



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Gospel of Matthew

TRANSCRIPT

“The Son of God Being Repudiated by the Sons of Men,” Matthew 27:22-31

The Scripture reading is found in Matthew chapter 27 verse 22 through verse 31. Matthew 27 verse 22 through verse 31. We are in the midst of the trial by Pontius Pilate and come to the conclusion of it in this particular portion of the word,

“Pilate saith unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus who is called Christ? They all say unto him, Let him be crucified. And the governor said, Why, what evil hath he done? But they cried out the more, saying, Let him be crucified. When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this righteous person: see ye to it. Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children. Then released he Barabbas unto them: and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified. Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers. And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe. And when they had platted a

“The Son of God Being Repudiated by the Sons of Men” by S. Lewis Johnson  
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crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews! And they spat upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head. And after that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify him.”

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

[Prayer] Father we turn again to Thee with thanksgiving and praise and a measure of awe over the things that have happened that concern our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We give Thee praise and thanksgiving in the worship that is due Thy name because of all that has been done for us through our great substitute. We thank Thee for the representative man who has stood for us the judgment of eternal death, and we rejoice, Lord, in the assurance that we possess the life that is life indeed, but Father, we also stand a little bit in awe of that great moment in which our Lord did accomplish this great work. Truly, it is too marvelous for us to fully understand and enter into, but we do thank Thee and praise Thee.

We do worship Thee. We think Lord of Thy wisdom in devising this plan of salvation of Thy power, in carrying it out, of the love that is manifested in it for the saints of God, and we are so grateful that we belong by grace to the family of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We thank Thee that he stood for us, and we praise Thee for the redemption that we have because he has borne our penalty.

We thank Thee, too, Lord for all of the other things that accompany eternal life, the assurance of a Father in heaven who cares and who cares continually and who desires to meet all of our needs. And O Father we pray that as a result of the ministry of the Holy Spirit, we may truly learn to rely upon Thee for the things that we need. We know

that that Thy word and the Spirit are sufficient for all of our needs. Help us Lord, to prove that in our daily lives.

We would especially ask, Lord, for any who may be here who do need the ministry of the Holy Spirit at the present time. Comfort those, Lord, who need comforting. Console those who need consolation. Strengthen those who need strengthening. Restore to health those, Lord, who need restoration to bodily well-being and spiritual well-being.

We pray that all of the needs that exist in our lives may be met. We pray for the poor. We ask Thy blessing upon them. And for the rich and wealthy, we pray O God, for them that they may be given perspective.

We thank Thee for the privilege of proclaiming the message of the Lord Jesus, and ask Lord that we may be faithful to the commission which has been given us by Thee. What a great privilege it is to proclaim the Lord Jesus Christ as the Savior of sinners. Lord we pray that Thy wilt gather here, if it should please Thee, those whose hearts have been touched by the Holy Spirit and may there be response to him. Give us tender hearts toward the gospel.

We pray for our country. We ask Thy blessing upon its leadership. We pray for the entire body of Jesus Christ wherever it may be in the four corners of the earth, especially those Lord, who very rarely have mention made of them before the throne of grace. We pray for them. We remember those who have left Believers Chapel and who are in foreign countries in Africa, several Lord, we ask Thy blessing upon them in Canada and in other places. O God strengthen and give fruit. May Thy blessing be with us as we turn to the Scriptures in a moment in this meeting.

We pray for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

[Message] The subject for today in the exposition of the word is “The Son of Man Repudiated by the Sons of Men.” As we study the passion accounts of our Lord Jesus more clearly, or more precisely I should say, we see what the Apostle Paul meant when he spoke about the self-emptying and self-humbling of our Lord Jesus Christ. I’m sure

you remember the great passage in Philippians chapter 2 in which the apostle writes concerning him “who being in the form of God thought it not robbery to be equal with God but made himself of no reputation.” In the original text that is very vivid: made himself as of no reputation is, literally, he emptied himself.

And when we think of our Lord’s incarnation we always think of the condescension that was involved in the fact that the second person of the Trinity took to himself an additional nature, a human nature and came down in our midst. It was a humbling thing. It was a thing of condescension for the triune God, the second person of the Trinity, to pass by becoming an angel, or a seraph, and become a man—one of God’s creatures.

