

Easter Week
PILATE: WHAT IS TRUTH?

Tuesday, April 12

Reading: John 18:28 – 19:16

John 18:36 Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, My servants would fight to prevent My arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now My kingdom is from another place." **37** "You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to Me." **38** "What is truth?" retorted Pilate. With this he went out again to the Jews gathered there and said, "I find no basis for a charge against Him."

Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea from 26 to 36 AD.¹ The Jewish historians Josephus and Philo (both writing not long after Jesus' died) both describe Pilate as a hard-nosed, violent governor who caused a riot among loyal Jews on several occasions. This anti-Jewish attitude is hinted at in the gospels where Pilate is said to have mixed the blood of Galileans with their sacrifices (Luke 13:1). Pilate had been appointed to his position by Lucius Sejanus who was Emperor Tiberius' 'right-hand man' in Rome. But about 1½ years before the trial of Jesus it was revealed that Sejanus had conspired against the emperor and was executed as a traitor.² Now all those he had appointed were under suspicion as well --- including Pilate!

Normally Pilate would not have cared about the death of one Jew. He might even have released Jesus just to spite the Jewish religious establishment. But now he was under pressure. In fact, within a few years he would be removed by the emperor for excessive cruelty. But when Jesus stood before him, Pilate could not afford any more bad reports going back to Rome. He tried several tactics to release Jesus whom he knew was not worthy of death. He tried to pawn the case off to Herod Antipas but the king sent Jesus back (Luke 23:6-12). He tried substituting Barabbas but the crowd cried for the criminal's release. He tried to invoke the crowd's pity by having Jesus scourged but this only made them cry for more blood. Finally the Jewish leaders threatened Pilate by saying, "If you let this Man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar" (John 19:12). "Friend of Caesar" was an official title given by the Roman emperor to those in his favor. Pilate decided it was not worth risking the ire of the emperor and so, though he had declared Jesus innocent several times, he condemned Jesus to be crucified.

In his interview with Jesus, Pilate had heard that Jesus' kingdom was not of this world and that He came into the world "to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to Me." To this Pilate sarcastically replied, "What is truth?" He does not even wait for Jesus to answer his question. He did not realize that Truth itself was standing before him with an invitation for Pilate to hear and respond to God's voice. But like many today, the price for Pilate was too high. He would rather appease the crowd than do what was right. He may have "washed his hands" of Jesus' blood (Matthew 27:24-25) but this did not absolve him of guilt for his indecision and rejection of the One who said, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life" (John 14:6).

Many today follow Pilate's example. They reject Christ because it means changing their lives by giving Jesus control. They claim the words of the poem *Invictus*, "I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul." Where do you stand on Jesus' call to obey the Truth?

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pontius_Pilate

² <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sejanus>

READ THRU THE NEW TESTAMENT: 1 Corinthians 9-10