

# What Will You Decide

by Anton Bosch

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*This sermon delves into the trial of Jesus before Pilate, highlighting the repeated declarations of Jesus' innocence by Pilate and Herod, the pressure from the crowd and religious leaders to crucify Jesus, and the pivotal decision-making moments faced by Pilate and the people. It emphasizes the importance of making decisions based on truth, resisting external pressures, and choosing Jesus over worldly expediency or popularity.*

**Scripture:** Luke 23:13, Matthew 27:24, Acts 4:10, Romans 1:18, John 18:38, Matthew 27:26, John 18:40, John 14:6, Matthew 16:26

**Topics:** "Truth in Decision-Making", "Choosing Jesus Over Popularity"

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## Description

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## Transcript

Luke chapter 23, Luke chapter 23 and we're going to read 13 through 25. Luke chapter 23, 13 through 25. Then Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests, the rulers, and the people, said to them, You have brought this man to me as one who must lead the people.

And indeed, having examined him in your presence, I have found no fault in this man concerning those things of which you accuse him. No, neither did Herod, for I sent you back to him, and indeed nothing deserving of death has been done by him. I will therefore chastise him and release him, for it was necessary for him to release one to them at the feast.

And they all cried out at once, saying, Away with this man and release to us Barabbas, who had been thrown into prison for a certain rebellion made in the city and for murder. Pilate, therefore wishing to release Jesus, again called out to them, but they shouted, saying, Crucify him, crucify him. Then he said to them the third time, Why, what evil has he done? I have found no reason for death in him.

I will therefore chastise him and let him go. But they were insistent, demanding with loud voices that he be crucified. And the voice of these men and of the chief priests prevailed.

And so Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they requested. And he released to them the one they requested, who for rebellion and murder had been thrown into prison, but he delivered Jesus to their will. So if you remember, Jesus had been tried illegally by the Sanhedrin.

They had handed, the Jewish leaders, they had handed Jesus over to Pilate. Pilate examined Jesus and he finds no fault in him. He then decides to send Jesus to Herod, because Jesus came from Galilee, which was Herod's jurisdiction.

Jerusalem was Pilate's jurisdiction. Galilee was Herod's jurisdiction. Herod examines Jesus.

He finds no fault in him. So for the second time, the Roman government finds him innocent. But Herod didn't like Jesus, and so he has him beat up and mistreated, and sends him back to Pilate.

So the section that we're dealing with this evening, this morning, is Jesus in front of Pilate. And so Jesus comes back to Pilate again, and Pilate then calls the chief priests, the rulers, and all the people, all the people. So the chief priests, remember there was two high priests, effectively, Annas and Caiaphas.

The rulers are the Sanhedrin, the 70 leaders of Israel, elders of Israel, and then the people. Now, we don't know how many people there were, but certainly this was a major event. Remember, this is the time of the Passover, and the people had followed Jesus up to that point, and they are gathered in the praetorium, the outer court of Pilate's palace.

And so he said to them, you have brought this man to me as one who misleads the people. Remember, they changed the charge several times. Indeed, having examined him in your presence, I have found no fault in this man concerning those things of which you accuse him.

So in this section, this is the first time that he declares Jesus guiltless, innocent. This is, of course, the third time. So Pilate first finds Jesus guiltless, Herod finds him innocent, and now Pilate finds him innocent again.

So this is the third time that he is pronounced not guilty. Now, you know that this is not America where you have double jeopardy. You can't find a man guilty of the same crime, or you can't find, you can't retry him once he's been declared innocent.

Well, Jesus was declared innocent, and he is now being retried and retried and retried. Now, obviously, they didn't have the double jeopardy law, but at the same time, this is clearly injustice, because having found him not guilty, Pilate should have released him. And so, having examined him in your presence—so this was not a secret interrogation.

He had interrogated Jesus in front of everyone, and he had found him not guilty. He says, neither did Herod. Now, remember that Herod doesn't make a statement.

Herod just beats Jesus up and sends him back. Herod doesn't make a statement that Jesus is not guilty, but obviously, he had sent the message back to Pilate and said, I don't find the man guilty. So Pilate is giving Herod's decision.

So, neither did Herod, for I sent him back, sent you back to him, and indeed, nothing deserving of death has been done by him. So, I will therefore chastise him and release him. This was—remember that the Roman law really was built on intimidation.

It wasn't really built on justice in that sense. While there was much of Roman law that was that was good, and certain countries—South Africa, amongst others—South Africa's law used to be built on Roman principles, Roman Dutch law. But there were other aspects of the law which were totally unsatisfactory.

And so, the idea was that he would then be whipped, and there were different grades, three different levels of whipping. This would be the lowest level, but still serious enough. It wasn't a joke at all.