And when the apostle says after that that being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, that humiliation that he refers to in that second word is a humiliation that is even greater than the condescension of becoming a man. We could conceive of our Lord becoming a man and becoming a king when he became a man, but the Lord Jesus passed by kingly man he as not cradled in the palaces of kings. He passed by kingly man. He came to be a lowly man and in fact, the psalmist, when he writes in typical fashion of the Son of God who would come, he has the Son of God saying, typically, I’m a worm and no man. So it truly was a matter of great condescension and humiliation for the Lord Jesus to empty himself and then humble himself and come into our midst.

We are not surprised then to read the Apostle Paul’s words in 1 Timothy chapter 3, “great is the mystery of godliness.” It is, however, a fact that the Lord Jesus conquers by virtue of this humbling. In the old Latin verse of Psalm 96:10, the words “from a tree” are added, and instead of reading simply, the Lord reigneth, the text reads in some of the old Latin versions or in the old Latin version in some of the manuscripts of that version, “the Lord reigneth from a tree.” The early church fathers knew of that reading, and Augustine and some of the others said that the fact that the words, from a tree, have been

eliminated from a number of the manuscripts is due, they said, to some of the Jewish interpreters and critics of the Old Testament who did not like the idea of the Lord reigning from a tree, because Moses had said, “Cursed is everyone who hangs from a tree,” and it was their contention that it was the original reading of Psalm 96:10, “The Lord reigneth from a tree.”

Well now, whether it is the original reading from the Hebrew text at that point or not is inconsequential. It is true that our Lord does reign from a tree. The uniqueness of the work of the Lord Jesus is one of the things that impresses us as we think about this self-humbling. No one could have ever devised a gospel except a man under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

I wonder if you have ever taken down your pencil and tried to write an account that could be put into the Bible. There are people who look at our four gospels and say why they are simply forgeries. They are written by men who after the fact sought to construct the life of an individual so that the result would be that it would be a fulfillment of prophesy. And it is the contention of many contemporary New Testament scholars that what we have in the New Testament gospels is not what really happened but that which the church constructed after the time of our Lord, and so therefore our gospels are in measure forgeries.

The best reply to a person who contends for that is to say, if it is true then we must say that these gospels were written by men, and if they were written by men, it surely is true that someone could forge another gospel. And so the best answer I think is to ask for a fifth gospel. If you’ve ever tried to write just a paragraph that could fit into one of these four gospels you will come to realize how unique these records are.

In fact, I’ve tried to do that. We do not have in the Bible an account of the conversion of Mary Magdalene. Out of her, we know, went seven devils. And it is interesting to try to construct an account of the conversion of Mary Magdalene. I’d like for you to try it some time. Do you know what you will wind up doing? You will wind

up taking prepositional phrases and clauses from other parts of the Bible. It is impossible to construct a paragraph which will give the impression when you finish it that it ought to be in the word of God. The gospels are unique.

"Every critic," Mr. Spurgeon said, "would cry out, this is not genuine. The life of Jesus is a robe 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." I think that the amazing thing about this is that in the light of the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus, we have these gospel records presenting us with a complete rejection of him. The completeness of the rejection of the Lord Jesus by man would be puzzling were it not for the biblical indictment of the heart of man.

Jeremiah says, "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked." And the desperately wicked character of the human heart is beautifully portrayed in the sufferings and death of our Lord Jesus. The section that we are looking at contains a repudiation of our Lord by the Roman leader. It contains a repudiation of him by the Jewish leaders who theoretically should have been waiting for their Messianic king, and it also contains a repudiation of him by the Roman soldiers. We want to look at these three repudiations but lay a great deal of stress upon that of Pilate, because he stands out in this section as the living illustration of vacillation.

This is the time of the crunch for Pilate. We don't know a great deal about the life of Pontius Pilate. There is some tradition concerning his beginnings and some tradition concerning his end. It is said by some who have passed down bits of information to us that Pilate was a frontier fighter and that he gained some measure of approbation from the authorities for his skills in that endeavor. We do know that he married well, for he married Claudia Procla, who was the grand-daughter of Augustus. And whether he was rewarded for the marriage or for his accomplishments or not, Tiberius Caesar had made him the procurator, or probably better, the prefect of Palestine.

