

Sermon for Sunday, March 30, 1980, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor  
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"DOES JESUS HAVE A PARADE PERMIT?"

St. Matthew 27:11-26

Text: "Pilate said to them, 'Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ? They all said, 'Let him be crucified.'" St. Matthew 27:22

Time: somewhere around 30 A.D. during the reign of Tiberious Caesar, Emperor of the great Roman Empire. Place: the area of Palestine, the province of Judea, the city of Jerusalem. Person: Pontius Pilate, Roman governor, Length of rule: approximately ten years.

During those ten years Pilate made many decisions, some of them which vitally affected the lives of the people under his rule. Yet, history remembers only one of those decisions. Were it not for that decision, as a minor governor of a minor province, the annals of history would probably never have remembered his name. Certainly we would never have heard of him. That one decision which indelibly imprinted his name on history's record for all times revolved around this: "then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?"

On Palm Sunday Jesus had come sweeping into Jerusalem without the permission of the Jews or of Pilate. He had taken the town by storm and he didn't even have a parade permit. So the Jews had arrested him and brought him before Pilate. Already Judas had bestowed his traitor's kiss, the disciples had fled, and Jesus stood before Pilate alone and friendless. Yet, as he stood there with abuse being heaped upon him, there was something regal about him, the mark of a kingly man who marched to a different drummer. Pilate looked into his eyes and he could not help himself. "Are you the king of the Jews?" he asked. Even as he sat in the judgment seat with the power of life and death in his hands, his wife sent a message to him anxiously pleading with him to release Jesus. Something incredibly strange was going on. This was no ordinary man. Pilate must have felt the pressure building up--pressure from the Jews, demanding his death; pressure from his wife pleading for release; and the pressure from within his own heart as Jesus stood there looking into his eyes. "What shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" he asked. What shall I do with this man who has marched into Jerusalem and he doesn't even have a parade permit.

Many of us can sympathize with Pilate, for we have also been confronted with this man who comes parading into our lives without our permission. We, too, have felt the pressure of the world to reject him. We too, have had some loved one--a wife, a mother, a friend--plead with us anxiously and tenderly. Have you not found yourself asking, "what shall I do with Jesus...?"

When faced with that question, Pilate tried to do three different things. Each course of action represented a collapse of his character. First, he tried to evade the question. When Jesus was brought into his presence, Pilate had asked, "what charge do you bring against this man?" With arrogance the priests had replied, "If this man were not an evil doer, we would not have handed him over." at this point Pilate took his first downward step for he sought to evade the question. "Take him yourselves," he said, "and judge him by your own law." In certain matters of religion, the Romans had permitted the Jews to exercise their limited discipline and control over their own people. Pilate saw in this a chance to turn the case over to them. But it was the blood of Jesus these men wanted and the Roman law forbade them to enforce the death sentence. "No," said the Jews, "it is not lawful for us to put any man to death." Pilate's first effort to evade had failed.

A second time Pilate sought to evade the question. In the discussion that followed, he discovered that Jesus was from Galilee which was under the jurisdiction of Herod. Pilate knew that Herod was in Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover and he said, "He is under the jurisdiction of Herod; take him there to be judged." Pilate must have breathed a sigh of relief as the procession moved off down the street, but his relief was short-lived. The Bible says, "And Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him; then, arraying him in gorgeous apparel, he sent him back to Pilate." The second effort to evade had failed.

Still a third time Pilate sought to evade the question. Each year it was customary for the Romans to release a prisoner during Passover. So Pilate picked out a criminal who was a rebel and murderer, a man named Barabbas. "Surely," he must have thought, "They will choose to release Jesus rather than this criminal." So, Pilate put the question up to the multitude, "Whom do you want me to release for you, Barabbas or Jesus...?" But back came the dreadful cry, "Barabbas, Barabbas, let Barabbas go." The third effort to evade had failed. Pilate still must decide about the man who came to town without a parade permit. "What shall I do with Jesus...?"

There are some questions in life that force an answer--they cannot be evaded. If we don't answer them, time will decide them for us. Suppose you are traveling down a river, carried along by the current, and you are trying to make up your mind, weighing all the factors, evaluating each consideration. But the river has not waited. In your indecision and the current has made your decision for you as you are swept along right past the dock. Thus, it is in life. Some decisions must be answered decisively. Time is a stream that sweeps us relentlessly along. We are confronted with decisions and choices, but when we hesitate in an effort to evade the issue, time sweeps on and the decision is made for us.

"What shall I do with Jesus? What shall I do with this man who comes sweeping into my life without a parade permit?" Can you evade that question? Try it! Tomorrow or next week, in a few years at best, the question will have been decided for you. Are you weighing a decision about Jesus? The clock will not stop for your debate. Soon you will reach the fork of the road and you will have taken one road or the other--your decision will have been made for you.

