



**BELIEVERS CHAPEL**

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

John 18:28 – 19:15

“Pontius Pilate, a Vacillating Man”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Today we're beginning a series of studies in some of the outstanding figures in the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ. And for the first of our series I want you to turn for Scripture reading to John chapter 18 and verse 28, John chapter 18 and verse 28. And this morning, I wish, in contrast to some of our other mornings, to read a lengthier portion from the word. So we will begin at chapter 18 and verse 28. The context is the passion of Christ,

“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. Pilate then went out unto them, and said, what accusation bring ye against this man? They answered and said unto him, If he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up unto thee. Then said Pilate unto them, Take ye him, and judge him according to your law. The Jews therefore said unto him, it's not lawful for us to put any man to death: (I think you might say they'd kind of made up their minds what they wanted to do.) That the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled, which he spake, signifying what death he should die. Then Pilate entered into the judgment hall again, and called Jesus, and said unto him, Art thou the King of the Jews? Jesus answered him,

Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me? (That text has been woefully misused in preaching, it does not mean what it has commonly been thought to mean, it means simply, Pilate is this your own personal evaluation or has a charge and accusation been brought to you by the Jews?) Pilate answered, Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee unto me: what hast thou done? 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. 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. (That is a very, very important statement, may I read it again?) Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice. 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. 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? Then cried they all again, saying, Not this man, but Barabbas. Now Barabbas was a robber. Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged him. And the soldiers platted a crown of thorns, and put it on his head, and they put on him a purple robe, and said, Hail, King of the Jews! and they smote him with their hands. Pilate therefore went forth again, and saith unto them, Behold, I bring him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in him. Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe. And Pilate saith unto them, Behold the man! When the chief priests therefore and officers saw him, they cried out, saying, crucify him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Take ye him, and crucify him: for I find no fault in him. The Jews answered him, we have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God. When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he was the more afraid; and went again into the judgment hall, and saith unto Jesus, Whence art thou? But Jesus gave him no answer. (That too, is a very important

statement, Jesus gave him no answer.) Then saith Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me? Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee? Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin. And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release him: but the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar. When Pilate therefore heard this saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha. And it was the preparation of the Passover, and about the sixth hour: (Roman time) and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King! But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, (And mind you, this is the theocracy, this is the people of God.) we have no king but Caesar.”

May God bless this reading from his word, let's bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Our gracious God, the father of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, we come to Thee through him who suffered the passion, that we might have life. And we acknowledge Lord that our allegiance is to him and to Thee by the Spirit. We thank Thee Lord that in the inscrutable wisdom of God we have become believers in Jesus Christ, and thus are of the truth and have heard his voice. We cannot understand, but Lord, we are grateful for that which Thou has done. And today before Thee as part of that company of people who belong to Thee, we want to confess our unworthiness, confess our lack of gratitude for that which Thou has done, confess our unfaithfulness in the life which Thou has given to us. And we pray oh God for ourselves individually and then as a group of the children of God that Thou wilt enable us by Thy grace to do Thy will.

We thank Thee Lord for each one present and we know that many many needs are represented here, for those who are not yet in the family of the faithful, O God bring conviction through the Holy Spirit that they turn to him and find in him the solution to the riddles of life, and the possession of an everlasting life and relationship to Thee. For those of us Lord who know Thee and who have failed we pray that Thou will lift us up by the Spirit of God, and restore us to that brightness of relationship to Thee that means fruitfulness in Christian service. We pray for those who are troubled by the stresses of life and the tragedies of life and we pray that Thou wilt comfort them and build them up and encourage them. For those Lord who face important decisions this week, may the guidance of the Holy Spirit be their portion and may they sense that Thou art going before them in the path that Thou wouldst have them to take.

Lord we pray for Believers Chapel, for the Christians who meet here, and we pray that this testimony may continue to reach out in the city of Dallas and to the uttermost parts of the earth. We pray O God that Thou would enable us to walk under the head of the church, Jesus Christ, in reliance upon him. We especially pray for the young people who are here, and pray that Thou wilt minister to them through the word, and prepare them for life that lies ahead of them.