But this was just his attempt to appease the people, just to say, well, you know, I'm going to do something to give you what you want, but I can't find him guilty, and I can't have him crucified, because he is innocent. For it was necessary for him to release one to them at the feast. Now, he's saying, I want to let Jesus go.

There was a custom—Matthew says that it was customary for the local governor to release a Jewish prisoner to appease the people, to make the people happy. And so, Pilate is looking for an opportunity to release Jesus. Now, we have to speak a little about Pilate.

We've spoken about him before, but Pilate clearly finds Jesus not guilty, in spite of the fact that Pilate is not a particularly nice character. Pilate is not religious in any way. Pilate does not respect the Jews or their religion.

He had shown this on a number of occasions. He had killed many, many Jews at different times. He had disrespected the Jewish faith from the beginning.

There was an understanding, for example, that the Jews having a problem with idols, based on the second command, that the Romans, when they came into the city with their army, they would lower the standards. The standards would be the crest. Today, our equivalent would be the flag.

They would lower the standards because the standards were seen to be idols. And so, in respect of the religion of the Jews, they would lower the standards. And remember, the armies—I'm sure you've seen pictures of Roman legions marching, and there's the standard on a post, and there'd be a standard bearer.

Like today, we have a flag bearer. But they would lower the standards in respect to the Jewish laws, not that they respected God, but simply because they respected the Jewish laws and did not want to cause any trouble. Pilate refused to lower the standards, and this created rebellions.

This created all sorts of problems, and Pilate would simply quash that through violence and through strong-arm tactics. So, he didn't respect the Jewish faith. He didn't respect God, it seems.

But there is something that is inside of him, a conscience, and somehow God is speaking to him. And so, Pilate now is wrestling between what he knows is right and what is politically expedient. And of course, at the end of the day, Jesus is crucified by the Romans for political expediency, because it was politically easy to get Jesus out of the way.

And so, he's trying all along to let Jesus go. But the Jews will not let Jesus go. So, it was necessary for him to release one at the feast.

And so, they all cried out at once, saying, away with this man, and release to us Barabbas. Now, this is the crowd, and obviously they're incited by the high priests and by the Sadducees and the Pharisees, by the Sanhedrin, the leaders of the Jews. I've read one commentator who says, these were not the same people

who followed Jesus all along.

But there is nothing that indicates that this is a different crowd. There's absolutely no indication that there were two separate factions of people amongst the common people. It seems that the common people, up to the day before, were following Jesus, wanting to hear him preach.

Remember, every day he would be in the temple, in the outer court, and he would be preaching, because the people wanted him to preach. Many of them had followed him for a long time, as he was coming from Galilee all the way down to Jerusalem. And so, it seems to me that this is exactly the same crowd who, the previous week, had wanted to make him the king.

They brought him in on Palm Sunday, and he was riding on the donkey, remember, and they throw down their clothes, and they throw down the palm leaves, and they say, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. And they were ready to crown him as their king. This is a week later, and they turned against Jesus.

I think that this is an important lesson for us about the fickleness of our own emotions, how easily we can be swayed by other people. The people had not come to their own conclusion. They had been whipped up and stirred up by their religious leaders.

I think that this whole story is a story of people acting against what they basically know is right, simply because they are pressurized by those around them. Pilate hands Jesus over because he is pressurized by the Jews. The people turn against Jesus because they are pressurized by their leaders, and nobody is doing what they know is the right thing to do.

I think that in that is an important lesson, that we not make up our mind based on pressure brought to bear on us by those around us, by the news media, by the politicians, by the conspiracy theorists, by some preachers, but that we make up our minds based on what is truth. That, at the end of the day, is the issue. That is the question that has to be asked.

What is truth? Remember, Pilate is not in this passage, he's in the book of Matthew, but Pilate asks Jesus, and he says, what is truth? That is the question. None of these people, Pilate, Herod, the Sadducees, the Pharisees, the priests, and the people, none of them were acting on what was truth. They were simply acting on where everybody else was going.

And folk, we live in a time when there's a lot of pressure on us to think certain ways, to act in certain ways, to make certain decisions. We need to make sure that the decisions we make, that the values we hold, the things that we believe, are based on truth, and are not based on mass hysteria, are not based on the pressure that is being brought to bear on us by every which side, but that we make up our minds. And the question at the end of the day is, what is truth? What is truth? And so they all cried at once, saying, away with this man, and release to us Barabbas.

And he tells us, who had been thrown into prison for a certain rebellion or insurrection made in a city, and for murder. So Barabbas had rebelled against Roman authority. He had led some kind of insurrection.

Remember, this was an ongoing thing. They had this all the time. Many of these people were zealots, or they were part of the far-right establishment, if you will, seeking to overthrow Rome.

And in the process, he seems to have killed some people. A story that's not unfamiliar to us here in America in recent years. It's interesting that the thing that Jesus was accused of was insurrection.

