



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Suffering Savior, Mark 15:1-15

TRANSCRIPT

"Before Pilate: Witnessing a Good Confession of Unconditional Election"

[Prayer] Father, we're grateful to Thee for the privilege of the study of the Scriptures again. We ask Thy blessing upon us now as we study in the passion of our Lord. And we pray that Thou wilt enable us to appreciate anew the sufferings of our Lord and the love that he manifested in them in order that he might redeem us through the shedding of his blood. We commit the hour to Thee. We commit all who are present to Thee and pray Thy blessing upon us. For Christ's sake. Amen.

[Message] Tonight we have come to number fifteen in our series of studies in the, "Suffering Servant of Jehovah: The Old Testament and the Doctrine of the Atonement," and the subject for tonight is, "Before Pilate: Witnessing a Good Confession of Unconditional Election." And we are turning to Mark chapter 15, verse 1 through verse 19, and we shall try to base our studies primarily upon the Markian account, but tonight in the light of the subject we will have to turn to Matthew and also to John.

While you are here now, next Monday night we will not be having the class because I have to be out of town in California to straighten out all the Californians, and so we will not have a class next Monday night but the following Monday we will. And on that night we begin a two part study in the "Suffering Servant: Songs of the Prophecy of

Isaiah." And that study, I think, is very important for the understanding of the passion of our Lord, so if you have a little free time I think it would do you good for the lessons if you would read Isaiah chapter 42, Isaiah chapter 49, Isaiah chapter 50, Isaiah chapter 52 and 53; 42, 49, 50, 52, and 53, and then if you have a little time left over chapter 61 would also be good for you to read. Then you will be well prepared for the beginning of that series of studies in those Old Testament prophecies, probably, the greatest Old Testament prophecies concerning the ministry of Christ.

Tonight, "Before Pilate: Witnessing a Good Confession of Unconditional Election." The leading part in the civil trial of the Lord Jesus was played by Pontius Pilate, the Roman procurator, or better, the Roman prefect. For it seems evident from the study of the ministry of Pilate and from what we know of ancient Roman customs and terms that Pilate was a prefect in the land of Judea and not a procurator. We do not know a great deal about the life of Pontius Pilate. Tradition says that he was a frontier fighter, that he married Claudia, the granddaughter of one of the emperors.

We also know that from Luke chapter 13 and verse 1, that when he came into the land of Judea, he immediately got into trouble with the Jews because he mingled some of the blood of the Galileans with their sacrifices. Tradition also says that while he was the prefect in the land of Judea during these very difficult times, he finally was recalled because of displeasure with his work in the land, and finally, he was exiled and died a suicide. This is all that we know of Pontius Pilate from tradition. It's not very much, and of course, we're not really sure about most of it. But if you were to write a multivolume biography of the life of Pontius Pilate having known all of its details, you could not tell more convincingly the kind of person that he is than is as revealed in the pages of Holy Scripture, because there comes through plainly and clearly the fact that Pontius Pilate was a kind of politician who became so caught up in his politics that he ultimately sold his soul for them. Someone has said, "Politics is a game with two sides and a fence." And Pontius Pilate was a man who liked to sit upon the fence.

There's an old story about politicians, which I like, which I've heard other preachers use too. It's the story of a Texas politician who arrived home in the midst of a debate on a very important issue. One of the newspaper men came up to him and asked him how he stood on this particular issue. And he said, "Well, a great many of my friends stand on this side." And he explained in careful detail that side of the issue. And then he said, "A good many of my friends stand on the other side." And he explained very accurately the other side of the issue. And the reporters pressed him and said, "But where do you stand?" He said, "I stand with my friends." I think that expresses the kind of attitude that Pontius Pilate would have liked to have had. He would've liked to have been able to stand with the Jews, and he would've liked to be able to stand with Jesus Christ, but he was unable to do so.

A group of the first later spoke of him as an inflexible, merciless, and obstinate man. But from the things that Jesus Christ said concerning Pilate, and from the things that Pilate said which are recorded in the word of God, it seems to me that the Lord Jesus must have had a high regard for Pontius Pilate as a man. For example, the Lord Jesus would not waste a syllable on Herod. He had little more than a few words of rebuke for Caiaphas, the high priest. But for Pilate, he had a message of tender appeal, such as he might've given to a Paul before Paul was converted. Furthermore, it is evident from the New Testament records that Pontius Pilate had a very fine mind. Some of the most strangely significant and striking words are words that come from Pontius Pilate. For example, Pontius Pilate is the man who said, "What is truth?" Pontius Pilate is the man who said, "Behold the man. Behold your king. What shall I do with Jesus that is the Christ? Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." The superscription written above the cross of Jesus Christ was the work of Pontius Pilate. And in addition, when the Jews objected to the fact that he wrote, this is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews, he said, "What I have written, I have written." All of these are the words of Pontius Pilate, and

they have a strange appeal to us as we read the New Testament. It seems that this man was a man with unusual ability and with unusual mind.