Today we remember particularly the work of Campus Crusade for Christ, on the campus of the University of California at Berkley and we know Lord that amid the turmoil that exist there today, young people are going in with a testimony for Jesus Christ, and we pray that thou wilt encourage them and in the midst of that turmoil, enable many of the young students to discover in Jesus Christ the meaning of life. And may they put their trust in him and may the work of God move forward today significantly and throughout this week, through the testimony to Jesus Christ that is given on that great campus. And so Lord we pray that Thou would undertake there, protect and keep and guide, and may there be the blessing of the Holy Spirit upon the activities of the week. We commit

our service to Thee, pray for the singing, may it redound to the glory of Jesus Christ, and for the ministry of the word, may it be in the Spirit for Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] Our subject this morning is Pontius Pilate, a vacillating man who lacked the courage of his convictions. Pilate was the Roman procurator of Judea. He began to serve in the year twenty-six and his procuratorship ended in the year thirty-six A.D. He played the leading part in the civil trial of our Lord Jesus Christ. We don't know a whole lot about the life of Pilate except that which is recorded in the word of God, there is tradition to the effect that in his early years he had been a frontier fighter and then he married well, he married Claudia Procla who was the daughter of Tiberius, the granddaughter of Augustus, and as a result either of his service in the frontier or as a result of his marriage, he had been made by Tiberius the Procurator of Judea and Samaria.

Someone has said that politics is a game with two sides and a fence. Most politicians find the fence the easiest place to sit. A few years back I remember Billy Graham telling a story about a Texas politician who was approached by a newspaper man and asked his opinion about a certain issue. He said, “Well I have many friends on one side of this issue and I have many friends on the other side of the issue.” The newspaper man pressed him and said, “But where do you stand?” He said, “I stand for my friends.”

[Laughter] Now if we were giving a political exposition of Pontius Pilate that is the kind of opinion that we would reach. For this man was a vacillating man. A group of the first said later said that he was inflexible merciless and obstinate but when you look in the word of God, you discover that Pilate comes off much better than that. As a matter of fact, Jesus Christ apparently had a high regard for Pontius Pilate and you can sense that in the fact that he had scarcely a word for Caiaphas the high priest, he wouldn't even speak to Herod, but he had a long conversation with Pontius Pilate, and apparently dealt with him and dealt with him in a very tender way. And when you notice the things that Pilate said in the New Testament, you come to the conclusion that apparently Jesus thought that

Pilate was a man with whom he might struggle, that is for his soul. Think of some of the things that Pilate said, they are words that have rung down through the centuries.

"Behold your king!" "Behold the man." "What shall I do then with Jesus who is called the Christ?" "What is truth?" "This is Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews." All of these are words of Pontius Pilate.

I think there is one little touch about the man Pilate that gives us another inkling of the kind of man he was, in the midst of the trial, he received a very very hurried word from his wife. And apparently there was in the heart of Pontius Pilate, a love for his wife. And you remember that she sent word to him and the word was, "Have thou nothing to do with this just man for I have suffered many things in a dream because of him this day." I've always said, and I've said it here in this auditorium more than once that one of the best ways to learn something about a man is to look at his wife, for the kind of wife that a man chooses is a great insight into the character of that man. And Pontius Pilate apparently had chosen a woman who had a love for him and for whom he had a love, and who also was interested in him and concerned about him. And it gives us, at least it gives me the idea that in a man in whom there exists love for a woman, there can also exist love for God. And it appears to me that perhaps this too is one of the reasons that Jesus so pleadingly dealt with Pontius Pilate.

In John's account there are four phases of the civil trial of Jesus. Not all of the details are given here, and we have to rely upon the information that we have from the Gospel of Luke, but the four phases are the phases that I want to briefly consider this morning in attempt to get at the character of this man Pilate and draw the lessons that should be drawn from it.