He's stirring up the people against Rome. And yet Jesus was innocent of that charge. Barabbas was guilty of exactly the same charge.

They did not bring a charge of murder against Jesus, but obviously there's a charge of murder against Barabbas. Now remember that treason in those days, or rebellion against the state, was punished by death. So Barabbas is in prison.

He is under the sentence of death. And the people say, give us Barabbas, crucify Jesus. Another important thing to remember is that Barabbas is a very important picture in this whole story, because Barabbas is a picture of us.

Because at the end of the day, Jesus dies and Barabbas is set free. Barabbas was guilty. Jesus was innocent.

And yet the innocent dies in the place of the guilty. We were guilty, but Jesus died in our place. The name Barabbas means son of the father.

Remember Bar means son. Simon Bar Jonah, Jesus said. Simon son of Jonah.

Abba, we know what that means, means father. So son of the father. Interesting.

Jesus was the son of the father, the son of God. This man was not the son of God. He was an imposter, as it were.

And yet he is set free. We live in a time when people are making decisions. When people in America and all over the world are making decisions.

One of the things I noticed as I was traveling is how people are making decisions about the governments, and about the future, and about all sorts of things. And making decisions based on bad information. Making decisions based on pressures being brought to bear.

We must make a decision concerning Jesus. We must make a decision concerning truth. And we must come to the right conclusion.

Otherwise, this in fact becomes a life and death situation. And so Pilate therefore, wishing to release Jesus, again called out to them. So Pilate is trying now, I think this is the second time, to release Jesus.

And so there's obviously a tumult. People are shouting and screaming. And there's a lot of people.

Pilate is probably up on a balcony or somewhere where he's able to address the crowd. And so he calls out to them. He's trying to get their attention.

And, but they shouted saying, crucify him, crucify him. What a statement. The Messiah, the Saviour, the Anointed One, the Son of God, crying for him to be crucified.

Of course, there's always this debate as to was it the Romans or was it the Jews. And as we've said many times, both were equally guilty. If the people hadn't persisted, Pilate probably would have released Jesus.

So the Jews are guilty. And remember that Peter on the, in Acts chapter 4, in his sermon on the day of Pentecost says, you, speaking to the Jews as he's preaching to Israel, he says, you, you've taken with wicked hands and you have crucified him. So the Jews were guilty of crucifying Jesus.

But at the same time, Pilate was guilty because Pilate handed Jesus over to them to be crucified, knowing he was innocent. At the very least, Pilate should have taken Jesus and put him in protective custody. Now that, there's a precedent for that because you remember a few years later, Paul would be put into protective custody.

The Jews wanted to kill Paul as he comes into the temple. And the Romans rushed down into the temple area and they grabbed Paul and they put him into protective custody, not because he had done anything wrong, but simply to save his life. So the very least Pilate could have done is to put Jesus in protective custody if he was not going to let him go.

But in fact, Pilate is guilty because Pilate hands him over to be crucified. And then he said to them the third time, why, what evil has he done? I have found no reason for death in him. I will therefore chastise him and let him go.

So three times Pilate is trying to let Jesus go. His conscience tells him, Jesus is innocent. And yet he acts against his conscience.

And folks, how many times do we know something is wrong and yet we still do it? And we act against our own conscience. And just like with Pilate, it's easy to look at these men and to condemn Pilate and condemn the Jews. And yet we are exactly the same as they are.

We are no different. And so three times Pilate acts against his own conscience and does the wrong thing. How many times do we act against our conscience, even though there is a repeated warning from our conscience, from the Spirit of God, from the Word of God, for us to act in a different way? And yet we reject or we push away, we suppress the Word of God.

Paul deals with this in Romans chapter 1, because he says the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, who suppress the truth. God's anger, and in the context of Romans chapter 1, God's anger is not about homosexuality and murder and all of the terrible sins that are listed in Romans chapter 1. God is angry because people have the truth and they don't obey the truth. They suppress that truth.

Pilate is suppressing what he knows is right. He's pushing it down. He knows what he should be doing, but he's wrestling with it and he's putting it down, he's pushing it down, so that it doesn't rise up and force him, in a sense, to do the right thing.

And so it's easy to blame everybody else, and yet many times we do exactly the same thing. We know the truth, and yet we suppress it, and we don't obey the truth. And that is what God is angry about.

The sins, by the way, in Romans chapter 1 are a consequence of suppressing the truth. And the Romans 1, of course, is a warning of where we end up if we don't listen to the conviction that comes by the Holy Spirit. And so he says a third time, what evil has he done? I found no reason for death in him.

I will therefore chastise him and let him go. I think this is the fourth time that Pilate has declared him innocent. At the first trial, and then three times in this second trial, he says he is not guilty.

But they were insistent, demanding with loud voices that he be crucified. And the voices of these men and of the chief priests prevailed. It's amazing.

