
The Final Interview

“So Pilate said to Him, ‘You do not speak to me? Do You not know that I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify You?’ Jesus answered, ‘You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above; for this reason he who delivered Me to you has the greater sin’” (John 19:10–12).

After Pilate had sent Jesus through a brutal scourging and a period of humiliating mockery (John 19:1–3), he stood Him—blood-covered, thorn-crowned, and exhausted—before the Jews and exhorted, “Behold, the Man!” He must have thought that the sight of Him would solicit their sympathy and gain their agreement to release Him. Untouched by His pathetic appearance, the chief priests, the priests, and the crowd cried out even more insistently, in louder voices and with more passion, “Crucify, crucify!” (John 19:6a). Exasperated, Pilate said in words of quiet desperation, “Take Him yourselves and crucify Him, for I find no guilt in Him” (John 19:6b). The next cry of the Jews stunned Pilate. They declared, “We have a law, and by that law He ought to die because He made Himself out to be the Son of God” (John 19:7). They were presenting an argument that was out of Pilate’s realm of judgment—a religious accusation that the Sanhedrin had been commissioned by Rome to handle. Normally, Pilate would have said, “You must solve this problem. Take Him to your court. I am through with you.”

However, at this moment, Pilate was jarred by the accusation against Jesus and had difficulty in trying to ignore these words. The text says that when he heard their affirmation, he became “even more afraid” (John 19:8). F. F. Bruce thought that the words of John should be translated “he became afraid”¹ and not, as

the NEB has it, “he was more afraid than ever.” Bruce suggested that this cry filled Pilate’s heart with a dominating fear that he had not experienced before. Their words, coupled with what Pilate had seen in Jesus, flashed fear into his heart. The Scriptures do not tell us what his inner thoughts were, but the implication appears to be that Pilate was deeply disturbed by the “Son of God” declaration. Perhaps Pilate was immediately struck with the thought that he may have scourged One who was in some way divine. No doubt, the governor had seen Jesus conduct Himself as no other prisoner ever had. His words were matchless and His conduct beyond reproach, even though the charges made against Him were strange and baseless.

This deity charge that had been voiced hit Pilate with such force that he quickly decided to talk to Jesus again. Without further argument against the Jews, He took Jesus into the Praetorium for another personal examination. Alone with Him, away from the yelling mob, he confronted three eternal truths regarding Jesus’ identity.

Pilate found out again that Jesus at times chooses to remain silent. Thinking he must have overlooked something about Him, Pilate asked Jesus, “Where are You from?” (John 19:9). Jesus responded to his question with silence. Pilate had seen His silence before. When He was asked to answer the flimsy arguments of the Jews, Jesus was silent, and “the governor was quite amazed” (Matthew 27:14). He was silent each time He was asked to answer what was obvi-

¹F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1983), 361.

ously ridiculous. At this point in the trial, He was silent again when asked to give an answer that revelation had made clear.

In a sense, Jesus' silence was an answer. Nothing is more profound than His silence. It speaks louder than words and has a deafening quality to it. Since He had already addressed this question (John 18:33–37), there was no need to address it further.

Jesus teaches us, but He does not break down the door and compel us to believe. He puts evidence before us, but we must accept it within a limited period of time. He will provide sufficient evidence for anyone who wishes to believe, but He will not coerce or constrain us against our wills. After providing the evidence, He chooses to be silent.

Second, Pilate found that he could judge Jesus only through the authority that God had given him. Pilate was irritated by Jesus' silence. In a rebuking tone, he said, "You do not speak to me? Do You not know that I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify You?" (John 19:10). In response, Jesus reminded him that he had no authority but the authority that God had given to him. He said, "You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above" (John 19:11a).

This fact that Jesus stated in regard to Pilate is applicable to all of us. No person on the earth has any authority except what has been given to him from above. Nothing in this world just happens. God either makes it happen or allows it to happen. God has either put us where we are or has allowed us to be where we are.

Pilate looked into the physical face of Jesus and judged Him. God gave him that position and that opportunity, and Pilate will have to answer for the way he used them. You and I have different positions, but this truth overshadows us as well. In His providence, God has put us where we are. Our choice concerning Jesus must be made where we are, with what we have, and with the authority God has given us.

Third, Pilate found that some sins are worse than others. As Jesus continued in this discourse with Pilate, He said, "For this reason he who delivered Me to you has the greater sin" (John 19:11b). Undoubtedly, Jesus was speaking of

Caiaphas, who had sent Jesus to Pilate. The sin of the high priest was the greater because He had rejected Jesus and sought His crucifixion. Pilate had observed Jesus' innocence and was trying—though he was weak-willed about it—to acquit Him. Pilate had not done everything that he should have done for Jesus, but he had declared His innocence three times.

When one looks at the sinless Son of God, throws away the evidence, and condemns Him, he has committed the greatest of all sins. In his wavering about what to do with Jesus, Pilate had sinned; but he had not sinned as Caiaphas had. Pilate, in his ignorance and fear, had sinned against the truth; Caiaphas, in his knowledge, had sought to destroy Jesus.

There seems to be little doubt that we will be judged in light of the truth we have heard. Those of us who are exposed to much biblical teaching will be judged by the truth that we have confronted, considered, and been asked by God's providence to obey.

This last interview that Pilate had with Jesus presents life's greatest challenges to us. When it comes to deciding about Jesus, each of us must decide in an arena that has three boundaries: one is the authority which God has given us, another is the magnitude of the opportunity that has been presented, and the third is the non-coercive spirit of the occasion. We must make our individual decisions within the positions and the circumstances that God has provided for us. Let us choose to do the best we can with the opportunities that we are given, whether they be great or small. Soon the day of deciding will pass, and Jesus will be silent.

Eddie Cloer



"Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. Nevertheless I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you" (Matthew 11:21, 22).

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me" (Revelation 3:20).