

Pilate

Last 24 Hours of Christ

By Dr. Jeff Meyers

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: John 18:28-40
Preached On: Sunday, February 27, 2022

Crossroads Ministries
301 S. 8th Street
Opelika, Alabama 36801

Website: www.fbcopelika.com
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/jeffmeyers

Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, you have prepared our hearts to hear from your word. Lord, this morning we recognize that that which we're about to read from, that which we're about to study from, that which we're about to preach from, Lord, has oftentimes been ridiculed, been mocked, and been treated the same way that you were treated in the story today but, God, I pray that we would see your word as not only that which was inspired from you, has been preserved by you, which is able to transform our lives and to change our course if necessary, God, I pray today that those who are in need of comfort, those that are struggling, those that are from an earthly perspective just barely getting by, God, I pray that you would comfort them with your word and, Lord, for those that continue to self-rationalize and justify and make excuses, God, I pray you would convict them from your word. God, today we pray that you would do only what you can do is take your Spirit and your word and to change our lives. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

This morning, I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to two very specific places within the New Testament. The first is John 18, the gospel of John, and we're going to spend almost all of our time in the gospel of John 18 but there's a brief moment that I'm going to invite you to go over to Matthew 27 as well, and for those of you that are first time guests, visitors with us, let me welcome you, invite you to a very specific journey through scripture. Oftentimes we take a respective book of the Bible or a theme of the Bible and we take a journey throughout but as we walk through this season of life, we're looking at a time period within the gospels that is actually probably the most saturated time period within them. When you read through the gospel accounts of the life and the ministry of Jesus Christ, oftentimes there's a story, a miracle, a message that one or more of them will share but when you get to the place where all four gospels are describing the same event in "different manners," you know that the focus has been heightened and it happens in the last week and most importantly it happens in those last 24 hours of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Allow me to remind us before we go to John 18, this is not just a study of events of 2,000 years ago, this is not a "biblical history lesson," though it may be, one of the things that we've noticed walking through these last 24 hours is that it

is not a message that we can just leave back then, in fact, you're going to see particularly today how relevant this story is not just for this day but for coming days.

In John 18, beginning in verse 28, we're about to meet one of the most infamous men in the history of the world, a man by the name of Pontius Pilate. In verse 28,

28 Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment: and it was early; and they themselves went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the passover. 29 Pilate then went out unto them, and said, What accusation bring ye against this man? 30 They answered and said unto him, If he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up unto thee. 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: 32 That the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled, which he spake, signifying what death he should die. 33 Then Pilate entered into the judgment hall again, and called Jesus, and said unto him, Art thou the King of the Jews? 34 Jesus answered him, Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me? 35 Pilate answered, Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee unto me: what hast thou done? 36 Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence. 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. 38 Pilate saith unto him, What is truth? And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews, and saith unto them, I find in him no fault at all. 39 But ye have a custom, that I should release unto you one at the passover: will ye therefore that I release unto you the King of the Jews? 40 Then cried they all again, saying, Not this man, but Barabbas. Now Barabbas was a robber.

One of the most famous stories not only biblically in the history of the world regarding a man who though there is extensive history regarding his life leading up to this event, there's not a whole lot afterwards and that's critical to the story in just a moment. But as we have in previous weeks, I just want to walk through this passage asking some very strategic questions building up to why this story is so relevant for our lives today.

Let's begin with the "when," when does this happen? Well, technically speaking it is at the break of day. Jesus was betrayed by Judas in the garden of Gethsemane about six hours prior to. He's been at the high priest Caiaphas' palace for almost six hours where there they had to conjure up false witnesses because they could not find any ill in him. He was eventually accused of blasphemy. He was mocked. He was made fun of. He was denied by his own Simon Peter three times on the porch.

