



January 8, 2023

“Pilate the People-Pleaser”

[John 18-19](#)

Pastor Gary Hamrick

Pontius Pilate was the Prefect appointed by Rome to oversee central Israel, including the city of Jerusalem, during the time of Christ. In fact, he became the pivotal figure in sentencing Jesus to death by crucifixion. Ironically, Pilate had determined three times that Jesus was not guilty of being condemned to death. So then why did he end up sentencing Him to death after all? Answer—because Pilate had a weakness for what other people thought, and that weakness moved Pilate off-center from what he knew was right. The truth is that all of us can be captive to the fear of people and trapped by a desire to always please people. This story from John’s Gospel helps us recognize that type of sin in our own lives so that we can instead live to please God and fear Him alone.

1. [John 18:28-38](#) – *“Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas to the Praetorium, and it was early morning. But they themselves did not go into the Praetorium, lest they should be defiled, but that they might eat the Passover. Pilate then went out to them and said, ‘What accusation do you bring against this Man?’ They answered and said to him, ‘If He were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him up to you.’ Then Pilate said to them, ‘You take Him and judge Him according to your law.’ Therefore the Jews said to him, ‘It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death,’ that the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled which He spoke, signifying by what death He would die. Then Pilate entered the Praetorium again, called Jesus, and said to Him, ‘Are You the King of the Jews?’ Jesus answered him, ‘Are you speaking for yourself about this, or did others tell you this concerning Me?’ Pilate answered, ‘Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me. What have You done?’ Jesus answered, ‘My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.’ Pilate therefore said to Him, ‘Are You a king then?’ Jesus answered, ‘You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.’ Pilate said to Him, ‘What is truth?’ And when he*

had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, 'I find no fault in Him at all.'"

2. Pontius Pilate

- a. Pilate was the Roman Governor or Prefect overseeing Judea, which included Jerusalem
- b. Pilate had a reputation for being blood-thirsty and cruel
 - i. Caesar had "put him on notice," meaning he could lose his command as Prefect if he continued to arbitrarily kill people
- c. He had a pivotal role in the decision to crucify Jesus
 - i. The Jews accused Jesus of blasphemy, but Rome had stripped them of the ability to execute capital punishment
 - ii. As an alternative, the Jews attempted to convince Pilate that Jesus had committed sedition against Rome by claiming to be king, hoping that Pilate would agree to crucify Jesus

3. Competing voices

- a. Pilate had competing voices in his head
 - i. Caesar
 - 1. He did not want to crucify Jesus for fear that Caesar would recall him to Rome and take away his command
 - ii. The mob
 - 1. He did not want to anger the mob by not giving in to their demand that Jesus be crucified
 - iii. His wife
 - 1. Pilate's wife pleaded with him to let Jesus go, stating that she had had a dream that Jesus was innocent
 - a. **Matthew 27:19** - *"While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent to him, saying, 'Have nothing to do with that just Man, for I have suffered many things today in a dream because of Him.'"*
 - b. **Matthew 27:19** - *"While Pilate was sitting on the judge's seat, his wife sent him this message: 'Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him.'"* (1984 NIV)

4. God's providential plan

- a. The crucifixion of Jesus was God's providential plan in God's providential timing to save the world through the sacrificial death of Jesus
 - i. **Acts 2:23b** - *"...the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God..."*
 - ii. **Acts 2:23b** - *"...the definite plan and foreknowledge of God..."* (ESV)
 - iii. **Isaiah 53:5-10b** - *"But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities. ... He was led as a lamb to the slaughter. ... For*

the transgressions of My people He was stricken. ... Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him..."

