



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

John 18:33–19:16

"Pilate and Jesus Christ"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] The Scripture reading this morning is a lengthier section than we usually read. It is John chapter 18 verse 33 through chapter 19 and verse 16. In our last study last week we began the account of the interview that Pilate had with our Lord. We looked at a rather brief part, verse 28 through verse 32. But now today we're looking at the remainder of John's account of that encounter. And we begin with chapter 18 and verse 33 and we're going to read through chapter 19 and verse 16. So if you have your Bibles before you, turn to John chapter 18 and verse 33. The apostle writes,

"Then Pilate entered into the judgment hall again, and called Jesus, and said unto him, Art thou the King of the Jews? Jesus answered him, Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me? Pilate answered, Am I a Jew? (Now he expected a negative answer from this. And so we could render it something like, "I am not a Jew, am I?") Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee unto me: what hast thou done? Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence. Pilate therefore said unto him, You are a king then? (Now I've taken the liberty of freely rendering that, because this expects the answer, "Yes." You are then a king?) Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Everyone that is of the truth

heareth my voice. (This verse is very interesting for a reason that I will not refer to in the message. This is the only instance in which the Lord Jesus says that he was born. His characteristic expression is that he was sent into the world or simply that he came into the world. And this is the only time that he said that he was born. And strikingly, of course, he said it to a heathen man. And then quickly modified it by saying, "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world." In other words, it was characteristic of him to say words that suggested his preexistence. He was sent. And he came. This one time he was born. And of course the reference is to his human nature.)

Pilate saith unto him, What is truth? And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews, and saith unto them, I find in him no fault at all. But ye have a custom, that I should release unto you one at the Passover: will ye therefore that I release unto you the King of the Jews? Incidentally, Pilate of course uses the term "King of the Jews" in an ironic sense. He doesn't really think that our Lord is a king of the Jews. But he knows that they are accusing him of that. And in a sense he's making fun of the Jews. He's scorning them; scoffing at them by saying, "Look at the kind of king you Jews have.") Then cried they all again, saying, Not this man, but Barabbas. Now Barabbas was a robber. (So our Lord was in custody as one Jewish man in custody. And Barabbas another Jewish man was in custody too. And he was in custody because he was a robber.) Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged him. And the soldiers platted a crown of thorns, and put it on his head, and they put on him a purple robe, And said, Hail, King of the Jews! And they smote him with their hands. Pilate therefore went forth again, and saith unto them, Behold, I bring him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in him. Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe. And Pilate saith unto them, Behold the man! When the chief priests therefore and officers saw him, they cried out, saying, Crucify him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Take ye him, and crucify him: for I find no fault in him. The Jews answered him, We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God. When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he was the more afraid; And went again into the judgment hall, and saith unto Jesus, Whence art thou? But Jesus gave him no answer. Then saith Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me?

Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee? Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin. (That last statement has puzzled some. I know that it has because someone asked me after the service this morning, since I made no comment about that clause, "What does it mean?" Well it probably means simply this, that Pilate being a heathen man and responsible because he says, "Greater sin than they," being a magistrate of God, being a human ruler is responsible to the Lord God. Nevertheless his responsibility was not nearly so great as Caiaphas and the Jews for they had knowledge far beyond Pilate's knowledge of spiritual things. And in spite of the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ to which they were intimately exposed, they still willfully delivered him over to Pilate for crucifixion. As you can see Pilate has a great deal of difficulty bringing himself to acquiesce to the crucifixion of our Lord, although he ultimately does. But not having the knowledge, and understanding, and experience that they did, they have, Jesus says, the greater sin. You can see from this that our Lord believed in the doctrine of degrees of sin, just as there is the doctrine in the Bible taught of degrees of punishment.) And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release him: but the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend (That was an expression that had some political significance. *Amicus Caesaris* was the Latin expression and it was constantly used of people who were friendly with the Roman government, and in this case would be used as an accusation against those who are not friendly. "You are not *amicus Caesaris*, "Friend of Caesar"): whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar. When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha. And it was the preparation of the Passover, and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King! But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar. Then delivered he him therefore unto them to be crucified. And they took Jesus, and led him away."