There is also one tender touch in the story of Pontius Pilate that gives us an insight into the other side of his character, a side of his character which is not often mentioned. There's nothing that more reveals a man than the character of woman that he makes his wife. And you can, I think, write that down as a clue to a man's character. Just look at the kind of person that he married. Now I hope that none of you ladies in the audience feel bad over this. It is a fact and I think, also, the same thing would be true of on the other side. You can tell a great deal about the character of the woman if you look at the man that she marries. A man expresses himself and his deepest desires in the choice of a wife, and the face of Pilate's wife appears to us in the record concerning Pontius Pilate. For even though they had apparently been married for some time, in the midst of the trial she sent of very earnest appeal to her husband and asked him to have nothing to do with this righteous man, Jesus of Nazareth, because she had suffered many things from him in a dream that day. And I would gather that since she was a woman who could give some noble wifely council, and the very fact that she sent her message to him, is a testimony to the fact that there existed between them a very good relationship. And that would tell us something about the personal side of Pontius Pilate. He was a man in whose heart a chaste and holy love was abiding and where love abides, it is possible for the love of God to enter in.

The civil charge against our Lord was treason and we're now going to consider his appearance before Pontius Pilate to answer it. I want you to turn with me now to Mark chapter 15, verses 1 through 5, where we have the formal condemnation and the first appearance before Pontius Pilate. Mark chapter 15, verse 1 through verse 5, and will you listen as I read these verses? I'm not going to read all of the Scripture reading tonight. I will trust that you will read it for yourself, but we're going to read these opening verses anyway.

"And straightway in the morning the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council, and bound Jesus, and carried him away, and delivered him to Pilate. And Pilate asked him, Art thou the King of the Jews? And he answering said unto him, Thou sayest it. And the chief priests accused him of many things: but he answered nothing." (I would assume this means he answered the chief priests nothing, in the light of the fact, that he evidently did answer for awhile Pontius Pilate's questions.) "And Pilate asked him again, saying, Answerest thou nothing? behold how many things they witness against thee. But Jesus yet answered nothing; so that Pilate marveled."

Pilate had come to Jerusalem to keep order at the time of the Feast of the Passover. The Jews were notoriously turbulent people; in the 1st Century as well as in the 20th Century and down through the centuries. They were a notoriously turbulent people because they believed theoretically that God was their ruler and that no human being was really their ruler. So when the Romans took authority over the land of Palestine, they had problems on their hands, they knew at feast times nationally patriotism ran at a very high pitch, and it was good to have some Roman soldiers around. And so Pontius Pilate had come there in order to keep the order at the time of the Feast. He lived in Caesarea, but he came over to Jerusalem for the feast time.

In the first phase of the civil trial of the Lord Jesus, which is not recorded for us in Mark, but rather in the Gospel of John, they tried a snow job on Pilate. They came to him, and they asked him immediately to condemn the Lord Jesus. And he said to them, well what charge are you bringing against him? And they replied simply, if he were not guilty we won't have brought him before you. And Pilate said, alright then you take him and deal with him. But he knew that they could not put him to death, and yet they wanted to. And he knew that in committing Jesus Christ to them, he was frustrating their desires, and they would have to come back to him. So the snow job did not work.

The formal condemnation is mentioned in verse 1. "The chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council, and bound Jesus, and carried him away, and delivered him to Pilate." They were going to charge him before Pontius Pilate with treason.

The first question of Pilate is in verse 2. Pilate asked him, "Art thou the King of the Jews? And he answering said unto him, Thou sayest it." Evidently, Pontius Pilate deserved an answer at this time and so he received one. Over in the Gospel of John we have the details of it, and so let's turn over there and look at the details of this brief encounter between the two which occurred in the opening of the civil trial before Pontius Pilate. And let's notice beginning at verse 33, "Then Pilate entered into the judgment hall again and called Jesus and said unto him, Art Thou the King of the Jews?" Verse 34, John 18, "Jesus answered him, Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me?"

