

## **LIFE'S MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION MATTHEW 27:22**

### **INTRODUCTION:**

It is the worst day of his life. He could not have imagined a worse circumstance than that in which he found himself. Pilot was the appointed governor over Judah with his official residence in Jerusalem. His day had begun early with the cries of a crowd standing just outside his official residence. They had a prisoner whose hands were bound who had been arrested on the evening before. The Jewish Sanhedrin has met through the night, listened to conflicting witnesses concerning the man, but at last reached a conclusion that He was worthy of death. Since they were not able to impose the penalty of death they were now presenting Him to Pilot for his judgment.

The relationship of Pilot with the Jews was less than he desired. His ruthless conduct and the abuse of his office had created strong tensions between him and the Jews. He knew that an official protest from the Jews that initiated an investigation of his conduct of his office would probably cost him his office. So, when the Jews came demanding of him that the prisoner be put to death, he was inclined to take their desire extremely seriously. He was afraid of them and what they might do if he did not do what they wanted to do. However, his investigation of the prisoner left him convinced that the man had done nothing worthy of death. His own judgment was that the Jews had brought him as a prisoner because they were envious of his success. His Roman background and his training in Roman law made it difficult for him to hand down a decision that he knew to be clearly unjust. Then to add to the discomfort that he felt because of his conscience, he

received a message from his wife. During the night, she had had a dream concerning the prisoner and was convinced that it would be unjust to put Him to death.

Every attempt Pilot made to convince the Jews that Jesus was not deserving of death failed. They did not buy any of the compromises that he offered. When he had in desperation presented Barabbas as an alternative, the Jews had picked up a chant that said, "Release Barabbas and crucify Jesus!" It was this kind of setting that prompted a desperate governor to voice this most important question—"What shall I then do with Jesus which is called the Christ?" This is a question that has a way of becoming personal to every life. Pilot first asked, "But many of us have been confronted with the implications of the question over and over again. We have a deep sense that there is something about Jesus of Nazareth that demands a verdict from our lives. Some of like Pilot are reluctant to do what our conscience tells us we ought to do.

I want us to consider this most important question. I want us to consider the person that stands at the heart of the question and the decision that it demands.

### **IT CONCERNS THE MOST IMPORTANT PERSON OF HISTORY.**

This is obviously a rather and audacious statement. When you consider all of the people that have walked on the planet across the millenniums of history, it is rather audacious to say that Jesus of Nazareth is the most important person of history. But before you discount it, you need to consider some of the evidence. As He stood there in front of Pilot on that spring morning, He may have not looked all that impressive. He had about him all

the marks of a common Galilean pheasant, but yet there was something about him that even Pilot could sense. As you think about Him, I want you to consider three different things.

#### 1. His claims.

It was really his claims as well as his conduct that resulted in his arrest and condemnation. He had gone across Galilee and Judah making claims that no sane mortal man would ever make. If you will just take a honest review of the claims that Jesus made and the implications of those claims, you will recognize if they are true He is indeed the most important person of history.

You will remember that He claimed to have the power to forgive sin. He first made this claim in a home in Capernaum and not only made the claim, but proceeded to forgive a man's sin as He healed his body. Those who observed Him that day correctly recognized that only God has the power to forgive sin. What did this mean? How could a mere man claim to have the authority to forgive sin? They were not ready to receive the implications of this claim.

He further offended his generation with His claims to a unique relationship with God. Who could ever forget his saying, "He who has seen me has seen the Father." Or who could forget his claim, "before Abraham was I am?" He was constantly making claims that suggested that he was uniquely related to the Father, even that he was the Son of the Father in a unique way.

Even before Pilot He had acknowledged Himself to be the rightful King of Israel. When pilot confronted him with this accusation, he did not deny it. He had even made such an assertion when He stood before the High Priest and the Sanhedrin. You will recognize that these are only a sampling of the claims that Jesus made. Who can ever forget the great "I am" claims that are found in the gospel of John? They heard Him say, "I am the way, the truth and the life, and no one comes to the Father but by me." Pilot was not aware of all these claims but you are. What do you do with the claims of Jesus?

## 2. His character

His most severe critics were never able to lodge a verifiable accusation against Him. He Himself never indicated any sense of having violated the law of God for having done something wrong. He would invite His critics by saying, "Which of you convicts me of sin?" His critics have scrutinized the record of the life of Jesus for two thousand years and no one has been able to lodge an accusation against his character that will stick. He was indeed the one sinless life that has ever walked on this planet. When you put His spotless character down beside His audacious claims, you will have to give consideration to Him.

