

CROSS EXAMINATION

(Mark 15:1-20)

Although our gospel reading is taken from Mark's Gospel, I feel it is important that we reference all four gospels, to enable us get a firmer picture of the crucifixion narrative.

To Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea, one Jew was like another, he had a low opinion of them and considered them to be a particularly unpleasant people. When Pilate met with Jesus early in the morning, we are told Pilate did not want his day spoilt and wanted the meeting to be over with as quickly as possible.

However, the meeting with Jesus was to change his life in the same way over the last 2,000 years, people have been meeting with Jesus and their lives have been changed.

The theme for our talk this morning is "Cross Examination." and the image that comes to mind straightaway is of a trial, or a court case. Our reading recounts a cross examination that became a conversation between two people, Jesus and Pilate. Unfortunately, while this conversation was taking place, the crowd outside were hostile and demanding the life of the blameless Jesus.

Let's take a look at this conversation between Jesus and Pilate. The conversation begins with the searching question: "Are you the King of the Jews?"

What is interesting here is that the same question is recorded in the Passion Narrative in all four Gospels. The significance of the question was so important, to claim to be the Messiah or the Son of God, the King, was blasphemy - unless of course the claim was true, as in the case of our Lord.

Let's concentrate for a few moments on the two characters in our narrative, Jesus and Pilate. We know quite a lot about Jesus but what do we know about Pilate?

Briefly:

- Legend says he was born in Perth (Scotland).
- His role in history was Procurator/Governor of Judea.
- His wife was the granddaughter of the great Caesar Augustus.
- His appointment upset Jerusalem with his Flag waving and marching (similar to Nuremberg Rally).
- He used Temple money to pay for his own needs, not a popular man.
- He was at enmity with King Herod, the recognised Jewish Ruler.
- He was kept in his job by his connections.
- He had already met with Caiaphas the High Priest and the Sanhedrin prior to this case.

However, in meeting Jesus and talking to Him, Pilate must have realised Jesus was no ordinary person and I believe he became frightened, which prompted him to ask the searching question, "Are you the King of the Jews?"

Pilate's state of mind would be further disturbed when he received this message from his wife (as recorded in Matthew's Gospel). "Don't have anything to do with that innocent man..." Matt 27:19.

She recognised that Jesus was no ordinary person and should not be confronted as a common criminal. Pilate stood before Jesus with a rank to which he should never have risen. Jesus stood before Pilate with a rank to which he should never have had to descend.

I want us to look at three things, across all gospels, which Pilate said or did during his experience with Jesus:

1. He looked for a way out of the situation.
2. He asked, "What is Truth?"
3. He told Jesus he had the power over his life.

Let's look at that first point. Pilate looked for a way out of the situation.

I wonder how many of you have been in a situation or involved in a task that has become too big or difficult?

I remember as a boy agreeing to paint someone's outhouse for a sum of money. I began painting on a hot day and the paint was drying too quickly.

What I had estimated to be a two-hour job went into five hours and it was only a quarter completed. It seemed like the Forth Bridge. In desperation, I tried to discuss the problem with the person I had agreed to do the job for, hoping he would pay me for the time and work I had done (I was only a boy). I thought he might realise I had underestimated the amount of time and labour required. But the answer was a resounding, "No! An agreement is an agreement." The more I talked the more the situation seemed to get worse, there was no compromise and no solution.

Pilate was in a situation that was getting more difficult and complex by the minute. He had probably planned his day, possibly a trip to the Gladiator's, a bit of sunbathing maybe, it would be quiet with the Jews making their Passover preparations.

Jesus was not only spoiling his day; he was beginning to frighten him. In Luke's gospel we're told Pilate sends Jesus back to Herod, as he could find no fault in him, he says: "I find no basis for a charge against this man." Luke 23:4.

Pilate was a reluctant judge and on Jesus' return from Herod he tried to compromise by promising to punish Jesus, probably with a scourging, and then release him. Neither Herod or Pilate could find a basis for the charges against Him.

