

# Pilate's Wife - Part 1

by John Piper

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*Jesus' words of truth and mercy bring hope and forgiveness to Claudia Procula, the wife of Pontius Pilate.*

**Duration:** 10:34

**Scripture:** Matthew 10:28, Luke 8:43-48, Luke 13:1-5, Luke 23:34, Romans 6:23, Romans 8:28, James 4:14

**Topics:** "Sovereignty Of God", "Repentance And Forgiveness"

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## Description

In this sermon transcript, the preacher emphasizes the importance of recognizing the gift of life and the imminent judgment that could befall anyone. The speaker urges the listeners to marvel at the fact that they are still alive and breathing, despite the possibility of death. The sermon also highlights the seriousness of sin and the sovereignty of God in governing all things. The preacher then focuses on the encounter between Pilate's wife, Claudia, and Jesus, where she is confronted with the truth and the need for repentance. The sermon concludes with a declaration of hope and the power of Christ to forgive even the most heinous sins.

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## Transcript

Not only is this my 23rd Advent season with you, even though most of you haven't been here that long, it is also the 21st Advent season in which I have tried to write and read Advent poems during the season of Advent. And perhaps just a word by way of introduction for those of you who are new. My aim in spending the time and effort it takes to write these and read them to you is in large measure for my own soul, because I find that the doing of it causes me to see and to savor the Gospel in ways that I wouldn't otherwise see it.

What I do is add a human imagination to biblical meditation in the hope that I will see and say to you a lot of truth, perhaps in a way it isn't ordinarily said, and nothing that contradicts what we know from the Bible. So those are the parameters that I set for myself in writing these. I make up a lot of details.

None of them, as far as I know, contradict anything we do know from the Bible or from history. Now, my aim this season is to write perhaps three Advent poems on the wife of Pontius Pilate and to tell you the story as I'm going to reconstruct it behind the little we know from history and from the Bible about Claudia Procula, as she was known. So the wife of Pontius Pilate this week, part one, the wife of Pontius Pilate hid her trembling hands and did what she had done a dozen times before.

Her husband's deadly crimes against the Jews had made her face well known and hated every place where she might go in Palestine. And so she wore a veil. The fine apparel of the court she laid aside and wore the common grade of clothing women wore who worked in shops.

And there, unseen, she lurked around the edges of the crowd and put her hands beneath the shroud that lay across her face and fell in simple folds. No one could tell she trembled there. Or that behind the veil stood Claudia, the kind and gentle wife of Pilate, bold and daring, as she might behold perhaps the teacher of the Jews once more and hear from him some news to still her fearful heart.

This time, because of Pilate's gruesome crime, there was a tension in the air and people wondered if and where the Lord would speak his mind about it. Claudia had gone without her royal meals three days and kept her secret vigil as she wept herself to sleep each night since she had heard of the atrocity. As much now as she feared to hear what he might say, she lingered near enough to listen if he spoke.

At last, one voice dared speak and broke the angry silence of the crowd. Good teacher, some of us have vowed revenge on Pilate, and we do believe it is with justice to. My brother and his wife three days ago were slaughtered by the craze of Pilate's bloody power, and they were not the only ones like clay, he trampled them beneath a horde of soldiers, slit their throats and poured their blood in mockery upon the altar of our God.

We don therefore ourselves with robes of truth and righteousness and pledge our youth and zeal to overthrow this pawn of Rome and sweep away like dawn the dark of night his house. Tell us, should we now fear Tiberius and all the wrath of Rome? What do you make of men who make a brew of sheep and human blood and pour it out to God like holy gore? Or do you think, good master, that these Galilean sin was at the root of their demise and brought all this from God that Pilate wrought? She stood like stone and listened to her own death sentence there and knew that he was right, that Pilate killed the Galilean flock and spilled their blood for nothing but his own disgust for Jewish flesh and bone. But Claudia was stunned to hear the man ask Jesus if the mere sin of his family had brought all this from God, as if the thought that God could possibly ordain such things was thinkable, the pain, the grief, the wickedness.

And so she waited for the Lord to show this crowd that God cannot be found behind a wicked plot, as if the sin of Pilate could be punishment from God. Or would be more than Pilate's own design. She watched to see the Lord assign a proper guilt and say, go fight the man for your revenge is right.

The silence lengthened as the Lord looked out upon the crowd. And toward the place where Claudia stood by. For one brief instant, eye to eye, they met.

At least it seemed to her that he could see as if there were no veil at all. And then he said, do you think these who now lay dead were sinners since they suffered so and died this way? I tell you, no. But you, unless you will repent, must suffer to the same extent.

These words struck Pilate's wife with such a moral force that she lost all touch with crowd and time and Christ. She felt as if a world where Jesus dwelt had opened shocking to her eyes and God till now was in disguise. And sin was small and self was great and justice was a balanced hate.

But now there lodged this arrow in her soul from Jesus bow begin, he seemed to say, with this, the lot at which to be amazed is not that some have died in pain and shed their blood, but that you are not dead. Let wonder fill you daily that the judgment has not lingered at your door. You take another breath, a gift you

don't deserve, and death delays its final blow at this now marvel, Claudia, and kiss the mercy of each passing hour while you escape his raging power.

All sin is serious, not small. And yes, the Lord God governs all how much time passed. She didn't know.

The sun had set a golden glow, made all the rocks burn orange on the western side. The crowd was gone. She sat in peace, though all her world had been thrown down and kindly hurled into the sea by Jesus word of truth.

Then suddenly she heard emotion, turned and saw the Lord. His face was peaceful now, the sword that shattered all before was gone. Then Jesus spoke, You are no pawn of Rome, whatever a pilot is good, Claudia, though you be his by marriage here today by grace, you have become my own.

My face, you will not see again until the night before I die. He will once more make Jewish blood to flow and then no more. He does not know the greatness of God's work and this through all his sin and cowardice.

But you be strong, your holy dreams are not in vain, and though it seems you will have lost your husband and your Lord. Trust in the unseen hand of God. I now declare by oath and blood that you will have them both.

Come, children, take your fire and light this advent candle one for bright and blazing is our hope and deep desire that all the world will leap to know the truth that Christ destroys false worlds that he might fill with joys to know the truth that massacres might be forgiven and one who errs a thousand times may find at last that all his horrid sins are cast into the deep. And Christ, by grace, has made his massacre into a place of life where even those who scorned his face may be with life adorned.

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