

Life's Most Important Question - Matthew

27:11-26

Introduction: Once, a Sunday School teacher had her class to write down a question they'd like to ask God. Here is a sampling of their questions:

Dear God, why do we have church on Sunday? I thought it was supposed to be a day of rest.

Dear God, are you really invisible? Or is that just a trick?

Dear God, Do you know when I'm bad or good? Or is that just Santa Claus?

Dear God, Instead of letting people die and having to make new ones, why don't you just keep the ones you have now?

Dear God, I went to this wedding and they kissed right in church. Is that okay?

Dear God, My grandma says she's going to heaven. But I want her to stay here. Can we make a deal?

These are important questions for children, but today, I want us to look at the most important question of all. "*What will I do with Jesus?*" Pontius Pilate posed this question to an angry mob during the trial of Jesus before His crucifixion. It was an important question for Jesus because His fate hung in the balance. But it's also an important question for us because our eternal destiny hangs in the balance.

D.L. Moody, the great evangelist of the 19th century, tells about the night he felt he made the biggest blunder of his life. It was Sunday night October 8, 1871 during a meeting in Farwell Hall, Chicago, IL. He used this very text and

asked the very same question, "*What will I do with Jesus?*" His blunder came when instead of giving the folks the opportunity to respond that night, He asked them to evaluate their relationships to Christ and return the next week to make their decision.

Well, that crowd never gathered again, because during the last verse of the closing hymn, which, by the way was, "Today the Savior Calls," the singing was drowned out by the clanging of the fire bells and the noise of fire engines. That was the night of the great Chicago fire. Moody wished then, that he'd called for an immediate decision for Christ.

Matthew 27:22 (NIV) Pilate asked. "*What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?*" Today, let's see if we can determine how we have, or how we will answer this question. First, let's notice:

1. The Inevitable Interruption

Pilate was the supreme Roman official over Judea. He was the procurator or the governor of this district of the Roman Empire. He had command of the Roman troops in that area. Having governed in this district for awhile, he was well aware of who this Jesus was. No doubt he had been told of the miracles He had performed. No doubt he had heard of the little band of disciples who were following Him. No doubt, he had been advised of the growing animosity the Jewish religious leaders had of Him. He had to know that sooner or later he was going to have to deal with this man named Jesus.

But on this day, as thousands of Jews had filled the streets of Jerusalem as the Jewish celebration of Passover was in full swing, this was the day of decision. On this day, Pilate was aroused from sleep very early that morning. On this day, Jesus would interrupt Pilate's life as he would be brought to the Praetorium by the chief priests. The Praetorium was the residence of the governor. The Praetorium also served as the judgment hall where the governor ruled on matters that were brought to him. On this day, Pilate would have to deal with Jesus. (27:1).

No longer would Pilate just be hearing of reports of Jesus. No longer could Pilate shrug Jesus off as a person of no consequence. On this day, Pilate would be faced with the reality of the presence of Jesus. Jesus has been delivered to Pilate's very house, and now He's looking face to face at this man named Jesus.

The reality for Pilate is the same reality for everyone. Jesus is going to interrupt everyone's life at some point, and they'll have to stand face to face with Jesus. It may be in a worship service such as this one, when some preacher or teacher or friend tells them the truth about the sin in their life and how it keeps them in bondage and will eventually lead them to destruction. That may be the time when Jesus will interrupt their life with the truth of His love and His sacrifice to pay for their sin. And they'll have to answer the same question, "*What will I do with Jesus?*"

Or, this interruption may be during some crisis when someone's world is turned upside

down. That may be the time when Jesus interrupts their life and says, "*Will you turn to me now? Will you trust me now?*"

One thing is for sure, there will be a judgment day for everyone. Hopefully, yours will be on earth while God's grace is still available. But the reality is, there will be a judgment day in eternity. And on that day, it will be too late for those who never deal with this question on earth. On that judgment day, the unrepentant sinner will stand before Jesus Christ, and He'll say to him or her, "*Depart from me, I never knew you.*" On that day, it will be too late to decide what you will do with Jesus.

This is why the Lord said in **2 Cor. 6:2 (NIV)** "*...I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.*" This is the time when we ought to be asking ourselves, "*What am I going to do about all I've heard about Jesus? What will I do about the claims He's making on my life? What will I do about the sacrifice He made for me on the cross? What am I going to do about Jesus?*" When Jesus interrupts your life, that is the time of decision. Next, let's notice:

2. The Empty Evasions

In his efforts to avoid responsibility, Pilate made several attempts to evade a decision about Jesus. First, he tried to pass it off to his enemy Herod and make friends with him, but Herod sent Him right back. (Luke 23:7-12). He couldn't pass Him off.

Listen, you can't make deals with the devil and avoid your responsibility of dealing with Jesus. The devil knows Jesus all too well, and he can't handle Him. Eventually, Jesus will come right back to you. And you'll have to decide for yourself.

