

Into Thy Word Ministries Bible Study www.intothyword.org

General Idea: It seems that Pontius Pilate was trapped among his paranoia, political future, and conviction to do the right thing. Yet, not only did he not find guilt in Jesus, but he actually wanted Him released. He may even have been captivated to a degree, but not enough to turn from his ways; a little conviction was happening, just not enough to do the right thing. So, out of frustration or to please the religious leaders so Jesus would not be killed, he had Jesus heinously whipped and beaten. The soldiers took it too far and went overboard in their cruelty, beating Him, mocking Him, and giving us the iconic image of the True Suffering Servant who came to love, redeem, and set us free. Ironically, He came to set free the very ones who beat and mocked Him with fists that Jesus Himself created and who wanted to undeservingly give them the grace of redemption. Then, to add insult to injury, Pilate makes the proclamation, *behold your king*; but, what he did not know was that Jesus was The KING of kings, and Pilate was conducting the universe's greatest act of evil for the greatest good of all. Jesus was publicly displayed and humiliated and the evil religious leaders and wayward crowd called for His crucifixion. And yet, Pilate still did not want to kill Him, so the leaders manipulated him to stoop to their will. Pilate was shaken that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God; somehow and somehow, Pilate knew this to be true, yet still would not let Jesus go. Jesus stood stoic and humble with extreme strength under His control and made that known to Pilate, yet, still he would not do the right thing. So, he put Jesus through another mock trial of humiliation and ridicule to see if that would please the leaders; it did not. All they wanted was blood lust—Jesus crucified! Pilate complied and handed Jesus over to death.

Contexts and Background: In this passage, we see our Lord and Savior as He began His tremendous physical suffering and humiliation on our behalf! He was accused of a crime He did not commit; we committed it. He was unjustly tried for our crimes and scourged for our sins. Jesus was submitting to the will of God in the midst of thugs and the disloyal, conniving, religious leaders—but not because of His desire to retaliate or get out of harm's way. If He had, we would not have redemption! Fortunately for us, He is also God, and stayed obedient to the Father for our benefit! It was the will of the Father that Jesus would suffer and go through this phony, illegal, and unjust trial for the very people who cause injustice, evil, and sin in the world—us!

Commentary—Word and Phrase Meanings

- *Flogged / scourged Jesus.* Scourging was a long process of whipping. His hands were tied to a pike above His head. Then, He was brutally whipped with a “flagellum,” or a “cattail,” which was a short whip of several heavy tentacles, the ends tied with small balls of lead, rocks, or bone fragments. It produced deep, large, painful bruises and intense pain. Cutting deep into the subcutaneous tissues, it literally tore the flesh off His back, exposing the muscles as well as maybe a rib or two. The flesh from the back would have hung in long ribbons and looked like a mass of torn, bleeding muscle. The person(s) doing this torture was a trained centurion, and when the victim was near death, the beating would be stopped. They were also careful not to puncture a lung, as that would have killed the victim and ended the intended, prolonged agony. The purpose? To weaken a person's constitution! It was possible Pilate was having Jesus whipped to please the crowd so he would not have to kill Him, because subjects were routinely whipped and/or beaten prior to crucifixion but not scourged. Jewish law allowed only thirty-nine lashes, Romans allowed it to continue till the soldiers were too tired to continue or they were told to stop (Luke 23:16; 1 Peter 2:24).
- *Crown of thorns.* They pressed a crown of sharp thorns into His scalp, made from the thorny acanthus shrub. These thorns were nasty—a display of utter contempt. Matthew recorded that soldiers further mocked Him by placing a scepter, a representation of authority, in His hands, hands that were aching from the leather straps holding him to the pike as they whipped Him. The beating would press the sharp thorns further into His scalp, causing a lot of bleeding. The soldiers continued to mock our Lord and hit Him across His face. By this time, Jesus would have been unrecognizable (Matt. 27: 27- 44).
- *Purple / scarlet robe.* This was a very expensive “chlamys” garment, perhaps an old, faded one, and a symbol of a prince. This was also the *robe* or cloak of a Roman soldier that was made of mohair, a

very harsh, prickly fabric from camels that would have adhered to wounds, further tearing into the flesh! The Jewish leader Agrippa I was mocked in this way too. Roman soldiers were vicious and would brutally mock their prisoners, even use the knuckle bones of their victims for dice to play games with to relieve their boredom!

