

SERIES: “A Journey into Forgiveness”
Taking the Easy Way Out – John 18:28-19:6

Today we continue our journey into forgiveness, as we find our place among the characters of Holy Week and realize that the only way out of our sin and failure is Jesus. Today we will look at someone who chose to take the easy way out, by blaming others and not standing up for the truth and what is right. We look at Jesus before Pontius Pilate in John 18 & 19.

As we lay the groundwork for this trial, we begin to see how truth can get turned around for convenience' sake! The “buzz word” in the 1990's, and some could argue today, was that “everything's relative--there are no absolute truths anymore” but, when one looks at these particular passages in John and the other Gospels and the encounter with Jesus and Pilate, relative truths are nothing new! In fact, relative truth has been around a long time and it has provided many people with the 'easy way out' of their problems. Problem is relative truth changes and comes right back at you like a boomerang, and it is then you face what you should have all along, the absolute truth!

So, who was this man called Pilate. He was sixth in the order of the Roman procurators of Judea, serving from 26-36 A.D. His headquarters were at Caesarea, but he frequently went up to Jerusalem. He hated the Jews whom he ruled, and in times of irritation freely shed their blood. He visited Jerusalem as seldom as possible as he saw his residence there dreary compared to the pleasures and comforts of Rome. When he did visit he stayed in the Palace of Herod the Great. Pilate is known to us because of the day Jesus stood before him and he sentenced Jesus to death. Later, in A.D. 36 the governor of Syria brought serious accusations against Pilate, and he was banished to Gaul where he committed suicide.

So, we turn our attention to early Good Friday morning when following Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin, the Jews brought him before the Roman procurator, Pilate, who had come up to Jerusalem as usual to preserve order during the Passover.

Note the time of the trial – very early a.m. They've been up all night with Jesus' arrest in the garden of Gethsemane and probably waited just long enough for day to break so they could continue their dastardly plan. In verses 28 & 29 we see the “2-faced” attitudes of these hate-filled Jews. By Jewish law, if they entered the house of a Gentile they would be ceremonially unclean and could not participate in temple worship or celebrate the feasts until “cleansed.” So they stayed outside. They kept the laws of their religion WHILE harboring hate in their hearts against the very God-in-the flesh-Jesus, who gave them those laws. And, Pilate was very unpopular with the Jews, in fact they hated him yet risked his anger against them and even sided with him and the Roman government he represented in order to put Jesus to death.

There once was a popular song by Paul Simon entitled “50 Ways to Leave Your Lover.” Pilate could have re-written that song titled, “4 Ways to Abdicate Your Responsibilities!”

a. Put the responsibility on someone else ... what a novel idea! “Do it yourselves,” he said.
b. Find an escape 'loophole' to let Jesus go and get out of the mess ... Matthew tells us in his account that Pilate's wife warned him of a dream she had and pleaded for him to have nothing to do with this innocent man... so, there was a custom to release a prisoner during Passover, and so he offered the worse dude he could think of, Barabbas....and you thought loopholes were a 20th century legal trick!

c. Compromise-compromise! He flogged Jesus to make him look bad to the people, thinking they'd let him go. Every try to placate someone?

d. Try the direct approach and appeal to their sympathetic side "I find no guilt in him, behold the man! ... but they didn't have a sympathetic side, their anger was consuming them..." "Crucify him, crucify him!"

Face it, Pilate couldn't face his responsibilities with any decisions so the people he despised made the decisions for him and he came up the loser.

This thing called TRUTH ... notice how Pilate asked Jesus a straightforward question and Jesus' replay was clear and concise. Pilate had no question in his mind that Jesus spoke the truth and was innocent of the accused crimes. Sad, though, that in recognizing the truth, he couldn't accept it. It's tragedy enough when we fail to recognize truth, but an even greater tragedy when we do recognize it and fail to heed it, and then try like Pilate to take the easy way out!

In verse 38 we see how truth became "relative" to Pilate. In other words, what the majority wanted, that makes it OK. A note here from the Life Application Bible is worthy of reading: "When there is no basis for truth, there is no basis for moral right and wrong. Justice becomes whatever works or whatever helps those in power." Things haven't changed much in 2,000 years, have they!?!

But, the truth always has a way of coming out, doesn't it? In verse 19:7 the real motive of the religious leaders is revealed! "We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has made himself the Son of God." They didn't care which charge Pilate would agree to, they just wanted something that would declare Jesus guilty enough for the sentence of death by crucifixion.

Then, in Matthew's account of this trial, Pilate took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. "I am innocent of this man's blood," he said. "It is your responsibility!" Funny thing about blood, it's virtually impossible to get rid of. Forensic scientists can usually find blood trace even when evidence has been compromised. I worked in my uncle's dry-cleaning shop for 6 years...

Of course we know that we too, find a place in Pilate's story. It is not just Pilate who can't stand up for truth or what is right, and in turn finds something or someone else to be responsible. Each of us has had the blood of innocents on our hands. We have all taken the easy out and abdicated responsibility. "I am innocent; it is someone else's responsibility."

Then, there's Jesus. Yes, we have his blood on our hands. We scrub, and we scrub, and we scrub, and it just won't wash away. Only Jesus can wash those stains away! Thanks be to God that Jesus submitted to His Father's will, and out of great love for us, took our place on the cross and took our sins there and died for them, once and for all! When he rose from the grave, we were set free from sin and death. As Paul said, "The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

As we look at the central characters who, by God's divine plan, played an integral part in Christ's death. As we examine their involvement, we see ourselves and the situations of life that we have been placed in. Let us resolve to be more like Jesus, loving, forgiving, compassionate and caring. Amen.