Now the reason that he says this is because he wants to know if Pilate pondering his situation has come to some conviction concerning who he is or whether he's just repeating the charge that the Jews brought against him. "Pilate answered, Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee unto me: what hast thou done?" So Pilate says it didn't come from within my heart as I reflected upon the divine revelation. It is come from the Jewish people. I'm not a member of the Jewish nation. "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 here." In other words, Pilate, I'm not the kind of king that they're accusing me of. I'm not a treasonous king. If I were the kind of king who had an earthly kingdom then I would have an army and my soldiers would fight for me, but that is not the case with my Kingdom. My Kingdom is not of the earth.

Now he did not mean by this that his Kingdom would not ultimately be upon the earth, but he meant that the nature of his Kingdom was a spiritual kingdom even though it might be upon the earth ultimately. Its principles were spiritual. Pilate therefore said,

"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." So Pilate I am a King alright, but my Kingdom is a kingdom of truth. It is not an earthly political kingdom. I've come here to bear witness unto the truth. And then he utters, I think, one of the most important sentences in all of the Gospel of John. He says, "Pilate, everyone that who is of the truth heareth my voice." In this statement which I consider one of the most important in the Gospel of John, the Lord Jesus feels for the conscience of Pontius Pilate.

We often are given courses in personal evangelism. We are told how to lead men to Jesus Christ. We are often told how to use such little instruments as the Four Spiritual Laws and things like this. We are told that winning souls is like fishing for fish. Now we are fishing for men. Basic principles are set forth, such as, we must be sure that we have the message plainly and clearly given. We must be very tactful. We must have, also, we must be lead by the Holy Spirit. We must be sure in our dealing with a soul that we are careful and present the message of the gospel in such a way that it may be attractive to them. I do not know that I have ever heard any teacher of personal evangelism ever say that he should say things like this to people who were lost. And in this we see the great difference between our Lord's dealing with souls and the kind of dealing with souls that is taught in our personal evangelism classes.

Now I'm not attacking all of the things that are said in personal evangelism classes, except in so far as to say, almost all of them fall short of the New Testament. Here we have one of the strangest lures, if I may use fisherman's language, one of the strangest lures that was ever used by anyone in seeking them to win them to the gospel of Jesus Christ, and it is used by our Lord himself. "Pilate, everyone that is of the truth heareth my voice." He is saying simply this to Pontius Pilate, Pilate if you really had the right stuff inside of you, you would respond to my message. He is saying "everyone who is of the

truth hears my voice." And if you are not hearing my voice, Pontius Pilate, it may be because you are not in sympathy with the truth.

Now have you ever heard any personal evangelism teacher ever tell you to say that to anyone? No. You probably never have. If you've heard one, well then you have been the recipient of a miracle, because it is not told because it is the kind of sharp language that people with sweet dispositions do not like to give out. They do not like to say things like this. If our Lord were guided by this kind of language, he would not have spoken to Pontius Pilate in this way at all.

Now this is not the only kind of statement that our Lord has given along this line. He has given other statements along this line. Back in John chapter 8 and verse 47, in the second most important verse in the Gospel of John bearing on this kind of subject, Jesus said, "Which of you convicteth me of sin? And if I say the truth why do ye not believe me? He that is of God heareth God's words." So here he says if you are of God, you will respond to the words of God. Back there he said if you are of the truth, you will respond to the truth. Then he says, "You do not hear them because you are not of God." So our Lord reduces the whole question of a person's relationship to the Father in heaven to the question of response to truth and response to God.

If a person does not respond, then there is a good likelihood that they are not of God and that they are not of the truth. And the only reason I say of good likelihood is because they're not dead yet and the chances then, there is always a possibility that the time may come that they do respond. But as long a person does not respond to the truth, as long as he does not respond to God, he is not of, so far as we know, he is not of God and he is not of the truth. And I think if the Lord Jesus were to expound this great truth in further detail, he might well have turned to the Parable of the Four Soils and pointed out that there are four kinds of people in this earth. And there is only one kind that is responsive to the truth of God, and that is the person who is described in his parable as being "good ground".

So what he is saying in effect is everyone who is good ground hears my voice and if he does not hear my voice then there is a good likelihood that he is not good ground. And if he dies not hearing my voice, he was not good ground; he is not of God, he is not of the truth. Now that is strong language that ultimately comes down to the truth of election. I'm not going to say anything more about it, except to say, it is unconditional election, and it is truth that our Lord Jesus accepted and believed. For it was he who said, "No man cometh unto me except the Father which has sent me draw him."

