

Suffered Under Pontius Pilate

by Mariano Di Gangi

The sermon explores the trial of Jesus before Pontius Pilate, emphasizing themes of truth, justice, and the fulfillment of prophecy in His suffering and crucifixion.

Duration: 31:38

Scripture: John 18:28

Topics: "Jesus", "Redemption", "Truth"

Description

Mariano Di Gangi explores the trial of Jesus before Pontius Pilate, emphasizing the political and moral complexities surrounding the event. He highlights Pilate's struggle between his disdain for the Jewish people and his fear of losing his position, ultimately leading to the unjust condemnation of Jesus. The sermon underscores the significance of Jesus' declaration that His kingdom is not of this world, and the choice made by the crowd to free Barabbas instead of the innocent Christ. Di Gangi connects this narrative to the heart of the Gospel, illustrating how Jesus' suffering and death were for the sake of humanity's redemption. He calls on believers to witness the truth of the Gospel boldly, despite societal pressures.

Transcript

Reading from the Gospel according to John, God's written word, as we find it at the 18th chapter and beginning with verse 28. Hear now the reading of this portion of God's written word. Then the Jews led Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor.

By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness, the Jews did not enter the palace. They wanted to be able to eat the Passover. So Pilate came out to them and asked, What charges are you bringing against this man? If he were not a criminal, they replied, we would not have handed him over to you.

Pilate said, take him yourselves and judge him by your own law. But we have no right to execute anyone, the Jews objected. This happened so that the words Jesus had spoken, indicating the kind of death he was going to die, would be fulfilled.

Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus, and asked him, Are you the king of the Jews? Is that your own idea, Jesus asked, or did others talk to you about me? Am I a Jew, Pilate replied? It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me. What is it you have done? Jesus said, My

kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews.

But now my kingdom is from another place. You are a king then, Pilate said. 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.

And with this he went out again to the Jews and said, I find no basis for a charge against him. But it is your custom for me to release to you one prisoner at the time of the Passover. Do you want me to release the king of the Jews? They shouted back, No, not him.

Give us Barabbas. Now Barabbas had taken part in a rebellion for hundreds and hundreds of years in Latin, in Greek, in hundreds of languages around the world. The Apostles' Creed has been recited as an expression of the faith of the Christian Church.

It has antiquity. It has universality. Its framework is that of the Holy Trinity.

It begins with a reference to Him, God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. It continues with a reference to Jesus Christ, our Lord. It concludes with a reference to the Holy Spirit, who is the author of the forgiveness of our sins by applying the merits of Jesus to our needy souls, who creates new life, who builds together the unity and community of faith, and who at the last will raise our mortal bodies from the dust.

Embedded in that confession of faith, with its reference to God the Father, Jesus Christ, His Son, and the Holy Spirit, we also find references to two people, the Virgin Mary, in whom Jesus was conceived by the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit, and a Roman governor by the name of Pontius Pilate. For hundreds of years and hundreds of languages, men and women around the world have joined together in saying, He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried. Who was Pontius Pilate anyhow? He was the man who was appointed by the Emperor Tiberius in the year 26 A.D. to the southern region of Palestine.

He was to represent Caesar in southern Palestine. That appointment was certainly no plumb, because southern Palestine then, as today, was at the center of storm. It was a turbulent territory.

It was agitated by political strife, religious strife, guerrilla strife, and Pilate was ill-suited to deal with such a delicate, controversial situation. On the one hand, he despised the people whom he had been sent to govern. He detested them.

He didn't waste any opportunity to rub it in that he was the representative of a supreme country and they were his subjugated subjects. But if he despised the people he was sent to govern, he also dreaded them, because if they filed a complaint with Caesar at Rome, and if they presented even the scantiest evidence that he was guilty of misrule, that he was incapable of maintaining law and order, even if he cared nothing for justice, he would lose his job and be exiled to the fringes of Roman society. On the one hand, he despised them.

On the other hand, he dreaded them. And this attitude of his shows up in several of his actions, which are noted in the pages of the New Testament. On one occasion, he allowed pagan, heathen Roman soldiers to bring their images into the sacred shrine of Israel so that the people became greatly offended and hotly

incensed at his insensitive display of idolatry.

On another occasion, he raided the treasury of the temple and misappropriated funds to build an aqueduct, and those who dared to protest were clubbed into submission, Russian style. On another occasion, he ordained the slaughter of Galilean pilgrims and mingled their blood with the blood of the sacrifices that they had just offered to God. And now he turns up in the Passion narrative in the 18th chapter of the Gospel according to John.

Let it never be said that in the crucifixion of Jesus we have grounds for anti-Semitism. Let it be noted right at the very outset of the Passion narrative that speaks of the suffering of our Lord that a Gentile, no less than the Jews, participated. That a pagan, along with those who followed a misleading hierarchy among the Jews, shared the guilt and complicity in the death of Jesus Christ.