Phase one, if I were Bob Theme in Huston, I would call operation rubber stamp. For the first thing that the Jews wished to do when they brought Jesus to Pontius Pilate was to have him simply rubber stamp the decision that they had already made about him. They wanted to snow him, and so they brought Jesus in and they said, when Pilate said,

“What accusation have you against this man?” They simply say, “If he weren’t a malefactor, we wouldn’t have delivered him to you.” They don’t answer the charge, they don’t give a charge. They simply say we brought him to you and if we brought him to you it’s certain that he is a malefactor, so simply rubber stamp our action and we will go about the job of putting him to death. Now Pilate was too clever for that, he had already had experience with the Jews and that experience was not very happy, and it was not altogether their fault either. And so he didn’t fall for that stratagem, he said, “you have a law, you deal with him.” Knowing of course that they couldn’t do to him by their law what they wanted to do. And so they replied, “But we can’t put him to death.” And then John interjects a word which I think is very interesting, he says “in order that the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled which he spake signifying by what death he should die.” In other words, it had been prophesied from of old that Jesus would die by crucifixion and not by stoning. But if the Jews had put him to death, they would have stoned him. And in this little interplay of action in which Pilate says, “You put him to death” and they say, “We cannot put him to death, the Romans must put him to death,” John sees the hand of God. In other words he sees the providence of God even in the fact that by this simple denial of their accusations and their desires, the word of God is fulfilled and Jesus is crucified rather than stoned to death. Now that was phase one, operation rubber stamp.

Phase two, involves the political accusation. John doesn’t state the accusation; we have to gather this from the statement that is made in the Gospel of Luke. At this point, when Pilate asks for an accusation, they say, “Why he said that he was a king, that he was Messiah, the king of the Jews.” Now this of course was designed to bring our Lord Jesus in to conflict with the Roman authorities. And so Pilate goes into the judgment hall again, and he calls Jesus and he says unto him, “Art thou the king of the Jews?” Now this is a question that is loaded because of course, Jesus was the king of the Jews, but he wanted to know if Pilate though he was king in the Jewish sense or in the Roman sense, for if

Pilate was speaking in the Roman sense then he would have to say, “I’m not a king.” But if he was speaking in the Jewish sense, that is a king who conquers by the truth of God and who shall rule over the earth in the kingdom of God, then he would answer yes. And so Jesus spoke to Pilate and said, “Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell thee of me?” And Pilate says, “I got it from the Jews, am I a Jew? Your own nation and your own chief priests have delivered thee unto me, what has thou done?” I think it was Mr. Spurgeon who said, “Perhaps he could have answered then, I’ve gone up and down Jerusalem doing good, as Peter did. What hast thou done?”

Well Jesus then answers, “My kingdom is not of this world.” Now we must stop for just a moment here, because this text has also been misused. It is sometimes been said, because Jesus said “My kingdom is not of this world,” that he shall never have a kingdom in this world. You only have to read back a chapter or so in the Gospel of John to see the fallacy of this kind of reasoning, for in the preceding chapter, the 17th chapter, Jesus had spoken of the disciples and he said that they are not of this world, and yet they were in this world. He meant that they were not by nature related to those who were in the world because they had a new nature, their nature had been given them by God and consequently, they were not of this world, they possessed divine nature, they were the children of God. And when Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world, he did not mean that he would not have a kingdom in this world ultimately, but he meant that that kingdom when it came would be a heavenly kingdom. That is one that was dominated by the principles of Heaven rather than the principles of earth. So in a Roman sense, I’m no king, I’m not a rival of Caesar, Pilate, but I’m a king in the Jewish and in the biblical sense.