What's coming next? It's the Roman phase. Technically next week we're going to meet a man by the name of Simon of Cyrene, a man who is displaced from his homeland, happened to be there in Jerusalem with his young family, and as the Bible says he was compelled to bear Jesus' cross. We'll unpack all that next week but the "when" part is this: we're midway through. If you were to look at a strict chronology of the last 24 hours of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, this event that we just read is the midway point. We're 12 hours in and there are 12 to go.

It's the "who" that may be the most critical to today's study to understand the "what." We know who Jesus Christ is. We know his identity. We know his purpose. We know what the Lord has designed for him to do. In fact, in John 17 he says, "Father, I've done all that you've called me to do." But let's talk about this Pilate guy. This was an individual that, for lack of better terms, was in a proverbial between the rock and the hard place. He was being squeezed. On the professional side here is this Roman governor who's been relegated to the uttermost parts of the proverbial empire. In our terminology, he's basically a third tier ruler who's been given one more shot not to blow it. Today's terminology, baseball, he's sitting on an 0-2 count. He's got no balls, two strikes, and he knows what's about to come from the mound. He's in literally a no-win situation. If he sides with the Jews there will be chaos. If he sides with the Romans there will be chaos. And he knows professionally there's no way this can work out well for him.

But then there's personally. This is the same man, and though it wasn't in this account, whose wife came to him and said, "I've had a dream regarding this Jesus of Nazareth, and in my dream I've learned do not touch him. Do not harm him." That's what I call between a rock and a hard place. You've got your wife saying, "You'd better choose Barabbas. You've got the world telling you it doesn't matter who you pick, you're in trouble." And so he's being squeezed professionally and personally.

Then there's Barabbas. Notice how it ends in the gospel of John's account as he was a robber. He's referred to as a malefactor. If you'll back up into Matthew 27, if you have it, I want to share with you what the Matthew account describes, and I think this is important to see with your own eyes, not just for me to refer to it. Beginning in verse 15 of Matthew 27, it says, "Now at that feast the governor was wont to release unto the people a prisoner, whom they would." Listen to verse 16. "And they had then a notable prisoner, called Barabbas." Notable. He was not a first-time offender by any stretch of the imagination. The very fact that he was notable means there were multiple lines in the ledger, there were multiple occasions. In fact, throughout an understanding of who he was, the best way we can describe him in our culture today, I want you to imagine that the decision is between Jesus Christ and Charles Manson. That's who Barabbas was. He wasn't somebody who was at the wrong place, at the wrong time, and fall into the wrong situation. He was notable, purposeful, willingly...he was a vile, violent man and then there's Jesus.

But there's one more group of people, the Sanhedrin. These were the men that stayed up all night at Caiaphas' palace. These were the men who had to conjure up all these falsities to somehow get him to this place. And what would they do? They would stand before

Pilate, Barabbas and Jesus and they would say, "Crucify him!" referring to Jesus, and they would also say, "May his blood be on us and our children." These men who claimed to be righteous, these men who claimed to be above reproach literally said, "Give us Barabbas."

Now I know that it may seem like a stretch but you can put yourself in any position of faith anywhere in the world, can you imagine a crowd that would choose Charles Manson over a local pastor? That's essentially what we see happening before us. So where does it happen? Notice it says in this passage that they gathered in the judgment hall and, of course, the Pharisees were too self-righteous to go in there but this is critical because what Pilate has done is he's taken Jesus before them, they've asked him to have him crucified, so he takes him back to the judgment hall, this is a private place, imagine it's almost like going into his personal office, into his chambers, for lack of better terms, and he begins to ask him and dialog questions and concerns. Do you remember the movie "Gladiator"? It pictures the world in Jesus' day and though "historical fiction," there is this repetitive scene in that movie where the one that was in charge had the ability to either put his thumb up or down and that would determine the fate of the one within the ring. That's what's happening. Whom we know as Pontius Pilate has brought Jesus into his inner chamber and said, "Do you not understand that when we go back out there, if I put my thumb up, you're free," proverbially speaking, "but if I put it down, you will be crucified?"