May the Lord bless this reading of his word. Let's bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Our heavenly Father, we come to Thee in the name of our great High Priest after the order of Melchizedek, our Lord Jesus Christ. We thank Thee and praise Thee that his priesthood is an eternal priesthood, and therefore far more significant and valid and worthy than the priesthood after the order of Aaron, which had its limited validity in Old Testament days. We thank Thee for a priest who lives forever, because he is able to save unto the uttermost those that come unto God by him, since he ever lives to make intercession for them. We are grateful today, Lord, for the blood that was shed on Calvary's cross that we might have the forgiveness of sins. And we are especially comforted to know that our great high priest who has offered the once and for all sacrifice, now is seated at the right hand of the throne of the majesty on high, to see that all of his purposes are carried out perfectly and completely. And so we look forward to the completion of the work of salvation in us. We thank Thee that the blood has been shed and we are delivered from the guilt of sin. And we thank Thee for a priest who continues to minister, that we may be delivered from the power and the presence of sin ultimately.

And Lord, we thank Thee for all of the promises of the word of God. And we would particularly now pray for those who are mentioned in our calendar of concern. We bring them all before Thee, many of whom have members of their or friends who are suffering, who are ill, very ill, some at the point of death it seems. And some who are bereaving, and we pray, Lord, that Thou wilt minister unto them out of the consolation and the greatness of the mercies of our great God. We pray that Thou wilt comfort, and console, and strengthen. And then we pray, Lord, for friends who have visited us today, and we ask especially that through the ministry of the word they may be built up in their faith. And if there should be some without faith in Christ, may the message of the Apostle John designed to bring men to life through the knowledge of the Son of God, have its effect in their lives too.

We pray for our country. We ask Thy blessing upon it. We pray for the body of Christ, all of its members. And we pray for this local church, its leadership, its elders, its deacon, its members, its friends. And we ask, Lord, that the work of God may continue in our midst. And may the name of our great triune God be glorified thereby. We ask, Lord, that we may have the joy and the privilege of the presence of the eternal God in the midst of this service. For Jesus' sake and for his glory. And we pray in his name. Amen.

[Message] This morning we are looking at the account of our Lord's encounter of Pontius Pilate, a vacillating kind of man who clearly lacked the courage of his conviction. He was the Roman prefect of Judea in the years 26 to 36 A.D., and of course all who have any acquaintance with Christianity know that he played a leading part in the civil trial of Jesus Christ.

Last week, as we looked at the beginning of this account, we noted that little was known of the life of Pontius Pilate except that which is found in Scripture. Tradition says that he was a frontier fighter in his earlier days. Then he married well because he married the daughter of Tiberius. And she was in turn the granddaughter of Augustus. And so in marriage, he married well, and perhaps as a result of that was given authority as prefect over the land of Judaea. We know that the Scriptures make the claim and accusation that he had irritated the Jews on more than one occasion by virtue of the kind of life and character that was characteristic of him.

Tradition says that he committed suicide ultimately. But while we do not know a great deal about Pilate so far as the facts of his life are concerned, we know a great deal about his character. One only has to read this account a few times to realize the kind of man that he was. Agrippa the First said that he was "an inflexible, merciless, and obstinate man." But if man looked at the account of the New Testament, one would probably come to the conclusion that the Lord Jesus Christ had a remarkably high opinion of Pilate if we judge by the loftiness of the revelation that he gave to Pilate. For example, he didn't waste a syllable on Herod. And he had little more than a rebuke for Caiaphas.

But for Pilate he had a message of tender appeal, such as might have been given to a Paul before his conversion.

Another thing that stands out about Pontius Pilate is the character of his mind. If we look at the things that he said you get the impression that this man was a remarkable man in some ways. He spoke of the most strangely significant expressions found in all of the Bible. And still today they have a prophetic kind of power. Listen to some of the things that Pilate said, "What is truth?" "Behold the man." "Behold your king." "What shall I do with Jesus who is called the Christ?" And the Pilate is the author of the superscription on the cross, "This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." And when the Jews objected Pilate said, "What I have written, I have written."

