

John 19:1-16
January 11, 2026

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: Have you ever found yourself in a “no-win” situation? If yes, can you describe the scenario? Or if one doesn’t specifically come to mind, what feelings did you have in that situation? [Let people engage]

Transition: In the world of counseling, there is a term that is used when someone is in a no-win situation. It’s called a “double bind.” Here is the more formal definition:

“A situation in which a person is confronted with two irreconcilable demands or a choice between two undesirable courses of action.”

EX: Co-leader went to pastor first to get permission to lead a Bible study during Christmas when the pastor asked group leaders to wrap up groups by mid-December to model the importance of taking a break.

As we get ready to read today’s passage, I have to admit that I feel sorry for Pilate. I realize there are multiple opinions about his leadership abilities, or lack of courage to make a stand for an innocent man, which are all valid. But it doesn’t change the fact that Pilate was put in a no-win situation. He was either going to displease the Jewish people, and more specifically, the leaders of the Jewish people, or he was going to upset Caesar because it would look like he’s affirming Jesus’s kingship over the Jews, and there can only be one king! So let’s read the story and see what we can learn. Let’s begin.

BOOK:

Jesus Sentenced to be Crucified

19 Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. ²The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They clothed him in a purple robe ³and went up to him again and again, saying, “Hail, king of the Jews!” And they struck him in the face.

⁴Once more Pilate came out and said to the Jews, “Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against him.” ⁵When Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, “Here is the man!”

⁶As soon as the chief priests and their officials saw him, they shouted, “Crucify! Crucify!”

The Crucifixion

But Pilate answered, “You take him and crucify him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against him.” ⁷The Jews insisted, “We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God.”

⁸When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid, ⁹and he went back inside the palace. “Where do you come from?” he asked Jesus, but Jesus gave him no answer. ¹⁰“Do you refuse to speak to me?” Pilate said. “Don’t you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?”

¹¹ Jesus answered, **“You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore, the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.”**

¹² From then on, Pilate tried to set Jesus free, but the Jews kept shouting, “If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar.”

¹³ When Pilate heard this, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge’s seat at a place known as the Stone Pavement (which in Aramaic is Gabbatha). ¹⁴ It was the day of Preparation of Passover Week, about the sixth hour. “Here is your king,” Pilate said to the Jews.

¹⁵ But they shouted, “Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!” “Shall I crucify your king?” Pilate asked. “We have no king but Caesar,” the chief priests answered.

¹⁶ Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What stood out to you? What questions do you have? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you learn about man? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you learn about God or Jesus or the Holy Spirit? [Let people engage]

Q: What is your takeaway? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

From the human standpoint, the trial of Jesus was the greatest crime and tragedy in history. From the divine viewpoint, it was the fulfillment of prophecy and the accomplishment of the will of God. The fact that God had planned all of this did not absolve the participants of their responsibility. In fact, at Pentecost, Peter put both ideas together in one statement! (Acts 2:23) When Israel asked to have a king, and God gave them Saul, the nation **rejected God the Father** (1 Sam. 8:5–7). When they asked for Barabbas, **they rejected God the Son**. Today, they are **rejecting the pleading of God the Holy Spirit** (Acts 7:51; Rom. 10:21). Yet there will come a day when they shall see their King, believe, and be saved (Zech. 12:10–11; Matt. 24:30; Rev. 1:7). Both the nation and the governor were on trial, and both failed miserably. May we not fail!

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary (Vol. 1, pp. 379-381)*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

“Shall I Release the King of the Jews?” (John 19:1-7)

The fact that Herod had found nothing worthy of death in Jesus encouraged Pilate to confront the Jewish leaders and seek to release the prisoner. He summoned the chief priests and rulers and told them that he found no guilt in Jesus, that Herod had found no guilt in Jesus, and that the next step would be to punish Jesus and release Him. The Jews had already made it clear that they wanted Jesus to die (John 18:31), but Pilate was feebly trying to do the noble thing.