So what happened? What happened in that judgment hall? What was said? The first thing I want you to know is how personal the conversation was. Go into verse 35, "Pilate answered, Am I a Jew?" Verse 36, "Jesus answered, My kingdom." Verse 37, "Pilate therefore said unto him, Art you or art thou a king?" Do you notice how personal this conversation is? Why is it so personal? Because Pilate knows his own person is on the line. You see, in his world, this is bigger than Rome. In his world, this is bigger than Judea, this is bigger than the Sanhedrin because he knows that whatever decision is made, he knows whatever verdict is rendered will not only determine the temperature in his home but also the potential of what his life, his career and his own physical well being will look like.

Then I want you to see a picture. If you'll notice in verse 36, Jesus makes a statement regarding his kingdom and in just a moment some of your Bibles are going to have a very strategic word that I'm going to focus on; those of you that do not have this word, it kind of gets around to the idea therein. Just work with me. Verse 36, "Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence." Notice that focus: now. Can I give you the picture of what Jesus was painting in the judgment hall? "Pilate, there's a day coming where not even Rome can stand up to what I'm going to do. There's a day coming where they can get every ruler, every leader, every soldier, it doesn't matter who you get, when I come in power, when I come in authority you're not going to ask me if I'm a King because according to Revelation 19 inscribed on my thigh will say, 'King of kings and Lord of lords.'"

But now. Do you see the picture? What Jesus is saying is, "Oh, that day is going to come but that's not now, Pilate. Right now, I'm going to allow you to put a crown of thorns on my head. I'm going to allow you and your minions to mock me, to make fun of me, to ridicule me, to beat me, and to falsely accuse me." Essentially the picture he's given is, "Pilate, I have the ability and the authority right now to save you from your predicament but you've got to believe in me. Let's not worry about the artillery. Let's not worry about sovereign states of lines and such. This is about you and your soul."

But it's very prophetic. You say, "What do you mean prophetic?" We can't leave this story in the judgment hall. We can't leave it just as a historical account of Jesus and Pilate having this conversation. I want you to notice what Pilate says to him in verse 38. "Pilate saith unto him, What is truth?" Now for some of us it seems like an arbitrary question but let me kind of peel the layers away for a moment. Up until about 40 years ago, this seemed like a ridiculous question to ask because we know what is true, right? Truth is that which is not wrong, not in error, not false. In fact, the majority of our culture and our world for years and years and years has lived in a world that said if it's true, it's true, if it's not, it's not. We use scientific investigation, we use logic, we use whatever means necessary to determine what is right, what is wrong, what is true and what is not, and yet he asked what is truth. I'll give you the academic term. Over about the last almost half century, we've created this term called post-modernity. It's a fancy word that basically means this: you can believe what you want to believe, I can believe what I want to believe, and even though they're in great conflict, it doesn't matter because truth for you is what is most important. Just because it's not actually objectively true has nothing to do with it. It doesn't matter that you can look under the microscope and see the biological distinction, you can do what you want to do because truth is up to you. It's subjective.

Notice how prophetic Pilate was being. He asked a question that our whole world is asking in these "last days": what is truth? Would you ever think that we would get to the place where the animals are smarter than the humans? Oh, we've been there. Don't you remember Noah? Let me ask you a question: what was the numerical difference between the animals and the humans? You see, we've been down this road before. When we start justifying, rationalizing and declaring, "Well, I don't care if it's objective, I don't care if it can be logically proven, it goes against my feelings and it goes against what I want to be true," I've got news for you: I want to have the build of a pro basketball player but it ain't happening. It's not truth.

