

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 15 February 2026. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

What Will You Do with Jesus?

Matthew 27:15-26

In the 400's B.C., a man named **Theagenes of Thasos** was making a name for himself throughout Greece, on account of his incredible physical strength, and swiftness of foot. Over the years, Theagenes competed multiple times in the Olympian, Pythian, Nemean, and Isthmian games, both in the long-distance races, and in the *pankration* matches. (*Pankration* was a cross between modern boxing, wrestling, and martial arts—except much more brutal.) It is said that Theagenes won more than 1,400 boxing matches!¹

Now, according to an ancient historian named Pausanias, there was another runner from the island of Thasos who had once competed against Theagenes in a competition, and lost; and he wasn't exactly a "good sport" about it. Over the years, his bitterness toward Theagenes grew, until he was utterly consumed with jealousy. Finally, Theagenes died; and the people of Greece, who had come to regard Theagenes as a son of a god, began to erect statues of him all over the place. One of these statues was crafted by a famous sculptor named Glaucias, and was placed right there in Theagenes' hometown of Thasos—which was also the hometown of his old enemy. At last, this bitter man knew how he would "get back" at Theagenes: he would assault his statue. At first, he vented his rage by scourging the statue.² Then, he came up with another idea: he would destroy the statue little by little. Night after night, he went out under cover of darkness and chipped away at the base of the statue a little bit more, so as to weaken its foundation. Well, I think you can guess what happened: one night as he was chiselling away, he made one chip too many, and the statue fell down on him, and crushed him to death.³

And so it was with Jesus' old enemies, the chief priests, elders, scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, and members of the Sanhedrin. Many of these men knew, in their heads, that Jesus must be the Messiah; but they refused to acknowledge Him as Messiah, and believe on Him, because they were insanely jealous of Him. They envied His miraculous power, and the authority with which He spoke; and they couldn't wait to find some way to kill Him. Finally, they figured out how to kill Him: they would accuse Him of being an insurrectionist, so that the Romans would put Him to death. However, they forgot with whom they were dealing. Jesus is the **Foundation Stone of Israel**; and when you try to hurt a stone, what happens? *You get hurt!* This reminds me of when I was a little kid, and I stubbed my toe against a rock, tree, wall, bookcase, or some other solid, immovable object. In my blind anger, I sometimes kicked the rock, or tree, or bookcase, or whatever it was. But who got hurt? *I did!* Likewise, all who reject Christ, and kick at Him, and try to remove Him from their lives, do so to their own peril. Only a few days before His crucifixion, Jesus warned the religious leaders, "***Whosoever shall fall on this stone (meaning Himself) shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.***"

Now, the religious leaders of Israel had already decided what *they* would do with Jesus; but what would **Pilate** do with Him? What would **the people of Israel** do with Him? And what will **you** do with Him? This is the question of the ages: and *no one* is exempted from it. We *all* must decide what we will do with Jesus of Nazareth. The title of this morning's message is *What Will You Do with Jesus?*

Matthew 27:15-26

I. A criminal is offered (vv. 15-18)

In last week's message, we found that Pilate was feeling rather stressed. On the one hand, his job was on the line. The religious leaders of Israel were telling him that if he didn't sentence Jesus of Nazareth to death for treason, then he was no friend of Caesar's; and Pilate knew very well that Caesar's frown was like the "kiss of death." Politically, it would be suicide for Pilate not to let the Sanhedrin have their way on this one. Yet, on the other hand, Pilate knew that there was something otherworldly about Jesus of Nazareth. Pilate sensed that this Man standing before him really *was* the King of a Kingdom that is "*not of this world*"; and it unnerved him. At first, he tried to relieve himself of his judicial responsibility by sending Jesus to *Herod's* court; but Herod simply sent Jesus back to Pilate's court, when he realised that Jesus wasn't going to give him the little "magic show" that he had demanded.

Now, before you start to feel sorry for Pilate, you need to realise that he was *not* a nice guy. He was *not* a mild-mannered, well-meaning, but ill-informed man who just happened to be having a "bad day at the office," on account of those pushy Jewish leaders. He was actually a very cruel, contrary, spiteful, haughty, condescending kind of man, who seemed to delight in doing provocative things just to incur the wrath of the Jews. Yet, at the same time, he had a streak of cowardice in him. Sometimes he stubbornly carried through with a brutal or provocative decree, despite the mayhem that it caused; but at other times, he retracted his decisions, when it looked as though there might be some serious consequences. For instance, Pilate loved to rub Emperor Worship in the Jews' faces. On one occasion, he brought the Imperial standard into Jerusalem at nighttime, and set the banners all over Jerusalem. The Jews were so outraged by this idolatrous image of Caesar, that they surrounded Pilate's palace in Caesaria for five days. Finally, Pilate summoned these Jews into the arena there in Caesaria, as though he would discuss the matter with them; but when they were all in the arena, he commanded the Roman soldiers to draw their swords on them. However, the Jews showed such fierce defiance, that Pilate relented, and removed the banners.⁴ On *that* occasion, Pilate backed down; but at other times, Pilate did *not* back down. On one occasion Pilate put golden shields, with an inscription praising the emperor as a "god," on the walls of Herod's palace in Jerusalem; and the Jews were *not* happy. The Jewish leaders demanded that Pilate remove the shields; but Pilate dug in his heels, and refused to remove them. And so, the Jewish leaders appointed four princes from Herod's court to go to Rome to tattle on Pilate. When Tiberias heard about it, he was furious; and he gave Pilate a severe reprimand, and