And Pilate says, “Art thou a king then at all?” Jesus answers, “Thou sayest that I’m 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.” The Lord Jesus did not come to bear witness to religion, he did not come to bear witness to priest craft and pomp and incense and ritual and all of the



other things that go to make up religion. He did not come to bear witness to the program of the church; he came to bear witness to the truth he said. “I have come into the world that I should bear witness unto the truth.” And then he adds these significant words which I want to speak on now for a few moments. He said to Pilate, “Everyone that is of the truth heareth my voice.” You know, Jesus said that we were to be fishers of men, and when he said that we were to be fishers of men, he meant that we were to seek to win men to him. Now there are many angles that a fisherman uses. He has all kinds of flies, he has all kinds of hooks, and he has all kinds of stratagems whereby he catches fish. And there are all kinds of Stratagems and there are all kinds of hooks and there are all kinds of flies in catching the souls of men. A man who is a fisher of men must learn how to catch fish, and they all are caught in different ways. But one of the strangest angles which Jesus ever used is the angle that he used here. If I were speaking to a class in theology I would say it was the angle of a strict and strong Calvinism. For that is exactly what he says, he says “everyone that is of the truth heareth my voice.” In other words, there is a basic relationship to God that precedes the hearing of the voice of Jesus Christ. Is a man of the truth? If he is of the truth, he hears the voice of Jesus. And this you see was our Lord Jesus attempting to land the soul of Pilate, wondering if perhaps, in the human, wondering if perhaps Pilate might really be of the truth.

In the 8th chapter in the 47th verse, he gives another statement that bears right on this point. He says, “He that is of God, heareth God’s words. Ye therefore hear them not because ye are not of God. He that is of God heareth God’s words.” “Everyman who is of the truth heareth my voice.” “My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me.”

Jesus used an angle which I want to use this morning, and I want to ask you this morning, are you of the truth? Are you of God? Do you hear the voice of the shepherd? Is it deep down within your heart, is there down within your heart response to the truth of God? “He that is of God heareth God’s voice.” And he that is not of God does not

hear the voice of Jesus Christ. It's a very very sad thing in some ways, but it's a very wonderful thing in another way because actually not one of us deserves to be of God. AND the fact that he has reached down in his wonderful electing grace and laid his hand upon some of us is of course something for which we shall praise him throughout all eternity. We may not like the fact that God is an electing God, but he is an electing God and Jesus is an electing Savior. “He that is of God heareth God's voice.” Do you hear it? Is there an answering response down in your heart? Do you really belong to him? This is the thing that our Lord is speaking about when he says to Pilate, “Everyone that is of the truth heareth my voice.”

Pilate, an agnostic skeptic, agnostic skeptic, answers, “What is the truth?” He is of the earth, earthy, he waits for no answer; he turns immediately after saying, “What is the truth?” and goes out. Carlyle once said, “He looked at truth and discerned her not there where she stood.” Right in front of him stood the truth, and Pilate said, “What is truth.”

Well now when Pilate went outside to speak to the Jews who wouldn't dirty their hands by coming in to speak in the judgment hall with him, after all it was the time of the Passover, and you must not defile yourself at the time of the Passover. Here are Jews mind you who are so punctilious about the observance of their laws with respect to the Old Testament and their interpretations primarily of them they're so punctilious in their observance of the laws that they can say, “We do not want to speak to the heathen king in the judgment hall lest we be defiled, while we go out in a few minutes and slay God's Passover lamb himself. I've seen many Christians like that, they can observe their little ritual and their little laws which they have manufactured which are not found in God's word at all and they can be so punctilious about them and at the same time run directly counter to the great truths of the word of God and have no mercy, no love, no desire for fellowship with the saints of God or any of the other great virtues that are set forth in God's word.

Pilate went out and he said, “I find no fault in this man at all.” What should you do, Pilate? You have authority, if you find no fault in the man, what should you do? Dismiss him, dismiss the charge, let him go free. But here we catch an insight into the man that is very very rewarding. Pilate though he has said “I find no fault in him at all” does not release him. And now, typical of the man, engages in some expedience. One is not stated here, it’s stated in Luke. Someone made the inadvertent remark that he had come from Galilee, and so Pilate grasped for that straw like a drowning man and said, “From Galilee? Then he belongs to Herod, send him to Herod.” Herod happened to be in the city at that time, the two became friends over Jesus in their antipathy to him, they got together. It’s kind of like I, I got together with some friends from the American Football League, when Kansas City played the Green Bay Packers, sometimes you know in our common antipathies, we become friends, and Herod and Pontius Pilate became friends, because they were opposed to Jesus.