- *Hail, king of the Jews! Hail* was the salutation a soldier gave an important commander or Emperor; here, it is extreme sarcasm. The soldiers were acting with a mindset of sadistic sport and contempt towards Jesus!
- *No basis for a charge / guilt / fault.* The Roman verdict against Jesus was *not guilty*; normally this would have been the last word (Luke 23:4-22; John 18:38).
- *Here is / behold the man!* Another mode of mocking our Lord to make Him appear as a fool and not the true KING of kings! So many people do this today, even Christians, by chasing pride and foolishness and ignoring Him! Ironically, here is the God-Man, the last Adam who sums up all of humanity at its best to be our example and substitute for sacrifice.
- *Chief priests and their officials.* People who were to instruct others of the ways of God and be His showcase became mere thugs.
- *Crucify.* For the misguided Jews, this was blasphemy—a capital offence. The people were relying only on their emotions, not facts or truth. They did not care about guilt or innocence, only their thirst for blood and sport. This passage has been used to justify (sinfully) the persecution of the Jews; but, the fact is, they did not kill Jesus; you and I did! Every Christian who has ever accepted Him by faith killed Him because He died for our sins, not because of the Jews or the Romans! If He had not died, we would not have been saved. To blame others for His death diminishes the act He did for us (Lev. 24:16; John 1:29; Acts 4:27)!
- *You take him.* Pilate sought both to please the crowd and keep from punishing an innocent man, and he knew the Jews had no legal right to kill Him. This was also a public declaration to absolve guilt, saying, *I do not approve* and *I have no part in this*. However, Pilate still had the power to release Jesus and control the crowd if he chose; his response was “double minded.” Jesus modeled bravery while Pilate modeled cowardice. In their writings, the early church fathers pointed to Pilate as the one responsible (Duet. 21:6; Psalm 119:113; Matt. 5:39, 43-44; James 1:8; 4:8).
- *Son of God.* Here, meaning the Messiah who is destined to die, but this was not a crime. (Ex. 4:22; Deut. 8:3; 2 Sam. 7:14; Psalm 2:7; 89:27; Isa. 53; Hos. 11:1; John 10:34-36).
- *More afraid.* This statement either gave Pilate a fear with some conviction or a cause to act cautiously. Romans were cynical, especially Pilate, and this was a common claim then by many would-be messiahs and Greek philosophers. And Romans believed either the gods themselves or agents they sent to earth came to spy on and judge people.
- *Jesus gave him no answer / Jesus kept silent, / He answered him not one word.* For Romans, this was a statement of *not guilty*. Jesus kept His composure, focusing on God, and did not allow anyone to distract Him from His purpose of His submission as an offering for us. Most of the time, Jesus kept silent indicating they had no right or power over Him! Also, there was the possibility that Pilate would not have understood or would not have believed Him, so Jesus was saving His strength. The other Gospels record a few retorts. Why did Jesus not answer them? They would not have believed Him and they did not deserve an answer! Jesus exercised discernment, as we need to at times; we do not always need to open our mouths, even to defend ourselves. Jesus also modeled for us bravery and the refusal to compromise even in the face of immeasurable adversity (Isa. 53:7; Eccles. 3:7; 1 Pet. 2:18-23)!
- *I have power... from above.* Romans respected courage, especially in the face of death, and Jesus was displaying a lot of it. Conversely, Pilate was a coward! This is a statement of God’s sovereignty even over wickedness, and that leaders are responsible to God. Jesus is claiming to be the Cosmic Ruler as predestined in Daniel (Dan. 7:13-14; Acts 2:23; 4:27-28).

- *Guilty of a greater sin.* The betrayal of Judas and His own people and priests like Caiaphas whom God rescued and set apart were all conniving against Him (John 11:49-50; 18:13-14).
- *Tried to set Jesus free.* It seems that Pilate was weighing the political consequences of releasing Jesus and perhaps causing problems with his job security. Even if Pilate believed Jesus was at least a Divine messenger or a Prophet, it was not enough to sway him from the manipulation of the religious leaders.
- *No friend of Caesar / Emperor.* Perhaps an official title for the Emperor's supporters. Pilate's cowardice was perhaps because his political mentor and sponsor, Sejanus, was being disposed during this time as the very paranoid Roman Emperor Tiberius was on a warpath to remove governors who might not be loyal, even by only a rumor. These leaders could do that and they knew it! Some researchers think the paranoia from the Roman rulers was due to their drinking from cups made from silver and gold laced with mercury and lead, which caused brain damage.
- *The judge's seat / Judgment seat* refers to the power of being a judge; it does not refer to a specific "chair" although a specific chair was used. Pilate could have his chair moved to the courtyard, if it was good weather, and judge from there.
- *Stone Pavement.* Perhaps the common area at the front of the fortress Antonia or the outdoor area of Herod's palace, platforms for public addresses, where legal charges were official rendered (Rom. 14:10-12).
- *Day of Preparation of Passover.* Referring to the Thursday before and the morning of the Friday of Passover week, where the meals were prepared and the lambs slaughtered for the sacrifice, as Jesus becomes our Lamb (Matt. 27:17; Luke 2:41; 22:1-38; Acts 12:3-4)!
- *Sixth hour.* Meaning dawn, 6 a.m. or six hours from sunrise, referring to noon. Mark 15:25 records that Jesus was crucified at "the third hour." Contradiction? No, John uses Roman or symbolic time and Mark uses Jewish time, making the first appearance before Pilate at 6:00 a.m. and the crucifixion at 9:00 a.m. (Matt 27:45-46; Mark 15: 25, 33-34; Luke 23:44).
- *No king but Caesar.* The chief priests and children of Abraham must have forgotten that God is their King—and ours (Psalm 2:1-3; John 1:19)!
- *Handed him over.* Pilate had full authority and discretion as well as responsibility, but was very paranoid and perhaps felt forced; for if he did not do so, he could be accused of treason and then disposed (1 Cor. 2:8).
- *Crucified.* The standard Roman form of execution then. Ironically, the Jews desperately wanted a messiah and when He came, they killed Him, the very one the Passover pointed to (Matt. 27:32-37)!

