

KINGS NORTON BAPTIST CHURCH (Wharf Road Chapel)

Sunday 4th October 2020 10 am

Pontius Pilate cowardice

Welcome.

Opening Scripture

Hymn mp 385 Jesus the Name high over all (EMW choral)

Scripture Reading Ps 65

Prayer

Communion read CH 411

Reading John 18:28-19:16, (Matt 27, Mark 15, Luke 23)

Hymn mp 391 Jesus you are the radiance (Divine Hymns)

Sermon Pontius Pilate Cowardice

Hymn mp 542 One there is above all others

Closing prayer/Dox.

Close -----

Listen to today's sermon by clicking on the link at www.knbc.org.

The audio file is [20_10_04.mp3](#)

Welcome, pray

- John was telling his friend that he and his wife had a serious argument the night before. "But it ended," John said, "when she came crawling to me on her hands and knees."

Oh, "What did she say?" asked the friend. John replied, "She said, 'Come out from under that bed, you coward!'"

In real life being a coward has much more serious consequences, and as we shall see eternal consequences

As we continue to look at those Jesus met many demonstrate faith and the message to you and I is – copy them. Here in Pontius Pilate is someone who is the opposite, he displays no faith rather he is ungodly, so the message to us is – don't copy him - do the opposite!

All the way through life we can learn from people; how to, and how not to!

When we read of Jesus we can learn about him. When Jesus meets others – we learn about them. Jesus' unique interaction with people exposes their true character. There is plenty here to reveal Pontius Pilates' true character.

The main passage we are looking at is Jesus before Pilate which appears in all four gospel accounts Matt 27, Mark 15, Luke 23, John 18,19

The spotlight is squarely on Pontius Pilate. Here is a life of fear and failure. Here is a life of conscience, compromise and condemnation. In short he is a coward.

1stly his biographical background his 'bio', - and background to the trial.

Biographical - the man

The Roman empire had regional governors, or procurators. Pontius Pilate was the 5th or 6th in the province of Judea. He was appointed in AD 26, and continues in the province until AD 35. Usually residing at Caesarea on the coast he was often in Jerusalem where he kept a garrison.

Pilate was a typical modern Roman though not without a sense of ancient Roman justice in his soul. Pilate like King Herod built infrastructure, his most noteworthy project being an aqueduct, an extraordinary engineering work 30 miles long. He was though pleasure-loving, imperious, and corrupt.

In the severity and cruelty of his administration Pilate became odious both to the Jews and to the Samaritans. He hated the Jews whom he ruled, and in times of irritation freely shed their blood. They returned his hatred by accusing him of every crime, maladministration, cruelty, and robbery. Pilate almost drove the Jews to rebel by his provocative impositions of pagan idols on the temple mount in Jerusalem. Pilate checked the riot by soldiers with concealed daggers, who killed many of the insurgents and even spectators. Scripture records he mingled the blood of Galileans with their sacrifices, probably at a feast in the temple's outer court, where riots often occurred.

Background - the trial

The Jewish leaders had decided to put Jesus to death. As they plotted and schemed they tried to avoid the sympathetic crowds and the major Passover festival coming up. Judas agrees to betray Jesus; the opportunity came after Jesus left the last supper for the mount of Olives. There they arrested him.

With the next day being Friday, the day of preparation, they were in a hurry to get the execution over with quickly. The problem is that they couldn't execute anyone, only the Roman occupiers could sanction that. So after a

perfunctory meeting with the chief priest, essentially to rubber stamp his death sentence - they now sought out the governor's approval. It is late Thursday / early Friday.

Important people don't like to be bothered at weekends, the golf course beckons etc. So they plead with him for a quick interview in the morning. This they do the night before and are on his doorstep first thing early in the morning. 'Early' is not something we do here, that is not true of other cultures (India).

Let's stop for a moment and think about how we are as people

You and I were all made to be at peace, peace in every respect, peace with God, peace with each other, and peace with ourselves. That is not how it is now. We are moral beings, men and women made in the image of God. But since Adam and Eve rebelled against God we all have an inner corruption. We are now at odds with ourselves. Let me explain this complicated inner interplay: You have an inner knowledge of what is right, hard wired in us all. God has placed His law on your heart. Your God-given conscience judges your actions against it and jumps up at you when that law is broken. However, that conscience is adjustable, can be trained, weakened and even deadened.

Our corrupt minds are now strongly affected by self-interest. Instead of seeking God's Glory I constantly seek my own. So when it comes to the decisions I make, that is my Will, then I go with 'me' with what suits 'me'. My weakened Will, instead of acting out my knowledge of what is right – helped by my conscience – suppresses it in favour of the easier self-interest. This is what we see exposed in Pontius Pilate through this trial. And just to be clear the truth is - it is not Jesus who is on trial – but Pontius Pilate.

