

Great Questions of the Bible: “What Shall I Do With Jesus?”

Our series “Great Questions of the Bible” brings us to a question that you must answer. There is no avoiding or ignoring it. You will answer this question. There is no alternative that will allow you to escape answering it one way or another; there is no middle ground. It was first asked by a man who stood at the crossroads of history. He faced a choice that would determine not only his own destiny, but the destiny of multiplied millions of people. Imagine that! One question asked by one man that would forever change the history of the world and alter eternity. It’s found in **Matthew 27**. Jesus has spent all night in a kangaroo court, being maligned and falsely accused, and He is now standing in Pilate’s Hall, where we will begin reading.

Matthew 27:17-26 “Therefore when they were gathered together, Pilate said unto them, Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ? For he knew that for envy they had delivered him. When he was set down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him. But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus. The governor answered and said unto them, Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you? They said, Barabbas. Pilate saith unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus which 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 just 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.”

“*What shall I do then with Jesus?*” Little did Pilate know how that question would echo down the corridors of time into every human heart. This is a great question because it involves a great decision. In fact, it’s the most important decision you will ever make. Not only that, it is a decision that you can’t avoid making. You may not even be sure that Jesus even existed. You may not necessarily believe in Him at all. Well, you’re still making a decision about Him. Isn’t that something, that nearly 2,000 years after the Bible tells us about Jesus standing before Pilate and Pilate asking the question, “*What shall I do then with Jesus who is called Christ,*” we’re still talking about what men will do with Jesus. He’s that important and influential of a person, and every single person who is confronted with the evidence of Jesus Christ has to weigh and answer that question.

In ancient Jerusalem, Jesus stands in Pilate’s Hall, for the most part remaining silent. His controversial ministry has ended in this place, and now it has come down to this. Jesus’ life rests in the hands of Pilate: a pagan, who had no interest in the religion of the Jews or in Jesus. Jesus was nobody to him. But, little did Pilate realize that that day, he was face to face with God. The Son of God stands before him, and now, Pilate must render some decision: execute Him or let Him go.

Now, Pilate wanted to let Him go. It wasn't that he had an overwhelming sympathy for Jesus; he just saw no reason to condemn the man. There was no evidence to put Him to death. Pilate didn't see Jesus as a threat to Caesar or the Roman government. He could see through the nefarious motives of the Jewish leaders who had brought these charges against Jesus. But, Pilate was a politician. Politics were at play, and Pilate was torn between his conscience and convenience. Jesus must be adjudicated, but Pilate didn't want that responsibility. This was the religious mob of Jesus' own people who were forcing this matter into court.

So, Pilate fell back on the custom of the Passover, thinking maybe this would be how he could get Jesus off his hands. It was the custom of the Passover to release one of the Jewish prisoners to the people, so Pilate thought he could give the people a choice: either he would release Jesus, or he would release a murderer named Barabbas. Surely, the people wouldn't want such a heinous criminal released, so they would choose Jesus. But, no, without hesitation, that angry mob demanded that Barabbas be released: a bloodthirsty thug. They wanted him set free, and Jesus held.

So, Pilate, in exasperation asks, *Then what am I supposed to do with Jesus?* They said, *Crucify Him!* Pilate had Jesus on his hands and had to make a decision that would last for eternity. Friend, that question comes right down through time and it confronts you and me today, just like it did Pilate. Here is Jesus, standing before you with bowed head. His words, His miracles, the witness of heaven itself have pleaded their case, and now, you must render a verdict.

Let's consider the voices that confronted Pilate that day. First of all, there was the voice of Pilate's own logic and reason. Pilate knew better than to condemn Jesus. He knew there was no reason to condemn Jesus.

Matthew 27:18 "For he knew that for envy they had delivered him."

He could see right through their plot! He knew that Jesus wasn't being fairly represented by these people. They were crying out for Jesus' blood, and acting as though Jesus was an eminent threat to the Roman state. They knew He wasn't a threat to the Romans, and frankly, they didn't care about a threat to the Romans. Pilate also knew He wasn't a threat to the Romans. He knew better than to believe what they were saying about Him; Pilate wasn't a fool. He knew their charges were trumped up. He looked at it and saw that the whole thing reeked of pride and politics. When Pilate turned Jesus over to those soldiers to be crucified, he knew that he was condemning an innocent man.

Hebrews 6:6 "If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame."