Devotional Thoughts and Applications: This passage has a very interesting and responsibility-ducking response that is reminiscent of many people today, called *postmodernism*. Pilate had the great opportunity to showcase Truth, yet he did not want to take responsibility. In the previous passage, he questioned what truth is and made a claim that it is all relative and unimportant; he skirted the issues and blamed others so he would not get into trouble. Then, when all that did not work, he compromised and placated the crowd instead of taking a stand to do the right thing. How many of us do that? A Judge, knowing a defendant is innocent, follows the technicalities of the law, ignoring truth and justice, and sends an innocent person to prison while a guilty person gets off because of those same technicalities. Church boards ignore a good pastoral candidate because his teaching is too relevant and convicting, choosing another who will not rock the boat or make them feel uncomfortable, even though the person whom they choose compromises truth and merely entertains. When we seek to ignore truth or Truth, blame others, and/or refuse to take responsibility, we are being more like Pilate and less like Jesus!

In contrast, when we are seeking Christ first and His work in us, then we are pursuing righteousness and all that is good as a way to glorify Christ as Lord. What we all need to be doing is applying His character into our lives and relationships, from our daily lives, our service, and our mission

for His glory. This is real, authentic application of our faith development that is essential—not only in our personal Christian lives, but also in how we are to prepare ourselves to build relationships and model and make Him known. With sin, all we will have is quarreling, jealousy, anger, selfishness, envy, pride, and such, as these so-called Jewish leaders modeled. The results of these will cause chaos and strife to any situation, and hinder God's work in us. Extreme division will be wedged into any church or relationship focusing our will and desires over His, preventing our receiving of any good or pleasing work, as well as any blessings. It will prevent God from using us to the fullest extent possible, especially in helping others. We will not be real, functioning Christians when we have pride or focus on pleasing others and not pleasing Christ. We have to be willing to counteract these rotten works by committing to the good fruit, keeping our goals, and focusing upon Christ and His Word, so we can develop them (Prov. 6:32-35; Rom. 8:29).

The Essential Inductive Questions (for more Inductive questions see Inductive Bible Study):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

Additional Questions:

1. Where do you come from? How have you seen or struggled with paranoia and/or conviction to do the right thing? Have you ever struggled with bravery over compromising, even in the face of adversity?
2. Do you realize the magnitude of what our Lord did for you? Pilate may have been a bit captivated by Jesus, but why do you think it was not enough for him to do the right thing? What did it take to turn you away from sin and to Him?
3. Somehow and someday, Pilate knew Jesus to be true, yet he still would not let Jesus go, why? How is Jesus your True Suffering Servant? How has He come into your life to love, redeem, and set you free?
4. How do you feel when an innocent person is found guilty and sent to prison? How do you feel when a guilty person is set free? How do you feel knowing that Jesus is the innocent One and you are the guilty one He set free?
5. What does it mean to your daily life that Jesus went through all of this humiliation and ridicule? How do we humiliate Jesus when we seek to please others and not Him?
6. Jesus was accused of a crime He did not commit; we committed it! How can this fact help you be a better Christ-follower and church-builder?
7. Do you see the mistake both Judas and Pilate made? They took hold of their desires and sought themselves regardless of guilt; they refused to deal with their sin, so sin took them over. What happens when we do this in our lives and church?
8. Pilate placated the crowd instead of taking a stand to do the right thing. How have you done this? What can you do to prevent this from happening in your life?
9. How is it ironic that those who desperately wanted a messiah, when He came, killed Him? How do the church and our leaders do this today? What can we do to not kill Jesus away from our life and church? How can you make better decisions in the face of fear, peer pressures, and hostile circumstances?