

Foothills Christian Assembly Sermon June 27, 2021  
Luke 23: 1 – 25 “Who Was Pontius Pilate?”

66 As soon as it was day, the elders of the people, both chief priests and scribes, came together and led Him into their council, saying, 67 "If You are the Christ, tell us." But He said to them, "If I tell you, you will by no means believe. 68 And if I also ask you, you will by no means answer Me or let Me go. 69 Hereafter the Son of Man will sit on the right hand of the power of God." 70 Then they all said, "Are You then the Son of God?" So He said to them, "You rightly say that I am." 71 And they said, "What further testimony do we need? For we have heard it ourselves from His own mouth."

1 Then the whole multitude of them arose and led Him to Pilate. 2 And they began to accuse Him, saying, "We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, saying that He Himself is Christ, a King." 3 Then Pilate asked Him, saying, "Are You the King of the Jews?" He answered him and said, "It is as you say." 4 So Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowd, "I find no fault in this Man. 5 But they were the more fierce, saying, "He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee to this place."

6 When Pilate heard of Galilee, he asked if the Man were a Galilean. 7 And as soon as he knew that He belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time. 8 Now when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceedingly glad; for he had desired for a long time to see Him, because he had heard many things about Him, and he hoped to see some miracle done by Him. 9 Then he questioned Him with many words, but He answered him nothing. 10 And the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused Him. 11 Then Herod, with his men of war, treated Him with contempt and mocked Him, arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe, and sent Him back to Pilate. 12 That very day Pilate and Herod became friends with each other, for previously they had been at enmity with each other.

13 Then Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests, the rulers, and the people, 14 said to them, "You have brought this Man to me, as one who misleads the people. And indeed, having examined Him in your presence, I have found no fault in this Man concerning those things of which you accuse Him 15 no, neither did Herod, for I sent you back to him; and indeed nothing deserving of death has been done by Him. 16 I will therefore chastise Him and release Him" 17 (for it was necessary for him to release one to them at the feast). 18 And they all cried out at once, saying, "Away with this Man, and release to us Barabbas"-- 19 who had been thrown into prison for a certain rebellion made in the city, and for murder 20 Pilate, therefore, wishing to release Jesus, again called out to them. 21 But they shouted, saying, "Crucify Him, crucify Him! 22 Then he said to them the third time, "Why, what evil has He done? I have found no reason for death in Him. I will therefore chastise Him and let Him go." 23 But they were insistent, demanding with loud voices that He be crucified. And the voices of these men and of the chief priests prevailed. 24 So Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they requested. 25 And he released to them the one they requested, who for rebellion and murder had been thrown into prison; but he delivered Jesus to their will.

I. Introduction

- a. As we consider Pontius Pilate today, we will continue our walk alongside Jesus and His disciples. Imagine being there during the public trial before Pilate. Remember, we know the outcome looking back over >2,000 years of hindsight,

but the disciples did not know what would happen. Would Jesus be executed? Would He be imprisoned? Would He be scourged? What would happen to their Lord? As they watch the trial unfold, Pilate emerges as the main character. He will decide Christ's fate. Even though Jesus had told them He would be killed and resurrected, the disciples were still whirling in fear and confusion as this trial marches on before their eyes.

- b. Luke 23: 1 – 25 “Who Was Pontius Pilate?”
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- II. About Pontius Pilate
- a. Lk 3:1,2 “Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, 2 while Annas and Caiaphas were high priests, the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness.”
  - b. Lk 13:1-3 “There were present at that season some who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. 2 And Jesus answered and said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all [other] Galileans, because they suffered such things? 3 "I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.”
  - c. LBD “Roman governor of Judaea from ad 26–36/37. Appears in the Gospel narratives at the trial of Jesus. Many key witnesses mention Pilate, but much of what is known of his life and rule comes from Josephus (*Antiquities* 18.2.2 §35; 18.3.1–2 §§55–62; 18.4.1–2 §§85–99; *Jewish War* 2.9.2–4 §§169–77). Philo recounts a single incident involving Pilate (*On the Embassy to Gaius* 299–305; compare Luke 3:1) and Tacitus confirms that the crucifixion of *Chrestus* came by Pilate during the reign of Tiberius (*Annales ab exessu divi Augusti* 15.44.4). In all four Gospels, Pilate is involved in the trial of Jesus (Matt 27:11–26; Mark 15:1–15; Luke 23:1–25; John 18:28–19:22). Luke also references an otherwise undocumented incident involving Pilate and the Galileans (Luke 13:1). An inscription at Caesarea Maritima gives the technical title of his position as *praefectus Iudaeae*, prefect of Judaea. A prefect (ἡγεμών, *hēgemōn*) was a leader of 500–1,000 military troops. The office involved military, financial, and judicial responsibilities (Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 44). Pilate is portrayed in several ways in the three main sources—Josephus, Philo, and the Gospels. Philo and Josephus present Pilate as a cruel tyrant, while the gospels