When he came in among the Jews, he offended them because one of his earliest acts among them was to bring the Roman soldiers into the city of Jerusalem at night with the Roman standards before them as they entered the city. And on the standards there were images of the Roman emperor, and to the Jews this was idolatry, suggesting that men should pay homage to the Roman emperor rather than to the one God, Yahweh. And so Pilate got off on the wrong foot. He mingled the blood of some Galileans with their sacrifices, and so he was not a very popular man.

There are some other incidents that are traditionally said with reference to him, and finally, it is said that he was recalled because of mismanagement and exiled and finally committed suicide. You know we do not have much in the Bible about Pilate, but you could not have if you wrote a many-volumed biography of him, have a clearer picture of the kind of character that he was. The Bible makes it very plain that Pilate was a vacillating man who lacked the courage of his convictions. He was a politician who sought to stand on the fence if possible. Someone has said politics is a game with two sides and a fence. And Pilate sought to stand right on the fence if he possibly could.

Agrippa I said, “He was inflexible. He was merciless. He was obstinate. In the light of that, isn’t it interesting that the Bible does not really attack Pilate directly? What appears with reference to Pontius Pilate appears somewhat indirectly. There is no attempt on the part of the gospel writers to attack this man, which is a remarkable thing in itself. I think that the Lord Jesus regarded Pontius Pilate very highly. He wouldn’t waste a syllable on Herod. He had only a few words of rebuke for Caiaphas the high priest, but for Pontius Pilate he had a message of tender appeal, such as he might have given to an Apostle Paul in the days of his rebellion against the authority of God. You can sense that in the 18<sup>th</sup> chapter of John when John [sic., Pilate] asks, “Are you really the king of the Jews?” And the Lord Jesus replies, “Pilate sayest thou this thing of thyself or did others tell it thee of me?”

He asks Pilate, Pilate is it true that perhaps you have come to the conviction or at least the thought that I might be king of yourself, or is it simply because you have been told by Jewish men that I have made those claims? You see, the Lord Jesus was appealing to him, hoping perhaps from his human nature that Pilate was concerned about who Jesus Christ was. And you know Pilate answers him very brusquely, making it very plain that he had not thought as far as he was concerned about whether the Lord Jesus was king at all.

Pilate had a fine mind, and I think you can see that in the things that are found in the gospel records which have come from his mouth. He has uttered some strangely significant words. Think of them. Pilate is the person who said, What is truth? That’s a magnificent question. That question is really the ultimate question of life. What is life all about? What is truth? How do we know God? How do we have the assurance that we know God? How do we know what we are here for? What is truth?

Pilate said, Behold the man. Pilate said, Behold your king. Pilate said, What shall I do with Jesus which is called Christ? These words ring down through the centuries and stick in our memories. Jesus of Nazareth. This is Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews, Pilate had written above the cross of the Lord Jesus. And then, as if to make it all permanent, he said, What I have written I have written. Those are remarkable statements.

There is one tender touch I think in the story of Pilate that lets us see right into his heart. It has been said that there is nothing that more reveals a man than the character of the woman that he makes his wife. Well, I’ve always thought as far as I’m concerned you would if that were true, you would think a whole lot more of me that you ought to, if you judged me by my wife. I think, however, there is a great deal of truth in this. You can tell a great deal about a man if you look at the wife that he has chosen for himself. And I think it’s true you can tell a great deal about the wife if you look at the husband that she has taken to herself, too.

Pilate had a wife who thought enough of him to warn him to have nothing to do with the Lord Jesus. Evidently that was the reflection of some affection between the two.

I don’t think that we are stretching it when we say that it seems evident that she was a woman who loved him. And I think also the fact that she would do that would indicate that perhaps within the heart of Pontius Pilate there was love for a woman and when in the heart of man there exists a holy and chaste love, then there is capacity for the love of God to enter. So Pilate then is a man of whom we don’t know a great deal so far as the facts of his life are concerned, but we know a great deal about the kind of man that he turned out to be.