The Jews knew which buttons to press, the first button they press is *'fear'*.

The charge before the Jewish leaders was a religious one, understandably. But this would cut no ice with Pontius Pilate the Roman. So they dream up other charges that will really rattle his cage, and they do! Here they say is not a religious law breaker but a civil one. **"If he were not a criminal," they replied, "we would not have handed him over to you."** Joh 18:30

Now they lay it on thick, listen to the charges: **"And they began to accuse him, saying, "We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Christ, a king."**" Lu 23:2

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Here's a criminal involved in subversion on a national scale, even more importantly he's stopping the money, the taxes to Caesar... and He's a King! another leader, your competitor. **"Are you the Kings of the Jews?"** Pilate asks. **"Yes it is as you say"** Jesus replied All this, he fears, is a direct challenge to his authority. **"Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law."** Joh 18:31 he says to the Jewish accusers – you sort it out. It is early, it is his day of and he can smell the breakfast. - But he can also smell trouble, the opposing 'King' charge is especially serious.

With all these direct challenges to his authority this is not something he can ignore and do nothing about. So he goes inside to question Jesus: **"You are a king, then!"** said Pilate. Jesus answered, **"You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."** **"What is truth?"** Pilate asked.

Pilate is not a truth lover he is a peace lover. Not peace for others but peace for himself: so **with this he went out again to the Jews and said, "I find no basis for a charge against him."** Joh 18:33-38

■ I have had a number of managers over the years. Sadly, some have been like this, they want above all else 'an easy life'. Bring to them a problem and their overriding thought is pragmatic, "how can I remove the problems as simply as possible so I can maintain my easy life. You won't find them seeking the truth or standing by a principle, nor do any more than is needed, they are motivated only by self-interest.

So Pilate says it's OK we can let him go. Sorry Pilate not so simple. The Jews **insist, "He stirs up the people all over Judea by his teaching. He started in Galilee and has come all the way here."**" Lu 23:5 So Pilate in fear - looks around for an escape.

Scheme 1 - Send him to Herod

Ah, Jesus is from Galilee, he comes under Herod so Pilate sends Jesus to him. But - Herod sends him back. So much for pushing responsibility onto someone else.

Cowardly scheme 1 is replaced by cowardly scheme 2 - Tone down the charges

"Pilate called together the chief priests, "You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him. Neither has Herod, for he

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sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death. Therefore, I will punish him and then release him.”^{Lu 23:13-16} “he has done nothing to deserve death. We can let him go there are no charges to answer”.

His wife and her dream

Add to that his wife Claudia had a dream about Jesus. As the Jews came to them late the night before. She calls Jesus, “*that just man,*” recalling Plato’s unconscious prophecy (The Republic) of “*the just man*” who after suffering restores righteousness. She urges her husband not to condemn the Just One.

Scheme 3 the custom

He wants the problem over. He presto **the crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did.**^{Mr 15:8}. How convenient there’s this custom to release a prisoner at the feast: “So come on let’s be charitable, let’s release him and let him go, it is a special weekend a time of good will right? Surely they wouldn’t choose the notorious Barabbus who really is a nasty piece of work. He is a murderer, a terrorist we might say and deserves to be punished. But **with one voice they cried out, “Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us!”**^{Lu 23:18}

✚ All his scheming does not deal with the problem – trying to take the easy way out by not confronting evil never works.

The man is innocent, Pilate knows it. He has to power to dismiss the whole thing and send everyone away - but he procrastinates – do you know that word? in his heart he dithers. He won’t do what he knows he should do. He is weak.

■ President Lincoln said, “To sin by silence when one should speak makes cowards of men.”

A coward knows what to do but will not do it. In his weakness he actually brings it on even more strongly - the pressure continues – and grows.

■ Britain before WWII dithered, appeased, hoped for the best, hoped the problems would go away – and the result? It brought it on. Y

Pilate with Jesus before him knows there is no guilt here deserving death. “So Pilate be a man, and dismiss the whole thing”.

Instead he says to them: “**What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?” Pilate asked.**^{Mr 15:12} What shall I do with him? Are you asking them!! Why is Pilate asking them? He’s the one in charge. Handing the mic

over “Crucify him!” they shouted. “Why? What crime has he committed?” asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, “Crucify him!”^{Mr 15:13-14}

Are you intimidated by numbers, by the loudness of the shouting? What was going on.....

1. Was Pilate influenced by the ‘false consensus effect’ in crowd psychology where we conform our views to others no matter what our beliefs & opinions
2. Was Pilate fearful of a mass disturbance and more trouble?
3. Or did Pilate think he could put the blame for this decision, - his decision - onto others? Do you do that? As did Adam and Eve? Try to shift the blame.

