

Choices Week 2: Pilate

This is week two of our series we are calling **"Choices...to follow or not."** These are stories of people all throughout the Bible who have been **confronted with what God was doing in the world.** In some cases they are crossing paths with a representative of God, like a **prophet** in the Old Testament or an **apostle** in the New Testament. **In other cases they collide with God himself.**

Last week, we saw the rich man collide with Jesus and decide not to follow and leave sad. This week, we will look at another person who met Jesus, Pilate. Whatever the case, the people we will meet had a choice to follow God, take the path he was leading them to, or go their own way. It is a choice between two things, what God wants to do in them and through them in this world, or what they want to do.

Before Pilate, we want to take a look at a person who had to choose to follow what God wanted for her and how God wanted to use her. She might be the least like Pilate of any person I know. Pastor Julie come on up. (Interview)

1. You had a path in mind for your life and you weren't really thinking that the poor in Uganda were a part of that path. Tell us about the choice that you made to follow Jesus to Uganda.

Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea at this time. He kept control with brutality. He was kind of a **B lister** in the power structure of Rome. **Judea was not the most popular place** to be deployed as a Roman soldier or politician. **He was always insecure and ready to please his bosses back in Rome.**

Jesus' trial before Caiaphas ended in the early hours of the morning. Then he was taken to the headquarters of the Roman governor. His accusers didn't go inside because it would defile them, and they wouldn't be allowed to celebrate the Passover.²⁹ So Pilate, the governor, went out to them and asked, "What is your charge against this man?"³⁰ "We wouldn't have handed him over to you if he weren't a criminal!" they retorted.³¹ "Then take him

away and judge him by your own law," Pilate told them. "Only the Romans are permitted to execute someone," the Jewish leaders replied. ³² (This fulfilled Jesus' prediction about the way he would die.^[9]) ³³ Then Pilate went back into his headquarters and called for Jesus to be brought to him. "Are you the king of the Jews?" he asked him. ³⁴ Jesus replied, "Is this your own question, or did others tell you about me?" ³⁵ "Am I a Jew?" Pilate retorted. "Your own people and their leading priests brought you to me for trial. Why? What have you done?"³⁶ Jesus answered, "My Kingdom is not an earthly kingdom. If it were, my followers would fight to keep me from being handed over to the Jewish leaders. But my Kingdom is not of this world." ³⁷ Pilate said, "So you are a king?" Jesus responded, ³⁸ "What is truth?" Pilate asked. Then he went out again to the people and told them, "He is not guilty of any crime. ³⁹ But you have a custom of asking me to release one prisoner each year at Passover. Would you like me to release this 'King of the Jews'?"⁴⁰ But they shouted back, "No! Not this man. We want Barabbas!" (Barabbas was a revolutionary.) John 18:28-40

The rest of the story is that finally Pilate has **choose between** giving the Jewish leaders what they want, and possibly what his bosses in Rome would want, **and doing what is right and just**. But really, it **goes deeper** than that. **It is another life colliding with Jesus where a decision to follow or align one's life with the life that Jesus was living**. That's the deeper choice. In a way, these two choices are connected. By sentencing Jesus to death, Pilate is saying **no to justice, but also saying no to following Jesus**.

The worst kept secret is how this story ends. Pilate **finally stops going back and forth** with the Jewish leaders, trying to get them to do their own dirty work, knowing full well that Jesus did not commit any real crime. He condemns Jesus to death on a cross.

So how did he come to this decision? What lead him to choose to say no to justice and no to Jesus?

How we choose and what we choose tells something about us. **What does Pilate's choice tell us about him?**

1. He doesn't understand real power.

Pilate does a lot of what I would call "flexing". **Flexing is when you give a visual demonstration of the power you have.** This is also called a "gun show."

I was watching **basketball**, and this player dribbled right through the middle of the defense, jumped up and slammed the ball right over top a defender. As he lands, he lets out a yell and flexes his arm and chest muscles. **This is a way of saying I just dominated you because I am more powerful.**

In boxing, there is always this weird flex-off after the fighters weigh in. They need to check to see if they are in the same weight class. As they finish standing in their underwear they both flex simultaneously for the camera. **Both fighters are trying to demonstrate** that they are stronger and tougher and will win the fight.

The guy sitting behind a huge desk, while the person across the desk has a tiny chair, that's flexing.

Dad and big brother meeting daughter's date at the door, that's flexing.