Now we are in the midst of that trial, and Pilate is seeking to get if he possibly can, off the fence keeping the friendship of the Jews so that his own little governmental realm might proceed in peace, but at the same time satisfy his own conscience. His conscience was telling him that Jesus of Nazareth was not guilty. What he knew of the situation led him to believe that the Jews had for envy delivered the Lord Jesus. So he seeks if he possibly can to have our Lord Jesus released and yet maintain the friendship of the Jewish people. He had said to them, “Which of the two will ye that I release unto?” and surprising to him, and no doubt he was disappointed, they said, Barabbas.

Pilate saith unto them What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ? This is a kind of plaintive response of Pilate. If you’re going to take Barabbas for your released criminal what then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ? And they all shout out, and stress rests upon the all, they all say unto him, let him be crucified. It is a unanimous response on the part of the people. Crucify Jesus of Nazareth.

Now Pilate is disturbed over that. What evil has he done? They cried out the more saying, let him be crucified, and Pilate saw that it was going to be a riot, or else he must give up Jesus, and so he seeks in a pathetic way to absolve himself from the guilt of the Lord Jesus.

Now it was pathetic because he was a Roman, and Romans were supposed to have a high regard for justice, and of course he should have said, our law says that this man is not guilty; I must release him. But with his Roman’s regard for justice and with his

wife's warning ringing in his ear, he still goes on, admitting in effect that what he is doing is murder. So he gets out in front of the crowd and following the Jewish practice, startingly, he takes water. He washes his hands before the multitude and says, "I am innocent of the blood of this righteous person; see you to that." You cannot of course escape responsibility by that. Incidentally, there is a legend that when storms rage around Mount Pilates in Switzerland, the ghost of Pilate comes out and washes his hands again in the storm clouds around that high mountain. Pilate has repudiated the Lord Jesus.

Then there comes repudiation from the nation itself. When Pilate sought to excuse himself, then answered all the people and said his blood be on us and on our children. Now I want you to catch the force of this because this is the deathknell of the Nation Israel. In the Johanine account which contains other information not found in this account, just previous to this, the Jewish leaders had said to Pilate, We have no king but Caesar.

Now that's a startling statement, because remember, the Nation Israel had its beginning in God's election. He had chosen Abraham. He had given Abraham certain promises and those promises included a kingdom and a king and a realm and a name that would be known over the face of the earth and in fact, ultimately, worldwide blessing to the Gentile peoples. And that covenant and those promises had been confirmed to Isaac and Jacob, and then after the children of Israel had gone into captivity in the land of Egypt, this great God Yahweh who had made these promises came and through the deliverer Moses, as the mediator, delivered the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt by means of mighty miracles of power, brought them through the Red Sea and into the land, ultimately into the Promised Land. They were the theocratic nation. Their nation had as its king God.

Now of course the vision became blurred, and soon they said we want a king like everyone else, and God gave them kings like others, but it was always the intention of

God that he be the king of the nation, for they were a theocratic nation with a position before him, with covenant promises and priesthood all pointing forward to the Lord Jesus.

Now isn’t it an ironic thing that the theocratic nation possessed of the covenant of God—the covenantal promises: the priesthood and the promise of a priesthood after the order of Melchizedek, permanent priesthood—it is this same people who stand before the Roman king, Roman leader, and say, we have no king but Caesar. It’s almost as if they have voluntarily, well it is that, they have voluntarily thrust away from themselves the right of the theocratic nationhood. And as a result of this, they shall soon be scattered to the four corners of the earth in divine discipline and down through the centuries as the prophets of the Old Testament have said, Israel shall abide many days without a king, without a prince, without a sacrifice, without an image without an ephod, and without teraphim, afterwards shall the children of Israel return and seek the Lord their God and David their king. So it is the nation itself that has given up their place before God.