So these are very strong words. These are the kinds of lures that a man uses with the unsaved when the real issue of human existence is at stake. And so I stop for just a moment and I ask you a question in our Lord's name. Are you of the truth? Have you responded to the truth? As our Lord said, "Everyone that is of the truth hears my voice." Do you hear the voice of Jesus or do you respond negatively to him? If you are of God, do you hear God's voice or is God's voice something that is repellant to you? It may be that you also are not of God and not of the truth. And as an ambassador of Jesus Christ, I appeal to you in the name of the eternal trinity that you do not pass out of this earthly existence without responding to the essential call of our Lord to respond to the truth and to the words of God.

Pilate heard an appeal from the lips of Jesus himself. Those are strong lures. "Everyone who is of the truth heareth my voice. Pilate saith unto him, 'What is truth?'" The accusations of the chief priests are given us in that Markian account, and evidently, the Sanhedrin does not deserve an answer, because Jesus is silent to them. I would presume from this, that there is also a time reached in a man's life when after he has had the appeal of the testimony to Jesus Christ over and over again, there comes a time when he no longer can hear the message of God because he will not hear the message of God.

It was the Lord Jesus who also gave those terrible words, "Do not cast your pearls before swine," and that's another lesson in the principles of personal evangelism too. And our Lord is applying it here. He didn't even bother to give them an answer. But he's still

answering Pilate. Pilate's verdict is what is truth? Apparently, offered in an off-the-hand manner. The Lord demanded dismissal, but Pontius Pilate's answer is a kind of half-hearted, "What is truth?" And he doesn't even stop to hear an answer from the Lord Jesus. "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." Well, what do you do if you are a Roman prefect, if you are the supreme authority judicially, and you have had a defendant before you who has been accused of certain crimes, and who is evidentially in your own mind, not guilty of these crimes? What do you do? Well, of course, you dismiss the case against him, but Pontius Pilate is a politician who is seeking to maintain the favor of the Jews and at the same time, extricate himself from a difficulty which is becoming more serious by the hour because it's touching his own heart now. But the answer is typical of anyone who knows the Lord Jesus Christ or anyone who tries him in a court of law. He is guiltless, but Pilate's sin is such that he can not bring himself to exonerate the Lord Jesus.

I say, this is the way men have tried Jesus Christ down through the centuries and I think this is largely true. If you will put our Lord Jesus Christ before the law, he always comes out guiltless. There is no character like that of Jesus Christ in the whole of human history. And if you think that he should be condemned then bring the charge forward by which you hope to prove him guilty. There are people who say there was nothing unusual about our Lord Jesus Christ. There's nothing really unusual about the testimony to him. As a matter of fact, the gospel records are nothing unusual. Why, there are many people who have been as holy as Jesus, and there are many books that is remarkable as the gospels. I think we could justly challenge anyone who thinks that the gospel records are the kinds of things that men would write in forgery. Let him try to write a fifth gospel who thinks that these four gospels are not unusual books. I think that's a good test. This is the kind of thing I would like to tell all of my professor friends who teach New Testament, but who also believe that the New Testament records are in part forgery and part nonsense and perhaps, have a breath or a whisper of something that actually

happened in the 1st Century. If these records of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ are of that type then it should be perfectly within our power to write a fifth gospel, but no one would ever dare attempt to write a fifth gospel. As a matter of fact, it is doubtful that anyone could ever write one incident and insert it in our gospel records and have it pass as a genuine incident.

I think Mr. Spurgeon is right in one of his comments. "That every critic would cry out, this is not genuine." And then he adds, "The life of Jesus is a robe of cloth of gold of the manufacture of which the art is utterly lost. His spotless character stands alone and by itself, and all true critics are compelled to say that they find no fault at all in him." So if you think that the gospel records are just ordinary books, I challenge you to give us a fresh incident in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. And let's put it by the side of one of these gospel records and see if some of the rest of these Christian people here cannot ferret out its lack of genuineness. You wouldn't even dare to do it, not a one of you. You wouldn't even go home tonight and say, I will take up the challenge and I will write another incident in the life of Jesus, because do you know what you would do if you wanted to make it sound genuine? You would write it in the words of these four gospels that we have here. You could not produce anything that was not here, that someone wouldn't say, that's a forgery. And that's a fair challenge if these records are nothing but the records of human beings.