5. Pilate's weakness

- a. Pilate had a weakness for what other people thought, and that weakness moved Pilate off-center from what he knew was right
- b. God used Pilate's weakness to advance His own purposes without violating Pilate's free will

6. Pilate's decision

- a. Pilate interviewed Jesus and ruled that there was no reason to put Him to death
 - i. **John 18:38b** - *"And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, 'I find no fault in Him at all.'"*
- b. On a legal technicality, Pilate sent Jesus to Herod Antipas hoping that Herod would decide whether to crucify Jesus
 - i. Jesus was a Galilean, and Galilee was part of Herod's jurisdiction, not Pilate's
 - ii. Herod interviewed Jesus and then sent him back to Pilate
- c. To attempt to appease the mob, Pilate had Jesus scourged beyond recognition, but again ruled that he had found no fault in Jesus
 - i. **John 19:1-4** - *"So then Pilate took Jesus and scourged Him. And the soldiers twisted a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and they put on Him a purple robe. Then they said, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' And they struck Him with their hands. Pilate then went out again, and said to them, 'Behold, I am bringing Him out to you, that you may know that I find no fault in Him.'"*
- d. Then for a third time, Pilate stated that he had no reason to crucify Jesus
 - i. **John 19:5-6** - *"Then Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. And Pilate said to them, 'Behold the Man!' Therefore, when the chief priests and officers saw Him, they cried out, saying, 'Crucify Him, crucify Him!' Pilate said to them, 'You take Him and crucify Him, for I find no fault in Him.'"*

7. If Pilate didn't believe Jesus was at fault, why did he have Jesus crucified?

- a. He capitulated to the loudest voices
 - i. **John 19:12-16** - *"From then on Pilate sought to release Him, but the Jews cried out, saying, 'If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar's friend. Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar.' When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus out and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called The Pavement, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha. Now it was the Preparation Day of the Passover, and about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, 'Behold your King!'"*

But they cried out, 'Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him!' Pilate said to them, 'Shall I crucify your King?' The chief priests answered, 'We have no king but Caesar!' Then he delivered Him to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus and led Him away."

- b. Pilate was controlled by the fear of man and the desire to please people
- c. It was more important to him what people thought than what was the right thing to do

8. Lessons from Pilate

- a. The fear of man will cause you to not do things you should
- b. Being a people-pleaser will cause you to do things you shouldn't

9. If you endeavor to please God and God alone, He will take care of everyone else

- a. Oswald Chambers said, *"The remarkable thing about God is that when you fear God, you fear nothing else, whereas if you do not fear God, you fear everything else."*
- b. John Witherspoon said, *"It is only the fear of God that can deliver us from the fear of man."*
 - i. **Romans 12:2** - *"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."*
 - ii. **Colossians 2:8** - *"See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ." (1984 NIV)*
 - iii. **Joshua 24:14-15** - *"Now therefore, fear the LORD, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the LORD! And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."*
- c. When we are captive to the fear of man and the trap of always trying to please people, we will inevitably violate our conscience and sin against the Lord
 - i. **Proverbs 29:25** - *"The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD shall be safe."*
 - ii. **Proverbs 19:23** - *"The fear of the LORD leads to life, And he who has it will abide in satisfaction; He will not be visited with evil."*
 - iii. **Psalms 27:1** - *"The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?"*
- d. Stop making decisions based on whom you fear or whom you want to like you
- e. Start making decisions based on fearing God and pleasing Him

- i. [Galatians 1:10](#) – “Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.” (1984 NIV)

A prayer for deliverance from the fear of man

Lord, deliver me from the fear of man and the trap of being a people-pleaser. May I be a person who fears YOU and pleases YOU in all things—at home, at work, at church, at school... wherever I go; with my friends, in public, and in private (because You see all things). And I will trust you with everybody else in my life.”

Discussion Questions

1. Read [John 18:28-38](#) to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. Who was Pontius Pilate? What was his reputation like? What role did he play in the crucifixion of Jesus? (See #2 above)
3. Describe the different “voices” that attempted to influence Pilate as he determined whether to crucify Jesus. (See #3 above)
4. What was Pilate’s major weakness? (See #5a above)
5. How did God make use of this weakness? (See #4b and #5 above)
6. Read [John 18:38](#) and [John 19:1-6](#). Did Pilate want to crucify Jesus? How do we know? (See #6b above)
7. Why did Pilate decide to crucify Jesus despite his initial hesitancy to do so? (See #7 above)
8. Have you ever struggled with trying to please others instead of God? What can we learn from Pilate? (See #8 above)
9. Read [Romans 12:2](#), [Colossians 2:8](#), and [Joshua 24:14-15](#). How do we overcome the fear of man?
10. Read [Galatians 1:10](#). What should be our focus when we make decisions? What does this look like practically?
11. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the 1984 New International Version