present him as a weak and easily swayed ruler. These varying positions may be reconciled by considering Pilate's relationships to Roman leaders, especially Tiberias and Sejanus. Pilate's cruel behavior and disregard for Jewish customs began immediately upon his arrival in Palestine in ad 26. He obtained his position through his mentor Sejanus—who was commander of the Praetorian Guard and known to hate Jews (Philo, *On the Embassy to Gaius* 159). Pilate first offended the Jews by bringing Roman standards—with images of the emperor—into Jerusalem. Previous prefects had not placed any images in Jerusalem. The Jewish people sent a delegation to Caesarea and pleaded with Pilate for five days to remove the images from the city. On the sixth day, Pilate sent soldiers into the crowd. At his signal, they were to draw their swords and cut the Jews to pieces if they did not allow Caesar's image. The Jews fell down together and exposed their necks, for they would rather die than transgress their law. Pilate, not desiring a revolution, decided to remove the images from Jerusalem (Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.9.2–3 §§169–74; *Antiquities* 18.3.1 §§55–59). A second conflict occurred after Pilate took funds from the sacred treasury to build aqueducts. When Pilate visited Jerusalem, his actions caused uproar among the Jews. He mixed his own soldiers into the crowd disguised as civilians. At his signal, they beat the protestors with clubs. Many Jews died from the beatings or were trampled by the crowd (Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.9.4 §175–77; *Antiquities* 18.3.2 §§60–62). Philo describes an incident where Pilate, in an attempt to honor the Emperor Tiberius, placed shields bearing the emperor's name in the former palace of Herod in Jerusalem. By placing the shields in the headquarters of the Roman administration, not the temple, Herod was attempting not to offend the Jews (Bond, *Pontius Pilate*, 36–48; Thatcher, "Philo on Pilate", 215–18). However, the leading Jews, along with four of Herod's sons, requested that Pilate remove the shields. When he refused, they appealed to Emperor Tiberius by letter. Tiberius was infuriated and ordered Pilate to remove the shields and place them at the temple of Augustus at Caesarea. Pilate's attempt to honor Tiberius caused him to fall into disfavor. The last recorded conflict resulted in Pilate's removal from office. When a Samaritan false prophet led his followers to Mount Gerizim, claiming to show them Moses' sacred vessels, Pilate blocked their route with cavalry and armed men. Some followers were able to flee, but others were killed or taken prisoner. The most prominent men were executed. The Samaritans appealed to Vitellius, the prefect of Syria. Vitellius sent Marcellus to temporarily take over Judaea, and ordered Pilate to stand before the emperor in Rome to answer the accusations of the Jews (Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.4.1–2 §§85–89). This took place at the end of ad 36—or the beginning of ad 37—and he arrived in Rome after Tiberius' death. Tiberius died in March of 37, before Pilate arrived. Nothing is recorded of Pilate after his arrival in Rome, but he was

likely exiled to France. Eusebius recorded that Pilate committed suicide after the trial of Jesus, though no evidence confirms this (*Ecclesiastical History* 2.7)."<sup>1</sup>

- d. So, Pilate was prefect of Judea for about 10 years, serving on behalf of the Roman Emperor as the local governor of that region that included Israel and Jerusalem. The Jews saw him as one who hated Jews, and he did not have favor with his Roman overlords.

### III. Pilate's questioning of Jesus v3,4

- a. "Then the whole multitude of them arose and led Him to Pilate. 2 And they began to accuse Him, saying, "We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, saying that He Himself is Christ, a King." 3 Then Pilate asked Him, saying, "Are You the King of the Jews?" He answered him and said, "It is as you say." 4 So Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowd, "I find no fault in this Man." 5 But they were the more fierce, saying, "He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee to this place.""