Well Pilate, having heard them say his blood be on us and on our children and a clause by which they take to themselves the guilt of the death of the Lord Jesus, Pilate released Barabbas to them took the Lord Jesus and had him scourged – a very painful form of punishment – hoping perhaps that the scourging would avert their requests that he be put to death and satisfy them. But the weakling failed in all of his attempts to avoid the crunch until finally he had to give him over to them in order to be crucified.

Someone has said there is no cruelty like that of underlings. I think that’s true. Often the leaders have much more mercy than those who stand under them. And there is no cruelty like the cruelty of the soldiers, because it is the mockery of men who are little men, who take the biggest man whoever lived and make fun of him.

The mock crowning of the Lord Jesus is a most interesting thing. Someone has said laughter is a gift of God. It is. But no other gift so often becomes a curse. When laughter is directed at sacred things it becomes a curse. When laughter is used to belittle or to degrade, it becomes cursed. When laughter is misused, this gift of God, it becomes

instead of a blessing a deadly kind of curse, and that’s what it becomes here. The soldiers take Jesus. They take him into the common hall, and they strip his garments off of him, and now they’re gonna play out little act. It’s a what someone has called a grim kind of barrack jest. And so they strip off his clothes and they put on him a scarlet robe. After all, he claimed to be the king of the Jews; kings dress in scarlet. And so the scarlet robe is designed to represent the imperial purple of the Roman emperor. He’s a king; let’s clothe him as a king.

So the scarlet robe is placed upon him for the imperial purple. Kings have scepters, and he needs a scepter, so they give him a reed – a little stick – and say that’s your sword. And kings also wear crowns, and so they plied a crown of thorns, and they take that, and they crush that down on top of our Lord’s head so that it pierces the skin, and he begins to bleed. But at least he has a crown. It’s a crown of thorns. And then in mockery they get down upon their knees before the king of the Jews, and they pay him this mocking, scorning, deriding worship saying, here’s the king of the Jews, see how beautifully he’s dressed.

Now there is a very important truth about this crown of thorns that I want you to be sure to get. I think I’ve been saying this over and over again, because it’s something that I myself feel very deeply about these accounts of our Lord’s passion. There is a thread of irony that runs through all of them and a thread of instruction through the irony that we should not ever lose.

Of all the features of the scene of our Lord’s suffering, the one that has most impressed the imagination of Christendom is the crown of thorns. It was something unusual. It brought out the ingenuity and the wantonness of the cruelty of the Roman soldiers and of course, it was God’s way of reminding Christians of what was really happening.

Do you remember the story in the Garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve fell in the garden of Eden, God judged the woman, judged the man and then laid a curse upon

creation itself, and he said concerning creation itself, that thorns and thistles it would bring forth, so that the thorns become suggestive of the curse pronounced by God upon man and his creation because of sin in the Garden of Eden.

There's something ugly about a thorn. In the wintertime when the leaves are off a bush and you look at a bush and you see nothing but the gnarled limbs and the wicked thorns, it reminds you of the of what destructive power they have, the thorns, and it was designed of course to represent what it really means for man to sin. And there is a beautiful fitness in what these Roman soldiers have done. How dumb can a person be when he performs the work of God? Because they were performing the work of God in a kind of, well it was a kind of child-evangelism type of lesson. A pictorial representation of what our Lord Jesus Christ was going to be doing, and these Roman soldiers who thought they were mocking the king were actually the instructors of the people of God down through the years. They planted their crown of thorns not realizing that what they were doing was trying to get over what they were doing is get over the point that our Lord Jesus is bearing the curse.

Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law having been made a curse for us, and so by taking the crown of thorns and cramming it down on the head of the Lord Jesus, they were proclaiming to spiritually wise people the fact that the Lord Jesus is the one who bears the curse and whenever you look at the Lord Jesus with the crown of thorns upon his head, never forget that what that means is the Lord Jesus is the sin-bearer. That's what that means. He's the sin-bearer, and that's why it is something that has struck the imagination of Christians down through the years and probably has been, as some have expressed it, the feature that has most impressed the true believers.

Our Lord Jesus wore a crown of thorns, and that crown of thorns is representative of your own sin, placed upon the head of this Messianic king. What a beautiful fitness there is in this act which they did not understand, and down through the years as the Lord Jesus has passed by he has passed by wearing the crown of thorns, and genuine

Christians who truly love him desire no other diadem for him other than this crown of thorns, because it suggests how much we owe.