Pilate does a lot of flexing in front of Jesus. Look further in chapter 19.
⁸ When Pilate heard this, he was more frightened than ever. (When you are nervous about how you are being perceived, you flex.)⁹ **He took Jesus back into the headquarters again and asked him, "Where are you from?" But Jesus gave no answer. ¹⁰ "Why don't you talk to me?" Pilate demanded. "Don't you realize that I have the power to release you or crucify you?" 19:8-10**

Do you see what Pilate is doing? He's flexing; he's letting Jesus know that he has the power and that **Jesus needs to make nice with the Jewish leader**, because the back and forth dance is about to be over.

There is probably no one in Palestine who could win a flex-off with Pilate. He is used to intimidation working for him. **But he never tried it with Jesus.**

Then Jesus said, "You would have no power over me at all unless it were given to you from above. So the one who handed me over to you has the greater sin."

Then Pilate tried to release him, but the Jewish leaders shouted, **"If you release this man, you are no 'friend of Caesar 18:11**

Jesus is saying you're not doing anything. I'm doing something here and I'm allowing you to play a small part in it. Whatever you think you are doing is only going to happen because I let it happen. I could stop all of this right now if I want to.

Pilate gets right to the point of power with this question. **"Are you the king of the Jews?" he asked him. 18:33b**

Jesus answered, "My Kingdom is not an earthly kingdom. If it were, my followers would fight to keep me from being handed over to the Jewish leaders. But my Kingdom is not of this world." ³⁷ Pilate said, "So you are a king?" 18:36

Pilate must discern if he is a political king or a messianic king of the Jewish faith. Is he a rival or not? Jesus makes it clear that his kingdom is not of this world and that the behavior of his followers is proof. In other words, as far as politics and the power that Pilate is interested in keeping, Jesus is not your rival. That's one thing you don't need to worry about.

What about the power Pilate thinks he has over whether Jesus lives or dies. Here's how he tries to demonstrate that power.

Crucifixion was not really for the condemned, it was for the community to see Rome's response to being crossed or challenged. This whole show begins with flogging and parading him back in front of the people. Then Pilate had Jesus flogged with a lead-tipped whip. John 19:1 You see now Jesus, this is only the beginning of what I am capable of.

Pilate went outside again and said to the people, "I am going to bring him out to you now, but understand clearly that I find him not guilty." ⁵ Then Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. And Pilate said, "Look, here is the man!" John 19:4-5

Pilate presents him as humbled and properly punished. He is clearly been brought to **submission** to both Pilate and Rome therefore he presents no threat in Pilate's eyes.

He is wrong about the purpose of power. It is to serve and set free, not to control and subdue.

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. Mark 10:45 This is the purpose of real power, not to intimidate, subdue, and dominate.

Pride goes before destruction, and haughtiness before a fall. Proverbs 16:18 Those who flex when confronted with Jesus end up looking foolish. Jesus is humble about his power. He doesn't need to bring down angels as a way of winning the flex-off with Pilate. Pilate is all pride and, therefore, he will one day longer have this position and, even more importantly, he will stand before Jesus again. Let's see him flex then.

This is where Pilate and each one of us is heading. **For the Scriptures say, "As surely as I live," says the LORD, "every knee will bend to me, and every tongue will declare allegiance to God."** Romans 14:11 **Already kneeling good, standing and flexing bad.**

How about you? Do you really understand power? "I got this." Do you really?

✓ America...the church.

Here is the second thing we learn about Pilate from the choices he makes. **2. Attempts to remain neutral with Jesus are pointless.**

Pilate is trying to walk this line of not taking sides between the Jewish authorities and Jesus. He's trying to find a way to appease or silence the Jewish leaders and not convict and kill an innocent man. **If the Jewish leaders keep yelling, or Jewish people rise up, then it will not look good** in the eyes of the bosses back in Rome.

To say, "if you aren't for me, you are against me" is arrogant unless you are the Christ, the promised Son of God.

Jesus says...“There are two paths, follow me and I will transform you and use you in what I am doing in this world, expanding my Kingdom and authority, or go your own way and be your own king.”

Jesus is forcing his hand to be with him or against him. The washing his hands and then giving the sentence is nonsense. It's like the kid I knew in Columbus who said, “If they would sell me the beer at 16, then I wouldn't have to steal it out of the back door at Krogers.” No, it doesn't work that way. **Either you are obeying the law or you are not,** whether someone else supports your or makes it possible.

