

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

Of Fear and Fate

John 19:12-15

Intro: We've been looking at the struggles of Pilate as he stands in judgment of Jesus Christ. He's already officially pronounced Him innocent and said as much to the Jews awaiting his verdict. His initial acquittal of Jesus didn't sit well with the chief priests and their cohorts so they began to stir up the crowd to call for His execution! Pilate makes several attempts to affect a release of Jesus but they all failed. He finally had Jesus beaten with in an inch of His life to try to evoke some sympathy from the crowd but it actually has the opposite effect – they demand He be crucified.

When Pilate balked at their demand, the crowd finally levied their real charge against Jesus – He claimed to be the unique Son of God! This caused Pilate to fear Jesus even more and attempted to interrogate Him further but Jesus refused to answer his questions. Finally, when Pilate tried to pull rank on Him and remind Jesus of his power; Jesus explained to him the true source of his power and his responsibility to execute that power according to its source. There must have been something in Jesus' response in vs11 that won Pilate over although it's hard to see just what it was. Jesus didn't excuse Pilate's actions in any way; He simply stated that another party had greater guilt and his own part in this was less than Pilate thought it was. Whatever it was, Pilate strengthened his efforts to release Jesus.

12-14 – When you read through the crucifixion accounts in all 4 Gospels, one thing is made abundantly clear: Pilate did not want to condemn Jesus! Why he didn't want to see Jesus executed is not so clear. Pilate wasn't known for being particularly strong on justice and he certainly had no high regard for the Jews or Jewish prisoners. For the most part, he couldn't care less about them. But, in this case, he was obviously trying to get Jesus off the hook. He pronounced Him innocent, tried to pawn Him off on Herod, tried to release Him as part of the traditional Passover prisoner release and then had Him scourged. Now, we see he is still trying to release Jesus. John doesn't tell us what other actions he takes or attempts he makes but they are met with the same stubborn resistance.

If Pilate was so unwilling to pass the death sentence upon Jesus as this entire passage seems to suggest, how did the crowd eventually prevail on him to do just that? Once the Jews saw that they couldn't force Pilate to comply with their desire to have Jesus executed, they played their only trump card and implied in no uncertain terms that if Pilate refused to condemn the One they considered to be a traitor, they would find a way to denounce Pilate to Caesar. This was the one thing that Pilate feared the most.

Here, Pilate is seen in his most contemptible position and his most pitiful. Pilate was the governor. He spoke for Caesar and had the Roman legions at his call to enforce his decisions. Yet, the one who should've been above fear is riddled by it. His fear made him weak-kneed in the greatest moral encounter of his life. What was Pilate afraid of? 3 things: **1)** he was afraid of Jesus (**8**). This was certainly not the kind of holy reverence for Jesus that a true follower of Christ should have, but it was a true fear. Pilate thought Jesus may actually be more than a man, maybe one of the half-human, half-divine gods of Greek / Roman mythology who could move fate against him if he judged unfairly.

2) Pilate was afraid of the people. He didn't like them at all. His rough treatment of the Jews showed his disdain and hatred for them. Yet he knew their power and feared to have them united against him. If he hadn't feared the people, he would've released Jesus quickly and would have shown no interest in pacifying them whatsoever.

3) Most significantly, Pilate feared Caesar. And for good reason! The suspicious nature of Caesar Tiberius was well known, and Pilate had already had other confrontations with the Jews which had proved detrimental to his standing before the emperor. What if Caesar disapproved of his handling of this matter? What if Caesar should hear that Pilate had refused to deal forcefully with one guilty of high treason? If Pilate would've had a clean record, he could've overlooked such a threat based on false charges. But his record was not clean; and it was very possible Pilate could lose his position or even his life if such an accusation were made. In fact, history says this is what happens to him.

Why did Pilate condemn Jesus to die when he so desperately wanted to release Him? Pilate feared man! The Bible has something to say about the

fear of men – it's a snare, a trap (**Prov 29:25a**). That describes Pilate's situation to a tea: he knows exactly what he ought to do, what he is legally bound to do and yet he cannot do it, he won't do it! He's trapped! Because he is stuck in the snare of the fear of men, he's unable to do the just and right thing and even stoops so low as to pronounce sentence on the very Son of God. The fear of men is a dreadful snare.