Now of course the Roman soldiers didn’t realize it, but after all the day of the Lord Jesus is coming. They had their day. But his day is coming. And day is coming when, according to Paul every single intelligence in the universe – things in heaven, things on the earth, things under the earth – shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Can you not imagine some of these Roman soldiers standing before our Lord Jesus in the glory of that time of judgment, and having to acknowledge what they mockingly sought to make fun of thousands of years before? But now having to confess, yes, Jesus of Nazareth, the one whom we clothed in scarlet into whose hands we put a stick, and on whose head we put a crown of thorns, he is after all Yahweh. King of kings and Lord of lords.

Now let me, before I close, say just a few words about Pilate. You can trace the course of Pilate’s downfall. I think it’s fair to say he had heard of the Lord Jesus because his wife had a dream concerning him. He was the governor during John’s and Jesus’s ministry, and certainly in the king’s quarters a great deal of discussion had taken place over the fame and ministry of this Jesus of Nazareth. So he had opportunity to ponder something of what people were saying about this man from Nazareth. And then when the Lord Jesus appeared before Pilate, he had had a personal appeal from the Lord. Pilate sayest thou this thing of thyself or did others tell it thee of me? That was an appeal. Pilate have you thought about the claims?

Pilate had an appeal from the voice of law, because he was a Roman and supposed to execute the law. He refused the voice of law. He said I find no fault at all in him, and nevertheless handed him over to those who would put him to death. He resisted his wife’s appeal and it was a kind of supernatural appeal, because it was a dream given him. He turned to rationalizing expedencies by scourging him hoping that perhaps that would satisfy the Jews.

He rejected the warning of his conscience because, John tells us, that as the Jews pressed upon him in the crunch to make his final decision, they said he made himself the Son of God, and the text of John says that when Pilate heard, he became afraid. Even his conscience spoke to him and said, there’s something different about this man. But finally the Jews knew how to their man they said, Pilate if you don’t give him over to us, we’re gonna report you back to Rome and tell them you’re not *amicus caesarus*; you’re not a friend of Caesar’s.

And with that, Pilate capitulated, after having attempted to absolve himself saying I’m innocent of the blood of this just man. “He washed his hands,” James Staulker says, “When he ought to have exerted them.”

Shakespeare is probably our greatest dramatist, and he’s drawn us a picture of an awakened soul that is very vivid. It’s the picture of Lady Macbeth to whose senses an impotent sleep will come, but to whose conscience rest is ever more denied. And as she is walking up and down in a trance and washing her hands, the blood red murder stain will not come out, and finally she cries out, “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’s a terrible scene. And anybody reflecting upon it cannot help but some have some kind of horror.

But there is more horror in the thought of an individual who has had the gospel preached to them and who have never agonized even for one moment, asleep or awake, over their sins. There are people who have the supercilious agnostic sneer at truths which bring peace and hope to others and their consciences have ceased to feel even a twinge. They hush up their past, and they wash their hands in some specious rationalization or some new philosophy, or perhaps in a little religious observance like attending Believers Chapel on Sunday morning. It would be better for each one of you to walk in the midnight in a trance, moaning and groaning in remorse and repentance, than

to so stifle the voice of God that you can eat and drink and live in the peace which is death.

What kind of man was Pilate? Well, he was a man, who because he was skeptical was weak and superficial, sold his soul to gain the world and lost both. That always happens. Isn’t ironic, too, that Pilate said, what is truth?, and also, behold the man just a few moments later, and if he had just been able to put the two words together: what is truth; behold the man? I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me.

What is truth? Who will make God known to us? What is truth? Who will explain the mystery of our human existence? What is truth? Who will tell me where we are going? It is our Lord who has the infallible answer to all of these questions. I know this is just an old story. No it’s not an old story. It’s a very modern story, because there are many people today who find no fault at all in our Lord Jesus, but at the same time never bow down before him. Just this past week, I read in the newspapers or in one of the periodicals that I take of a certain man, a very important man, who acknowledged that the Lord Jesus was a most remarkable character against whom he could say nothing but nevertheless he himself had not bowed before him. It’s possible to say Jesus was a great man, Jesus was a great teacher, he was a great moral leader, he has given us the greatest system of ethics the world has ever seen, and not believe in him, not realizing the contradiction of those words. He’s a great moral teacher, but at the same time he said he was God.