ordered him to remove the shields immediately.⁵ On another occasion, Pilate seized money from the Temple treasury, and used it to fund a new aqueduct in Jerusalem. Of course, a huge riot quickly broke out over it; but Pilate ordered his soldiers to beat the people to death with clubs, and trample them with their horses. Also, in **Luke 13**, Luke tells us about a time when Pilate mixed the blood of some Galileans with the blood of the sacrifices. Evidently, Pilate suspected that these Galileans were followers of a rebel named Judas of Galilee; and so, while they were offering their sacrifices in the Temple, Pilate's soldiers entered the Temple, and slaughtered them right there in the courtyard. Their blood was literally splattered and mingled with the blood of their sacrificial animals, right there on the altar.⁶

Now, lest you still think that Pilate was a halfway decent guy who simply got “caught in the crosshairs” of the Jews and the Emperor, consider this: Pilate was *not* a new governor, newly arrived from Rome. *He had been governor of Judea from the beginning of Jesus' ministry.* He must have known a *lot* about Jesus. He had had 3 ½ years to “do his homework” about Jesus; and, just like everyone else, he had had plenty of time to consider whether Jesus really is the Christ, the Son of God. The reports about Jesus must have been rolling into Pilate's court constantly. Yet, for 3 ½ years, he had tried to avoid coming to a decision about Jesus. There is no record that Pilate had ever acted for *or* against Jesus: he had remained silent and neutral. However, his time was up, and there was no more evading the question. Jesus was now looking Pilate right in the face; and Pilate was forced to decide, “What will I do with Jesus?”

Now, we'll return to that thought later in the message. For now, though, let's look again at **verse 18**, and see what we can learn about Pilate's perception of this situation. (**Read Matthew 27:18.**) Not only did Pilate already know a lot about Jesus: he also knew the religious leaders of Israel well. He knew that they were hypocrites. He knew all about their greed, and their love of power; and he knew that their “sedition” charges against Jesus were bogus. Even this pagan idolater could plainly see that these so-called “holy” men were motivated not by zeal for God, but by **envy of Jesus**.

Envy and lust dominated every aspect of these men's characters. Their envy was like an iron chain, binding them, and dragging them to their own destruction. Envy is a powerful thing; and it is cruel. It doesn't matter who you are (or who you *think* you are): envy will destroy your life (regardless of whether others *perceive* your envy, or not). **Proverbs 27:4** says, **“Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous; but who is able to stand before envy?”** Little did the Sanhedrin realise that their cruel and envious actions against Jesus had been prophetically foreshadowed by ten cruel and envious men who had lived hundreds of years earlier.

Genesis 37:3-11, 18-20, 26-28

Acts 7:9

Anyone with functioning eyes and ears knew that the religious leaders were delivering up Jesus to death out of *envy*. The Jewish people knew it; and Pilate knew it. Just as Jacob's ten oldest sons, moved with envy, delivered Joseph into slavery for twenty pieces of silver, so Jesus' Jewish brethren, moved with envy, were now delivering *Him* up to be slain, for *thirty* pieces of silver. Joseph's brothers had said, "***Shalt thou indeed reign over us?***"; and likewise, the people of Israel were now saying, "***We will not have this man to reign over us.***" Jesus had foretold their rejection of Him in parable form, just days before His crucifixion.

Luke 19:11-14

Pilate knew very well that the Sanhedrin wanted to kill Jesus for just one reason—envy! However, Pilate himself was on no moral high ground. The truth of the matter is that *Pilate* had envy issues, too. He hated and envied his old enemy, Herod Antipas. Pilate loved power, and desired more of it; and he certainly wasn't about to give up his position of governor. Yet, at the same time, he feared to make a judgment against Jesus. And so, in desperation, another idea popped into his head. Once again, he tried to shift the blame to someone else. (This was a consistent trend in his life.) He decided to give the Jews a choice. Would they release Jesus? Or would they release a man named Barabbas, who was a notorious seditionist and murderer? After all, it was the custom, at Passover time, for one prisoner to be released; so the timing was perfect. Surely this was a no-brainer. Even if the religious leaders still wanted to kill Jesus, surely the will of the *people* would prevail. Surely the people would prefer to release Jesus, who had healed the sick, and raised the dead. Jesus had *saved* lives, whereas Barabbas had *taken* lives. Surely they would prefer to crucify Barabbas, who had murdered their own loved ones, and caused havoc. (Or *would* they?) Pilate would soon find out.