There is one incident in Pilate's life that is a remarkable incident in the sense that it reveals something of the character of the man that might be missed. Now we probably have heard people say that a man's character is revealed by the kind of woman that he takes for his wife. There's a great deal of truth in that. And if that is true, then the face of Pilate's wife, who is seen in the gospel records for just a moment, reveals something not only of her, Claudia Procula, but of Pilate as well. Remember that at a critical point in the encounter that Pilate had with the Lord Jesus she sent word to him and she said, "See that you have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered many things of him in a dream today." So evidently Claudia Procula, in spite of her background, was a devout and reverent woman. And this prayer that she uttered to Pilate is a prayer that breathes some noble wifely counsel. And the very fact that she sent her message to him declares that there was a relationship that existed between Pilate and Claudia which was a relationship which was perhaps revelatory of a chaste and holy love. "And where love abides," someone has said, "God may enter in." Well there are people who say that men should listen to their wives. There are others who say, of course, "How can we help but listen to our wives?" [Laughter] But this was surely one time when Pilate should have paid attention to his wife's counsel.

Now we noticed last time that as the Jews bring Jesus before Pilate and our Lord is not in custody, that the Jews engage in a series of moves which are designed to bring to pass the crucifixion

of Jesus Christ. They have a problem and their problem is essentially this, they want him crucified, but they realize that the power to crucify him does not lie with themselves. And so they must implicate Rome in the condemnation of the Lord Jesus. And this they seek to do by their wily moves. The first one we could call "Operation Rubber Stamp." And we looked at that last week, because when they bring the Lord Jesus before Pilate. Pilate as the prefect says, "What is the accusation that you're bringing against this man?" Now, they do not give the accusation. They simply say, "If he were not a malefactor, we would not have brought him to you. In other words, you can trust our judgment. Of course, Pilate knew that that was impossible for any kind of just judge. And so the first maneuver fails.

Now we are looking at the second, the third, and the fourth maneuvers. And of course, they will succeed. But the second one, which is described in verse 33 through chapter 19 verse 6 is to accuse him politically. Now, in the Johannine account the details are not given. We have to learn the details of this in the Lukan account in chapter 23 verse 2 where they do say to Pilate in this context that he contended that he was a king. And so Pilate entered into the judgment hall, we read in John 18:33, "And he called Jesus Christ, and he said unto him, Are you the king of the Jews?" Now the Lord Jesus was interested as a human in the source of this question. And so he said, "Pilate are you saying this of yourself?" In other words, "Has it really come to your mind that I might be a king, a king of the Jews? Or have some other people told you about this concerning me?"

Now, of course, Pilate replies, "I'm not a Jew am I? Why your own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee to me. What have you done?" In other words, he says, "It's not come to me. It's come from your own people and from your own nation." And so Jesus then says, "My kingdom is not of this world." And what he means by that simply is that his kingdom is not a worldly kingdom. It's not a kingdom like the Roman kingdom. In other words, in the sense of Caesar's kingdom, a political kingdom, he is no rival of Caesar. "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight that I should not be delivered unto the Jews. But now is my kingdom not from hence." The character and disposition of my kingdom is

not political. It is a heavenly kingdom. And in fact, in a moment he will say in verse 37, when Pilate says, "You are a king, then?" Jesus said, "You say I'm a king, but to this end was I born and to this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth." In other words, my kingdom is a spiritual, heavenly kingdom, and my purpose is bearing witness to the truth." I do not, incidentally, bear witness to religion. He does not say, "I bear witness to priest craft, its pomp, its incense, its ritual." But he is to be a king in the biblical sense as a witness to the truth of the word of God.

Now our Lord adds a statement that I think is a most significant appeal to the conscience of Pilate. "Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice." Now that is a most significant statement. He approaches near to the heart of Pilate by this statement. Because this is a hint that, "Pilate if you really love the truth then you must respond to me." Isn't it striking that our Lord who is being judged by the judge really is judging his judge? Pilate, everyone that is of the truth hears my voice. And this is a strange way to fish for the soul of a man, is it not? There are many angles that people use to try to bring others to the knowledge of Jesus Christ. And our Lord certainly selects a strange one. It's reminiscent of the fact that he told a significant parable at one time; it was the parable of the soils. And he spoke of a sower who went out to sow, and he sowed some seed by the wayside. It was trodden down and the fowls of the air devoured it. Then he sowed some seed upon a rock. And as soon as it was sprung up it withered away, because it lacked moisture. And then he sowed some seed among thorns, and the thorns sprang up with it and choked it. And then our Lord says at the conclusion of the detailing of the events of the parable, "Other seed fell on good ground and sprang up and bear fruit an hundred fold." Then he added, "He that hath ears to hear let him ear."