Well, now let's turn secondly; we're going to go more rapidly now after that first important Roman 1 to Roman 2, the expedience and the question regarding Barabbas. Mark chapter 15, verse 6 through 11. Now Pilate at this point has a hot potato upon his hands because he has a guiltless man. He is convinced within his own heart that the Lord Jesus is guiltless, at the same time, he is also getting the general impression that it is for envy that the Jews have delivered him, as one of the other accounts puts it. So what shall he do? He is a politician. He wants to sit on the fence. Well, he will try some expedience in order to get himself off the hook. And among the several expedience to

overt sentencing, what he thought was perhaps a harmless lunatic, is the incident concerning Barabbas.

Now Barabbas was in prison and evidentially was a Jewish man. The Lord Jesus was also in custody and was a Jewish man. It was the custom according to Pontius Pilate and what we know of the times; it was the custom at the time of the Feast in order to placate the Jewish people, for the Roman authorities to release one of the criminals that they wished released. And so he tells them this. "You have a custom that I shall release unto you one at the Passover. Will you therefore that I release unto you the King of the Jews? Then cried, they all again saying, not this man but Barabbas." The other man was a man by the name of Barabbas. And over in the Gospel of Matthew chapter 27 and verse 16, in the edited texts of the New Testament published by one of the Bible Societies, the name of Barabbas was not simply Barabbas, but the name of Barabbas was Jesus Barabbas. That's very interesting if that is really Barabbas' name. The text is in dispute, and we're not certain that in Matthew chapter 27 and verse 16, we should read, "Jesus Barabbas," or simply, "Barabbas". The point that I'm going to make is made no matter what we take the name of Barabbas to be. But in my Greek text over here in Matthew chapter 27 and verse 16, while the term Jesus is in brackets, nevertheless, it is in the text. So let's just say for the sake of our exposition that his name was Jesus Barabbas.

So here we have two men and Israel is making a choice. On the one hand, by the side of the *bemab* seat of Pilate is the destiny of Jesus Barabbas. Jesus, who means Joshua and Joshua, means, of course, something like, the Lord saves or Jehovah saves. So here is a man whose name is Jehovah saves Barabbas. The Aramaic word for son is *bar*, and *abba* is the name for father. So here we have Jesus "the son of the father." Now whether Barabbas' name was the son of the father because his father was a rabbi or whether it was simply a name given to him, we do not know. But on the one hand, we have the Lord saves or Jehovah saves, the son of the father, Jesus Barabbas. And on the other hand, we have the Lord Jesus, the true Son of the true Father, the real Barabbas.

And Israel is asked to make a choice. It is obvious that this is a very ironic decision that Israel is going to make. And it is as if all of the streams of divine providence meet in this choice that the nation will make. And they respond, not this man Jesus, the Son of the Father, the true Son of the true Father, the true Jehovah that saves, but the robber Barabbas, son of the father. And that is the kind of choice that a man makes when he rejects the Lord Jesus for any other kind of choice.

Now third, the dream of Pilate's wife. In the midst of this trial which is I say becoming a more and more terrible thing to Pontius Pilate, suddenly someone breaks into the judicial chambers with a word from his wife. I imagine that a person rushed over with a note to Pontius Pilate and he stopped the proceedings for a moment, and he took the note out of the hand of the messenger and he opened it up and he read. I don't know whether she called him, Ponty or Pontius or Baby or whatever their name for him was, but nevertheless, she said Pontius Pilate, "have thou nothing to do with that just man because I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him." Tradition gives Pontius Pilate's wife the name of Procla, and as you might expect, even calls her a Christian. She may later have become a Christian, of that, we are not certain.

Now men there are times when we should listen to our wives. And this is a time when Pilate should have listened to his wife. Most of the time, of course, we have to listen to our wives, but in this case, Pontius Pilate made the dreadful decision of not listening to this voice from his wife. I must say in reading this, the voices that my wife frequently utters to me, have a great deal more significance, because it is evident from here that the woman was right and the man was wrong. Pilate did not respond to this loving appeal from his wife. I might also mention that this was not only a loving appeal but this was a supernatural appeal, evidentially, because it had come from a dream.

Fourth, the religious accusation before Pilate. Pilate, you see, all through the trial is wavering. When these decisions are to be made, he hopes all the time that he may be able to placate the Jews and at the same time, have Jesus released. But he's not able to

work this, and the Jews at critical moments when they see him weakening, they immediately rush in with some fresh and deeper accusation. And at this point in the trial of the Lord Jesus, when evidentially, Pilate is again weakening and maybe yielding to the pressures of the situation and not listening to them. They rush in and they say we have a law and by our law he ought to die because he made himself the Son of God.

