

Pilate's Wife - Part 2

by John Piper

The sermon delves into the emotional and spiritual turmoil of Pilate's wife as she grapples with her husband's impending decision regarding Jesus.

Duration: 10:50

Scripture: Isaiah 53:5, Matthew 27:19, Matthew 27:24-25, Luke 23:34, John 1:29, John 19:1-3

Topics: "The Cross", "Atonement"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher vividly describes the scene of Jesus' crucifixion and the emotional turmoil experienced by those who witnessed it. The preacher emphasizes the innocence of Jesus and the injustice of his execution, highlighting the pain and suffering he endured. The preacher also emphasizes the significance of Jesus' sacrifice, suggesting that his death will bring about a profound transformation in the world. Throughout the sermon, the preacher references biblical passages and draws parallels between Jesus' crucifixion and the prophecies of the Old Testament.

Transcript

This is the second in a three-part series of Advent poems on the wife of Pontius Pilate. If you missed the first one, it's online and you can both read it and listen to it this afternoon to get up to speed. And, God willing, there will be one more next week.

So, the wife of Pontius Pilate, part two. She knew that he was teaching in the temple court all week. There had been reports to Pilate that the crowds were seething with unrest and clouds of rage were gathering among the Pharisees and scribes.

His tongue was like a trumpet of a long-forgotten truth, an ancient song of mercy, well concealed within the ordered sounds that scribes had been arranging from the fragments of God's holy masterpiece, the love song of the centuries. She heard the fragments of his word and savored every piece and prayed that Pilate would be moved and made awake from all his slumbers of conceit, from putting peace above the truth and fearing every face that seemed displeased, as if his place as procurator of the state hung by a thread and all the weight of truth a threat. With all her heart she prayed that somehow even part of Jesus' words would penetrate her husband's soul and there create a noble ruler, strong and free, a man of truth and bravery.

Oh, how she wanted to admire the man that once held her desire. The sixth day of the week her sleep was fitful. Pilate rose to keep, she thought, some early rendezvous with Jewish men who chose to do their Roman business in the dark.

If Pilate ever leaves a mark, she mused, it will, if I am right, be how he governed in the night. At last she slept and in her sleep she saw as in a dream a sheep with eyes as deep as ocean caves and caught in thorns among the graves. It made no effort to escape and all the others watched agape while cruel winds turned thorns to spikes with force the way a soldier strikes and all its spotless wool was made like scarlet with its wounds all laid in order as if by design.

Then far beyond the meadow line there stood a shepherd named I Am whose back was turned against the Lamb. She woke with sudden fear that it was Jesus in the dream. She split the curtains in her room and there with torches all around a pair of soldiers stood on either side of Jesus.

Pilate sat legs wide like Roman Caesars splayed before some victim who might now implore for mercy and bestow on small and anxious governors the all-important look of regal power as stable as a summer flower. She knew this look on Pilate's face and that the time was short. Her pace was quick.

She took a charcoal shard and scribbled on a board, Look hard at what you are about to do, my husband, in my head. Are you about to judge a man for fear of his accusers? Pray, give ear, O Pilate, I have suffered much this night because of him. O touch not any hair upon his head, for none in all your realm has spread more good than he.

I have it in a dream that he will bear the sin of wicked men and is the Lamb of God, but how will God not damn the man that puts his son to death? She rang the servant, took a breath and said, Take this at once and give it to the governor. I live and by my life do swear no harm will come to you. Let no alarm upon his face deter you from this charge.

Now go and bring me some reply from Pilate's lips. She took the servant's arm and whispered, Look in Pilate's eye when he has read the board and say, The mistress calls him Lord. She knelt and prayed, O God, if it is possible that Pilate quit his cowardice and risk his throne to speak the truth and stand alone against the enemies of Christ and not one good be sacrificed, then grant him courage, Lord, to stand.

If not, then do what you have planned. In half an hour he returned. My mistress, Pilate said, I learned some twenty years ago how much to listen to my wife and such fond counsel is the reason I am deaf to her desires.

Tell my good wife that dreams are fickle things and if her mind again sprouts wings and flies away from reason, then perhaps she should perch like a wren among the branches of a tree and chirp her little prophecy into the wind where it belongs. With tears she smiled and said, The wrongs you carry are well said, good friend. I thank you.

You may go. And tend your marriage well. You see where it can end.

When he was gone, she split her royal gown in two and fell in sobs upon her bed. So well do you reward me. Twenty years of marriage, she punches Pilate.

Tears, my daily tears you feed me, lest I thirst for something sweet, some blessed embrace. It is a strange device for keeping me. And such a price we pay.

I thought perhaps the Lord had meant that we would be restored. I thought that was his oath. But now it seems I lose you both.

Then suddenly there was a great commotion in the hall. The hate spilled into the praetorium. Six hundred soldiers pressed to come into the great hall just outside the room where Claudia had tried to save the Christ.

She tied her gown, ran through the door and started down the stairs, but stopped as Pilate grabbed her by the arm. Let go, she jabbed him in the side. What's going on down there? Let go, she screamed.

It's gone beyond what you would want to see. It's not for women. Come with me.

She jerked free from his hold and ran down to the floor and saw the man she knew was Jesus, but would not have recognized. The air was hot with sweat and breath. The soldiers roared with laughter every time the Lord was struck.

His eyes were swollen shut. He couldn't see from where the butt of one spear or the next would come to crush his rib or smash his thumb or knock his breath away. His hair was matted, scarlet, woven there among the thorns, half sunk inside his head from being struck.

She spied at last his back and almost fell faint to the floor. What means in hell had they devised to grind his flesh like that? And now, as if to thresh his skin were not enough, they made sport of his holy soul and flayed his tender heart with blasphemies. We hear you are a prophet.

Please, make known from whom this message comes and what's the point and if it plumbs the depths of God. The soldier stood behind and sank the sharpened wood tip of his javelin the length of one long finger in the strength remaining of the Savior's thigh. He gasped and fell.

The woman's cry made every soldier turn. She rushed between the ranks and as they hushed, she fell beside the body of the Lord and wept the tears of love that she had held so long and laid his head upon her lap and made a bow as if to kiss. But no, she stopped and listened to the low and almost breathless words.

And then she lay his head down once again upon the marble floor, stood, turned, and climbed the steps where Pilate burned with rage. Well, what sweet nothings did your Jesus say, my dear? I bid you tell me what he whispered there. His blood-stained wife paused on the stair and looked in Pilate's shallow eyes and said to him, When Jesus dies today, the world we know will be no more.

Now wait and you will see. And I will tell you what he said when he's long risen from the dead. The light of candle two is dim like love and hope in many grim and dying marriages.

What light lay on the floor that awful night in the praetorium? Was it the final spark of life once lit by love now gone? Or was it more? Let every husband ask, therefore, and every wife, Which is the true and faithful view? Is candle two the fading light of day withdrawn? Or is this flame the light of dawn?

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