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# The Disturbing Dream

*“While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent him a message, saying, ‘Have nothing to do with that righteous Man; for last night I suffered greatly in a dream because of Him’”  
(Matthew 27:19).*

Pilate took his wife with him when he made the journey to Jerusalem for the Passover festival. According to *The Acts of Pilate*, an un-inspired, second-century document, his wife was named Procla. For a governor to take his wife with him on a trip was a common enough occurrence. Tacitus said that governors of provinces were permitted to take their wives with them as they visited the different areas under their governance.<sup>1</sup> However, the presence of Pilate’s wife in Jerusalem on this occasion would prove to be troubling to him. She entered into the narrative of our Lord’s trials and received a unique place in the Gospel of Matthew. She provided a piece of the evidence that the righteous Son of God was being crucified.

Haunted by Jesus’ innocence, Pilate was trying to release Him without antagonizing the Jews any further. He had already announced his judgment concerning Jesus, stating that he had found no fault in Him; but that announcement had fallen on deaf ears. Stepping further into the dilemma that he had on his hands, he enlisted the long-standing custom of releasing a prisoner during the Passover season. His thought was that, as long as the Jews saw Jesus labeled as a criminal, they would acquiesce to His release. Pilate had already called for a decision to be made on the one to be released, asking the Jews to decide between Jesus or Barabbas, a notorious criminal. He sat on his judgment seat waiting for

their answer. During that lull, he sat in quiet, fearful, agonizing contemplation.

The perplexing question “What if they ask for Barabbas to be released?” must have been running with thunderous steps through his mind. Suddenly, a servant placed into his hands a note from his wife, interrupting his meditation on what to do next. He quickly read what she had written.

His wife had likely been awakened by the commotion of her husband’s departure to handle the trial of Jesus at a pre-dawn hour that morning. He may even have mentioned something about the nature of the trial as he prepared to leave the place where they were staying. Perhaps it was when she attempted to go back to sleep that she dreamed a strange and disturbing dream. In addition to what Pilate had told her, she must have earlier heard something about Jesus. Jerusalem had been astir with news of His words and deeds. Maybe someone had briefed her on His miracles and teachings. In her dream, she may have seen Jesus unjustly tried and condemned by Pilate, her husband. She awoke from the dream trembling and overwhelmed. This nightmare reached into her soul and shook her deeply. She was constrained to do something about the premonition.

Procla did the only thing that she knew to do: She sent word immediately to her husband about what she had dreamed. Extrabiblical evidence reveals that Romans were greatly influenced by the dreams that they had and by dreams that were reported to them. They had

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<sup>1</sup>Tacitus *Annals* 3.33.

an eerie feeling about them. Suetonius' *The Lives of the Twelve Caesars* indicates that both Julius and Augustus Caesar attached much importance to dreams.

Procla's message to her husband was blunt and to the point. She said, "Have nothing to do with that righteous Man; for last night I suffered greatly in a dream because of Him." No doubt, Pilate was also shaken by her testimony concerning her dream. He was nervous already, unsure of what to do next and concerned about the outcome of this entire furor. He believed that Jesus was innocent, but he had been backed into a corner by the Jews and was not having any success in his attempts to acquit Him. With all the other things on his mind, he now had to contend with this dream. It surely added one more piece of wood to the fire that was burning within him. He must have thought, "Never have I had such an unusual trial in all my experience as a governor!"

Like Pilate, we wonder what to think about this dream. Was it an inspired dream? Was God seeking to influence Pilate in this unusual way? He had uttered a prophecy through Caiaphas. Was He doing something similar through this woman? We cannot answer these questions, but we do see in connection with the dream some profound truths that cannot be overlooked.

*First, we learn from it that the righteousness of Jesus will, in one way or another, haunt us. What was in this dream that bothered Pilate's wife? It was the fact that Jesus stood before her in the dream as a righteous man. We do not know if she had come to believe this truth about Jesus or not, but this dream disturbed her greatly. She awoke asking, "What if my husband puts this innocent man to death?"*

Every person has to ask, "What if Jesus is totally righteous, as the Scriptures say?" Every thinking person will be haunted by this question. If Jesus is totally righteous, as the Scriptures declare, then the Son of God has visited this planet to become our Savior. No one can go very far into the study of His life without asking this question, and no one can accept His righteousness without acknowledging Him as God's Son.

*Second, we see that the knowledge of Jesus does not always bring a calm, but sometimes it brings a*

*storm. Procla's dream did not speak peace to her heart; it introduced turbulence. It put her in the midst of a whirlwind involving God and man. On one occasion Jesus said, "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Matthew 10:34). This woman had likely traveled with Pilate to be part of the nice Passover festival in Jerusalem. In the early hours of this historic morning, she had been thrown into the middle of the greatest trial of all time. No event in subsequent history would equal it. No gathering for judicial action would ever come close to it in lack of justice, influence, notoriety, or finality. Every person attends a continuation of that trial.*

We must stand among the people who cried, on the one hand, "Crucify Him!" and Pilate, who, on the other hand, was saying, "Why, what evil has He done?" (Matthew 27:23a).

*Third, we are reminded by this dream that we have to take some action regarding Jesus. Pilate's wife had to do something about Him, and so do we. No one can ignore God's Son. People may think that they can be indifferent, but they cannot. A stand must be taken regarding Him. This woman had to ask, "What should I do about this man I saw in my dream?" We, too, must ask, "What will I do with what I know about the Christ?" Some have more knowledge about Him than others, but each person must process the evidence that he is given and decide what to do with it.*

Jesus—by His presence—judges us. He said, "He who is not with Me is against Me" (Matthew 12:30a). Whether we have a small amount of evidence or a mammoth amount, we have to do something with it. A person cannot meet Jesus and be neutral about Him.

Procla was stunned by a dream; she had a nightmare that disturbed her soul. Matthew selected it to be included in his portrayal of the way Pilate handled Jesus' trial. It is true that "God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform."<sup>2</sup> It is also true that God sometimes uses unusual ways to put His message of mercy upon our hearts. Procla's dream was only a

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<sup>2</sup>William Cowper, "God Moves in a Mysterious Way," *Songs of Faith and Praise*, comp. and ed. Alton H. Howard (West Monroe, La.: Howard Publishing Co., 1994).

small part of the story. When the whole story is brought together, we see accumulated evidence that is sufficient for the rational mind.

Eddie Cloer



*“[Procla’s] advice cannot be called wholly good. She was urging her husband not to have anything to do with Jesus. Now this was what [Pilate] himself was constantly attempting, namely, not to have*

*anything to do with the accused; that is, to dodge his responsibility as a judge. But that was wrong. He should have been brave enough and fair enough not only to pronounce Jesus ‘Not guilty,’ which, in fact, he did again and again, but also to acquit him! His wife’s advice, though good to a certain extent, could have been much better.”<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>3</sup>William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1973), 954.