Hoping to strengthen this suggestion, Pilate offered to bargain with the Jewish leaders. It was a custom at Passover for the governor to release a prisoner and please the Jews; so, why not release Jesus? Or, he could release Barabbas; but why would the Jews want Barabbas set free? After all, he was a robber (John 18:40), a notorious prisoner (Matt. 27:16), an insurrectionist and a murderer (Luke 23:19). Who would want *that* kind of a prisoner turned loose?

Incredible as it seems, the crowd asked for Barabbas! The people were persuaded by the chief priests and elders (Matt. 27:20) whose religious convictions did not motivate them toward justice and equity. National feelings always increased during Passover, and a vote *for* Barabbas was a vote *against* Rome. Even though Jesus had been a popular figure among the people, many of them no doubt were disappointed that He had not led a popular uprising to overthrow Rome. Perhaps they had even hoped that His “triumphal entry” a few days before would be the start of Jewish liberation.

There is no explaining how a mob chooses its heroes. No doubt many of the Jews admired Barabbas for his cunning and courage, and they rejoiced that he was fighting Rome. Had they honestly compared and contrasted the two “candidates,” the people would have had to vote for Jesus Christ. But when a mob is manipulated by crafty leaders, in an atmosphere of patriotic fervor, it loses itself and starts to think with its feelings instead of its brains. Their condemning vote said nothing about the Son of God, but it said a great deal about them.

Never at a loss for an idea, Pilate tried a new approach—sympathy. The crowd had cried “Crucify Him!” (Mark 15:14) but perhaps they would be placated if Jesus were scourged. What man could behold a scourged prisoner and still want the victim crucified? The scourge was a leather whip, knotted and weighted with pieces of metal or bone; and many a prisoner never survived the whipping. It pains us to think that the sinless Son of God was subjected to such cruelty. He was innocent, yet He was treated as though He were guilty; and He did it for us. He was slapped in the face before Annas (John 18:22), and spat on and beaten before Caiaphas and the council (Matt. 26:67). Pilate scourged Him and the soldiers smote Him (John 19:1–3); and before they led Him to Calvary, the soldiers mocked Him and beat Him with a rod (Mark 15:19). How much He suffered for us!

Pilate had called Him “King of the Jews” (John 18:39), so the soldiers decided that the “king” should have a crown and a robe. The Jews had mocked His claim to being a Prophet (Matt. 26:67–68), and now the Gentiles mocked His claim to being a King. The verb tenses in the

Greek text in John 19:3 indicate that the soldiers *repeatedly* came to Him, mocked Him, and beat Him with their hands. The forces of hell were having a heyday in Pilate's hall.

Sin had brought thorns and thistles into the world (Gen. 3:17–19), so it was only fitting that the Creator wear a crown of thorns as He bore the sins of the world on the cross. The very metal He had created and placed in the ground was used to make nails to pound through His hands and feet.

For the third time, Pilate went out to face the people (John 18:29, 38; 19:4), this time bringing Jesus with him. Surely the sight of this scourged and humiliated prisoner would arouse some pity in their hearts; but it did not. For the second time, Pilate declared that he found no fault in Jesus, but his words only aroused their hateful passions more. "Behold the man!" carries the idea, "Look at this poor fellow! Hasn't He suffered enough? Take pity on Him and let me release Him." It was a noble effort on Pilate's part, but it failed.

The failure of Pilate's plan teaches us an important lesson: it takes more than human sentiment to bring the lost sinner to salvation. There is a view of the Atonement called "the moral influence theory" that would fit right into the governor's approach. It states that the realization of our Lord's sufferings moves the heart of the sinner so that he turns from sin and begins to love God. It is purely subjective and has no bearing on the holiness of God or the importance of satisfying divine justice.

If any crowd should have been moved by pity, it was the Jewish crowd that waited on Pilate. What nation has suffered more than the Jews? Here was one of their own, a Jewish prophet, suffering unjustly at the hands of the Romans, and the Jews did not repent or even show any touch of pity! If sinners who actually saw Christ in His suffering did not repent, what hope is there for people twenty centuries later who only read about His agonies?

