

Pontius Pilate and the Romans

Message 2 of 6 in the series: "Brought to Life"

A. Some important background information:

Roman Emperors appointed prefects (governors) over provinces to administer the affairs of government and keep the peace. Rome couldn't afford to keep large numbers of troops in small, remote provinces like Judea, so they maintained control by using brute force to punish troublemakers and crush rebellions quickly.

Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor over the provinces of Samaria and Judea from AD 26-36. (Jerusalem was located in Judea.) He was very unpopular with the Jews because of his stubbornness, excessive use of force, and his disregard for their religious beliefs. The Sanhedrin (High Council) threatened to have Pilate recalled which would likely cost him his job and perhaps his life.

The religious leaders who hated Jesus had to persuade the Roman governor to sentence Jesus to death because they didn't have the authority to do it themselves.

B. Even though they detested Pilate, on Good Friday morning, some members of the Sanhedrin brought Jesus to Pilate requesting Jesus' immediate execution.

"Then he was taken to the headquarters of the Roman governor. His accusers didn't go inside because it would defile them, and they wouldn't be allowed to celebrate the Passover. So Pilate, the governor, went out to them and asked, 'What is your charge against this man?' 'We wouldn't have handed him over to you if he weren't a criminal!' they retorted. 'Then take him away and judge him by your own law,' Pilate told them. 'Only the Romans are permitted to execute someone,' the Jewish leaders replied." John 18:28b-31 (NLT)

Note: The Jewish leaders knew a charge of blasphemy (Jesus claimed to be the Son of God) would mean nothing to Pilate, so they accused Jesus of three other crimes: tax evasion, treason, and terrorism which were capital offenses under Roman law. "This man has been leading our people astray by telling them not to pay their taxes to the Roman government and by claiming he is the Messiah, a king... he is causing riots by his teaching wherever he goes—all over Judea, from Galilee to Jerusalem!" Luke 23:2b & 5b (NLT)

Life Application: If we allow pride to go unchecked, we will become blind to our own sin and hypocrisy.

"Blind guides! You strain your water so you won't accidentally swallow a gnat, but you swallow a camel!"
Matthew 23:24 (NLT)

"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life." Psalm 139:23-24 (NLT)

C. Pilate knew Jesus was innocent, but he didn't set Jesus free.

"He knew very well that the religious leaders had arrested Jesus out of envy." Matthew 27:18 (NLT)

1. Pilate had become so cynical that he had given up on seeking truth and justice and settled for finding whatever works.

Pilate tried making a deal with the crowd. "Then Pilate went back into his headquarters and called for Jesus to be brought to him. 'Are you the king of the Jews?' he asked him. Jesus replied, 'Is this your own question, or did others tell you about me?' 'Am I a Jew?' Pilate retorted. 'Your own people and their leading priests brought you to me for trial. Why? What have you done?' Jesus answered, 'My Kingdom is not an earthly kingdom. If it were, my followers would fight to keep me from being handed over to the Jewish leaders. But my Kingdom is not of this world.' Pilate said, 'So you are a king?' Jesus responded, 'You say I am a king. Actually, I was born and came into the world to testify to the truth. All who love the truth recognize that what I say is true.' 'What is truth?' Pilate asked. Then he went out again to the people and told them, 'He is not guilty of any crime. But you have a custom of asking me to release one prisoner each year at Passover. Would you like me to release this "King of the Jews"?' But they shouted back, 'No! Not this man. We want Barabbas!'" John 18:33-40 (NLT)

Life Application: We need to turn to God for help when we face difficult decisions. "Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need."

Matthew 6:33 (NLT)

Pilate tried appeasing the crowd. "Then Pilate had Jesus flogged with a lead-tipped whip. The soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they put a purple robe on him. 'Hail! King of

the Jews!' they mocked, as they slapped him across the face. Pilate went outside again and said to the people, 'I am going to bring him out to you now but understand clearly that I find him not guilty.' Then Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. And Pilate said, 'Look, here is the man!' When they saw him, the leading priests and Temple guards began shouting, 'Crucify him! Crucify him!' 'Take him yourselves and crucify him,' Pilate said. 'I find him not guilty.' The Jewish leaders replied, 'By our law he ought to die because he called himself the Son of God.' When Pilate heard this, he was more frightened than ever." John 19:1-8 (NLT)

Life Application: We can count on God to show us the way out when we are tempted to give in to the crowd. "Just then, as Pilate was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent him this message: 'Leave that innocent man alone. I suffered through a terrible nightmare about him last night.'"

Matthew 27:19 (NLT)

"The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure." 1 Corinthians 10:13 (NLT)

2. Ultimately, Pilate ordered Jesus to be crucified because he was afraid of being cancelled.

"Then Pilate tried to release him, but the Jewish leaders shouted, 'If you release this man, you are no "friend of Caesar." Anyone who declares himself a king is a rebel against Caesar.' When they said this, Pilate brought Jesus out to them again... 'Away with him,' they yelled... 'Crucify him! 'What? Crucify your king?' Pilate asked. 'We have no king but Caesar,' the leading priests shouted back. Then Pilate turned Jesus over to them to be crucified." John 19:12-16 (NLT)

Life Application: Pilate had his opportunity to do what was right, and today/this week we will have ours.

"Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it." James 4:17 (NLT)

"Don't excuse yourself by saying, 'Look, we didn't know.' For God understands all hearts, and he sees you. He who guards your soul knows you knew." Proverbs 24:12a (NLT)

D. Jesus willingly suffered injustice, torture, humiliation, and death in order to save us from our sins.

"But he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed. All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God's paths to follow our own. Yet the Lord laid on him the sins of us all." Isaiah 53:5-6 (NLT)

Life Application: We must respond to God's gracious gift of salvation. "As God's partners, we beg you not to accept this marvelous gift of God's kindness and then ignore it. For God says, 'At just the right time, I heard you. On the day of salvation, I helped you.' Indeed, the 'right time' is now. Today is the day of salvation." 2 Corinthians 6:1-2 (NLT)

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Connect Group Questions:

Read John 18:28-19:22. Then discuss the following questions:

1. How are you and your family celebrating Easter this year?
2. Have you ever been wrongly accused? If so, how did you respond?
3. Why didn't Jesus speak up to Pilate and save himself? (see Isaiah 53:6, Mark 10:45)
4. Why do you think Pilate's attempts at appeasing the crowd failed?
5. Read John 8:32, 14:6, 16:13, & 17:17. What do the following verses teach us about truth? How do we know truth? Why wasn't Pilate interested in truth?
6. Have you ever been pressured to do something you knew was wrong? How did you respond? Do you know someone who is currently facing a difficult decision where it would be easy to compromise their convictions? (see James 4:17 & Proverbs 24:10-12)
7. Spend some time as a group praying for our church. Ask God to make us spiritually strong, courageous people who seek God first without hesitating. Also ask God to bring people to Centerpoint this Easter who need to hear about Jesus and need a church home.