And he went on to interpret it. He said that that fell by the wayside refers to those who hear, and then comes the devil and takes the word out of their hearts lest they should believe and be saved. That that fell on the rock represents those who receive the word with joy. They have no root, they believe for a time but in time of testing they fall away. Then that which fell among the thorns refers to those who have heard and go forth and are choked with the cares and riches and pleasures

of this life and bring forth no fruit to perfection. But that on the good ground refers to those who in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it and bring forth fruit with patience.

That's a very striking picture of the whole course of this age. For in the preaching of the gospel by all of the servants of the Lord God they are sowing the seed of the word of God. And there are those who are like the stony ground. There are those who are like the wayside hearers, like the beaten path hearers. There are those in whom the seed is choked by the care of this world. And then there are those who may be called scripturally, good ground. Now, in them the word takes effect. It springs up, not temporarily but permanently. And it bears fruit, some thirty fold, some sixty fold, some one hundred fold. I think our Lord is appealing to Pilate along that line. He is saying, "Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice. If you are good ground you will respond, Pilate." And ultimately, of course, when a man becomes good ground, well that is due to the sovereign activity of the Lord God.

Well, Pilate after he has heard this appeal to his conscience rejects it in a sense. He's not interested in that kind of thing; he's an agnostic, skeptic. And he's of the earth, he's earthy. And he waits for no answer really. And he says, "What is truth? And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews, and saith unto them, I find in him no fault at all." Carlisle said, "He looked at truth and discerned her not there where she stood." Can you imagine how Pilate feels today having asked the question, "What is truth?" Standing before the embodiment of truth, and then not even waiting for an answer and going out to the Jews and saying, "I don't find anything wrong with this man." Well if there is nothing wrong with this man why not issue the verdict of not guilty and release him? That's what the law demanded. Even Roman law demanded that. But the answer is typical of anyone who examines the Lord Jesus Christ without faith.

Occasionally I refer in the messages here to unbelieving scholars. One of the things that is characteristic of unbelieving scholars of Scripture is that they like to criticize the records of the word of God and the gospel records are particularly records that they love to criticize. Some people even say that the gospels represent four forgeries. And then others will say only certain parts of the

gospels can be traced to the Lord Jesus Christ and to the apostles. Other parts of the gospels are to be traced to the early church. Various other people may have been authors of individual parts of the gospel. You know, it is a fair criticism to say with reference to this, if it is true that these gospels are forgeries, and if it is true they have not come from the apostles under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, then we ought to be able to write gospels ourselves. Is not that fair? If these gospels are simply the products of men, then we ought to be able to write similar works. Isn't it striking that no one has ever written a work that has contended with the four gospels. As a matter of fact, no one has ever written a single paragraph, a single descriptive paragraph which has been able to find its way into the word of God. Mr. Spurgeon said, "The life of Jesus is a roll of cloth of gold, of the manufacture of which the art is utterly lost. His spotless character stands alone and by itself. And all true critics are compelled to say that they find no fault at all in him."

Well, after this we read that Pilate said, "What is truth? I find no fault in him." But he added; now he's going to engage in some expediencies. After all, he does have some ability and skill. He's the prefect, so we should expect him to have some intelligence and skill. So he's going to try to engage in some expediencies in order to get himself off the hook. And at the same time work in such a way that Jesus is not crucified. Because he has a fundamental conviction that there's nothing wrong with him, only the Jews want him crucified. But he nevertheless does more to provoke the Jews. So it's the Jews versus Jesus in his mind.