But Herod was too wise, he sent him back to Pilate, and so now, Pilate engages in a second expedient, he knows that the Jews have a custom, the Romans have given them this right, that they would release a prisoner at this time in token of friendliness to the Romans, and so he said, “Ye have a custom that I should release unto you one at the Passover, will you therefore that I release unto you the king of the Jews?” They had another fellow in prison, his name was Barabas. He was an insurrectionist, a revolutionist, before his time, a twentieth century man before his day. And he was in prison in contrast to some today, and Barabas was there and here was Jesus. And Pilate, thinking that surely the Jews would not want Barabas released, but would want Christ released, suggests this expedient. But the Jews are not taken in by that, they said, “Not this man, but Barabas, we want Barabas to be released, and Jesus, we want him to be put to death.” Do you know what Barabas’ name means? Bar Abba means in Aramaic, son of the father. It’s a very interesting choice, that the Jews were faced with, Jesus, the son of the Father, Barabas, the robber, the insurrectionist, the son of the father. Do you want

this son of the father to be released, Jesus who went up and down the land doing good and healing men who were possessed of the devil because God was with him, or do you desire this man the insurrectionist, the son of the father, the son of the rabbi? Many of the rabbi's sons were named Bar Abba, son of the father. Which will you have? The Jews say, Barabas.

Pilate doesn't stop here, he thinks that perhaps he can get by with the scourging of Jesus, and so his third expedient is the scourging of him and so he has him scourged thinking that perhaps the Jews will think this is enough. Scourging was a terrible crime and Jesus was scourged and in addition, the soldiers planted a crown of thorns and put it on his head and they put on him a purple robe and they had a mock coronation. And the soldiers have a lot of fun as they spat upon him as they smote him and as they bowed down before him in mocking worship and said, “Hail king of the Jews!” I want to say just a word about that, you know they put a crown of thorns on his head, have you ever wondered why? Oh I'm sure that they didn't think a thing about it, they thought, “My, a king, he should have a crown shouldn't he? Let's have one that will be nice and feel nice on his head.” And so they planted a crown of thorns and they took that crown of thorns, and I'm sure that they must have mashed it down upon his head in order that the thorns would break the skin and the blood would flow down the face. But God's hand was in that too, you see, the thorn is the sign of the curse. The sign of the curse in the Book of Genesis chapter 3 is that this earth shall bring forth thorns and thistles. And so when the soldiers took the crown of thorns and crammed it down upon the head of Jesus, God the Father was trying to give us an object lesson, that the one who bears the curse of our sin is our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the Law being made a curse for us. And in the coronation God speaks through the crown of thorns. Strange thing the way the crown of thorns has affected Christians down through the years. Many ways in which Jesus, in many ways he has been presented to the Christian world. But genuine Christians who know and love our Lord Jesus Christ desire for him no other

diadem then the crown of thorns because we know that that signifies that he has born our sins. And down through the centuries, Jesus has passed wearing the crown of thorns, and God has been trying to speak to the hearts of men.

There follows phase three, this is the religious accusation. Pilate takes him out, the scourging; the mock coronation has no effect upon him, they say, “Crucify him crucify him!” Then they said to Pilate, “Pilate, he said that he was the Son of God.” Now this stirred something in the heart of Pilate, this third maneuver produces however, the same verdict. But Pilate is disturbed by this word the Son of God, and John says when he heard this saying “he was the more afraid.” You see, God does not leave himself without a witness, and even in the injustices that Pilate was guilty of with reference to our Lord, he did not do them without a testimony being born to his heart, he had been afraid, deep down within there was something that had gripped the inner man of this man, and you know it is always true, those who do not know our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, deep down in their hearts they are fearful, fearful! Oh they may try to hide it. They may act as if they’re very courageous but God puts the fear of God in the heart of any man who does not know Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament there is a text that says, “The wicked fleeth when no man pursueth,” and the man outside of Christ is afraid. He has no peace in his heart. John says when he heard that saying, “he was the more afraid,” as if a strange presentiment had gripped this man that he was engaged in something that was beyond him and it had even a supernatural order about it.