✚ What he does next can only be described as a sign of a bad conscience.

When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd.

He washes his hands in front of them all. As if to say I’m walking away “**I am innocent of this man’s blood,**” he said. “**It is your responsibility!**” NO **All the people answered, “Let his blood be on us and on our children!”**^{Mr 27:24-25}

Now he shows his true character in what happens. Jesus is taken into the palace and beaten, spat up, mocked and a crown of sharp thorns put on his head. Putting on him a purple robe, they bow before him and strike him in the face.

Pilate is the one who is to uphold justice in the land, and yet though he knows Jesus is innocent shows callous indifference to his suffering and mocking. How is this? His hardness has grown and grown over years of unchecked cruelty.

French troops in Algeria withdrawn because they had become inhumane

Once more Pilate came out and said to the Jews, “Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against him.”^{Joh 19:4}

Again and again Pilate tries to hand him back, release him and walk away.

Now the Jews play their trump card. **7 The Jews insisted, “We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God.”**

Son of God? Pilate is out of his depth, he doesn’t understand these things – like all his countrymen he is superstitious. He is suspicious, he is frightened.

When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid, and he went back inside the palace. “Where do you come from?” he asked Jesus, but Jesus gave him no answer. “Do you refuse to speak to me?” Pilate said. “Don’t you realise I have

power either to free you or to crucify you?" Jesus answered, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Jo 19:7-11

Is there some power here, divine power, Will I be fighting against God? In fear, - a fear for his own soul? - he tries to release Jesus – it says **From then on, Pilate tried to set Jesus free,** Jo 19:12

The pressure continues **"But with loud shouts they insistently demanded that he be crucified, and their shouts prevailed."** Lu 23:23

■ **Relentless pressure – the Will to power principle of getting your way.**

The pressure is rising, so to their vitriol **the Jews kept shouting, "If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar."** Joh 19:7-12

The tirelessness of the crowds, is because of the tirelessness of evil - and behind it Satan's power of evil directed against Jesus the Son of God.

Then the fatal moment comes **Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified. So the soldiers took charge of Jesus.** Joh 19:16

Let's summarise

Pilate goes down in history as the man who gave in to the shouts of the crowds and the clamour within his own unchecked heart. He showed himself a coward. He did not have the firmness of character, nor the courage to defend the deep-rooted principle of justice and carry it through; and so after repeated efforts, he gives in to the pressure.....

His final inscription above the cross, *'This is the King of the Jews'* - and his refusal to alter the inscription - only confirms his self-condemnation.

Pontius Pilate came across as powerful, how else would he get to the top.

The truth is he was weak. Very weak. He gave in to his baser nature and rather than be Godly, loving and wise was Godless, hard and cruel. In every situation he pursued self-interest. He did not stand for what is right but cowardly gave in to his own desires.

That used to be me. Is that you? Then you need a change inside. Christ can change the inside. He has done that for me, He can give that to you:

We are not in Pilate's place to condemn Christ to death – but that is exactly what you do when you again and again reject him as Lord and give in to self

Pilate's life did not end well. When was the course set? Early, no doubt very early. To give in early is to set the course of your life, to be heading to

those unseen rocks. Pilate took the cowardly route – his Judgment would inevitably come. Pilate was reported to the Emperor, he was recalled, he was thrown into prison. When in prison - he committed suicide.

The Bible says **the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practise magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulphur. This is the second death.** Re 21:8 notice the **'cowardly'** Are mentioned.

Fear and fate - Pilate let his fear determine his fate, his future.

Pilate is a striking example of the danger of trifling with his conscience when he should be carrying out his plain duty. Fear of man, the Jews' accusations, and the emperor's frown, and consequent loss of place and power, led him to condemn Him whom he knew to be innocent and wanted to free. **This is definitely a 'don't do' sermon**

An epitaph may well say: It was too late for his miserable compromises and delays once the determined Jews saw him changeableness, his 'vacillating' wobbling. His shallow sense of justice gave in to his selfishness, worldliness, and cynical unbelief. Pilate ended his life a coward. May none of us here in our hearts and actions be like him.

Do you want to conquer your habit of always taking the easy, selfish, cowardly way? Then turn in repentance to Christ, take the toughest but best decision you will ever make. Christ will give you power to change. But first the Cross. When you don't like what you see inside then that is where you go. When you hate it - but can't change it, then that is where you go, to Christ on the cross. **There - with Him, you are changed.**

Do you deep down seek to be Holy? Then turn to Christ who will give you

4. Another Spirit of power and love to conquer your own.
5. A new heart, that desires what is right.
6. A reinvigorated conscience.
7. And a will that is strong - and will act according to what your new Spirit, heart and conscience desire.

✚ **All this Christ can and will do. Then you have learned the lesson of Pontius Pilate.**