

## **Title Slide #1**

### **PILATE'S DILEMMA**

John 18:1-19:42; Luke 22:14-23:56

*(Good Friday or Passion Sunday)*

## **Slide #2**

According to Dr. Paul Maier, Pilate was a “master” politician. That kind of says it all, doesn't it? I read recently that 53 percent of Americans can't name their representative in Congress. But that doesn't keep Congress from being highly unpopular. As someone once asked, “If pro is the opposite of con, then is progress the opposite of Congress?”

Pilate married into a political family. His wife Claudia was the granddaughter of Caesar Augustus. So, Pilate was a member of the Emperor's family by marriage, not but merit.

Pilate served as the Roman prefect of Judea for ten years, from A.D. 26-36. A prefect is like a governor. Pilate definitely held a position of power, but not complete power, because Pilate had to take orders from Rome and for that reason, he was insecure in his position.

Adding to his insecurity was the fact that He ruled at the whim of his wife's family, who could and would at times change their minds.

The appointment to governor of Judea was at best a mixed bag. While it was a powerful position, Pilate nevertheless had to contend with the Jews, who were a restless bunch of people, ready to begin a rebellion at the drop of a hat.

## **Slide #3**

Pilate upset the Jews as he took office in 27 AD, when he came riding into the city with his troops bearing their standards in full view. On the top of every flagpole that the soldiers bore was a carved image of Caesar. For the Jews this was a transgression of the commandment to have no graven images. Even more grievously, because of the Roman custom of emperor worship, Pilate's action smacked of blatant idolatry. This thoughtless action provoked a riot. So Pilate was in trouble from the beginning of his reign.

There were some skirmishes in which Pilate proved himself a brutal ruler. Luke

13 mentions one of these--an occasion where Pilate's soldiers killed some Galileans. And to compound their crime, the soldiers then took the Galileans' blood and mixed it with sacrifices to their pagan gods. For the Jews, this was a despicable act.

Pilate's brutality probably grew out of his fear of being deposed. He was caught between a Roman government which had little respect for him and a civilian population that was known for its riotous rebellion. And then he had to deal with Jesus.

#### **Slide #4**

It was the religious leaders who brought Jesus to Pilate's palace. It's interesting. They brought him to Pilate, but they refused to enter Pilate's palace. Why? Because this would make them ceremonially unclean by entering the residence of a lowly Gentile. Jews believed that if you took two steps over a Gentile threshold you defiled yourself. So they wanted Pilate to do their dirty work, but they wanted to keep their distance from him while he did it. To show you how afraid Pilate was of offending the religious authorities, he agreed to come out to them.

#### **Slide #5**

The dialogue is intriguing, even sarcastic. Pilate asked the religious authorities, "What charges are you bringing against this man?" referring to Jesus.

Sarcastically they respond, "If he were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you." That alone tells us what we need to know about the charges brought against Jesus. They were totally unsubstantiated.

Pilate knew of no Roman law Jesus had broken. Pilate could be just as sarcastic as the Jews, saying, "Well then, take him and judge him according to your law." That didn't work. "We are not permitted to put anyone to death," they said.

And it was true. The only man in the city who had the authority to pass a death sentence was Pontius Pilate. And the religious leaders were determined that Christ be put to death.

#### **Slide #6**

Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" "Is that your own idea," Jesus asked, "or did others talk to you about me?" "Am I a Jew?" Pilate replied. "Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What is it you have done?"

Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.” “Then, You are a king!” said Pilate. Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.” It is here that Pilate asked that famous of all questions, “What is truth?”

### **Slide #7**

There is no question Pilate was frustrated by Jesus. It was also clear to him that Jesus posed no threat to the empire. He said himself that his kingdom was not of this world. Pilate went out again to the religious authorities and said, “I find no basis for a charge against him.”

Then the religious leaders hit Pilate’s weak spot: “If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar.”

Pilate tried to reason with them. Then he tried to bribe them. He remembered that the Jews had a tradition that they would release one prisoner at Passover. He offered to release a notorious political prisoner named Barabbas! Still they would not be appeased. “Crucify him, crucify him,” they shouted, referring to Jesus.

At this point, Pilate had Christ flogged, hoping that would appease the mob, but it did not. He had his soldiers mock Christ. They put a purple robe on him and thrust a crown of thorns on his head, and called out in derision, “King of the Jews.” That still wasn’t enough.

The mob was determined for Jesus to die, while Pilate’s sense of justice told him the man was innocent. According to Matthew’s Gospel, even Pilate’s wife Claudia wanted Pilate to have nothing to do with Jesus. Matthew 27:19 states, “While Pilate was sitting on the judge’s seat, his wife sent him this message: ‘Don’t have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him.’”

Pilate simply didn’t know what to do. He couldn’t in good conscience find Jesus guilty, but it was not politically expedient to set him free. Three times, Pilate tried to release Jesus, fully convinced of Jesus’ innocence, but the mob would not listen. “Crucify him, crucify him,” they shouted.

## **Slide #8**

It is Matthew who reports that when Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. “I am innocent of this man’s blood,” he said. “It is your responsibility” (27:24). And with that Pilate handed Jesus over to be crucified. It was a cowardly act, one that has stained Pilate’s record for more than 2,000 years.

To strike the final comeback, Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross on which Christ died. The notice read like this: “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” Many of the residents of Jerusalem read this sign, says Luke, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek. The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, “Do not write ‘The King of the Jews,’ but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews.” Pilate answered, “What I have written, I have written.”

## **Slide #9**

Pilate could be very brutal. Pilate could be very mean and nasty. But Pilate only crime in this situation was that he was weak. And friends, that is true of us as well.

When we do wrong, it will probably not be because we are brutal, or greedy or even hard-hearted. It will probably be because we are weak--morally weak, spiritually weak. We will keep quiet when we should have spoken up. We will give in when we should have walked away. We will strike a deal when we should have held true to our values.

You know about weakness, don’t you--moral weakness, spiritual weakness? The kind that wrecks families and ruins lives. The kind that refuses to speak out in the face of evil? Weakness sometimes takes the form of sexual temptation. Sometimes it entraps us in chemical dependency.

Whatever the traps we wrestle with throughout our lives, the truth of the matter is that **We SIN!** We play the same games as Pilate did. We get ourselves entrapped in the same dilemmas as old Pilate. We can justify our wrong actions with a simple wave of our hands or shrug of our shoulders. But none of that ever makes things right, does it?

## **Slide #10**

No, what makes our dilemmas right is what happened today. A suffering and dying Jesus. A Jesus who took our place; suffered our death; and completely satisfied

His Father, saying “It is Finished!” The word we translate “it is finished” is really a banking term in Jesus’ day. It simply means, “our debt has been paid.” This is the love of God for us, that He was willing to offer up His ONLY Son in your place and mine, so that we can have forgiveness of sins and life eternal. That’s why we call this Friday “GOOD.” It certainly wasn’t good for Jesus. But in the plans of God – this Friday was especially good for us.

### **Slide #11**

Do you know this man, Archbishop Desmond M. Tutu? In his Good Friday address a couple of years ago, he said: “We tend to turn the Christian religion into a religion of virtues, but it really is a religion of grace. You become a good person because you are loved. You are not loved because you are good.”

Good Friday gives us hope, hope for weak persons like you and me. There was even hope for Pontius Pilate if he was willing to accept it. But he did not. Friend, do not make that same mistake. Accept the grace of God today.

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\*The Rev. Dr. Leslie Holmes, [http://day1.org/1060-quitting\\_aint\\_an\\_option](http://day1.org/1060-quitting_aint_an_option).