## 3. His contribution

It would have been interesting if Pilot had taken the trouble to make a personal assessment of the contribution of Jesus to His day. He had left behind Him changed, transformed, lives and improved homes wherever He had gone. His influence had been a positive force for good in each community where He had ministered. We have advantage

of taking a longer view of the life of Jesus. When you take the longer view and assess his contribution, it is even more impressive. Dr. Kenneth S. Latourette, the world-renowned historian, wrote a seven volume of the history of the expansion of Christianity. In the conclusion in his seven volume study he refers in glowing terms to the affects of the life of Christ through His followers: "No life ever lived on this planet has been so influential in the affairs of men — from that brief life and its apparent frustration has flowed a more powerful force for the triumphal waging of man's long battle than any other ever known by the human race—through it hundreds of millions have been lifted from illiteracy and ignorance and have been placed upon the road of growing intellectual freedom and of control over their physical environment. It has done more to allay the physical ills of disease and famine than any other impulse known to man. It has emancipated millions from chattel slavery and millions of others from thralldom to vice. It has protected tens of millions from exploitation by their fellows. It has been the most fruitful source of movements to less the horrors of war and to put the relations of men and nations on the bases of justice and peace." There are hundreds of other voices that will join Dr. Latourette in making the same assessment of the contribution of Jesus to history through His followers.

It is easy to see why this is life's most important question. It concerns life's most important person. So, you must address this question for yourself, "What shall I then do with Jesus which is called the Christ?"

## **II. IT DEMANDS THE MOST IMPORTANT DECISION OF LIFE.**

It is obvious that Pilot realizes he is faced with a decision. He is rhetorically seeking from the crowd some counsel about this most important decision that he will ever make.

1. The decision is unavoidable.

As you review the gospel record, it is obvious that Pilot did everything possible to avoid making the decision about Jesus. The first attempt he made to avoid making a decision was to send Jesus to Herod who ruled over Galilee. He thought maybe Herod would take responsibility and make the decision. After a brief deliberation, Herod gladly sent Him back to pilot. He then suggested to the Jews that he would release Jesus according to the custom of releasing a prisoner at the Passover. Instead of accepting his offer, the Jews chose to have Barabbas released.

Pilot then proposed to compromise. He proposed to have Jesus scourged before releasing Him. This was in spite of the fact that he had found Jesus innocent. But a scourging was not enough to satisfy the angry crowd.

You will recall that in His final gesture, Pilot took a basin of water and washed his hands. He publicly declared himself to be innocent and not responsible for what ever happened to Jesus. He then turned Jesus over to the Jews for them to do what ever they pleased with Him. He thought had had avoided making a decision, but he had not. He had actually made the decision for Jesus to be crucified.

While there may be a serious question about who bore primary blame for the crucifixion of Jesus. At least some of the responsibility is upon the shoulders of the governor, Pilot. He could not avoid the decision.

Neither can you avoid the decision. If you decide not to decide about Jesus, then you have made a decision. Your decision is to approve the verdict of the crowd that He ought to be crucified.

It is obvious that you cannot make a decision simply to treat Jesus as a good man. Professor C. S. Lewis correctly understood how this was not an alternative. In some unforgettable paragraphs he says, "I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people ought to say about Him. 'I am ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level of the man who says he is a poached egg—or else He would be the devil of hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a mad man or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit on Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and called Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."

2. The decision is personal.

Did you notice how Pilot asked the question? He said it correctly—"What shall I then do with Jesus which is called the Christ?" He did not say "we," or "they." He realized that the dilemma was his. The Jews had thrust upon Him the necessity of making a person decision. He must make a choice. It was in His power to have Jesus crucified or to have Jesus acknowledged for His claims.

Your decision is a personal one. You must decide! You must choose! You must register in a public way your own decision concerning Jesus Christ. What will your decision be?

3. The decision is momentous in implications.

There was so much more involved in his decision than Pilot ever realized in that historic moment. He may not have been familiar with the words of Jesus spoken earlier when he had said, "If you confess me before men, I will confess you before my Father which is in heaven. If you deny me before men, then I will deny you before my Father which is in heaven. Pilot did not realize in that moment that the decision he made that day could potentially determined His eternal destiny. He did not realize that ultimately the thing that determines whether or not a person is prepared to stand before God in eternity is what they have done with Jesus.

Do you realize the implications of this? You must either receive Jesus as the Son of God and your savior, or reject Him as a fraud and an imposter. You must agree with the crowd that He is worthy of crucifixion, or you must join the numberless multitudes of the ages who have chosen to crown Him as the King and Lord of life. You must step out from the

crowd and be for Him or join the crowd and be against Him. The decision that you make will determine where you spend eternity.

As you make your decision, let me share with you about Aaron Burr, a well-known name from the early history of this country. He was recognized in His day as being a brilliant and influential man. However, his name is written in our history in infamy because he betrayed our country in a time of war.

Dr. Robert Schuller reports about the turning point that came to the life of Burr while he was a student at Princeton University. It was during a religious emphasis week that a speaker challenged every person to give his life to Jesus Christ. Aaron Burr stayed up late that night, pacing the floor of the room in which he lived. He faced this ultimate question: should he give his life to Jesus Christ or not? Should he become a Christian or not? In the early morning hours he made his decision. Suddenly, he flung open the doors of his dormitory and called out into the darkness: "Goodbye, Jesus Christ!" He then slammed the shutters shut. From that point onward his life began to take a downward turn and in a moment of moral crisis he didn't have strength to do the right thing. But Aaron Burr was correct in his understanding—you must either receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, or you must say goodbye to Him. Unfortunately, he made the same decision Pilate made. He decided to take the easier road and join the crowd and to crucify Him.

What will your decision be this morning? Will you receive Him and crown Him as Lord of life? Or will you reject Him and rejoice in His death?