Pilate's second step downward was the way of compromise. He could find no guilt in Jesus. "After examining him," he said, "I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him; neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Behold, nothing deserving death has been done by him; I will therefore..." I will therefore what? Dismiss him for lack of evidence? Protect an innocent man from injustice? See to it that the legal system is preserved from abuse? Release a man unfairly arrested? "I will therefore..." what? "I will therefore chastise him and release him." Pilate proposed a compromise. He proposed to have Jesus whipped to appease the Jews and then let him go. Justice? Is it justice to have a man beaten when you admit you can find no guilt in him? No, it was a compromise aimed at satisfying the enemies of the man with no permit.

Thus it was that Jesus was stripped to the waist; thus it was that a prison guard took a heavy leather whip laced with bits of metal and beat him until the bones exposed and the flesh was bruised and bleeding; thus it was that the soldiers platted a crown of thorns and pressed it upon his head; thus it was that they clothed him in royal purple as a gesture of ridicule and hailed him as a king while they struck him and spat upon him. This was the Jesus that Pilate brought back before the multitude--beaten, humiliated, suffering. Surely the wrath of the Jews would be appeased; surely the hate would be abated; surely their vengeance would give way to pity. So Pilate cried out to the mob, "I am bringing him out to you, that you may know that I find no crime in him...here is the man!"

But the Bible says, "When (they) saw him, they cried out, 'crucify him.'" Pilate's efforts to compromise had failed.

Have you ever compromised with the enemies of Jesus? To my shame I know I have. I have compromised when I wanted to be "one of the crowd." I have compromised because I didn't want to appear to be different or "religious." Are you guilty of that? Like Peter we say, "I believe in him. I will not deny him." Yet, we are unwilling to even talk to a good friend about Jesus. We become like arctic rivers--frozen at the mouth. The world is choosing up sides. Whose side will we stand on? Can you ever compromise with evil? When we have compromised with God's laws, our moral standards decay; when we compromise God's clear word, our faith has decayed; when we compromised with belief in Jesus as the only way, humanism has won the day; when we substituted social action for holding up Jesus, the church has decayed. No, there is no real compromise. Either Jesus is the Lord of life or he isn't. There is no third alternative.

Then Pilate took a third step in the collapse of his character. He tried to avoid facing the question by shifting responsibility. When it came clear to him that the enemies of Jesus would be satisfied with nothing less than his life, Pilate called for a basin of water. There before the whole multitude he washed his hands and said, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves." Then the Bible records, "Then he...delivered him to be crucified."

Does blood come off that easily? Remember Shakespeare's Lady MacBeth? Her hands were stained with the blood of her kind whom she had murdered. Unable to sleep, her deed like a fire in her brain, she holds up her hands to look at them with tormented eyes, "Out, damned spot! Out I say! Here's the smell of blood still; all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. Oh, oh, oh!" No, blood will not come out so easily and Pilate could not shift the responsibility for his decision to someone else.

There are those today who place the blame for what people are upon heredity or environment or the instincts and tendencies handed down from birth. Yet we all know, you and I, that over and above all these things is the fact of personal responsibility. If a man wrecks your car, murders your child, or violates the sanctity of your home, you do not say, "environment," or, "heredity" and let it go at that. One may not be responsible for all the conditions of his life nor for the instincts of his inner self, but he is responsibly for what he does with them. He may wash his hands as Pilate did and deny responsibility, but that does not make it so. Every man must finally stand alone before God and give an account of himself. "What shall I do with Jesus...with this man who comes marching into my life and I have never given him a parade permit?" Can you wash your hands of that question? Yes, you can wash your hands of that question as Pilate did, but you can never wash your hands of the responsibility for that decision any more than Pilate could.

One final word! For Pilate all of this happened in one day. All of his infamy and disgrace and shame came because of one decision in one day. We are accustomed to measuring life by days and months and years. That is the way to measure time. But life is measured by decisions. For Pilate his eternal destiny hung on that one question, "what shall I do with Jesus...?" Yet, it was so. All of life may be concentrated around a single moment of decision. One wrong answer may ruin everything; one right answer may save everything.

Have you never felt the spirit of Jesus close to your heart? Have you never heard his voice in the chambers of your soul? Have you never heard him whispering to

you in your mind, touching you, pleading with you, to come and give your life to him? Unbidden he breaks into our lives even when we don't want to give him a parade permit. When he comes all of life may be measured in the decision we make about him. What will you do with Jesus? Will you give him a parade permit to march into your heart?

"What shall I do with Jesus?" the voice of Pilate cried.  
Back came the roar of the multitude, "let him be crucified!"  
What will you do with Jesus? The question hangs in the air.  
You cannot escape the decision when you see him standing there.  
Will you compromise with evil, evade the issue and then,  
Shift the blame to someone else, and wash your hands from sin?  
What will you do with Jesus? What will your answer be?  
Some day your heart will be asking, "What will he do with me?"

You are invited to make your Sunday morning complete by attending Sunday School. All visitors and members are welcome. There are ten classes for adults and there is something for every age group at both 9:30 and 11:00 a.m. Come join us.