So why, why does this interaction in the judgment hall? Why is it so important for us to understand it not just from a personal level, from a picturesque level, from a prophetic level? Because it is personal. The pronouns used here are not accidental, they're not coincidental because you know what the Bible says in Hebrews 9? "For we must all die and face the judgment." I've got news for you: one day when you stand before God, it's going to be a very personal conversation. He doesn't care what your mom or dad think at that time. He doesn't care what your boss thinks or your employees think. And for those of you who say, "Well, I'm just going to tell him I'm a Baptist, that should be good enough," I've got bad news for you.

It's a personal conversation and I don't know the exact wording that will be used but I've got a funny feeling that God himself is going to ask me this question: what did you do with my Son Jesus? If I respond, "Well, but my wife..." [buzzer noise] "But my church..." [buzzer noise] "But my denomination..." [buzzer noise] The response has got to be my response. You see, this is the picture I want you to see. Pilate isn't just a third tier Roman dictator of years gone by. Do you want to see the picture? You're Pilate. You say, "What do you mean I'm Pilate?" Yeah, you're Pilate. You find yourself right now in the same predicament that he was in. On one side, you've got Jesus, the man who was perfect in all of his ways, a man who walked on water, he healed the lame and the blind, he miraculously multiplied the food and he spoke words of great truth, he died on a cross and he rose from the grave. On one side, you've got Jesus, on the other side, you've got all that sin can become in life.

You do know that Barabbas probably wasn't that way in first grade although he might have been, I don't know what kindergarten was like for him, but nonetheless, over time his rebellion metastasized to such a point that he was a repeat offender, he was that one whom society was harmed greatly by. Isn't that really a picture of all of our lives? Do I pick Jesus or do I pick anything else? Do I pick where I want to go? Do I pick where I think I'd like to go? Do I pick what I feel? Do I pick what would give me great benefit in one aspect, or do I pick the one who says, "If you follow me, take up your cross and die daily"? And here's the picture: you and I are Pilate. We've got Jesus speaking into one aspect of our life. We've got this other sin thing speaking in. And guess who's standing right in front of us? The world. Do you know what the world is saying? "Crucify him!" The world is telling you, "You don't need Jesus." The world is telling you, "Just do as you're inclined to do, how you're disposed to do, what you feel like doing." The world is basically shouting, "You need to choose Barabbas."

We are Pilate and I know you're thinking, "Well, Pilate was in a no-win situation." You're absolutely right. You say, "What do you mean it's a no-win situation?" When John 16:33 Jesus made this statement that if we believed in him and followed him, that we would be persecuted and hated like he was. So it's a no-win in the sense that if we choose Jesus, we will choose the difficult path, the hard path, but if we choose Barabbas, then we've chosen hell for all of eternity. So I don't think it's really that hard of a choice, the question is will we experience the pain and agony temporally or will it be permanently? You see, for you and I, the picture is that we are Pilate.

You remember what his last action was? It's not in this account that we read. He comes out on the steps, he agrees with the world, and then he takes out a basin of water and he washes his hands and he says, "I wash my hands of this man." I've got news for Pilate: even though he may have said I want nothing more to do with him, what do you think happened when he stood face to face with God? He asked him, "So what did you do with my Son Jesus?" "Oh, I just washed my hands." That's not going to work.

But it's also very prophetic. You say, "How is it prophetic?" You know, in John 10 Jesus is speaking about the fact that he is the good shepherd and there's a hireling, the one that crawls over the wall, and there's this analogy and illustration of whom we know as the

enemy as Satan, being that vile one which the book of Zechariah calls the idol, i-d-o-l shepherd. And yet Jesus warned us over and over that not only does humanity naturally gravitate toward our sin position and against the things of God, but you know the Bible warns us that there is coming one day in the future, there is going to be a personality that rises literally from the ashes. We collectively call him the "antichrist" but the book of Revelation calls him "the beast," and do you know what you see in John 18 is exactly what the world is in the process of doing right now? The world has said, "Get the Bible out of the way." The world has said get Jesus out of the way. Put him on the "proverbial cross." Give us Barabbas. Give us somebody who doesn't care what we do. Give us somebody who will actually promote our rebellion. Give us Barabbas because Barabbas next time we do something we shouldn't do, his response is going to be, "Man, you beat me to it." Is that not who the world is craving right now? Anybody who will justify their sin and celebrate their rebellion. The world is craving Barabbas and guess what? They're going to get him. The Bible says that he is going to show up one day and when he does, his authority, his power, and his vileness will make Barabbas look like child's play.