I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! ¹⁶ So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. Revelations 3:15-16 **Pilate wants to be bath water,** not a refreshing glass of ice water or a steaming cup of coffee. **Pick a side Pilate;** you can't have it both ways. **You can have King Jesus, eternal life starting now, not to mention justice, or you can have your political career last a little longer.**

3. When we are in his presence we must lean in. This is when you don't know what God is saying to you but you know he is near.

Pilate said, “So you are a king?” Jesus responded, “You say I am a king. Actually, I was born and came into the world to **testify to the truth.** All who love the truth recognize that what I say is true.” ³⁸ “What is truth?” Pilate asked. 18:37-38

Pilate refused to listen when Jesus offered to tell him about truth. Jesus **opened the door to a real conversation,** but Pilate slammed it with the lamest way to dodge the question. This is what **philosophy students learn as a freshman.** that makes them the most annoying person on campus.

Pilate is saying, “He is king of the Jews but he's not my king bringing truth to me. Caesar is my king and he speaks the only truth that I care about because his truth is backed up with an army.”

How often do the Pilates of our world pursue a course of pragmatism and expediency, protecting their own self-interest, using the rhetoric of righteousness, feigning an interest in truth—but when backed into a corner, when pressed to make a decision with social consequences, they crumble? 'What is truth?' is the question you ask when truth is the last thing you want to hear. In the end Pilate is of the 'world' and so represents a system that is filled with darkness. He may intuit the light, as Pilate senses that something is wrong with this verdict, and he may make gestures toward truth, as when Pilate tries to free Jesus. But when the deal-makers arrive, when the pollsters report what it is that will secure the future, all commitments are tossed out like yesterday's newspaper. *Pilate killed Jesus. He did not have the resolve to act on what his instincts were telling him* ('I find no basis for a charge against him.' 18:38). He is a failed leader. Pg. 514

Paul spoke directly to Pilate and people like us when he wrote these words. *For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God.*

²¹ *Yes, they knew God, but they wouldn't worship him as God or even give him thanks. And they began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like. **As a result, their minds became dark and confused.*** Romans 1:20-21

Pilate has everything he needs to begin to open his mind and his heart to Jesus. He just doesn't want to lean into it.

To lean into what God is saying is to **seek** what you have just gotten a small taste of. *But if from there you **seek** the LORD your **God**, you will find him if you **seek** him with all your heart and with all your soul.* Deuteronomy 4:29

Like a blood hound that smells the scent of the missing child on his worn clothes puts his nose to the ground and starts searching for the scent.

*But **seek** first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.* Matthew 6:33

Here's more proof even after condemning Jesus to death that Pilate had gotten a whiff of who Jesus was. And Pilate posted a sign on the cross

that read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."... ²¹ Then the leading priests objected and said to Pilate, "Change it from 'The King of the Jews' to 'He said, I am King of the Jews.'" ²² Pilate replied, "**No, what I have written, I have written.**" 19:19 & 21-22

It was standard practice to have on the person or cross the name of the criminal and the crime that he was convicted of committing. **In this case, it was in three languages** so that anyone who saw, would be able to read, "**King of the Jews.**" This may have been Pilate's way of **sticking it to the Jewish leaders** that the thing they thought was a lie was now indorsed by the Roman government as the reason for which he was crucified. It also seems as if Pilate **doesn't want to be coerced into publishing a lie.**

Afterward Joseph of Arimathea, who had been a secret disciple of Jesus (because he feared the Jewish leaders), asked Pilate for permission to take down Jesus' body. **When Pilate gave permission, Joseph came and took the body away.** V. 38

Again, this is a risky thing to do which could come back to bite him.

So how did it end for this great, powerful man conflicted about Jesus, but still flexing and refusing to lean in to what Jesus was offering?

According to some traditions, the Roman emperor Caligula ordered **Pontius Pilate** to death by execution or suicide. By other accounts, **Pontius Pilate** was sent into exile and committed suicide of his own accord. Some traditions assert that after he committed suicide, his body was thrown into the Tiber River.

He might have lost his life following Jesus, turning his back on his political career. But, in that case, he would have had Jesus even through death. He meets death in a humbling way without Jesus.

Choosing to Follow

✓ Pray "Pilates Prayer."

Jesus help me today to not seek power and the ability to control but rather to seek your kingdom and the opportunity to serve those I want to control. Show me any area of my life where I am not relating to you as my King who

loves me unreservedly. Help me to live these words. "But seek first **his kingdom** and **his righteousness**, and all these things will be given to you as well." Matthew 6:33

Take home your outline or take a picture of the screen.