

Pilate's Wife - Part 3

by John Piper

The sermon highlights the importance of faithfulness and love in marriage, using the story of Pilate's wife as an example of God's design for grief and pain.

Duration: 17:04

Scripture: Psalm 23:4, Proverbs 18:22, Matthew 26:39, Matthew 27:19, Matthew 27:24, Matthew 27:26, Matthew 27:54

Topics: "Divine Power", "Eternal Judgment"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the story of Pilate's wife, Claudia, and her encounter with Jesus. The sermon begins by emphasizing the power of God and how nothing can stand against it, not even death. The preacher then describes how Pilate heard a voice from the dungeon door, indicating that the king was eager for a head of state. Pilate reflects on his past encounter with Jesus, where Claudia tenderly laid Jesus' bloody head on the palace floor. The sermon concludes by mentioning the historical context of Pilate's deposition and his appeal to Tiberius, but notes that we never hear from Pilate again in history.

Transcript

This is the third and last poem on Pilate's wife. We know from history that in 36 AD, Pilate was deposed by Vitellius, the Roman legate in Samaria. He appealed the decision and was sent to Tiberius in Rome.

Tiberius died before he arrived and we never hear from Pilate again in history. And so thus far is history, but we will go farther. Six years had passed since Pilate sold his soul for Caesar's praise and told the crowds, I found no fault in this strange man and therefore I dismiss my right to kill and I retire from petty quarrels.

Do your desire, Jerusalem, I take no side. Let him be flogged and crucified. The contradictions of his mind had multiplied.

And now, more blind than ever to his madness, he was driven like a raging sea to swallow up the Jewish race with hate who threatened to disgrace his rule as treacherous before the emperor. It wasn't more than two months after Pilate dipped his hands in royal water, ripped the truth in shreds and mocked his wife that by his foolishness fresh strife had filled the city. Pilate set five famous shields, a silhouette on each of Caesar in the court of Herod's palace for the sport of seeing Jewish purists rage.

And then, as if there were no sage among his counselors to aggravate the Jews, the stores of treasured offerings that filled the temple vault he took to build a Roman viaduct and set the city in an uproar. He let the frenzy gather force and then, just when the crowds crossed into mobs, he thrust his Roman power brutally and cut the branch of mutiny, but not the root. At last, six years from when he doomed the Christ, his fears were filled and he was ousted by Vitellius, the Roman high command based in the region of Samaria.

It fell above the Jordan plains, high in the mount called Gerizim, so the account that reached the Roman legate in the town of Shechem went. A thin and wild-eyed prophet from the eastern wilderness had come and gathered thousands in the hills with his apocalyptic skills and Pilate saw another chance to strike the Jews and to enhance his reputation with the head of Rome. His soldiers left for dead a thousand simple people on the hills of Gerizim and dawn brought down the wrath of Rome.

How wrong was Pilate to assume that long and hostile conflict with the Jews was how a petty ruler woos the tribute of Vitellius. Such blindness bred by hate. And thus the procurator Pilate fell from his small height and found the spell he thought he cast ten years now chained around his neck.

What pride remained gave him the nerve to make appeal to Rome and so with charge and seal and ten sad years of discontent and crime to Caesar he was sent. For six years Pilate's wife held fast to Christ. She knew that he had passed from death to life and that the skin which once had torn and bloodied bin was raised in glory from the dead.

She spoke with him upon her bed as Pilate fitful lay beside her through the night. She often cried herself to sleep with prayers that Christ would keep her true and unenticed from better men. She wept for all the Jews that he had killed the fall of every woman man and child and would have died when he reviled the Lord except that Jesus came each time and by his word and name embraced her heaving soul and fed her hungry heart with truth and said I made and rule the world dear one and all my perfect plans are done.

I do not call you slave but friend. I will be with you to the end and not one vow that I have made will waver or remain unpaid. With this before her every day she kept her covenant to stay with Pilate and his loveless sin till death and be his wife and win she hoped and prayed his twisted mind and hateful heart and eyes so blind they could not tell the difference between the night and day.

What sense the women used to say is there in living with this man. We dare you Claudia though he be rich and powerful there is no hitch unbreakable and this one has been broken just as surely as the man has failed in every vow he made. You are not bound to plow for this man like a heifer now nor lie beneath him like a sow to satisfy the lust of swine.

No Roman law has this design nor any Jewish ordinance that you should keep your vow. So when this foolish faithfulness that keeps you in the bed where Pilate sleeps and Claudia would answer them. Oh women of Jerusalem you speak as if there were no God.