Now, the first expediency is not described by John, it's described by the other gospel records. Because someone mentions the fact that our Lord has been in Galilee and that Herod is there. So making the connection between Galilee and Herod, Pilate has him sent off to Herod, hoping that Herod will get him off the hook. But that doesn't work, for our Lord appears before Herod. Herod was very glad. He had heard a lot about Jesus. He had actually engaged in activities that were inimical to the health of our Lord. But nevertheless the Scriptures say that he was glad that he was glad that he was going to get an opportunity to talk to Jesus face to face. And then when he

comes into the present of Herod our Lord keeps absolutely quiet and says nothing. In a moment we'll say something about that, but that doesn't work.

And so our Lord is back to Pilate again, and the second of the expediciencies that he will seek to invoke is the custom that they had at that time of releasing one of the prisoners as a favor to the Jews at the time of the feast of the Passover. And in prison there were two men. There was Jesus and there was a man by the name of Barabbas. And so he said, hoping to get our Lord released and get himself off the hook that was bothering his conscience, he said, "Surely you will wish that I release unto you the king of the Jews." And they cried out again saying, "Not this man but Barabbas." Now, Barabbas, John adds, was a robber. And of course, he's trying to simply make the point that they prefer a robber to the Lord Jesus Christ.

But the irony is even thicker than that. Barabbas had a name that is rather significant, Barabba. Now the Aramaic word for son was bar and the Aramaic term for God was *abba*. So Barabbas' name is really son of the father. So we have here son of the father, Barabbas, and on the other hand Jesus whose name means Jehovah is Salvation who is the Son of the Father. So here is the choice that Israel is faced with. Shall you release Barabbas, son of the father ironically, son of the father Barabba? Or shall I release to you Jesus, Yahweh is salvation, *the* Son of *the* Father. Why surely anyone would desire that Jesus be released, the Son of the Father, who is not a robber but an innocent man. But no, they say, "Not this man, but Barabbas." And John adds, "Now Barabbas was a robber."

Well, one can only reflect upon the irony of that situation. And one can see the depth of the condemnation that rests upon the nation. Well, that expediency did not work. And so Pilate tries a third. He will have him scourged hoping that that will satisfy the Jews, because scourging was a very, very painful form of punishment.

"Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged him. And the soldiers platted a crown of thorns, and put it on his head, and they put on him a purple robe, And said, Hail, King of the Jews! And

they smote him with their hands. Pilate therefore went forth again, and saith unto them, Behold, I bring him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in him. Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe. And Pilate saith unto them, Behold the man! When the chief priests therefore and officers saw him, they cried out, saying, Crucify him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Take ye him, and crucify him: for I find no fault in him."

Now one can see the providential hand of God in this as those soldiers were discussing this, "What shall we do to him? What shall we do to embarrass the Jews as much as we can? Let's make a crown for him. Because it's said that he claims to be a king, let's make a proper diadem." And so they go out and they gather some thorns. And they make a crown of thorns. And so they cram that down on the head of our Lord. And of course, no doubt the blood began to pour down his face, and the dirt of it was evident. And they said, "He's a king; let's put a proper coat on him, a kingly robe." And so they take a robe of purple and they put that on him in order to mock the Jews and to have a little bit of fun. It's a kind of galling humor, a barrack room kind of humor that these men engage in. But little do they realize that down through the centuries men will see great spiritual significance in this. Because you see, if you think about thorns for a moment your mind will go back to the Scriptures and finally back to the Book of Genesis and finally to the third chapter of the Book of Genesis. And there when man falls in the Garden of Eden you will read that among the judgments that God pronounced upon man was that the earth should bring forth thorns and thistles. Thorns and thistles, you see, are the signs of the curse. They are the signs of the divine condemnation of men.

Now think of the providence of these soldiers who are utterly blind to spiritual truth, who don't want to have any understanding whatsoever of what they are doing. But they are doing the things that the Lord God in heaven wishes that they do. And that is to take a crown of thorns and put it in on the head of our Lord in order that there might be a most visible expression of the fact that Jesus is bearing the curse brought about by sin in the Garden of Eden. It is a visible, large scale,

panoramic picture of what our Lord will be doing on Calvary's cross. And finally reaches its climax when he says, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" For he is bearing away the curse, the divine condemnation for sin. Paul says, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law having become a curse for us. For it is written, Cursed is every one that hangs on a tree." Oh the irony and oh the wisdom of the Lord God.