And now the Apostle John recalls the dialogue that went on and the feelings that were manifested in the 18th and 19th chapters of his Gospel. And the first picture that he sets before us is that of Pontius Pilate and the prosecutors. Jesus has been betrayed, arrested, bound.

He's been subjected to cross-examination by Annas and Caiaphas who were part of the hierarchy. He's been denied by Peter. He's been stricken by an insensitive soldier.

And now he is brought to Pontius Pilate. But the Jewish prosecutors who have already condemned Jesus have their scruples. They do not want to enter the residence of the Gentile governor of southern Palestine because entering under the roof of that pagan would contaminate them and being defiled, they would not be able to celebrate the Passover.

Scrupling about external defilement by entering under the roof of a Gentile and not mindful at all of the pollution and contamination of heart since they were determined to kill the Lord of Glory. They make their approach to Pilate with the prisoner they have already condemned. And Pilate asks them a straightforward question.

What charges are you bringing against this man? The Romans had a set procedure for charging someone with a crime. You had to apply to accuse. You had to take an oath that you were not motivated by hatred or by envy.

Then you had to lay the charge. And then there was opportunity to bring forth witnesses to substantiate the charge or to speak on behalf of the accused. None of these legal niceties was observed in what happened in the case of Jesus.

Pilate asks, what charges are you bringing against him? The prosecutors answer with a tinge of arrogance blended with insolence and impudence. Are you challenging our integrity? Take our word for it. If he were not a criminal, we wouldn't have brought him to you.

Why did you bring him to me? Well, because according to the current state of affairs, we can condemn, but we cannot execute. You as the representative of Caesar at Rome are the only one who's got authority to do that. We have made our decision.

We want you now to comply with our condemnation and rubber stamp the order for him to be killed. If he were not an evildoer, would we have brought him to you? We don't need any specific charges. We have branded him as an evildoer, and that's sufficient.

How many witnesses could have been brought to testify on the contrary? The hungry whom he had fed, the blind to whom he had restored sight, the deaf whose ears he had unstopped, the dumb whose tongues he had unloosed, the outcasts whom he had welcomed with the warmth of love that forgives, the dead whom he had raised from the dust, the lepers whom he had cleansed from their scourge. These would have testified had they been given the opportunity that he was not a malefactor but a benefactor in the fullest sense of the word. But their presence was not called for, and their voice remained unheard.

And so Pilate, dealing with the prosecutors, becomes involved in the case of Jesus even though he has tried to avoid it, saying, You have made the accusation. You have not substantiated it to my satisfaction. You take him, and you judge him according to your own laws.

Don't involve me. But he is involved. And what happens is that this way, Jesus is handed over by his own into the hands of the Gentiles who will not stone him as the Jews would have done but who will crucify him as the Romans were wont to do.

And so was fulfilled the prophecy that Jesus had made, that he would be betrayed into the hands of the hierarchy and that they in turn would so despise him and treat him with contempt as to turn him over to the Gentiles, rejecting him, in order that the Gentiles, through their form of punishment reserved for abject criminals and slaves, would crucify him. And all this happened that it might be fulfilled what Jesus had said concerning the kind of death he was going to die. Pilate and the prosecutors.

The second picture that John sets down for all time to look at is that which has to do with Pontius Pilate and the prisoner. A very dramatic encounter. A very momentous interview.

Here is Jesus in his lowly majesty confronting one with the haughtiness of military might that has imposed its peace on the Mediterranean world. And Pilate asks questions, and questions are given to him in return. Pilate says to Jesus, Are you the king of the Jews? Jesus counters with another question, Is that your own idea to question me about my kingship, or have they, my accusers, spoken to you about me in those terms? Am I a Jew? Pilate replies.

What do I know about the intrigue and the infighting that goes on among your people? They have handed you over to me. I'm stuck with you. What is it that you have done? Are you really a king? Are you the revolutionary they make you out to be? Are you really a threat to Caesar? And the declaration of Jesus comes forth, sublime as it is simple, My kingdom is not of this world.

If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews, but now my kingdom is from another place. When Jesus says that his kingdom is not of this world, he is not saying, My kingdom is a cloud nine kind of operation that is totally irrelevant to this world. Not at all.

It is he who has told his followers that they must be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, that they are to be in the midst of the insipid mix that is our society, that they are to be light shining in the midst of darkness. He is not for isolation. He is for involvement.

He is not saying, My kingdom has no relevance to this world and its problems. What he is saying is that the origin of my kingdom and the laws of my kingdom and the subjects of my kingdom and the extension of my kingdom and the ultimate destiny of my kingdom are not in any way derived from or subject to the sinful order of society that is called the world. It owes its origin and derives its standards and looks for the fulfillment of its destiny from above and not upon the earth.

My authority to rule does not come from people. It comes from my Father. My subjects are those who listen to the truth, believe it, and obey it.