The cross involves much more than an exhibition of innocent suffering. On that cross, the Son of God paid the price for the sins of the world and thereby declared the love of God and defended the holiness and justice of God. We are not saved by feeling pity for Jesus. We are saved by repenting of our sins and trusting Jesus, the sinless Substitute. "If Christ was not actually doing something by His death," wrote Dr. Leon Morris, "then we are confronted with a piece of showmanship, nothing more."

This does not mean that it is wrong for the believer to contemplate the cross and meditate on Christ's sufferings. The familiar hymn "When I Survey the Wond'rous Cross" helps us realize afresh the price that Jesus paid for us, but we must not confuse sentimentality with true spiritual emotion. It is one thing to shed tears during a church service and quite something else to sacrifice, suffer, and serve after the meeting has ended. We do not simply contemplate the cross; we carry it.

For the third time, Pilate announced, "I find no fault in Him!" The crowd might well have shouted, "Then why did you have Him scourged?" Pilate's actions belied his words. He was a weak-willed man who, like many politicians, hoped to find a happy compromise that would please everybody. The Chinese teacher Confucius defined "cowardice" as "to know what is right and not do it."

The religious leaders were not at a loss for a powerful reply: “We have a law, and by our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God” (John 19:7). This statement is not found in the other Gospels (but see Matt. 26:63–64); however, it fits right into John’s purpose in writing his Gospel (John 20:31).

“Where Are You From?” (John 19:8–16)

The Romans and Greeks had numerous myths about the gods coming to earth as men (note Acts 14:8–13), so it is likely that Pilate responded to the phrase “Son of God” with these stories in mind. Already the governor had been impressed by the words and demeanor of our Lord; he had never met a prisoner like Him before. Was He indeed a god come to earth? Did He have supernatural powers? No wonder Pilate was starting to be afraid! Also, Pilate’s wife had sent him a strange message that he should have nothing to do with Jesus (Matt. 27:19). Jesus had even come into her dreams!

Why did Jesus not answer Pilate’s question? Because He had already answered it (John 18:36–37). It is a basic spiritual principle that God does not reveal new truth to us if we fail to act on the truth we already know. Furthermore, Pilate had already made it clear that he was not personally interested in spiritual truth. All he was concerned about was maintaining peace in Jerusalem as he tried to expedite the trial of Jesus of Nazareth. Pilate did not deserve an answer!

Fear and anger often go together. When we are afraid we are weak, we go the other extreme and try to appear strong. This is what Pilate did as he reminded Jesus of his Roman authority. But his statement did not demonstrate his power; it demonstrated his weakness. For if he had the authority to release Jesus, *why did he not do it?* He condemned himself with his own boastful words. Of course, our Lord’s silence before both Herod and Pilate was a fulfillment of Isaiah 53:7. Peter later used this as an example for suffering Christians to follow (1 Peter 2:18–23).

John 19:11 records our Lord’s last words to Pilate, words that reveal His faith in the Father and His surrender to His will (see 1 Peter 2:23; 4:19). All authority comes from God (Rom. 13:1ff). Jesus was able to surrender to Rome and the Jews because He was first of all yielded to God. Pilate was boasting about his authority (John 19:10), but Jesus reminded him that his so-called authority was only delegated to him from God. One day God would call him to account for the way he had used his privileges and responsibilities.

To whom was Jesus referring when He said, “he that delivered Me up unto thee”? Certainly not God, because God does not and cannot sin. Jesus was referring to Caiaphas, the corrupt high priest who had long before determined that Jesus must die (John 11:47–54). Caiaphas knew the Scriptures and had been given every opportunity to examine the evidence. He had willfully closed his eyes and hardened his heart. He had seen to it that Jesus was not given a fair trial. It was his associates who were inciting the mob to cry, “Let Him be crucified!” Pilate was a spiritually blind pagan, but Caiaphas was a Jew who had a knowledge of Scripture. Therefore, it was Caiaphas, not Pilate, who had the greater sin.