Of all the features of the scene of our Lord's crucifixion, one that has impressed the imagination of Christendom has been the crown of thorns. It was something unusual, something that manifest human ingenuity, wantonness, cruelty. And of course, it, as I said, became the sign of the curse. Why is it that when we think of the crown of thorns now, we Christians, why is that when we think of the crown of thorns we think of it not as a means by which we exercise barrack room humor, but we think of it with a kind of exaltation. Why is it that when we think of our Lord bearing the crown of thorns we think of it as something that is good? Well it's because basically we've come to understand what was really transpiring in our Lord's suffering. And down through the ages the Lord Jesus has passed still wearing his crown of thorns and his followers desire for him no other diadem than that crown of thorns, because it reminds us of our sin, and guilt, and condemnation, and especially reminds us of the fact that he has born our sin.

Now then, that didn't work. And so the Jews try a third maneuver. And this is a religious accusation. And we read in verse 7, "The Jews answered him, We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God. When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he was the more afraid." A strange presentiment seems to grip the Roman prefect when the term, "Son of God" is mentioned. Now, we don't know, of course, when Pilate's wife sent word to him. But it may have been at this time that his wife unto him, "Have thou nothing to do with that just man, for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him." At any rate the mention of the term Son of God brings fear to the heart of this Roman prefect.

And of course, being the cruel man that Pilate was, it must have been a great deal of fear that came to his heart. And so he goes in to our Lord and he says, "Whence are you? From where have

you come?" Now you might expect at this point that John should have written, "Jesus reached into his garment and drew out the four spiritual laws." What an opportunity, one might think. What an opportunity to answer the question from whence he has come. "Why, I have come from the Lord God in heaven, and I am sent forth as a sacrifice for sinners like you, Pilate." I dare say that most of us would have replied that way. We would have thought that would have been the wise thing to do. But you will notice Jesus did not say anything, not a thing.

About ten years ago I was preaching in Portland, Oregon in a campground. And after one of the messages, and I had referred to divine retribution, a young lady came up to me and said that she and a friend of hers rode together to work every day. And this friend was a member of a well-known cultic kind of church, which is afflicted with legalism. And they nevertheless had a lot of fellowship, and at times she said, "I tend to think that she really is a Christian except she has this basic legalism that worries me." And the Christian had just been given a new New Testament, I have forgotten whether it was the New International Version or not. And she said "It's been a great blessing to me to read this, and I've been speaking about to my friend. And my friend who's a member of this legalistic cult has expressed a desire to read it." And the friend had said to her, "If you'll let me read it, I promise you I will read every book in it except the Epistle to the Galatians." And the reason, of course, she said that was because the Epistle to the Galatians she felt condemned her view of Christianity. And so she said, "If you'll let me read it, I'll read everything in it except the Epistle to the Galatians."

Now the friend said to me, "Dr. Johnson what would you do? Would you let her read it?" And I said, "No, I wouldn't. I would say to her, I will be glad [for] to you read my New International Version providing you read only the Epistle to the Galatians." [Laughter] Because it was obvious that that was the thing that she needed and that was the thing that she was refusing to respond to. You see, there is such a thing as divine retribution. The Lord Jesus is the one who is the author of the statement in the seventh chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, a statement that has often puzzled individuals, but which is nevertheless part of the word of our Lord, "Give not that which is holy unto

the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine lest they trample them under their feet and turn again and rend you." So there comes a time when it is proper not to cast your pearls before swine.

If we were teaching an evangelism class on how to reach people, if we did not give place in our lectures and our studies for keeping quiet when people are asking for information, we would not be true to the New Testament. There is a time when divine retribution is the only thing that is left and then a person is to be absolutely silent. And Jesus was silent to Pilate when Pilate asks the significant question, "Whence art thou?" Our Lord gave him no answer. Pilate was upset by that so he said, "Speakest thou not unto me? Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?" Our Lord said, "You could not have any power at all except it were given to you from above." Pilate you are a prefect of Judaea simply because God in heaven has determined that you be that. That could be said to President Reagan. That could be said to Andropov. That could be said to Mitterrand. That could be said to all of the leaders of the world, and it could be said all the way down to the least local official, "You do not have any authority at all except it has been given to you by that person who is above." And Pilate, I will add this, "Therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin." Because Caiaphas and the Jews had far more understanding of spiritual things than did this Roman prefect who hardly understood much of the language that the Jews were using. So the judge judges his judges.