As if there were no tender rod to comfort me and lead me through the darkest valley of my few and painful years. As if there's not nor should be higher aims than what you've dreamed for man and wife. As if the path were safe nor any cliff be close or any bitter wind be in my face.

Nor I be sinned against or feel the constant grief so long my death would be relief. How many women do you give such shallow counsel? As I live oh women of Jerusalem who counseled us I pity them. As for

myself there is one love one covenant one vow above all married bliss or pain.

And I once held the bloody price on my own lap and heard him dying say to me enough to show the way a covenant is kept. Now go and learn what God designs to show when Pilate crucifies his wife and she is faithful all her life. Tomorrow we will leave for Rome he said and you may stay at home.

I want to go alone she said. What do you want to see the head of Pilate on a platter in the Roman court? Do you begin to dream of my complete demise in Rome and there to find a prize when I am gone? She listened and she said I would be present when and if they take your life. And I would gladly hold your head on my own lap not on a platter in the Roman court.

It's never been once in my mind to profit through your death. But I have reason to believe that you will gain more in Rome than some new core of soldiers to command. May I please come with you? Not knowing why he gave consent.

Tomorrow we will reach the coast and then by sea make journey to the Roman court. There Tiberius exhort to overturn the ruling of Vitellius and put above that legate all his royal power. Then we will watch him cower.

Before they reached the western side of Italy, Tiberius had died. Caligula ruled in his place. A madman who once set his face towards Spain and made his soldiers fill with seashells all their helmets.

Till the boats were full. Then he proclaimed a triumph over Neptune shamed by mortal man brought to his knees though he be great the god of seas. Caligula had set a snare at ports and every thoroughfare to Rome.

Lest any chief or shrewd pretender to his power intrude and threaten his authority. So Pilate without bond or plea was seized at Puteoli when his ship put in. And Caesar's men with bludgeons boarded it and took the procurator bound with hook and leather cord.

Then paused and said with threatening voice. Is any led by this man here? Is anyone a faithful subject to this son of Caesar's wrath? Is any man or woman here a fool? A fan of Pontius Pilate? Speak if you are loyal to the man. Be true and perish with your little king.

The servants all stood shuddering and looking at the deck. I am. The voice was Claudius.

What ma'am? The soldier asked amazed. I said I am. You asked.

Is any led by him? Is any loyal to the king? I am. He grinned. Then you shall go and die with him.

They bound her at his side and put around their wrists a single cord and led them under chain and sword to wait the whim of Caesar for their fate. And there on dungeon floor in stench and darkness Pilate spoke. You didn't have to bear this yoke.

You could be free from prison and from me. Why did you speak and stand there fearless like a queen? Because I'm married to a king. The pause that followed lengthened into hours.

And Pilate pondered all his powers compared to hers. Then quietly at first the end of cruelty ran down his craggy face in tears. And then the cold and loveless years with Claudia broke open like a flood.

And through the shattered dyke of pride with shaking sobs, there flowed a reservoir of hate. The load and weight of joyless arrogance until the stones were wet. Then once he caught his breath.

He said. I'm sorry, Claudia. He fled back on the wings of memory six years and saw her tenderly lay Jesus bloody head again upon the palace floor and then ascend the stairs.

And so once more he asked when he was on the floor. What did he say? The one whose head lay in your lap, the Christ. He said.

No, Claudia. You may not kiss me now. It is not pure.

Save this for him. And love him as I love you now. One covenant above all others.

Here I make with you today and show you what a true and faithful marriage is. And how till death to keep a sacred vow. You think you've lost your husband and your Lord? No more than death can stand against my father's power.

Now go. And learn what God designs to show when pilot crucifies his wife. And she is faithful all her life.

Go, Claudia. And keep your truth. Remember.

I have made an oath. The dungeon door groaned. Opening.

Closing. And pilot heard a voice. The king is eager for a head of steak.

Is pilot ready for the date? They stood together and embraced. The first unhurried love and chaste that they had known for 20 years. She looked into his eyes through tears and saw them deep as ocean caves.

Dear Claudia, he said. The graves where I have lived and caused your pains are gone. And only one remains.

And I am ready now. You sacrificed your life. And I have seen the Christ.

I know now what our marriage meant. Farewell. Your life.

Has been well. Oh, blazing candle three. Come.

Shine your burning light on God's design for grief and pain in holding fast the covenant. And prove how vast the power of such faithfulness to show the suffering Christ and bless the married blind. Until they see what married love was meant to be.

When they have learned to keep their troth. And measure love. By blood.

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