

The Lord Knocks on the Door of the Heart

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^{18:33} So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" ³⁴ Jesus answered, "Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?" ³⁵ Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?" ³⁶ Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world." ³⁷ Then Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice." ³⁸ Pilate said to him, "What is truth?" After he had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, "I find no guilt in him."

My mother became a Christian through the ministry of an English missionary at a home meeting. I and my other two siblings attended church school from elementary school, but it took several decades for my younger brothers and my father to become Christians.

While they were attracted to the teachings of Jesus in their hearts, they found that their words and their lives were the opposite.

I believe that the Lord Jesus is close to such a family as ours and made Himself known through various things. In other words, He was knocking on the door of the heart that was not visible from the outside.

I believe that was true of Pontius Pilate as well. A man caught between being drawn to faith in his heart but living the opposite way in his outward life.

I'm sure there are many people who are not Christians who have never heard the name of Pontius Pilate – but I don't know if there are any Christians who have not heard of Pontius Pilate.

Needless to say, the Apostles' Creed confesses that Jesus "suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified..." Pilate's name has been mentioned wherever Jesus' crucifixion has been recalled, in every age and country for the past 2000 years.

The Pontius Pilate of the Apostles' Creed is mainly infamous as the magistrate or judge who sentenced Jesus to crucifixion. Even though Pilate was just one magistrate dispatched to the Jewish provinces of Rome, the impression of him as a bad person was planted from the beginning.

At the very least, the Bible commentators and scholars I have seen make some very harsh comments about Pilate, and I rarely see any good comments.

My goal is not to dispel this negative historical image through my message today, nor to claim that Pilate repented and was added to the Lord's flock. Not that I didn't want to try doing that at first, but I must start by telling you that I am still not sure about Pilate.

However, I do want to go back to the Bible and hear from Jesus, who was earnest in dealing with Pilate.

The Bible is not easy to understand, and I don't think the conversation between Pilate and the Lord can be understood just by reading it just once.

It seems that Pilate's questions to Jesus and the Lord's answers do not quite match. This is why it is difficult for us who read the Bible to immediately understand what the Lord is saying.

At any rate, as governor, Pilate had only one thing to do.

In order to maintain the Roman political system, he had to suppress by force in some cases to maintain control. Whenever there was a Jewish uprising or rebellion, he would impose severe punishment, including the death penalty.

Now Pilate was experiencing something he had never experienced or seen before: the Jewish leaders were shouting for him to give the death penalty, even though he saw no reason to execute Jesus.

His wife's words were one of the primary reasons why Pilate hesitated to pronounce the death sentence on this Jesus from Nazareth.

Matthew 27:19 "Besides, while he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, "Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much because of him today in a dream."

At this point, you could say Pilate suffered as his heart was torn in different directions. His wife's advice was to stop having anything to do with the "righteous man".

Pilate already knew that they were being motivated by envy when he was presiding at the trial, but maybe his wife's advice made him think "maybe this really is the king of the Jews".

John 18:33 So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" ³⁴ Jesus answered, "Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?"

The word "again" here means that this was the second time Jesus appeared before Pilate, after being delivered over to the ruler Herod, probably to escape responsibility. When Herod saw that he was not getting what he wanted, he did not take Jesus seriously and sent him away from his throne back to Pilate's official residence.

At that time, Pilate was torn between the thought that this man might be the king of the Jews, and the idea that as a Roman authority he should not be involved in the internal conflict of the Jews.

What was the Lord Jesus aiming at when He said this?

In counseling, it is said that the most important thing is to be a good listener.

In addition to listening, what is even more important is to guide the person to find the answer in his or her own words.

In this sense, what Jesus is saying to Pilate is to draw him out of his heart of doubts and lead him to a strong conviction.

³⁵ Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?"

Pilate didn't answer, "these are not my words. I just heard it's what the Jewish leaders are accusing you of." Instead Pilate answers, "I'm not a Jew, so even if I truly recognize you as a king, I'm not in a position to do anything about it."

You could say Jesus saw into Pilate's wavering heart and was leading him to the point where he could stand on his own. Jesus really considered Pilate's heart.

³⁶ Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world." ³⁷ Then Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king.

Pilate seems to already be convinced in his mind that this man is the King of the Jews. The Lord also clearly shows us that He is the truth.

"For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice." ³⁸ Pilate said to him, "What is truth?"

The Lord told His disciples, "I am the way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6), and in that sense, His address to Pilate was not as to an enemy, but as to His disciples.

The Lord told about Himself, that He is the truth, and that those who belong to the truth will listen to and obey His voice.

In other words, it is not because the listener has the will to listen that he hears the voice of the Lord, but because he belongs to the Lord he is able to listen with an open heart. Or you could say it the other way: if a person's heart is open and they are listening to the Lord, that person already belongs to the Lord.

To decide in your heart to belong to the flock of the Lord is sometimes called "resolving/making a decision for Christ".

However, the salvation of the Lord is by grace alone and even though it may seem from a human perspective that we are choosing between salvation or destruction, the people who are already the Lord's (but are "outside"/not "in Him" yet), are led to the decision when the time comes - when the Lord calls them.

When Pilate hears "Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice" he reacts to the word truth.

"What is truth?"

Not as a philosopher would say, but actually more curtly, "Seriously, truth? What is that anyway?"

There are several theories as to whether their conversation was in Greek or Latin, but in the movie *Passion*, the Latin word "veritas" was used.

It's important to understand Pilate's way of thinking, so let me share just a little of the meaning of Greek grammar.

The word the Lord used for "truth" is "te aletheia" with the article "te" in front of it, and the English translation is "the truth".

However, the word "truth" used by Pilate is "aletheia" and has no article.

In both Greek and English, the role of the article is to indicate a specific name, and when the Lord said "*the* truth," He was indicating Himself.

However, when Pilate said, "What is truth?", he only used the word as a sound, and truth was not connected to any specific concept, but could be anything.

It seems that the writer, John, wanted to highlight the difference between Jesus' and Pilate's thinking by highlighting this small difference in words.

Most Japanese people have this relative idea of truth; that if you call something the truth, it becomes the truth.

There is no answer written to Pilate's question in this passage. Why is that?

Because it is already written. "Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice." The Lord had already given Pilate the answer.

I believe that the Lord Jesus is guiding Pilate to realize that He is the King of the Jews, and at the same time, that He is the truth; He is knocking on the door of Pilate's heart.

There is a principle that says, "Do not add to, or go beyond what is written in the Bible."

Just like wondering what became of Joseph of Arimathea or Nicodemus after the Lord's resurrection, it is dangerous to go beyond what is written in the Bible and guess what happened to Pilate only by the lore and tradition of other ancient documents besides the Bible.

Some traditions say he committed suicide, while others say he converted and even became a religious teacher.

However, Pilate's wife must have been of course surprised, but also happy when she heard the news of Jesus' resurrection. Surely it must have been the same for Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus who, while it pained them, voted in favor of the death penalty for Jesus.

There are so many Japanese brothers and sisters who have accepted the Lord in their hearts but have not confessed their faith due to external factors such as their social position or the faith of their relatives.

However, the Lord is using various means to knock on the doors of the hearts of those who are/have been made His people; He is working that they would accept Him, would open the doors of their hearts to accept Him.

In a letter to the church in Laodicea, we read this:

Revelation 3:20 "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me."

Is there anyone here who feels caught between the world and the gospel of the Lord and is unable to make their faith known? The Lord will keep knocking on the door of your heart.

I pray that those who are struggling with this will be led to open the door of their hearts and accept the Lord soon.