And finally, the final phase of their maneuvers is a personal attack on Pilate himself. We read, "From thenceforth Pilate sought to release him: but the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend." Ah that's enough to put fear into the heart of Pilate, because of course to be not Caesar's friend is to bring his whole life and office into jeopardy. A Roman prefect hated nothing worse than a complaint lodged him against him at Rome. And in Pilate's case an accusation, for more reason than one would have been especially perilous." In the first place Tiberius seemed to delight in disgracing and humiliating his subordinates. At this time he was especially dangerous because he had a diseased body, the punishment of vices long indulged in, that had made his mind gloomy and savage. In fact, he was hardly more than a madman at this point.

And for word to get back to Rome that Pilate was dallying with a Messianic pretender, and actually unfaithful to Rome, would have been terrible. And in addition, no doubt, Pilate's administration could not stand close scrutiny.

And so when the Jews finally bring this maneuver, "If you let this man go, you are not *amicus Caesaris*, and we're going to tell Tiberius about it." Well that was enough to fix Pilate's mind. And so we read, "When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement." Ah, the irony of the Apostle John. "It was the preparation of the Passover," but those who are offering the Passover lamb are the Jewish authorities in conjunction with the Gentile prefect, so that Jew and Gentile unite in offering the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. "And it was the preparation of the Passover, and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King! But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar."

Now here is the nation that claimed to be a theocratic nation. Here is the nation that claimed Yahweh as their God. Here is the nation that claimed to be the head of the nations because God dealt with them. But here they renounce their ancient relationship to the covenant keeping God, Yahweh, by saying, "We have no king but Caesar." And so Israel, guilty of blasphemy in the denial of the Son of God, and apostasy denies herself by denying him and abolishes the theocracy, their own unique position before God, and in a few years they'll be scattered to the four corners of the earth, and there is no longer any Israel at all. One of my old New Testament professors said, "If today they have no king but a pagan ruler, tomorrow they will have no sacrifice, for the cultists will be dispensed with. And they are unable even to this day to offer a sacrifice, even in Jerusalem where sacrifices should be made. Adam-like," he says, "the soul of the nation died that day; the body forty years later with the fall of Jerusalem."

Now there is something very significant about this incident, and the significant thing about it is the lessons that one may see in Pilate's downfall. Think of the privileges that this man had. He

had heard of our Lord. He was governor during John's and Jesus' ministry. His wife's dream indicated that he had been something of a topic in the royal household. She would never have dreamed of him were it not true. We know our Lord healed a nobleman. His healing is recorded in this very gospel. And so Jesus' name was quite well known. Pilate knew of him. He had a personal appeal from the Lord. When Pilate is the recipient of the expression in verse 34, "Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me?" He refused the voice of the law which said, "Release him." He resisted his wife's supernatural appeal, that dream which occurred at a very propitious moment. He turned to rationalizing expedencies. He attempted to absolve himself according to the Gospel of Matthew, for when he brought forth Jesus he washed his hands in water and said, "I am not guilty of the blood of this innocent man." James Stalker said, "He washed his hands when he ought to have exerted him."

One thinks of Shakespeare's magnificent picture that he has drawn of an awakened soul when he pictures Lady Macbeth to whose senses an impotent sleep will come, but to whose conscience rest is ever more denied. Walking in her trance and washing her hands, but the blood red murder stain will not leave her hands. And finally she says, "Out, damned spot. Out I say." Here's the smell of the blood still. All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. It is a scene of unapproachable horror and Shakespeare has beautifully presented it, but you know it's not nearly as significant as the same kind of struggle that goes on in the hearts of men before the eternal God.