Contrast this to what the Bible says about the fear of God! When the Bible talks about the fear of God it's referring to a healthy, honoring respect that an individual has for who God is in His divine character and inherent nature. To know God truly is to love Him and if you love God, you will also seek to honor and obey Him. Thus, the Bible declares that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom (**Ps 111:10**) and **Prov 1:7** states that it's the beginning of knowledge. How does this happen? I'm sure there are many aspects to this spiritual principle. For instance, it is impossible to discover and understand the intricacies of God's creation if you lack an acceptance and a healthy respect for the One who created everything. But that's just one aspect. **Ps 25:14** gives another. Revelation from God and about God only comes to those who fear (respect) God.

But wisdom, knowledge and revelation are not the only benefits that are derived from having a healthy respect for God. **Ps 33:18** says that "the eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him..." While it's true that God knows and sees everything, it should be especially comforting to know that He delights to provide a special watch care over those who fear Him. **Ps 103:17** says those who fear God receive His everlasting mercy. **Prv 8:13** says it leads to holiness, **10:27** says it leads to prolonged life; **14:26** says it provides a strong confidence while **15:16** states that it results in a great contentment. The kicker is in **Is 51:12** which implies that the fear of God actually prevents the fear of man! Thus, the old saying is really scriptural: the one who fears God need not fear anyone else! Pilate was trapped! He didn't enjoy any of the benefits come from fearing God. We will never do any better than Pilate unless and until we fear God more than man and act justly, rightly, biblically regardless of the consequences that may result.

What does it mean to fear God more than man? How can each of us be brought to the place where we do this?

1st) We must be thoroughly convinced that God is truly sovereign in human

affairs. We know He is because the Bible teaches it. But beyond knowing it, we must also have it planted in our minds so firmly that we can trust God fully when crunch time comes. Daniel was able to do this. He was familiar with God's sovereignty for he witnessed the rise and fall of several great empires and was told by God that it was He Himself who was doing this. In fact, this was how Daniel came to the king's attention: he was able to interpret a dream for Nebuchadnezzar without the king even explaining the contents of the dream to him. Daniel obviously knew God's sovereignty in the matter of the setting up and taking down of kings. But Daniel didn't just know this intellectually. He knew it experientially too and so was not afraid to stand by his convictions.

Darius, who succeeded the Babylonian Belshazzar, was a kind man and a friend of Daniel. But he was tricked into signing a law that forbid anyone to petition any god or man for 30 days, except him. When Darius signed the law he wasn't thinking about Daniel. But, Daniel continued his practice of prayer to the God of Israel 3 times a day. Daniel was caught, and Darius was caught too, because the law he signed couldn't be changed. So, Daniel was thrown into a den of starving lions, which was the penalty for violating the emperor's decree.

God delivered Daniel from the lions, just as He had earlier delivered Daniel's 3 companions from the fiery furnace. But the fact that God would deliver them wasn't known to Daniel and Co. at the time of their moral predicament. What gave them the courage to do this when so many plausible arguments could've been made in favor of compliance? It was Daniel's personal knowledge of the truth of God's sovereignty. God was in control. Thus, God was able to do and certainly would do what He had chosen to accomplish in each situation ([Dan 3:16-18](#)). These men were able to resist the unjust demands of the powerful rulers of their day because they trusted an even more powerful Ruler. Plus, they were determined that in the final analysis God controlled their lives, not they themselves.

2nd) We must be thoroughly informed by Scripture. Wanting to do the right thing is not enough. We must know what the right thing is, and there's no way to know that apart from God's specific revelation of His standards in the Bible.

Sure, there are many areas in life that are still somewhat ambiguous and answers aren't always as clear as we might like. But without the Bible, there

are no sure answers at all! There's no substitute (even for the busiest Christian) for studying the Bible and deliberately striving to submit your own thoughts and will to it.

Some say we can just trust our conscience. But conscience is an unsure guide. At best, conscience merely tells us that we should do right when we know what's right. But it can't know what's right unless the light of God's revelation shines on it. The conscience is like a sundial, which is made for the sun just as the conscience is made for God's revelation. In the light of the sun a sundial may give pretty good time. But if consulted by moonlight, it may say its 10PM when it's actually 3AM. If you use a candle or a flashlight the sundial can be made to tell any hour you want. It's only reliable when the light of the sun shines on it. In the same way, the conscience is only useful when the light of God shines on the human soul from the pages of the Bible. We need this book, and we need to grow in our understanding of it. If we do grow in our understanding, God will increasingly show us His way and He will quicken our will to do what is right before Him.