Now if he is a great moral teacher, then we must accept his teachings concerning himself, and if his teachings concerning himself are true, then he is the eternal God at whose feet we must bow and worship and praise and trust. So like so many, they stumble on. Spiritual cowards ruined at last when, humanly speaking, they might have been redeemed.

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Anatole France has written *Mother of Pearl*. He has a picture of Pilate in it. It’s philosophical. It’s not intended to be true to fact, but it does reveal a great deal about the heart of this man, Pilate, and what may happen to others like him. You may remember that he has Pilate living out his last days in a villa in luxury in Italy, in the southern part of Italy, having been practically an alcoholic. His eyes are bleary with alcohol. And a man comes up to him and said to him in the midst of the picture of Pilate says, “Pilate weren’t you the governor in Judea when that man Jesus was crucified?” And Pilate is said to have said by Anatole France, Jesus? Jesus? I don’t remember the name. What a profound picture that is of what it means to reject our Lord Jesus and then inevitably to move into spiritual darkness.

The Lord Jesus stood before the *bema*, before the judgment seat of Rome, and Pilate was sitting on it. At a point in time it was our Lord Jesus who was judged by Pilate but as soon as our Lord’s human existence in the flesh and blood is over, then the tables are completely reversed, and it is Pilate who stands before the judge, our Lord Jesus, and stands before the judge down throughout all eternity. For it is not Pilate who is the judge; it is our Lord who is the judge, ultimately. It is not we who judge Jesus of Nazareth. It is he who judges us always.

You know, in the Apostles Creed we often have recited, Born of the Virgin Mary suffered under Pontius Pilate. Jesus, Jesus, I don’t remember the name. Ah Pilate you remember now. You remember and you are remembered. A vacillating man who lacked the courage of your convictions. And it is you who have uttered that great appeal: what shall I do then with Jesus who is called the Christ? And down through the centuries no man scorns himself more than Pontius Pilate, the agnostic who said simply, what is truth? in the presence of truth and failed entering into the eternal and everlasting darkness.

If you are here this morning and you have never believed in our Lord Jesus Christ, we appeal to you as an ambassador of our Lord Jesus. Do not let this moment slip by. Do not let the moment of the preaching of the gospel of our Lord Jesus slip by. Do not

take the attitude of Pontius Pilate and turn in your sin away from him. Come to him.

Trust him. He has offered the atoning sacrifice for sinners, and we are sinners. May God through the Holy Spirit so work in your heart that you come to Him.

You know there is one other word that the Lord Jesus spoke to Pilate. He said, Pilate he who is of the truth hears my voice. And he also had said, You do not hear my voice because you’re not of God. Whoever is of the truth hears his voice.

Are you of the truth? There are people who are of the truth and there are people who are of God, and there are people who are not of the truth and who are not of God, and that is manifested in their trust in our Lord Jesus. I could never, of course, know who is of the truth, who is of God. That ultimately is known only by God, and can only be known by ourselves when, by the Holy Spirit, we have come to trust in our Lord Jesus Christ and been given the new life that means the forgiveness and sins and justification of life. Only then may God speak to your heart. May the Holy Spirit so move in your heart that you come. Don’t let this moment slip by. Let’s stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for these remarkable, true accounts from the word of God that beautifully picture the dealing of our great God with the souls of men. O Father, deliver us from the expediency of a Pilate, the rebellion of a Caiaphas, the wanton cruelty of a Herod. By Thy grace, touch our hearts. Help us to see what we truly are, and help us, Lord, to see what Christ has accomplished for sinners, and O God bring us to trust in him. He that believeth in the Son hath everlasting life. He that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth upon him.

O God work for the glory of Thy name for those who are of the truth and of God. Bring them to Thyself.

May grace mercy and peace be with us.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.