About this time, Pilate received a very disturbing word. A servant came in, and said, “Mr. Procurator, your wife has a message for you.” The message is, “Have thou nothing to do with this just man for I have suffered many things from him today in a dream.” I don’t think there was an unhappier man in Jerusalem then Pontius Pilate at this moment. He comes back to Jesus; he’s so disturbed now that he says of him, “Whence art thou?” I’ve listened to a lot of people tell others how to witness for Jesus Christ; I would love to have someone teach people how to witness to Jesus Christ from the Bible.

I know you're looking at me very strangely, that's what I want you to do. I'd love for you to look at the Bible. I don't believe that there is any soul winners manual that I know of that would tell you not to say anything to someone when they ask a question about Jesus Christ. But there came a time when Jesus was silent to Pontius Pilate. When we study Herod we'll go over this again. Jesus was absolutely silent, why? For the simple reason that Pilate had enough truth, he had not responded to the truth that he had had. To give him more truth is only to provide more judgment for him.

If a man does not respond to the little truth he has, why give him more truth? I sometimes wonder about some of you, you've been coming in this meeting Sunday after Sunday; you've been listening to truth. Some of you are not yet Christians, you've listened to a lot of truth, the time may come when God becomes silent. The time may come when you have so resisted the word of God that you cannot hear, for you see when we resist truth and resist truth, and resist truth, the time comes when we are dull to the truth and we cannot hear it and though it comes as plainly as it can come, our ears are deaf. May I say a pleading word to you Christians? The same principle operates in the Christian life, you've become a Christian, and so you come to Believers Chapel, you hear the word, you think you hear the word of God in this place, I hope you always do, but you come here and you're proud of the fact that you hear the word of God, and so you become a Christian and you're a child of God and you rejoice in all of the possessions that God has given you.

And so you come and listen, and Sunday after Sunday you come and listen, but when we leave this meeting and we go out, you don't ever do any of the truth that you learn from God's word. You're hearers of the word, but you're not a doer of the truth, you've not advanced in the spiritual life, you've not grown spiritually. You've not become strong in the faith, you've not led others to Christ, you've not been bringing others in to hear the word of God, you haven't been fishing for men. The time may come when you sit in an audience like this and you get nothing out of it. I've been a Christian long

enough, sad to say to see that work. I know some Christians who were vital at one time, they had been saved wonderfully and they rejoiced in the fact that they had become a Christian, they knew Jesus Christ, they began to attempt to live the Christian life and they were happy and joyous and even brought others to hear the word of God. And then their love began to cool, began to cool. They lost their first love, they became indifferent, and finally, you couldn't reach them now with the finest preaching in the world, dull.

Jesus gave him no answer. Pilate saith unto him, “Speakest thou not unto me? Don't you know that I have authority to crucify thee, and I have authority to release thee?” And Jesus, I admire the courage of the man of God, the reason Luther could stand like he stood was because he was a man who had the spirit of Christ in him, and so Jesus stood up to the supreme authority in the land and said, “Pilate, you could have no power at all against me except it were given thee.” Jesus is a man who knew that God controlled everything, he believed in the sovereignty of God. Sovereignty that he really was God, that's why he spoke as he did previously, “He that is of God heareth God's voice.” “You couldn't do anything except it were given thee.” And you know, strange to say, if you had been there, you would not have found a trembling Jesus, speaking to a haughty self assured Pontius Pilate, but you would have found a calm peaceful self assured peasant from the North of the land speaking to a trembling ruler. Pilate brought Jesus forth and said, “I don't find any fault in him,” again. He sought to release him, but he didn't release him, he sought to, but he didn't.