This verse teaches that when a person ultimately rejects the Lord Jesus Christ, he crucifies Him afresh and puts Him to an open shame. In other words, he does the exact same thing that Pilate did. He may not think that he hates Jesus, but to reject Him, you see, is to condemn Him.

There are only three things one can conclude about Jesus. The evidence of history is on the side of Jesus' actual existence. We talked about that in our last study "What Think Ye of Christ?" A man named Jesus

of Nazareth, whom many called Jesus Christ, lived in the first century A.D., 2,000 years ago. This man named Jesus claimed to be more than a prophet or a moral teacher. He claimed to be more than a healer. He claimed to be the Son of God. The great apologist C.S. Lewis said that Jesus is one of three persons: a liar, because He knew He was not God, but claimed to be; OR He was a lunatic, a madman who really thought He was God, but wasn't; OR He was the Lord, and really was who He claimed to be. Those are the three choices, and there are no others. So, which is it? You see, a lot of people don't want to make that decision. Many people want to say, *Well, Jesus was a good man, but He wasn't God.* No, if He wasn't the Son of God, then He wasn't a good man. Get that, now. If He wasn't the Son of God, He wasn't a good man. He was a liar and a blasphemer, because He claimed to be the Son of God. He led people to believe that he was the Son of God. It's either that, or He was mentally deranged.

John 14:9 "...he that hath seen me hath seen the Father..."

C.S. Lewis was a determined atheist for several years, but later came to believe in the existence of God and in the deity of Jesus Christ. Listen to what C.S. Lewis said in his book Mere Christianity:

"I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice...Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us...To say that He was right in most of His teaching but wrong in His greatest theme is neither sensible nor honest."

You see, what he's saying is that you can't just tip your hat to Jesus. You either reject Him or you accept Him. So, what then will you do with Jesus?

But secondly, Pilate had to wrestle with the interceding voice of a loved one; not only his own reason and logic, but his own wife as well.

Matthew 27:19 "When he was set down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him."

Now, I can't say with any certainty what that dream was about or where it came from, but I can tell you that it frightened Pilate's wife enough to warn him. She believed that something was afoot that was not going to end well. She believed that something terrible would happen if her husband mistreated and condemned Jesus.

Is there some family member or friend who has prayed for you? Pleaded with you? Tried to sway you to consider Jesus? Tried to influence you to consider the Lord? Do you have a wife who has begged and prayed and asked for you to go to worship with her? Do you have godly parents who have tried—

imperfect as they might have been—so hard to raise you to serve Jesus? Are you ignoring them? There was the voice of Pilate’s wife, calling him to vindicate Jesus.

Then, there was the voice of Jesus Himself.

John 18:37 “Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? 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. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.”

Jesus didn’t say much as He stood before Pilate, but what He said was the truth of the ages. And Pilate will stand at the judgment with no excuse of ignorance.

Not only were there the voices of logic and reason, a loved one, and Jesus Himself; but, also the voice of Pilate’s own nagging conscience. And second only to the voice of Jesus, this was the most damning voice of all.

Matthew 27:22-24 “Pilate saith unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus which 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 just person: see ye to it.”

You see, Pilate felt dirty because of what he was doing to Jesus. He may have been a proud and powerful man, but he condemned Jesus to be crucified with a guilty conscience. It was bothering him to turn Jesus over to be crucified.

Now, I would suggest that all of us are confronted by those same voices today as we ask the question, *“What then shall I do with Jesus?”* Have you even stopped to logically consider the evidence, not only for the fact that Jesus lived, but that He really was the Son of God? Do you just dismiss the question by saying, well, He lived and He was a good man. We all gather around and adore the little baby Jesus and all that that supposedly means and represents, yet we don’t worship Him as a risen Lord. We don’t bow to Him in obeisance, as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Do you have loved ones who’ve tried to bring you to the Lord and to the knowledge of the truth? Maybe they’ve tried to get you to stop and consider your soul and what you will do with Jesus. Does your conscience ever bother you? Do you ever weigh this question in your mind? You know that there is something to this book, the Bible, and there’s something about Jesus Christ and His message, but you’ve never done anything about it.

Pilate had all of these voices coming to him, yet he condemned Jesus. Despite his logic, his wife, Jesus’ own testimony, and even despite his own conscience, he condemned Jesus. But, why would he do that? You see, there were some powerful forces at work against Pilate. For one thing, he had his ego and his pride.

John 19:9-10 “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?”

