - Investing time and energy in husbands and children
 - In growing themselves to be the woman God created her to be
 - In discipling children to know, love, and serve God
 - In investing her considerable intellect and skills in those things that would impact the people of the world for the Kingdom of God.

No Pilate, you are not alone in evading responsibilities we know are rightfully ours.

- Every one of us is tempted almost daily to do it.
- And all too often we yield to that temptation and refuse to wear the mantle of responsibility God has ordained for us.

And dear friend, be sure. When we lay aside our responsibilities

- To the neglect of spouse or children
- To the neglect of job or profession
- To the neglect of doing those things of the Kingdom of God that the Almighty has declared for us,

As with Pilate, things go terribly, terribly wrong.

We continue our reading in the second half of John, 18:31 to seek the next cause of trouble for Pilate.

John 18:31 31 Therefore the Jews said to him, "It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death," 32 that the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled which He spoke, signifying by what death He would die.

33 Then Pilate entered the Praetorium again, called Jesus, and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?"

34 Jesus answered him, "Are you speaking for yourself about this, or did others tell you this concerning Me?"

35 Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have 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, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here."

37 Pilate therefore said to Him, "Are You a king then?"

Jesus answered, "You say *rightly* that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness 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 fault in Him at all.

39 "But you have a custom that I should release someone to you at the Passover. Do you therefore want me to release to you the King of the Jews?"

II. PILATE TRIED TO BE DELIVERED FROM DECISION BY CUSTOM.

- We see clearly here that the problem was not that Pilate could not understand what was happening.
- He did not lack brain power.
- He was not short of understanding.

He said, "I find no fault in Him at all."

But

- I am not going to take up my responsibility as judge at this proceeding and set Him free.
- I am not going to say, "No matter what, I will act upon the truth."

Pilate thought he saw a way out just by keeping a local custom. It was a custom at Passover, for the Romans to set one of the Jewish prisoners free as a token of good will to the people.

- Pilate, thought, "Here is my out. I'll just keep the custom! Who could fault me for that?"

Pilate, I do not know if you had any children in the flesh, but I am sure you have a multitude of descendents in the spirit. For everywhere around us there are men and women and teens who say

- I just did what everybody else did?
- I'm no different from everybody else.
- What's the big deal, everybody is doing it.

And when did the laws of God get determined by majority vote or action?

When did the Lord who made you and who put you in this world tell you He created you to do what everybody else is doing?

Have you noticed that what everybody else is doing is not working very well?

- Not for them
- Not for those they love or ought to love
- Not for our country
- Not for the world
- And certainly not for the will, plan, and purpose of the God who made them.

When we like Pilate do what is customary, what everybody else is doing, we get the same result as everybody else and the same result as Pilate.

Things go terribly, terribly wrong.

40 Then they all cried again, saying, "Not this Man, but Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a robber.

Now at this point, I must jump briefly to the gospel of Matthew, because he adds a detail that is not in John or any other of the gospels, yet is pertinent in asking, "What went wrong with Pilate."

Matthew 27:15–19 15 Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to releasing to the multitude one prisoner whom they wished. 16 And at that time they had a notorious prisoner called Barabbas. 17 Therefore, when they had gathered together, Pilate said to

them, "Whom do you want me to release to you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?" 18 For he knew that they had handed Him over because of envy.

19 While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent to him, saying, "Have nothing to do with that just Man, for I have suffered many things today in a dream because of Him."

III. PILATE DID NOT LISTEN TO HIS WIFE.

- Men, God has given us a helpmate that is comparable to us.
- That means she complements us, not is identical to us.
- She provides what we lack.
- A godly wife is your best counselor. Karen has saved me from many a mistake and thus spared me a boatload of pain and heartache.
- Your wife will not always be right, but she is always worth listening to.

Continuing in John 19:1

19:1 So then Pilate took Jesus and scourged *Him*.

IV. PILATE SOUGHT TO AVOID PERSONAL DECISION BY COMPROMISE.

- The Jews leaders wanted blood, and Pilate did not want a fight with the Jewish leaders.
- So Pilate thought he could satisfy them by giving them part of what they wanted.
- So he sent Jesus to be scourged.

2 And the soldiers twisted a crown of thorns and put *it* on His head, and they put on Him a purple robe. 3 Then they said, "Hail, King of the Jews!" And they struck Him with their hands.

4 Pilate then went out again, and said to them, "Behold, I am bringing Him out to you, that you may know that I find no fault in Him."

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

And Pilate must have thought: what a smart dude I am.

- I'm not going to have to either yield to them or stand up to them.
- I did this Jesus a favor. Better to beat Him to a pulp than have Him nailed to a cross. Look at Him. Flesh peeled from His back, blood running in His eyes from that crown of thorns. He can barely stand.
- The enemy will be satisfied.

But we read on ...

6 Therefore, when the chief priests and officers saw Him, they cried out, saying, "Crucify *Him*, crucify *Him*!"

- The enemy is never satisfied when you start compromising the truth.
- He is never satisfied when you give up a portion of righteousness.
- The enemy is the devil and he is not satisfied until he gets it all!

So, now we read,

Pilate said to them, "You take Him and crucify *Him*, for I find no fault in Him."

V. PILATE TRIED TO PASS AND LET SOMEONE ELSE DO THE DIRTY WORK.

- OK, OK. I'm not going to do this.
- But I will let you do this.
- That is what 'wash his hands' was all about.

We may fool all the people some of the time with this tactic.
We may fool some of the people all the time doing this.
But we will not fool God even a single time.

David covered his sin well concerning adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah, but God sent His prophet Nathan who stuck his boney finger in the face of the King and pronounced, "God says, YOU are the man!"

And Scripture declares

7 The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and according to our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God."

8 Therefore, when Pilate heard that saying, he was the more afraid, 9 and went again into the Praetorium, and said to Jesus, "Where are You from?" But Jesus gave him no answer.

10 Then Pilate said to Him, "Are You not speaking to me? Do You not know that I have power to crucify You, and power to release You?"

11 Jesus answered, "You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin."

12 From then on Pilate sought to release Him, but the Jews cried out, saying, "If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar's friend. Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar."

VI. PILATE DECIDED TO SAVE HIS OWN LIFE AND FORTUNE.

The religious leaders blackmailed Pilate. They threatened to tell Caesar that they were more loyal to him than Pilate was.

Pilate would not risk his position, his wealth, or his status, just with doing what was right for this Jesus.

13 When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus out and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called *The Pavement*, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha. 14 Now it was the Preparation Day of the Passover, and about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, "Behold your King!"

15 But 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 Then he delivered Him to them to be crucified. Then they took Jesus and led *Him* away.

And Pilate did keep his position, and wealth, and status... for a while.

But then he lost those.

Then he lost his life.

Then he was lost for all eternity.

Jesus said, **Matthew 16:25** For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.