II. A concern is voiced (v. 19)

(Read Matthew 27:19 again.) Pilate was a cruel man, who loved to provoke and spite people. (He might have even been partly motivated to release Jesus simply because he knew it would spite the Jewish leaders!) However, God loved Pilate, and genuinely desired for him to repent and be saved. Pilate wasn't a mindless cog in God's plan, who had no choice but to condemn Jesus. God didn't predestinate Pilate, against his will, to reject His Son. Pilate had a free will; and he was being given a genuine offer to turn from his sin, and believe on Jesus. The fact that God gave Pilate's wife a fearful dream about Jesus of Nazareth shows that God was reaching out to Pilate, even at this late hour, and calling him to believe on His Son.

Throughout Scripture, God often sent dreams to people who didn't know Him, to warn them to turn from their wicked ways, and believe on Him; and several people (including King Nebuchadnezzar, and Saul of Tarsus) *did* repent and believe—either immediately, or farther down the road. In **Job 33**, a believer named Elihu said, ***“For God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed; then he openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction, that he may withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride from man.”***

Now, don't misunderstand: the canon of Scripture is complete, and God is *not* giving new prophecies or revelations to people anymore. However, God does still occasionally use dreams to point people to His Son—especially in lands of intense spiritual darkness, where His Word is scarcely to be found, and where believers are heavily oppressed. It is estimated that in Iran, about 50,000 mosques have been abandoned in recent decades; and people are turning to Christ by the hundreds of thousands. Why have people's hearts become so open? There are many factors; but one of these factors is that God is giving many people *dreams*. In these dreams, people sometimes see an open Bible, with a Scripture verse about Christ and salvation prominently emblazoned in it; or, they see a scenario that comes directly from one of Jesus' parables about salvation (such as a narrow door, with a banquet going on inside). Some people hear a voice in their dreams; and this voice commands them to believe on Jesus; or to find a Bible in a certain location, and read it; or to go to a certain place, where they will find someone who can show them the way of salvation. Many Muslims even see Christ Himself in their dreams. Somehow, they immediately realise that this Person who is shining like the sun is Jesus; and when He speaks, He speaks words about Himself—which, they later discover, are words from the Bible. Some believe on Christ immediately, before they even waken from sleep; and others believe on Christ a short time later, after they have found a Bible, and read it for themselves. The circumstances vary from person to person; but in every case (so far as I can see), these dreams are given to people who know, deep in their hearts, that they don't have the truth: and they are inwardly seeking (or even praying) for answers.

Folks, God is ***“not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance”***; and He often goes the “extra mile” to draw people to Himself. Pilate and his wife were mercifully being given a golden opportunity to believe on God's Son. For three years, Pilate had, evidently, been evading all the talk about Jesus of Nazareth; but God was getting him “up to speed” on all the truth that he had missed—whether he wanted to hear it or not. God even used the religious leaders to inform Pilate that this Jesus is called ***“the Son of God.”***

John 18:39 – 19:15

God had used the testimony of Christ Himself, as well as the testimony of a dream, and even the words of the religious leaders themselves, to warn Pilate not to condemn Jesus; and now, the choice had to be made. This leads me to our next point.

III. Choices are made (vv. 20-23, 26)

(Read Matthew 27:17, 20.) On the morning of Christ's trial, decisions of profound gravity were being made. First, **the religious leaders** made a choice. *They* chose to release a murderer, and condemn the Son of God; and they did everything in their power to convince the people to condemn Jesus, too. They were willing to go to any length to get Jesus out of their lives. When Pilate asked them if they would crucify their King, they said, ***"We have no king but Caesar."*** Now, stop and think about that statement. Did the religious leaders love Caesar? Not on your life! They hated the Romans with a passion. Yet, because they wanted to kill Jesus, they hypocritically pretended to be loyal, admiring subjects of Caesar.

Tragically, the Jewish people paid dearly for these words! Because their leaders rejected Jesus as their King, and said ***"We have no king but Caesar,"*** Caesar was whom they got. For centuries afterward, the Roman Caesars treated the Jewish people with cruelty. Even after the pagan Caesars were no more, the so-called "Christian" Pontiffs of the so-called "Holy" Roman Empire treated the Jews with even more cruelty than the pagan Caesars did. At the Great White Throne Judgment, God will severely punish the pagan Caesars, the apostate Roman pontiffs, and every other leader of every other government that has ever oppressed and slaughtered God's people, the Jews. However, this doesn't change the fact that the rulers of Israel rejected Jesus as their King, and owned Caesar as their king instead. To this day, most people are still like this. Many people want Jesus out of their thoughts so completely, that they are angered to hear His name. They hate Jesus, and despise His holiness. Little do they realise that by rejecting Jesus as their Ruler, they are owning Satan as their ruler.

