

Pilate: Facing the Truth

By Alan Huesing

“What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ” (Matthew 27:22 NIV)?

(Read Matthew 27:11–26, Mark 15:1–15, Luke 23:1–25 and John 18:28–19:22)

What did Pilate understand about the Jewish religious leaders? (Matthew 27:18)

What six questions did Pilate ask Jesus?

Luke 23:3

Mark 15:3–5

John 18:35b

John 18:38

John 19:7–9

John 19:10

What did Pilate’s wife have to say about Jesus? (Matthew 27:19)

What fault did Pilate find in Jesus as he interrogated Him?

Name five ways Pilate tried to avoid making a decision about Jesus.

John 18:29–31

John 18:38–40

Luke 23:5–11

Luke 23:13–17

Matthew 27:24

At first glance it appeared that some poor young Jewish guy had gotten himself into big trouble with some powerful Jewish leaders. His only hope seemed to be that the Roman governor might take pity on him and give him a break. But the Jewish leaders were really determined to get rid of the guy once and for all, and it just wasn't worth the time or effort for the governor to sort out all the details and rescue the poor guy.

A closer look at the situation reveals a different reality. Actually, Jesus was not on trial—Pilate was. Jesus' future was already determined and secure. He would accomplish His mission in a matter of hours and be resurrected as Lord of all in three days. Pilate was the one whose immediate and eternal future was in the balance. He had to determine what to do with Jesus.

Pilate wrestled with the all-important question of who Jesus is. First, he tried to release Jesus quietly. Then, when that didn't work, he tried to avoid making a public decision by passing Jesus on to Herod. Pilate could either declare Jesus innocent, the King of the Jews, the Son of God and the all-powerful Truth or he would have to send Him to the cross to be unjustly executed as a criminal. The decision was impossible to avoid and he couldn't wash his hands of personal responsibility.

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To declare Jesus innocent, he would have to defy the entire Jewish power structure and he knew they could stir up a riot that would cost him his job. Recognizing Jesus' innocence (holiness) eventually requires becoming personally subject to His lordship. Anything less is rejecting Him totally.

Now take a careful look at how Jesus dealt with Pilate in His crucial hour of decision. Jesus could have remained silent as He did before Herod and His Jewish accusers. Instead, He continued to carry out His mission to seek and to save lost people—even the Roman governor. Jesus revealed Himself to Pilate as the King of Heaven and the Son of God. He warned him of the seriousness of his situation through a dream (his wife's) and explained that Pilate's authority was limited by God's power and purpose. Jesus answered Pilate's questions and spoke to him in a personal and straightforward manner (John 18:33–38).

How did Jesus respond when Pilate asked him the following questions? (Refer back to Matthew 27:11–26, Mark 15:1–15, Luke 23:1–25 and John 18:28–19:22.)

Are you the king of the Jews?

How do you answer your accusers?

What did you do to make the Jewish leaders so angry?

Where did you come from?

Don't you realize that I have the power of life and death over you?

Like many lost people today, Pilate was not interested in religion. He saw and recognized the hypocrisy and politics of religious leaders. However, confronted face-to-face with the Person and Presence of Jesus, he was impressed by His poise and authenticity. Pilate had to decide personally what to do with Jesus Who is called Christ. Even after Jesus was dead and buried, Pilate apparently realized he had not seen the end of this Jesus as he told the Jewish leaders, "Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how" (Matthew 27:65 NIV).

We must follow Jesus' example as we encourage others to make Him their Savior and Lord. We don't need to defend or prove Him. He's never the one on trial. And the decision about what to do with Jesus, the King of the Jews, is never simply an intellectual choice. It is always a life-changing commitment.