Now they have here lodged against our Lord a religious accusation. They came in with the accusation that they said he was a king. But now since Pilate is wavering they try another of their expedience, "He made himself the Son of God." And a strange presentiment grips Pontius Pilate when he hears the words, the Son of God, and John tells us, "When Pilate therefore heard that saying he was the more afraid." And he goes back into the presence of the Lord Jesus having heard that he made himself the Son of God and he said to the Lord Jesus in the judgment hall, "Whence Art Thou?"

Now what that question means is what is your origin? What is the source of your existence? Now you would think that here is the critical point for which the Lord Jesus has been waiting. Pilate has now asked him a question about his heavenly origin and you would think, I say again; all teachers of personal evangelism would say, now is the time to reach in your pockets and whip out the Four Spiritual Laws and lead him to Christ. Now I'm not attacking the Four Spiritual Laws per say. There are some things in there which I have said before that should be purified in those four spiritual laws. But many a person has come to faith through the instrumentality of them. I cannot fight against that. I don't want to fight against that. I don't want to say well you've come into the Kingdom of God, but you didn't come in my way. Go back out and come in the proper way. I only say you would be better born, perhaps, if you did. [Laughter]

Now you are laughing, but there is more truth in what I'm saying than you realize. You will discover that people reflect the persons who were the instrumentalities to bring them into the Kingdom of God. For example, now I didn't mean to get off on this. It's not in my notes, but nevertheless, it's my opinion. You will discover that people who are

converted through men and women who love to study the Scriptures are born; it seems, with the love of the Scriptures. And people who are born in circumstances where there is no particular love of the teaching of the word of God, but the simple preaching of the gospel, they have a difficult time developing a love for Bible teaching. It's life the human life. It's true to human existence on the natural plain; that children reflect their parents and the same thing is true in the spiritual life.

So let's get back to our point. You got me off my point. [Laughter] We go back to our point and the point is this, when Pontius Pilate asked the Lord Jesus, "Whence Art Thou?" the Lord Jesus was silent before him. He did not answer him a word. "Whence Art Thou?" Why the text we read, "Jesus gave him no answer." Now if I were a critical student of the New Testament, I would say, that cannot be a genuine sentence because surely Jesus would have replied to Pontius Pilate. But then of course, I would not be understanding the New Testament which says, "Cast not your pearls before swine." And Pontius Pilate has had revelation after revelation of the essence of the ministry of the Lord Jesus and having rejected it all, apparently, he has come at this point in the trial to the place where he is now in the sight of God, not to be given any further word from God. And I want to say to you aside from all the levity of the proceeding few moments that there is nothing more full of horror and terror in the word of God than the fact that there can come a time when God is silent to our questions. And that is the plain teaching of the history of Pontius Pilate.

Now he does not answer Pilate and Pilate responds, "Speaketh Thou not unto me. Knowest Thou not that I have power to crucify Thee and have power to release Thee?" And Jesus answers, "Thou couldest have no power at all against me except it were given thee from above." In other words, Pilate it is not you who are in control of these things that are happening down here on the earth. Every thing that is happening is in the hands of a sovereign God above. Last week I was preparing a lecture on one of the outstanding contemporary theologians. His name is Wolfhart Pannenberg, Professor of Systematic

Theology at the University of Munich in Germany. In the midst of that book, Professor Pannenberg who is probably as highly regarded at the present moment as any contemporary theologian made these comments, "There are indications that Jesus on his own initiative had taken to himself the fate awaiting him. Perhaps he had even more or less provoked the outbreak of the latten conflict." Now that of course is unscriptural. Jesus Christ did not provoke the conflict against him that is purposefully, which of course is what he means. "Nonetheless, his passion and death remain something that happened to him and are not to be understood as his own action in the same sense as his activity with its message of the nearness of the Kingdom of God."

Now what Professor Pannenberg is saying about Jesus Christ is that this passion which our Lord is in the midst of now is not something that he himself is responsible for in anyway, but it is something that happened to him. It is something that overtook him. It is something in which he himself had no clear part. Now that again is totally unscriptural. The Bible tells us that the passion of the Lord Jesus is brought by the Father. It pleased the Father to bruise him. "Thou has brought me into the dust of death." It is also the work of Satan. It is the work of wicked men, but it is also the work of the Lord Jesus himself. And here, of course, he refers to the fact that all of the things that Pontius Pilate does are things that are permitted by God above. They're not something that has just happened to him. They are the events of the life that have been given him by his Father in heaven. And he, furthermore, voluntarily is giving himself to them.

Now it's also one of the striking ironies of the gospel record that when the Lord Jesus stands before the judges in the final analysis, it is he who judges the judges. They think they are judging him, but the centuries have shown that they were judged by him, for he is the great Judge.