What a dilemma Pilate was in! How would he go about investigating the claim that Jesus was “the Son of God”? And there was no evidence that He was a troublemaker or a seditionist. In a final burst of courage, Pilate tried to release Jesus. John does not tell us what steps Pilate took

(the Greek text says “he kept seeking to release Him”), but they all failed. In fact, the crowd started to accuse *Pilate* of being a traitor to Caesar! This was too much for the governor, so he gave his official verdict and delivered Jesus to be crucified. Matthew tells us that Pilate washed his hands before the crowd (Matt. 27:24), but this did not cleanse his heart. Alas, it was Pilate who was on trial, not Jesus!

It is likely that John used Roman time, so that “the sixth hour” would have been 6 a.m. Mark tells us that Jesus was crucified “the third hour,” which, in Jewish reckoning, would have been 9 a.m. Since John wrote “*about* the sixth hour,” we need not try to figure out why it took three hours to get Jesus from Pilate’s hall to Calvary.

The “preparation” refers to the preparation for the Sabbath (see John 19:31) which would begin at sundown that day (Friday). Being the Passover Sabbath, it was an especially holy day. The religious leaders were more concerned about their traditions than they were knowing the truth and obeying the will of God. On a high and holy day, they crucified their own Messiah, Jesus the Son of God!

The crowd had the last word: “We have no king but Caesar!” “We will not have this man to reign over us!” (Luke 19:14) Well-meaning preachers have often said that the crowd that on Palm Sunday shouted “Hosannah!” turned right around and shouted “Crucify Him!” on Good Friday. However, it was two different crowds. The Palm Sunday crowd came primarily from Galilee where Jesus was very popular. The crowd at Pilate’s hall was from Judea and Jerusalem where the religious leaders were very much in control. If the Galilean disciples had had their way, they would have revolted and delivered Jesus!

From the human standpoint, the trial of Jesus was the greatest crime and tragedy in history. From the divine viewpoint, it was the fulfillment of prophecy and the accomplishment of the will of God. The fact that God had planned all of this did not absolve the participants of their responsibility. In fact, at Pentecost, Peter put both ideas together in one statement! (Acts 2:23) When Israel asked to have a king, and God gave them Saul, the nation rejected God the Father (1 Sam. 8:5–7). When they asked for Barabbas, they rejected God the Son. Today, they are rejecting the pleading of God the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:51; Rom. 10:21). Yet there will come a day when they shall see their King, believe, and be saved (Zech. 12:10–11; Matt. 24:30; Rev. 1:7). Both the nation and the governor were on trial, and both failed miserably.

May we not fail!

Blum, E. A. (1985). John. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 2, pp. 338-339-) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

19:1–3. Third, **Pilate ... had him flogged**. Pilate’s action, according to Luke (23:16), was another attempt at compromise. He hoped the crowd would be satisfied with a little blood. Roman flogging was done with a leather whip with bits of metal at the ends. Such flogging often killed a person. The flogging, the mocking **crown of thorns** and **purple robe**, the ridiculing in hailing Him **King of the Jews**, and the physical blows on His **face**—these were all part of Jesus’ deep humiliation as He was identified with human sin as the Servant of the Lord (cf. Isa. 50:6;

52:14–53:6). (Matthew and Mark added that the soldiers spit on Jesus [Matt. 27:30; Mark 15:19].) The thorns **on His head** are mindful of the curse of thorns caused by human sin (Gen. 3:18).

19:4–5. Again Pilate’s attempt to free Jesus by an appeal to the crowd missed the mark. Their taste for His blood was beyond recall. Pilate’s words, **Here is the Man!** (KJV, “Behold the Man!” Latin, *Ecce homo*) have become famous. It is strange that several of Pilate’s statements have become immortal. **Jesus** by that time must have appeared as a pathetic figure, bloody and **wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe.**

19:6–7. The Jewish leaders displayed their hatred of Jesus and **shouted** for His death. Crucifixion was a shameful death, usually reserved for criminals, slaves, and especially revolutionaries. **Pilate** at first refused to be the executioner, but then the leaders brought forth their real reason: **He claimed to be the Son of God. According to the Law** the charge of blasphemy (Lev. 24:16) called for death, if it could be proven. About the same time Pilate’s wife sent him strange words: “Don’t have anything to do with that innocent Man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of Him” (Matt. 27:19).