Pilate appeals to the crowd who all shout for the release of the evil, dangerous criminal Barabbas. In desperation Pilate exclaims WHY? Pilate knew it was out of envy and malice that the chief priests had stirred up the trouble, but faced with an unruly inflamed mob shrieking, "Crucify! Crucify!" John 19:6.

Pilate was cowardly and gave in to mob rule, a crowd pleaser. In Matthew's gospel, we are told, Pilate then washes his hands of the matter; a phrase we still use today when we are looking for a way out of situations.

Do we feel like Pilate sometimes? In our Personal Life? In our Christian Life? Sometimes things begin to overwhelm us. Are we looking for a way out this morning?

Someone once said to me if you are looking for a way out, you are also looking for a way in. Scripture tells us that Pilate was amazed at Jesus and so are we today. Jesus is our way in, he is our loving Saviour and we are never alone with him.

Our second point, Pilate asked, "What is Truth?"

In John's gospel, Pilate asked, "What is truth?", I don't know about you, but the news at the moment is just so hard to believe. We have a deadly virus, which has turned our nation into a nation of self-seekers, me first. We read the good stories, but also many bad stories, we just don't know what to believe in the midst of all this turmoil.

Perhaps it might be helpful to look at some quotations on truth:
Geoffrey Chaucer – "Truth is the highest thing that man may keep."
Bill Clinton – "Nearly everyone will lie to you given the right circumstances."
Adolf Hitler – "There is no such thing as truth either in the moral or scientific sense."

Three different views of truth and the place truth had in their lives. In his teaching Jesus said on many occasions, "I tell you the truth..." As Christians we are looked on always to be truthful.

Our final point, Pilate told Jesus he had power over His life.

"Don't you realise either I have the power to free you or crucify you?"
John 19:10.

Jesus replied, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above." John 19:11

Realising he was dealing with a higher power Pilate, from this point, became worried. All earthly authority ultimately comes from God. Have you ever felt you had power over someone? Not life or death, but able to change or influence that person's life.

The film, "It's a Wonderful Life" with Jimmy Stewart (a film we have surely all seen) is a film that I always thought could have been an advert for a good Christian life. Would our lives in hindsight appear as impressive as George Bailey's?

As a Christian witness we can change peoples' lives and we can influence the lives of others. We may not have the power over their earthly life, but our Christian witness may help people in their eternal lives.

Pilate, a nobody who became a somebody when he met Jesus, was looking for a way out. Jesus says, "I am the Way."

There is a wonderful verse in Isaiah 30: 21. "Whether you turn to the right or the left your ears will hear a voice behind you saying, "This is the way walk in it." We have a choice – JESUS or THE WORLD

Pilate said, "What is Truth?" Jesus says, "I am the Truth."

Finally, Pilate said to Jesus, "I have the power over your life." Jesus says, "I am the Life." "I have come that they may have Life and have it to the full." John 10:10.

Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me" John 14:6.

Standing in front of Pilate was not just the King of the Jews but King of the Universe, the Son of God. Jesus was the answer to all Pilate's problems, if he only knew and understood Jesus is the answer to all our problems but we have to accept Him and let Him control our lives.

Life went downhill for Pilate after his encounter with Jesus, it is believed he took his own life not long after.

Is Jesus King in our lives? How do you think Jesus felt when he heard the crowds shouting, "Crucify him!"?

Yes, he knew what would happen but I am sure he still felt sad and disappointed. Just as earlier when he heard Peter reject him in the court yard, or on the cross when he said, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"

Some people today might feel that same sense of rejection that God does not want me, I am not good enough. However, two verses in Scripture dispute that.

"He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God..." John 1:11.12.

"For God So loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." John 3: 16

Let us this morning "Cross Examine" our own lives and let God be our Judge and Jesus our Advocate.