3rd) We need to be willing to surrender everything. It's possible to follow the first 2 steps: trust in God's sovereignty and study the Bible to know what's right; and still fail at the crucial moment simply because the right course is too costly. This was Pilate's problem. He didn't really believe in God's sovereignty, but he did believe in the power of the gods or in some form of ultimate retribution. Otherwise he wouldn't have been afraid when told that Jesus claimed to be God's Son. Also, he couldn't know the moral standards of God as revealed in the Bible, because he hadn't ever read it. Still, he knew what was right in this case, yet went against it. Why? It can only have been because he feared losing his position. This was what he valued above all else. Pilate had to choose between what was right and what the world wanted. When faced with that choice, he didn't hesitate to choose the world and its rewards.

15 – Pilate's presentation of Jesus was probably meant to be contemptuous; who else but a beaten and bloodied itinerant preacher would be a Jewish king? But John records the words with irony: this actually is the King of Israel!

If Pilate's statement was ironic, then the next statement from the chief priests was even more so: "We have no king but Caesar!" Nothing could be more ludicrous as this statement from the Jewish religious rulers. They're

actually saying, "We are loyal to none but Caesar alone." The truth was, they hated Caesar and regularly stated that only God was their king.

Why would they say this? You'd think they'd have choked on it as they said it. So great was their hatred of Jesus that they would rather deny their own convictions than see Him escape crucifixion. Still, they spoke truer than they knew. They thought that they were loyal to God and hated Caesar. But it was the Son of God, God incarnate, who they were rejecting; so they are actually showing that they really don't honor God and instead choose to serve Caesar.

While we can sit here and disparage the chief priest and religious rulers for their hypocrisy and hatred of Jesus, we must also recognize that this rejection of Jesus is not just a Jewish verdict, it's the verdict of the human race! What else does the fall of man mean if it's not the willful rejection of God's rule? It means, "We will not abide by His restrictions." What does the crucifixion of Jesus mean (both by Jewish and gentile hands) if it doesn't mean, "We will not have this man to rule over us"? This rejection will continue and will come to a head in full blown battle in the last days, a massive conspiracy to overthrow the authority of God and His Anointed One (Ps 2:1-3).

Why all the hostility? The kings and their subjects despise the rule of God which restricts their freedom. Their goal is autonomy. God's rule is seen as ropes and chains binding and keeping them from unbridled pursuance of their own desires. What is God's answer? Not panic or a flurry of preparation to resist the impending invasion. Instead: (2:4-5). The Lord is temporarily amused by this insanity. But the laughter quickly gives way as He moves to enthrone His Son and unleash His final judgments. They may as well attack hell with a squirt gun because their efforts against God are meaningless to Him. They offer no resistance to His will, just confirmation of their sin and self-centeredness.

It would appear from a human perspective that when the Jews threatened to accuse Pilate of not being a friend of Caesar, it was this declaration that sealed Jesus' fate. Yes, Pilate was guilty of fearing men more than God. Yes, the Jews were guilty of hating Jesus more than they despised being ruled by Rome. But, it wasn't Pilate's fear or the hatred of the chief priests that signed His death warrant and sealed His fate. The Bible declares Jesus

to be the Lamb who was “slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev 13:8).

This verse tells us in no uncertain terms that Jesus Christ was set to die on the cross for the sins of the world of mankind before there was even a world created for mankind! This means that the 3 members of the Godhead: Father, Son and Spirit, knew that Adam would fall and that the entire race of humanity would be hopelessly lost in bondage to sin and their own sin nature. And yet, they still set about to create the universe, the earth and all life that dwells upon it, including man who would ruin it. Why? They went through with creation despite the cost it would levy upon them because they desire to enter into a loving relationship with all those who are willing to accept them. God loves the world some much that He created it knowing full well the price required to purchase our freedom from sin.

It wasn't Pilate's sin or the Jews' sin that sent Jesus to the cross; it was all sin, the sin of the whole world. Sin is what prevents us from having any kind of relationship with God. Sin separates us from God. But, God has made a way to redeem us from the bondage of sin and restore us to a personal, loving relationship with God made possible only by the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

Pilate didn't fail to do the right because he didn't know what was right; he did! He failed because he feared to have it suggested that he wasn't Caesar's friend. What irony! He wanted so much to be a friend of Caesar but he wasn't; he barely knew Caesar. And what's more, Caesar wasn't his friend either. Pilate had no friends anywhere, and yet there stood before him One who, although He's God Almighty, the King of kings, still stooped to be the friend of sinners.

Is He your friend? If not, may I commend Him to you? He is a King! He will demand your total allegiance and faithful service, perhaps even to death. But He doesn't demand from you what He was unwilling to go through Himself. He died for you, and He promises that no matter what you may go through for His sake and the sake of righteousness, He will go through it with you, thus truly proving Himself to be “a friend who sticks closer than a brother.” 😊