Fifth, the release of Barabbas and the washing of the hands. Now that is not described for us in the Markian account. It is described in the Matthian account, chapter 27 and verse 24. In the midst of this, Pilate seeking to free his conscience from guilt goes

out in front of all of the people, washes his hands as a symbol of the cleansing away of the guilt and says that he has nothing to do with the death of this innocent man. And yet, Pontius Pilate with a Roman's regard for justice and his wife's warning still goes on his wicked path although he admits that it's a murder. There is a mountain in the vicinity of Lucerne in Switzerland called Mount Pilatus. Traditional has it that in the midst of storms in Switzerland, his ghost comes out and still washes his hands in the storm clouds, a reflection of what this event has meant on tradition in history. Stoker said, "He washed his hands when we ought to have exerted them." And we must not lose sight of the fact that Pontius Pilate is a Roman judge and should have freed our Lord Jesus and could not take this so called position of middle ground.

Sixth, the national acceptance of blame. The children of Israel respond by saying, "His blood be upon us and upon our children." John records the occasion of that statement when the Jews again see that Pontius Pilate is beginning to waver a little bit and then they rush forward again with another political accusation against Pilate and they say, listen Pilate, if you let this man go you are not Caesar's friend. Now every Roman procurator and prefect, every Roman minor official loved to be known as *a amicus Caesarus*, a friend of Caesar. For if word ever got back to Rome that one of the rulers of Tiberius Caesar was not *a amicus Caesarus*, there was no telling what might happen. Tiberius, at this time was in addition, a very dangerous man because he delighted in humiliating and disgracing his subordinates. He had a diseased body, the punishment of vices long indulged in. They made his mind gloomy and savage.

In fact, he was little better than a madman at the time. Arose suspicious and malicious and no charge was more likely to enflame Tiberius Caesar than to hear that the prefect in Palestine was playing politics with some local person who wanted to be another Caesar. And so when the Jews rushed out and said if you let that man go you are not Caesar's friend, well then immediately, of course, Pontius Pilate had to listen to them. The chances are that he had much to hide. The chances are, if we know politicians, he

probably had been engaged in quite a few cover ups all along out there in Judea, and he did not want that to come to light. And so they finally say, we have no king but Caesar, and Pilate acquiesces in the final judgment.

So here is the pitiful picture of the nation, the nation Israel, saying publicly, "We have no king but Caesar." And what kind of a nation was Israel? Why, Israel my Christian friend was a theocratic nation. What does a theocratic nation mean? Well, a theocratic nation is a nation that acknowledges no earthly ruler that acknowledges that the only ruler is God himself. They were told in the Old Testament that they had no king but Jehovah. And as a matter of fact, when they selected for themselves a king just like the other nations, they were engaging in expediency and sin then. God allowed them to have Saul and David and the rest, but he wanted them even then to recognize that these human kings which he permitted, which was not his direct will for them, he wanted them to just say, we have no king but our God in heaven. But even then, he wanted them to realize that the true King was Jehovah. They were a theocratic nation who had been elected and called to receive certain promises. And now here is the nation denying God, denying the Jehovah who had selected them and called them out of Egypt saying, "We have no king but Caesar. The blood of the Messiah be upon us and upon our children." And so Israel, guilty of blasphemy and apostasy, denies their self in denying him. And the theocracy which was their own unique privilege, they have abolished by their own unbelief.

My old New Testament professor said, "At this point, if today they have no king but a pagan ruler, tomorrow they will have no sacrifice. Adam, like the soul of the nation died that day, the body forty years later with the fall of Jerusalem."

Now the account says, at this point, that Pilate and the Roman soldiers take the Lord Jesus and they scourge him. They put upon his head a crown of thorns, and they send him out to the Jews saying, "Behold your king." Pilate seems to lose interest when he sees that the Lord has no friends in the crowd, and so he allows the soldiers to do

what they did. Perhaps there was still a lurking suspicion in his heart or a hope in his heart that if he allowed the Lord Jesus to be scourged, which was a terrible form of punishment itself. They might be satisfied by that. And so the Lord Jesus comes out with the crown of thorns upon his head, and Pilate speaking to the Jews says, "Behold your king." Of all the features of the scene, the one that has most impressed the imagination of Christendom is the crown of thorns upon our Lord's head. It was something unusual. It seemed to bring out the ingenuity and the wantonness of the cruelty of the Roman soldiers and the Jews to our Lord Jesus Christ. But listen, when you read these accounts, do not forget that there is an irony here that is designed by God. For you see, there is a meaning in the fact that a crown of thorns was placed upon our Lord's head.