Right now the world is faced of great conflict, the world is faced with great decision, and we have the opportunity do we choose the things of God or do we choose the vileness of the world? And what is the world saying? Give us Barabbas. This isn't just a story of 2,000 years ago. This isn't just a story of one man's pondering and perplexity. This is our story and we're Pilate and we have a decision to make: who will we choose now and who will we choose tomorrow? And we don't have the privilege of simply washing out hands. A decision must be made.

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. As we gather not only in this place but online and on radio, maybe you're that person that from the beginning of the service when you heard that tuned out Calvary and you saw the testimony of baptisms and you heard about the power of the cross, maybe you're that person today that the Spirit of God has been working on and moving in and maybe it's by the reading and the preaching of his word that the Lord has gotten ahold of you this morning, and maybe you're that person today saying, "Do you know what? I don't want to end up on the wrong side of history. I don't want to end up on the wrong side of eternity." The Bible says whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. I want you to notice it doesn't say whoever becomes a Baptist will be saved, it doesn't say whoever repeats a certain phrase will be saved, it doesn't say whoever doesn't do this or does do that will be saved, it says whoever calls on the name of the Lord. In other words, that means just admitting and crying out that you're in a sin position that you cannot fix and that Jesus Christ through his death and his resurrection has accomplished all that needs to be accomplished to forgive you of your sins and to save your soul. If you're that person today, can I encourage you to cry out. It's not something that has to necessarily be out loud, it doesn't have to be the phrases that I or somebody else would use. This is your heart's cry before God but maybe your cry would go something like this. "God, today I recognize I've got a sin problem. I've been places I shouldn't have been. I've done things I shouldn't have done. I've said things I shouldn't have said. God, I have thought things that I should have never thought. And I understand that according to your word the result or the wages of my sin is death, but your word also says that the gift of life is through Jesus Christ. God,

today I want you to know I believe, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he was willing to be born on my behalf. God, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much he lived a sinless life on my behalf. God, I believe today that he not only stood before Pontius Pilate and Caiaphas and Herod and multiple others but, God, that he went and allowed himself to be placed on Calvary's cross bearing the punishment of my sin. And God, I believe that three days later when he rose from the grave, he made it possible for my sin to be forgiven, he made it feasible for my soul to be saved. God, today I don't have all the answers to the issues, the struggles and the conflicts that are happening within me and around me, but there's one thing I know, that I've got a sin problem only Jesus can solve. The best way I know how, I'm asking you to forgive me, I'm asking you to save me, I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed, in a moment I'm going to pray for us, then we're going to stand and sing together and let me invite you if you had that conversation with the Lord, we'd love to have a conversation, we'd love to celebrate, just to pray with you and pray for you. Or maybe you're that person to say, "You know, I've already professed that faith, I've already believed on Jesus," but maybe like those young girls today, you need to follow in believer's baptism, we'd love the privilege of talking with you. Maybe you say, "Do you know what? Got all that covered." Maybe the Lord's brought you here from a different place, maybe you've been here a long time and the Lord has said, "This is where you need to put your spiritual roots." Maybe today is the day you step out and step forward, we'd love to celebrate with you.

Heavenly Father, as we come to this time of decision, much like Pilate on the front steps of his palace, God, we don't have the privilege of remaining neutral, we have the decision to either be for you or against you, in your way or not and, God, we know deep down inside what your word and your Spirit has told us, God, I pray right now you would silence the enemy and just allow us to respond to you personally the way you've called us to do so. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.