19:8–11. Pilate’s response was one of fear. As a pagan he had heard stories of humanlike gods who visited men and judged them. Perhaps the solemn majesty of **Jesus** with His claims of truth began to convict his conscience. Jesus’ refusal to **answer** Pilate’s question, **Where do You come from?** fulfilled the words of prophecy in Isaiah 53:7.

Pilate had his opportunity for truth and was found wanting. Disturbed by Jesus’ silence, he asked, **Don’t You realize I have power ...?** True, Pilate had some power, but he was a pawn. Yet he was responsible for his decisions (cf. Acts 4:27–28; 1 Cor. 2:8). In reality, God is the only One who has ultimate and full power. Pilate, Jesus said, was under God and therefore responsible to Him: **The one who handed Me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.** In this statement was Jesus referring to Judas, Satan, Caiaphas, the priests, or the Jewish people? Perhaps Caiaphas is the best choice since he is the one who handed Jesus over to Pilate. Pilate was guilty (cf. the words in the Apostles’ Creed, “suffered under Pontius Pilate”). But Jesus put more weight on Caiaphas as the responsible one (cf. John 11:49–50; 18:13–14).

19:12–13. **Pilate**, probably under conviction, wanted to **free** Jesus **but the Jews** now tried a new attack. To let **Jesus** go free, they argued, would be disloyalty to **Caesar**. The title **friend of Caesar** (Latin, *amicus Caesaris*) was an important consideration. Tiberius was on the throne and he was sick, suspicious, and often violent. Pilate had plenty to cover up and he did not want an unfavorable report to go to his boss. If he had to choose between showing his loyalty to Rome or siding with a despised and strange Jew, there was no question in his mind. The dilemma had to be resolved so **Pilate** made the official decision.

19:14–16. **The sixth hour**, by Roman reckoning of time, could indicate 6 a.m. (some scholars, however, take it to mean noon; cf. comments on 1:39; 4:6). This **was the day of preparation** for the **Passover Week** (i.e., Friday). That day was the Passover proper, the day on which Christ died. But it was also the preparation for the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread, which followed immediately after the Day of Passover, and which was sometimes called the Passover Week (cf. Luke 2:41; 22:1, 7; Acts 12:3–4; see comments on Luke 22:7–38).

Pilate said, **Here is your King** (KJV, “Behold your King!”). This is another example of irony. (John is the only Gospel writer who mentioned this incident.) Pilate did not believe Jesus was their King, but to spite the Jews he called Jesus the King of the Jews. John saw this as significant, for Jesus would die for His people as the King of His people, as the Messiah. Pilate could not resist goading the Jews: **Shall I crucify your King?** As if Rome would *not* crucify a Jewish king! The Jewish rejoinder, **We have no king but Caesar**, was full of irony. The rebellious Jews claimed loyalty to Rome while disclaiming their Messiah (cf. Ps. 2:1–3).

White, J. E. (1998). *John*. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), *Holman Concise Bible Commentary* (p. 488). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Source of Power (19:1–16a)

The physical and emotional torment that Jesus suffered is beyond description. He was not only physically beaten, but ridiculed and mocked. Perhaps as one last effort to have Jesus released, Pilate presented Him before the crowd after His beating in order to see if now they could accept His liberation (19:4). The Jews, however, insisted on His death because Christ claimed to be the Son of God (19:7).

Pilate’s claim that he had the power to free or crucify Jesus brought the following response: “You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore, the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin” (19:11). What should perhaps be noted here is Jesus’ intimation that Pilate, though not the initiator of the death of Jesus, was not without sin.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). John 19:1-16. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.