- i. So, Luke's first mention of Pilate appears positive. He's not quick to give in to the unjust demands of the Jews. Pilate finds no fault in Jesus and states this publicly to the clamoring Jews. The Jews will not be dissuaded. Perhaps the followers of Jesus were becoming hopeful at this point, even though the Jews were still fiercely accusing Jesus?

#### b. Other details from other Gospels

- i. Matthew 27:12-14 "And while He was being accused by the chief priests and elders, He answered nothing. 13 Then Pilate said to Him, "Do You not hear how many things they testify against You?" 14 But He answered him not one word, so that the governor marveled greatly."

- 1. Pilate marveled greatly at Christ's silence before the myriad accusations of the Jews.

- ii. Jn 18:28-38 "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." 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.

- 1. Pilate seeks to carry out a legitimate trial, but the Jews instead demand Pilate trust their verdict without any investigation of his own. Pilate initially refuses to use Roman capital punishment powers for a violation of Jewish law.

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<sup>1</sup> Massey, M. B. (2016). [Pontius Pilate](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

- iii. Going on in Jn 18: "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.""
  - 1. Pilate goes through a fuller questioning of Jesus after the Jews challenge Pilate's initial judgment. Face to face with Jesus, The Truth, Pilate asks "what is truth", showing that he is not of the truth, not hearing Christ's Voice as King of kings. Even still, Pilate again finds no fault in Jesus.
  - 2. Note the difference between worshiping Christ as God and "finding no fault" in Him.

IV. Pilate sends Jesus to Herod v6,7

- a. 6 When Pilate heard of Galilee, he asked if the Man were a Galilean. 7 And as soon as he knew that He belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time.
- b. Pilate is quick to avoid bearing full responsibility for this Jesus controversy. If Herod agrees with him ("no fault in Jesus"), then Pilate has more weight to push back against the Jews, and also Pilate has more political cover if the Jews create a tumult over Pilate not condemning Jesus. On the other hand, if Herod condemns Christ, Pilate can join Herod and have the same political cover. Either way, we see here Pilate's political motivation surfacing. Pilate's sense of justice only goes so far... it goes no further than his own neck.
- c. Note also that Pilate was not usually in Jerusalem. Pilate's usual residence was in Caesarea. He was there for the feast, to prevent tumult amongst the great crowd of Jews that would be present.

V. Pilate and Herod become friends v12

- a. 11 Then Herod, with his men of war, treated Him with contempt and mocked Him, arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe, and sent Him back to Pilate. 12 That very day Pilate and Herod became friends with each other, for previously they had been at enmity with each other.
- b. Pilate is willing to be friends with King Herod, a bad man whom we will look at more closely in the future. Briefly, about Herod:
  - i. **"HEROD ANTIPAS** (Ἡρώδης Αντίπας, *Hērōdēs Antipas*). Son of [Herod the Great](#) and Malthace. [Tetrarch](#) (ruler) of [Galilee](#) and Peraea from 4 bc—ad 39.

Antipas appears in the New Testament more frequently than any other member of the [Herodian dynasty](#)—his rule coincided with the ministries of [John the Baptist](#) and [Jesus](#). The gospel writers refer to Antipas only as “Herod”—Antipas adopted this name in ad 6 (Hoehner, *Herod Antipas*, 104–06).”

- VI. Pilate's verdict and sentence v13-17
- a. 13 Then Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests, the rulers, and the people, 14 said to them, "You have brought this Man to me, as one who misleads the people. And indeed, having examined Him in your presence, I have found no fault in this Man concerning those things of which you accuse Him 15 no, neither did Herod, for I sent you back to him; and indeed nothing deserving of death has been done by Him. 16 I will therefore chastise Him and release Him" 17 (for it was necessary for him to release one to them at the feast).
    - i. Other Gospels
      1. Mt 27:18 “For he knew that they had handed Him over because of envy.”
      - ii. So, Pilate moves ahead with his plan to dissuade the Jews. He knows they envy Jesus, so perhaps if Pilate publicly embarrasses Jesus with a scourging, the Jews will be satisfied, especially after Herod has also found nothing deserving of death in Jesus.
- VII. Pilate again called out to the people v20
- a. 18 And they all cried out at once, saying, "Away with this Man, and release to us Barabbas"-- 19 who had been thrown into prison for a certain rebellion made in the city, and for murder 20 Pilate, therefore, wishing to release Jesus, again called out to them.
    - i. But, the people will not be dissuaded from the death sentence for Jesus. They prefer a man accused of rebellion and murder instead of Jesus. Pilate’s plan is not working. The disciples continue to watch this back and forth, wondering, waiting.
  - b. Other Gospels
    - i. Mt 27:19 “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.””
    - ii. Did this message of a dream impact Pilate’s decision-making? “Have nothing to do with that just Man.” His wife has a painful dream because of Jesus, on the very day Pilate would be examining Jesus?! This providence would have fed Pilate’s fears and his desire to be completely disconnected from Christ.
  - c. Pilate still does not give in to the Jews. He wants to release Jesus. Pilate wants nothing to do with Jesus.
- VIII. Pilate's third plea to the people v22
- a. 21 But they shouted, saying, "Crucify Him, crucify Him! 22 Then he said to them the third time, "Why, what evil has He done? I have found no reason for death in Him. I will therefore chastise Him and let Him go."