Pilate may have known better than to crucify Jesus, but he also knew that he could crucify Him. So, he is feeling his oats, so to speak. And despite his conscience, his pride wasn't going to let him bow before Jesus and surrender to Him. There are a lot of people who have a conscience that tells them that they're wrong. There are a lot of people who can't give an answer as to why they reject Jesus, but their pride keeps them from receiving Him. I like how Jesus put Pilate in his place:

John 19:11 “Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above...”

So many people will ignore the voice of reason, the voice of testimony, of conscience because of one thing, and that is their pride. They will bless the Lord, but they will not bow before the Lord.

Then, Pilate considered what he would have to give up if he acquitted Jesus. Think about this for a moment. I think this really worked on Pilate and it sealed Jesus' fate, perhaps more than anything.

John 19:12 “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. Whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar.”

They're telling Pilate, *You'd better be careful; you don't want word getting back to Rome that you're making room for another king here. You don't want them to think that you're going along with a possible insurrection.* That bothered Pilate. He had a lot on the line. There was a lot at stake: his job, his position, his livelihood, his wealth. You know, those very things keep many people from confessing Jesus, even today.

Pilate also was swayed by public opinion. Look at what Mark says about this scene:

Mark 15:11 “But the chief priests moved the people, that he should rather release Barabbas unto them.”

These hypocrites and corrupt leaders got the people on their side, and Pilate felt this rising tide of public opinion.

Mark 15:15 “And so Pilate, willing to content the people, released Barabbas unto them, and delivered Jesus, when he had scourged him, to be crucified.”

Well, do you worry about what people will think if you obey the gospel of Christ? Do you worry about what your boss will think? Do you worry about what your family will think? Do you worry about what the fallout or the repercussions might be? I can tell you that if you're a young person today, it can be brutal to face your friends and others at school, on the college campus or the dorm, and for them to know that you really believe the Bible. But what will you do with Jesus? That's the question.

Well, all of this put Pilate in quite a predicament. What was he to do? He did the same thing that many, many people try to do with Jesus today: he tried to ignore Jesus. He tried to get Jesus out of his court and make the Jews deal with Him and do with Him as they pleased.

John 18:31 “Then said Pilate unto them, Take ye him, and judge him according to your law. The Jews therefore said unto him, It is not lawful for us to put any man to death:”

He didn't want it to be his responsibility. Maybe that's your attitude: *Oh, that's for all of you religious folks, all of you Jesus lovers over there. Don't bother me with all of that.* Friend, you can't ignore Jesus; you're going to stand before Him one day.

Pilate tried to shift the decision to others. When he heard that Jesus was from Galilee, a light came on and he thought, *Here is my out! I'll send Him over to Herod, the ruler of Galilee, and Herod can deal with Him.* But, no, Herod didn't deal with Him. He came right back to Pilate and Pilate had to deal with him. And nobody else can deal with Jesus for you either. It is a personal decision.

Pilate also tried to just admire Jesus.

Luke 23:14 “(Pilate) Said unto them, Ye have brought this man unto me, as one that perverteth the people: and, behold, I, having examined him before you, have found no fault in this man touching those things whereof ye accuse him;”

You see, he thought that if he could refrain from saying anything bad about Jesus that that would be enough. A lot of people think like that today. Friend, it would've been better had Pilate never heard of Jesus, or had Pilate found fault in Jesus, than to know that Jesus was innocent, acknowledge it, and then let Him be crucified. Sympathizing with Jesus will win you no favor in His eyes. How can you say *I find no fault in Him*, and refuse to accept Him? What does that say about your indifference and cowardice?

So, Pilate, trying to be neutral and appease everybody but Jesus, throws up his hands and says *All right, here's what you asked for. It's not my decision; it's now on you. You take Him and crucify Him, but it's not my fault. Look here, I'm washing my hands, because I don't want His blood on me. I'm out of it.* Friend, on that day, Jesus stood bound and subservient in Pilate's Hall at Pilate's mercy, but I want you to think about this: one day, this same Jesus is going to sit on a great white throne, according to **Revelation 20**, and Pilate is going to stand before Jesus in the place where Jesus once stood before him. And Pilate will stand there with the vile guilt of rejecting Jesus on his hands. That water didn't remove Pilate's guilt, and one day, you'll stand before Jesus, alongside Pilate. That day, Pilate asked, *“What then shall I do with Jesus?”* But one day, Jesus is going to ask of Pilate, *What am I going to do with you?* And He's going to ask the same question of you. Won't you obey the Lord Jesus today, and let Him be your Savior, your Lord, and your King?