Now when he came out again to the Jews, we have the fourth of the phases, and this one is personal attack. When he tried to release the Lord Jesus, the Jews cried out saying, “If thou let this man go, thou art not” and they uttered, they uttered the words that shook Pilate right to his soles. They said, “Thou art not Caesar's friend.” In other words, the fourth movement is the movement of intimidation. Now, we must just say a word about the times at this point, the man who was sitting on the throne in Rome was a man by the name of Tiberius; he was a very wicked man. In addition to being a very wicked

man, he was a very moody man and a wicked man who is a moody man is an even more wicked man than a wicked man. And on top of that, he was a sick man and a sick man who is a moody man is a more wicked man than a wicked man. And in addition, the one charge that inflamed a Roman more than anything else was the charge that a man was not *amicus Caesaris* a friend of Caesar. And if we add to that the fact that Tiberius knew that there were all kinds of rumors in the land about messiah's who were claiming to be king, and if word had come to Tiberius, Pilate knew that he was playing footsie with some messianic movement in the east, against the Roman authority, why Tiberius would have quickly recalled him and have punished him severely. And so when they said, “Thou art not Caesar's friend, if thou release him,” Pilate turned him over to the Jews.

John says that it was the preparation of the Passover, truly it was, the preparation of the Passover. The Jews will as usual prepare the Passover lamb at Passover time, this time they will prepare God's Passover lamb. And again we see the hand of God in it. And when Pilate brought him forth and said, “Behold your king,” they say, “We have no king but Caesar.” Now to catch the force of this last statement, we must remember that God laid his hand upon Abraham, called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldeans, gave promises to Abraham to Isaac and to Jacob, set them up as the theocratic nation, as the nation in which God ruled and they were told that they should never acknowledge any king but God. Now of course they disobeyed, and soon they had their own earthly king, but even then, at least they were Israelite kings. Do not acknowledge any kingdom but the kingdom of God, but the Jews because they were so in antipathy against Jesus Christ, in denying him they deny themselves and destroy the theocracy, “We have no king but Caesar.” So they are guilty of blasphemy, guilty of apostasy, and they deny themselves in denying him. One of my New Testament professors once said, “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.



As I conclude this morning, may I briefly trace the course of Pilate's downfall? It contains a lesson for all time. He first heard of Jesus, he knew of Jesus, the nobleman whose son Jesus healed knew of Jesus. The Lord Jesus was the topic of conversation, you don't dream about things that you don't know about. Those of you've been dreaming about the Cotton Bowl Game for the last couple of weeks, and that last series of downs on the one yard line, the reason you've been dreaming about it is because it really happened. And the fact that Pilate's wife dreamed about our Lord Jesus is evidence of the fact that he was the topic of conversation in the court. Pilate heard of him, he had a personal appeal from the Lord; he refused the voice of the law of Israel which said release him. He resisted his wife's supernatural appeal, a dream, he turned to rationalizing expedencies. He attempted to absolve himself, in the course of it Matthew tells us he came out and washed his hands with water and said that he was going to have nothing more to do with the blood of this innocent man, as if by washing his hands he could absolve himself of guilt.

Shakespeare in one of his great passages in Macbeth draws the picture of Lady Macbeth to whose senses there comes an impotent sleep. And finally when her conscious will not rest, she gets up and she walks about in a kind of trance and she's washing her hands, but the blood red murder stain will not come out of her hands. And so as she looks at her hands she says, “Out damn spot, out I stay, here's the smell of the blood still, all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand.” Sometimes Shakespeare has sensed spiritual truth better than our preachers. We sit in and listen to the word of God and our consciences do not feel any twinge of pain at all. We sit down in an audience like this in a peace that does not come from God. We listen and we pay no attention, but if we are outside of Jesus Christ and we have heard the words that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and has died for our sins may God have mercy upon us if we do not flee immediately to him.