There may be some here who have never agonized one hour, asleep or awake, over their sins. They have the supercilious agnostic sneer at truths which bring peace and hope to others. The consciences have come to the place where they don't even feel a tinge of guilt over their relationship to Jesus Christ. Their confidence is in some specious human philosophy or some religious observance. It would be better for some of us to get up at night and walk up and down in the terror of a conviction brought by the Lord God to our consciences than to sit and eat in the peace which is death.

In this past week or so we've all been stirred up by the day after, but the day after is not the day of which we should be concerned. It's the day after the day after which is of the greatest concern. As the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrew says in chapter 9 verse 27, "It's appointed unto men once to die, after this the judgment." The day after the day after is of the greatest concern. Pilate is certainly a picture of a man who wrestled with his conscience and with the truth and who lost. What kind of man was Pilate? Well, he was skeptical. He was weak. He was superficial. He sold his soul to gain the world and he lost both. Strikingly it wasn't long after this that a complaint was lodged against him, and he was recalled and later banished, according to tradition. And it's interesting that if he had just simply put together two of his own statements he would have come to the truth. What is truth? Behold the man. For the Lord Jesus is the truth. The truth about the knowledge of God, the truth about the mystery of human existence and the nature of man, the truth about man's destiny and how we reach the place of the presence of God, all in our Lord Jesus Christ.

It seems to me that this trial, which Pilate had to endure, has current claims. Many find no fault in our Lord. You don't find people walking up and down the street making accusations against Jesus of Nazareth. They tend to think of him as a good man. They don't find any fault in him at all, but they have not responded to him. They have not believed in him. They have not really committed themselves to him. They're all walking illustrations of Pilate. And so they stumble on, spiritual cowards, ruined at last when they might have been redeemed.

Campbell Morgan in one of his books comments upon the fact that Anatole France wrote a work called *Mother of Pearl* and in it he has a fictitious incident that concerns Pontius Pilate. According to this Pilate retired and he was living on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea in a villa in luxury, and also in physical corruption. He was a drunkard. And near the end of his life someone came to visit him, and he came into Pilate's presence and in the midst of the conversation this man asked him this question, "Pilate weren't you in the land of Palestine when that man Jesus was put to death?" And then Anatole France has Pilate say, "Jesus, Jesus, I don't remember the man." That's a very, very true to fact and true to experience statement. Because you see, it is so possible for us to

push off the claims of Christ until they mean nothing to us. But throughout time and throughout eternity Pilate remembers and he is remembered.

The Christian church has recited the Apostles' Creed for centuries. In the Apostles' Creed is the words, "Conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate." We do remember. He is remembered. And Pilate in the prison house of sin awaiting the final judgment of the Great White Throne, he too remembers and no one, no one so deplores his actions while he was here upon earth than Pontius Pilate, the man who said, "What then shall I do with Jesus is called Christ?"

That's the question for you. And that's the question for me. What shall I do then with Jesus who is called Christ? Oh may God help us as we reflect upon the ultimacy of these decisions to bow before him and acknowledge him to be truly the king of the Jews, the Son of the Father, the eternal Son, the only Savior. And may our hope and trust for all eternity rest in him alone.

You know, recently I received a letter. If you'll let me just say this then I'll close. I recently received a letter from a lady who's a school teacher in Buffalo, New York. She's a Roman Catholic. I confess that we do not receive too many letters from Roman Catholics that say things like this. "The ministry of Believers Bible Hour has been a great blessing to me, and I've listened to the program for two years. And I want you to know that my whole trust is in the Lord Jesus Christ who shed his blood for me. And my whole trust is in him and what he has done and in nothing else." Most significant. And she said, "If I don't see you before we all go to heaven, if I don't have the opportunity to see you, I look forward to seeing you there when the Lord comes, and I think he's coming soon," she added.

May God in his marvelous grace so work that we are there when he comes. And in order that the day after the day after may be a day that is happy and peaceful and blessed in the presence of the Lord God. If you're here today and you've never believed in Christ, we invite you to come to him.

“Pilate and Jesus Christ” by S. Lewis Johnson
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[Prayer] Father, how grateful we are for these magnificent accounts of the way in which our Lord dealt with the men of his day. O God, deliver us from the failure of a Herod...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]