Here is a man who would murder hundreds of Jews to enforce his rule, who had no problem acting against the will of the people. And yet at this time, the people prevail against him. Now, we must remember, he is in charge.

He has his army. He's come to Jerusalem with express purpose to keep order in case there was some kind of insurrection, some kind of trouble in Jerusalem. And so he comes with all of his soldiers, in addition to the garrison that is stationed in Jerusalem anyhow.

He has the power to enforce his will, but he doesn't enforce his will because he listens to the people. This is probably the only time in his life that he ever listened to the people. Remember, this is not a democracy.

This is a dictatorship. He doesn't listen to the people, but now he listens to the people. It's amazing how we change what we do and how we do things for convenience sake.

And I understand his problem because remember that in one of the other gospels, it says that one of the threats they brought against him, they said, if you don't crucify Jesus, then you are no friend of Caesar. And of course, that was a major problem for him because if Caesar heard that he wasn't doing a good job and that he was going against Caesar, he could lose not just his job, he could lose his life, he could lose his head. And so he's afraid of everything and he doesn't do the right thing and he makes the wrong decision.

In fact, I'm deeply concerned and I know I touched on this earlier, but I want to emphasize this. How many decisions do we make because we feel pressured by those around us? And when I mean decisions, I mean bad decisions, wrong decisions. It's time that we make decisions based on the truth, based on what is real.

It doesn't matter the price. What has a man profited if he gained the whole world, but he lose his soul? In the end, Pilate would go down in ignominy and shame. In the end, Pilate would lose everything that he had fought for anyhow.

All he did was hold on to power just a little bit longer. Folks, we need to see Jesus and as we see him, we need to make the right decisions. You see, at the end of the day, this is not Jesus who's at trial.

This is Pilate and Israel who are being tried. Jesus is innocent. He is the judge.

But this is a moment of decision for Pilate and Pilate finds himself weighed and found wanting. Remember that was true of the king of Babylon? This is true of Pilate at this time. This is true of the leaders of Israel.

This is the point at which they make a final decision concerning the Messiah. And in making the wrong decision, they sign their own death warrant. Forty years later, the temple would be destroyed and the nation would be dispersed, never to be reconstituted for 2,000 years.

This was the point at which they signed the death warrant of their nation. This is the point at which Pilate signs his own death warrant. You see, sometimes we sit in judgment of others, but in fact, the judgment is ours.

May we make the right decisions because those decisions have enormous consequences. Pilate had probably sat in judgment of hundreds of men, maybe even thousands, but this time it was different. And folk, we make thousands of decisions, but some of those decisions are cardinal.

Some of those decisions are pivotal. Everything revolves around those decisions. We must make the right decisions.

What is your decision today? Verse 24, so Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they requested. Pilate gave in. Pilate buckled.

Pilate folded. Right now, there are many Christians across the world that are buckling, that are folding, that are giving in to the temptations, to the pressures, to the demands that are around them. And they're making the wrong decisions, and those decisions have eternal consequences.

And he released to them the one they requested, who for rebellion and murder had been thrown into prison, but he delivered Jesus to their will. What a travesty of justice. Two men in front of him, as it were, obviously Barabbas isn't there, Barabbas is in prison, but two men on the stand, and he chooses the wrong man.

He chooses the wrong man. And folk, the church in America and in the West is making decisions. I'm not speaking about politics, but maybe I am, because many are choosing politics over Jesus.

Many are choosing expediency above Jesus. Many preachers are choosing popularity over the truth. How can you choose Jesus over Barabbas, or choose Barabbas rather over Jesus? And yet people do that.

I don't know what decisions you're making this morning, but all of us are at any time in our life making decisions about all sorts of things. And I plead with you, make the right decisions. Choose truth, choose Jesus.

Father, we thank you for your word. Lord, this is an awesome moment in the history of the world as the Son of God is put on trial, and they all got it wrong. They all got it wrong.

And Lord, I pray that we would not be those who get things wrong, but we get it right. Lord, that in making decisions, we make the right decisions. Lord, in choosing between truth and popularity, we may choose Jesus and truth.

Lord, in choosing convenience over the word of God, we may choose the word of God. Lord, it's easy to be pressurized by those around us, sometimes maybe not even a crowd, but just our husband or our wife or parents or children who put pressure on us to do things that we know we ought not to be doing. But Lord, we pray that you'd help us to have more guts and more spine than all of the men in Israel at that time.

Lord, that we may choose the right, that we may choose what is right no matter the cost. Help us, Lord, to think clearly, to not be in a fog or a haze because of the many voices that are shouting out for our attention and shouting for our decision. But Lord, that we may make wise choices in our lives, we pray in Jesus' name.

And so, Lord, I pray that you'd go with us, keep us, protect us. And Lord, as we make many decisions in this week, help us to make the right ones. In Jesus' name I pray.

Amen.

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