By the way, often in our studies of Scripture we go off reading all kinds of books about the Bible instead of reading the Bible itself. Now if you read the Bible itself, you would see the irony in this. For what do the thorns remind us of? Well now one of the signs of the curse as a result of sin was the thorn. Remember? As a result of human sin in the Garden of Eden, one of the effects of that fall of man and man's consequent fall into sin was that the earth should bring forth thorns and thistles. Thorns are the sign of the curse. And so they unknowingly, unwittingly plant a crown of thorns and take the thorns and crush them down upon the head of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is as if they were going through symbolically, the picture of taking the curse and placing it upon the head of our Lord Jesus Christ. And of course, that is precisely what our Lord is doing. He is in the business at the present time of being prepared to bear the curse for our sin. And in a few hours on the cross at Calvary, he will cry out, "It is finished!" And there he will have borne the curse as a result of sin.

"Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law being made a curse for us." Why is it, that when we think of the crown of thorns now, it's not only with horror and pity but it's with a sense of exaltation? When I think of our Lord Jesus going out to Calvary wearing the crown of thorns, there wells up within my heart a sense of joy and

happiness and positive exaltation over the fact that he wore the crown of thorns. Because you see, I'm thinking of what that really means. He is my curse bearer as a result of what he's done.

And so down through the ages Stoker has said, "Jesus passes still wearing the crown of thorns and his followers and lovers desire for him no other diadem." Amen. And in a congregation which looks like a group of Presbyterians and Episcopalians, in spite of you, Hallelujah! He bore the crown of thorns for me.

Now a few words by way of conclusion. I have four minutes before the tape ministry begins to hop with panic. The course of Pilate's downfall is a lesson for all time. Think of the steps in it. He had heard of Jesus. Evidentially, he was the governor during our Lord's ministry and through John the Baptist's ministry, and his wife's dream is evidence of the fact that he had been the subject of conversation in Caesarea. He had a personal appeal from the Lord himself. He refused the voice of the law which said, acquit this man. He resisted his own wife's appeal which had the element of the supernatural about it. He turned to rationalizing expedencies. He rejected the warning of his own conscience because fear came over him when he heard that Jesus made himself the Son of God. He attempted to absolve himself by washing his hands before the people, reminding us of the famous incident in Shakespeare when Lady Macbeth wonders in a kind of impotent sleep which came to her, but in whose conscience rest was forever more denied. You may remember that she walked in her trance and she washed her hands, but the blood-red murder stain would not leave her hands. And she cries out, "Out, damn spot, out I say!" Here is the smell of the blood still. All the perfumes of Arabia will not wash away this stain.

Now there are people who have listened to the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ whose consciences have ceased to feel even a twinge at the preaching of the word of God. They have hushed up their past. They've washed their hands in some specious philosophy, rich in easy excuses, or in a little religious observance. Far better would it be

for you to walk in a midnight hour like Lady Macbeth in unsleeping remorse than to stifle the voice of God within your soul so that you can eat and sleep in a sleep that is death. It's a terrible thing to hear the message of the word of God and refuse it. Pontius Pilate refused it.

What was the character of Pilate then? Well, he was a man consumed with self-interest for whom the truth had no ultimate appeal. If earnest, the Holy Spirit would surely have led him to the truth, might even have led him to put together two of his own statements, "What is truth? Behold the man," for he is the Truth.

Now some of you have heard me before on this, but I'm going to mention it again. Does this trial have current claims? Are there some today who find no fault in him, yet refuse his claims because committed to sin? Pilate had an ironical end. Anatole France in his, *Mother of Pearl*, had described Pilate's end. Its fiction, but he has caught the force of this incident, I think. He pictures Pilate in his last days living in luxury. Bleary-eyed as a result of dissipation, and a friend coming up to him and saying, "Pilate, weren't you the prefect in Judea when that man Jesus was crucified?" And he replies, "Jesus? Jesus? I don't remember the name."

But throughout time in the Apostle's Creed for the Christian church down through the years has said, "Suffered unto Pontius Pilate." Pilate is remembered and in eternity at this very moment, he remembers; and there is no person who so hates his own soul and the decision that he made as Pontius Pilate, who said ironic though it may be, "What shall we then do with Jesus who is called the Christ?" That's the question for you and for me. Let's bow in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the stories of the biblical record. How they do come home to us with great force. By Thy grace through the Holy Spirit, oh Father, may we respond. For Christ's sake. Amen.