Pilate then tried to appeal to popular opinion in an attempt to avoid a decision (Mt. 27:15-17). One of the customs at the feast of the Passover was to release a prisoner to the Jews, whomever they desired. Pilate knew of this custom, so in an attempt to avoid a decision about Jesus, he'd let the crowd decide for him.

No doubt, his thinking was, *"If I offer up the most notoriously wicked man in jail – a condemned murderer named Barabbas, the choice would be clear. The crowd will choose Jesus over a murderer, and I won't have to deal with him."*

But Pilate underestimated the religious leaders' hatred of Jesus. The chief priests wanted Jesus dead, so they began to persuade the crowd in their favor. **Matthew 27:20-22 (NIV)** *"But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed. 'Which of the two do you want me to release to you?' asked the governor. 'Barabbas,' they answered. 'What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?' Pilate asked. They all answered, 'Crucify him!'"*

Pilate feared the crowd, so the popular opinion of the majority won out. **Proverbs 29:25 (NIV)** says, *"Fear of man will prove to be*

a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe."

Pilate knew that with thousands and thousands of Jews in Jerusalem, if things got out of hand, there was a good chance that even his soldiers could be overran by an angry mob. He understood back then what can happen when emotions take over.

If you recall, back in 1992 when the 4 LAPD officers who were accused of police brutality on Rodney King following a high speed chase were acquitted, what ensued was the Los Angeles Riots. By the time order was restored, 53 people died, 2,383 people were injured, 7,000 fires were extinguished, 3,100 businesses were damaged, and the financial loss was nearly \$1 billion.

This kind of *"mob mentality"* was what Pilate feared. And if it happened under his watch, there was no explanation Pilate could give to the emperor that would be acceptable. His political career was on the line, and he was not going to do anything to jeopardize his standing. So, he caved in to the crowd. He thought that by letting the crowd decide, he could be neutral. However, by pardoning a condemned murderer, he decided to condemn an innocent man, rather than endanger himself. In essence, it was Pilate who decided what he would do with Jesus because he held that power. Again, Pilate could not escape a decision.

A psychologist once asked a patient, *"Do you have trouble making decisions?"* The patient replied, *"Well, Yes and no."*

Pilate could not evade the issue. He could not be wishy-washy forever. He could not remain neutral about Jesus. And neither can we - either we choose Him or reject Him. We're either for Him or against Him. Finally, I want us to see:

3. The Deadly Decision

Pilate's life had been interrupted by Jesus. Jesus now stood in his presence, and he had to deal with him. He tried to avoid it by dismissing Him to Herod, but He came right back. He tried to discuss it with Jesus, but he was given no reason to condemn Him. He tried to dodge it by letting the crowd decide, but the tables were turned on him. For all his attempts to circumvent the issue, Jesus still before Him. Ultimately, Pilate would have to decide. He would have to do something about Jesus.

Incredibly, Pilate made one last attempt to avoid responsibility. **Matthew 27:24 (NIV)** *"When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. 'I am innocent of this man's blood,' he said. 'It is your responsibility!'"*

Pilate thought that by symbolically handing responsibility for the murder of Jesus back to the Jews he was removing the guilt for condemning someone to die when he knew he was innocent. But he was wrong!

No one can pass off this responsibility to anyone else. It's your decision and yours alone. No one can wash their hands of innocent blood. Deciding not to do anything about Jesus is the

same as rejecting Jesus, and that is what Pilate did.

Pilate ultimately answered life's most important question, by deciding that he would reject Jesus. Washing your hands might clean the outside of a grimy hand, but it can never remove the stain of guilt from the inside of a man's heart. No water can wash away the sin of rejecting Jesus Christ. Something stronger is needed than water to wash the blood of Jesus off your hands.

Pilate made a personal and permanent decision to reject Christ. He knew what he was doing, and took the cowardly way out because he feared the crowd. Pilate made a deadly decision because **John 3:18 (NIV)** says, *"Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already..."* And **John 3:36 (NIV)** says, *"Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."*

Obviously, you will be given an opportunity to decide today what you will do with Jesus. But it's just than an opportunity.

Conclusion: Once there was a rather rebellious young man who joined the Navy. While on the ship, it didn't take long for him to develop the reputation of being a rebellious sailor. Finally, he was called before the captain, and he said to him, *"Son, I hear that you don't seem to want to obey the rules. But I want you to understand one thing. You're in the navy. Now, we cannot make you do anything. We can't*

make you into a good sailor if you don't want to be. We cannot make you keep the rules if you have no sense of loyalty. No, we can't make you do anything, but we can make you wish you had."

Nobody can make anyone decide for Christ, but if they don't one day they'll wish they had. Don't let it come to that! Deal with the question now!

The most important question in life is not where you will go to college, or what kind of career you will have, or who you will marry. Life's most important question is "*What will I do with Jesus?*" Our standing before God depends on it, and our status in eternity depends on it.