- b. Even a third time, Pilate pleads with the people, questioning the people. “Why should I crucify Him? I’ve found no reason for death in Him.” Pilate goes back to his plan to scourge Jesus and let Him go. He wants nothing to do with Jesus. He does not want to bear the responsibility for Christ’s death.
- IX. Pilate capitulates to the people v24,25
- a. 23 But they were insistent, demanding with loud voices that He be crucified. And the voices of these men and of the chief priests prevailed. 24 So Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they requested. 25 And he released to them the one they requested, who for rebellion and murder had been thrown into prison; but he delivered Jesus to their will.
    - i. Finally, seeing his plan is a failure, Pilate believes he must do as the Jews demand, likely because he feared a great tumult and uprising in Jerusalem if he didn’t agree to crucifying Jesus.
  - b. Other Gospels
    - i. Jn 19:5-16 “Then Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. And [Pilate] said to them, “Behold the Man!” 6 Therefore, when the chief priests and officers saw Him, they cried out, saying, “Crucify [Him], crucify [Him]!” Pilate said to them, “You take Him and crucify [Him], for I find no fault in Him.” 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.*” 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. So they took Jesus and led [Him] away.”
    - ii. Pilate was afraid to be seen as being against Caesar. The Jews play their final card, and it’s too much for Pilate to brave. He gives in.
      - 1. Mt 27:24 “When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather [that] a tumult was rising, he took water and washed [his] hands before the multitude, saying, “I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see [to it].””

2. Pilate deceived himself, believing he could blame the Jews and be free of the responsibility of Christ's death. He was wrong. Nevertheless, his reluctance to participate in Christ's execution is remembered in Scripture.
3. The followers of Jesus who saw this here the final verdict, and they see Christ turned over to be crucified. Hope crushed.

#### X. Pilate's Bible Legacy

- a. [Act 3:12-15 NKJV] "12 So when Peter saw [it], he responded to the people: "Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? Or why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? 13 "The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let [Him] go. 14 "But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, 15 "and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses."
  - i. Pilate is portrayed in a positive light here.
- b. [Act 4:23-28 NKJV] "23 And being let go, they went to their own [companions] and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. 24 So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: "Lord, You [are] God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them, 25 "who by the mouth of Your servant David have said: 'Why did the nations rage, And the people plot vain things? 26 The kings of the earth took their stand, And the rulers were gathered together Against the LORD and against His Christ.' 27 "For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together 28 to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done."
  - i. Pilate is grouped in with those who were gathered together against the Lord and His Christ. So, even though Pilate was determined to let Christ go, Pilate is still grouped amongst those responsible for Christ's death.
- c. [Act 13:26-29] "Men [and] brethren, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to you the word of this salvation has been sent. 27 "For those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they did not know Him, nor even the voices of the Prophets which are read every Sabbath, have fulfilled [them] in condemning [Him]. 28 "And though they found no cause for death [in Him], they asked Pilate that He should be put to death. 29 "Now when they had fulfilled all that was written concerning Him, they took [Him] down from the tree and laid [Him] in a tomb." (Pilate had authority)
- d. [1Ti 6:13-14 NKJV] 13 "I urge you in the sight of God who gives life to all things, and [before] Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate, 14 that you keep [this] commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ's appearing" (Pilate had authority to free Jesus)

#### XI. Questions to know, love and obey God