Pilate attempted to absolve himself. What kind of man was Pilate? He was a man who because he was skeptical was weak and superficial who sold his soul to gain the world and he lost both. If he had been a man of God, he might even have put together two of his own statements, “What is truth? Behold the man.” The world today is interested in meaning in life. College students are asking, “Why are we here? Where are we going?” Meaninglessness is the sign of the times; life has meaning in Jesus Christ. Men have lost the sense of meaning because they’ve lost Christ. If we know him, we know why we’re here, we know where we’ve come from, we know where we’re going, we know what we are to be in the mean time. Jesus Christ is the answer to the question what’s the meaning of life?

Does this trial have any kind of current claims upon us? I dare say if I went out in this audience, and I know there are some of you here who have not yet believed in Christ, I dare say if we had a large audience of thousands of people in which a great number of people were not believers in Christ and I went up to you and I said, “Do you dislike Jesus Christ?” “Oh no, I do not dislike Jesus Christ, I have a high regard for him.” “Do you know of anything in Jesus Christ that is absolutely contrary to God’s will and God’s law?” “No I don’t know anything against Jesus Christ, I think he’s an admirable man, I find no fault in him at all.” It’s a remarkable thing you know I read lots of the writings of professors, I have to. It’s remarkable how many of them can say wonderful words about Jesus Christ and denounce Christianity. I kind of sympathize with some of that too, because there’s a lot in Christianity which is not genuine Christianity. But it’s remarkable that men can say of Jesus Christ, “I find no fault in him at all” and yet not respond to him. So they stumble on spiritual cowards, ruined at last when they might have been redeemed.

I’ve told you before, but I mention it to you again Anatole France wrote *Mother of Pearl* in it, he takes a legend, and on the basis of a legend constructs something that is legendary. And it is legendary, but I think it’s profoundly true and perhaps even closer to

the truth then we might imagine. He pictures Pilate in his latter days after he had been recalled, for shortly after this someone wrote into Tiberius and Tiberius recalled Pontius Pilate and he lost his job. He pictures him in his last days, tradition is that he committed suicide, but he pictures him living in the southern part of Italy in a spacious villa and he has a visitor. And Pilate is now a man who has aged, he also is settled in his opposition to all that is of the truth, and he has this friend say to a bleary eyed Pilate, “Pilate, weren’t you procurator in Judea at the time that man Jesus was crucified?” Pilate is reported to have replied, by Anatole France, “Jesus, Jesus, I don’t remember the name.” You know the Christian church has never forgotten Pontius Pilate. They have a creed; it’s called the Apostles Creed. It’s not really the apostle’s creed; it’s called the Apostles Creed. That’s one of the minor things I have against Christianity by the way. In that Apostle’s Creed which is largely truthful, the statement is made that “Jesus Christ was conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, and suffered under Pontius Pilate.” Pilate may not remember the name, but when he has passed into eternity, he cannot forget. And down through the centuries, Pilate is remembered, and remembers and I don’t think there is any man throughout all eternity who shall so scorn himself because of the decision that he made in time.

Then Pontius Pilate, the vacillating man who had no courage of moral conviction, what about you? What about you, what about you? Jesus Christ who loved you and gave himself for you, the Savior who bore all of this that you might have life is the Son of God and you know you can know him by simply saying, “Thank-you Lord for giving Jesus Christ to die for me.” And in your heart, say “I take you as my personal Savior.” That’s all he wants. He doesn’t want you to go out and join the church to do good works to pray through, he wants you as you are. You cannot save yourself. You are in sin, you’re in bondage, he wants to free you and he will and give you wonderful joy and peace in your heart and the courage of your convictions. May God speak to your heart. He that is of God heareth God’s voice. He that is of the truth heareth Jesus’ words, “Come unto me

“Pontius Pilate: A Vacillating Man” by S. Lewis Johnson  
Copyright © 2008 Believers Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

all ye that labor and are heavy laden, I will give you rest.” May God lead you to make that decision which means life. May we stand for the benediction?

[Prayer] Now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God the Father who gave the Son, the fellowship and communion of the Holy Spirit, be and abide with all who are of God and who know him in sincerity. And oh Father give others no rest nor peace until they rest in him. For Jesus' sake. Amen.