My ideal is not domination, but diakonia, service, ministry to others. My kingdom does not make conquest by the edge of the sword, but by the power of my Spirit, who changes the hearts and minds and wills of men and women so that they enter into the kingdom as new persons. My kingdom is not of this world.

My kingdom is from above. And then the Lord adds these significant words. I am a king.

For this reason I was born. For this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. And everyone on this side of truth listens to me.

I have been born into the world. I have come into the world having been at the right hand of God from all eternity. And I have come into the world with this mission, to make known the truth.

Do you want to know the truth about God? You don't have to guess. You have to listen to what Jesus says. Do you want to know the truth about man and woman, as creatures and as sinners? Listen to Jesus.

He speaks the truth. Do you want to know how we can get rid of guilt and become children of God? Listen to Jesus. He'll tell you the truth about that.

Do you want to know how to resist temptation and lead a life of godliness and righteousness? Do you want to know how to obtain victory over the last enemy, which is death? Do you want to know how to live a life for the glory of God and the good of your fellow man? Listen to Jesus. He has come to speak the truth. His word is truth.

He himself is truth. For this was he born. For this has he come into the world.

And all who are members of his kingdom, all who are subjects to Christ, listen to him, believe, obey his truth. And so it is that Jesus witnesses a good confession before Pontius Pilate, and in that encounter makes known his claim to kingship. Are you and I able to witness a good confession before a world that puts questions to us? Are you and I able to give an answer to anyone that asks us concerning the hope that is in us? Can we do it with meekness? Can we do it with integrity? Can we do it with honesty? Can we do it with fidelity? As he witnessed a good confession before Pontius Pilate, so must we in front of the world that we confront today.

The final picture that is given by John in the words of our text has to do with Pontius Pilate and the people. Pilate leaves the prisoner inside the praetorium and goes out to speak to the people. He's dealt with the prosecutors.

He's dealt with the prisoner. Now he deals with the people. And as he turns from Jesus to go out to the crowd that is being manipulated by an unscrupulous hierarchy, he shrugs his shoulders and says, You talk about truth? What is truth anyway? Gullible people who abdicate their critical faculties find truth everywhere, in everything, all the time.

And they end up in contradiction and confusion. Cynical, skeptical people profess that they do not find truth in anything, at any time, anywhere, and so end up in the void of nihilism and on the edge of despair. Frederick Godet, a great French exegete and student of scripture, says, Pilate's exclamation is not the expression of a soul eager for the truth, nor of a heart in despair which has long sought truth in vain.

It is the profession of a frivolous skepticism. And so with a shrug of the shoulders, What is truth anyway? Who knows what it is? He goes out to the people. Pilate tells the people that the prisoner is innocent.

There is no valid charge that has yet been brought up against him. There is no substantiated charge. There is no evidence available.

And yet, Pilate is unwilling to release the prisoner because he has sensed that the climate out there has begun to change and to shift against the prisoner. The manipulation of the mindless mob has now reached its zenith, and he knows that if he would release the prisoner, believing him to be innocent, the people would file an adverse report against him for tolerating a seditionist, a rebellious man. And so he would lose his prestige and position.

And yet he tried one more expedient. The man is innocent. He should be released.

I haven't got the moral courage to release him. I'm going to let the people make that change by giving them a very obvious choice. On the one hand, Jesus, king of the Jews.

On the other hand, Barabbas, a robber, a man of violence, a man involved in murder. Surely the people will make the right choice. They will choose Jesus.

They will leave Barabbas condemned, and they will get me off the hook. And the unexpected choice takes place. And the rabble look to the robber, and they choose Barabbas, and Jesus goes to his death.

Jesus is crucified, and Barabbas is set free. How important it was to establish the fact that Jesus was innocent, for the lamb of God that was to be offered up upon the altar of sacrifice had to be without blemish and without spot. How significant that even in the faintest foreshadowing of it, the just dies, and the unjust is released.

This is the very heart of the gospel, that Barabbas goes free, and Jesus dies in his stead. Isn't this the heart of the gospel the way the Apostle Paul proclaims it in writing to the Corinthians? For in the wind-up of 2 Corinthians chapter 5 he said, God made him who knew no sin to be treated as a sinner in our place, that we in his place should be considered righteous in the presence of God. He is bound, and we go free.

He dies, and we live, all because the just was willing to die for the unjust. This, then, is what we understand when we use that phrase in the Apostles' Creed, that he suffered under Pontius Pilate, a man guided by expediency, a man who knew what was right, but was willing to do wrong. God grant that you and I may be so convinced of the truth of the gospel that we shall witness a good confession before the world, no matter what the cost.

Let us pray. Spirit of the living God, as you have inspired the writing of this text, so be pleased to illumine our minds that beyond the chief priests and beyond that cowardly pagan and beyond the mindless mob, we should see Jesus, King of kings, Lord of lords. Help us to be numbered among his subjects, men and women who listen to the truth, men and women who believe the truth, men and women who willingly and lovingly obey it.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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