Now, not only did the religious leaders make their choice: **the people** made their choice, too. **(Read Matthew 27:20-23, 25.)** Only three days before Christ's trial, a ***"very great multitude"*** had praised Jesus as He rode into Jerusalem. Seemingly the entire city (apart from the rulers) hailed Jesus as their King. Yet, now the majority of the people were demanding that Jesus be crucified. Why? Because it was now politically correct to reject Jesus. It was no longer popular to say ***"Hosanna to the Son of David"***; thus, they went with the tide. The popular thing to say now was ***"Crucify him"***; and very soon, the people would also be saying, ***"He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him; for he said, I am the Son of God."*** These words of scorn were prophesied by King David, 1,000 years earlier.

Psalm 22:1-8

To this day, many people are just like the people of Israel, who said ***“Hosanna to the Son of David”*** one minute, but then turned around and said, ***“His blood be on us, and upon our children,”*** as soon as it was no longer popular to be a follower of Jesus. Many people in *this* country once had a nominal “faith” in Jesus; but today they despise His name. Why? Because they never knew Him to begin with. The “faith” they claimed to have was never true faith. They were deceived by a false religion which teaches salvation through good works, sacraments, rituals, and prayers to dead saints, instead of by simple faith in the One who paid for our sins in full. They never had a relationship with Jesus, because the “Jesus” they had been told about is not the Jesus of the Bible. They simply traded the darkness of false, apostate Christianity for the darkness of humanism. Other people *profess* to be “Christians,” because it is the cultural expectation; but they don’t really want Jesus in their lives. When a *real* Christian comes around, they feel very uncomfortable. Why? Because they sense *Christ* in that believer. Remember what happened when Jesus cast hundreds of demons out of the maniacs of Gadara? How did the people of Gadara react when they saw the two men who had once terrified them clothed, in their right minds, and sitting quietly at Jesus’ feet? Did they thank Jesus for saving these two men’s souls, and for delivering *them* from their affliction, too? No, they did not. Instead of rejoicing that two men’s lives had been saved, they were angry that their pigs were dead. They were far more concerned about financial loss, than they were for these men’s souls (and for with their *own* souls). Furthermore, they were *uncomfortable* with this Man named Jesus. In fact, they were *afraid*. Luke records that the people ***“besought him to depart from them; for they were taken with great fear.”*** They would rather deal with the fear of the *demons* that had afflicted and terrified them, than to have the *fear of the Lord*. And so people still are to this day. When someone gets saved, and stops lying to his friends and family, or doing drugs and alcohol, or stealing, or cheating on his (or her) spouse, or gossiping, or cursing and blowing up in anger, and instead becomes kind and gentle, sober-minded, honest, and faithful, people back away from that person in fear. They would rather have their old lying, cheating, selfish friend, who had treated them with disdain, than this *new* man who now treats them with kindness and respect. Why? Because Jesus cramps people’s sinful lifestyles, convicts them of sin, and makes them feel uncomfortable.

Little did the Jewish people know, when they said, ***“His blood be on us, and upon our children,”*** how right they were. Those who have not, by faith, applied the blood of Jesus to the doorpost of their hearts, *will* have the blood of Jesus “upon” them in another way: they will have His blood “on their hands.” They will be counted guilty of the blood of Jesus, just as surely as the people who actually crucified Jesus will be counted guilty. They will stand before God and hear the awful words, ***“Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.”***

Now, there was one more person who had a decision to make on morning: and that person was **Pilate himself**. This leads us to our last point.

IV. A “cleansing” is attempted (vv. 24-25)

(Read Matthew 27:24 again.) How did Pilate receive Jesus? He rejected Him. Yet, unlike the Jews, who owned up to their decision, Pilate refused to take personal responsibility. He knew, deep inside, that Jesus was who He claimed to be; but he feared man. He may not have *wanted* to crucify Jesus; but he did it, anyway. He felt conviction; yet, he ignored the conviction in his heart, and then tried to soothe his conscience afterward. He literally washed his hands with water, as though water could magically wipe away his guilt. He tried to convince himself that it was not *he* who had rejected the Son of God, but rather the Jews.

Many people today are just like Pilate. They believe, intellectually, that Jesus is the Son of God; but their “faith” is not true, saving faith, because they have not repented (turned to God from sin). By clinging to their own self-righteousness, instead of placing their trust in Christ and His righteousness, they are rejecting Jesus; yet, they refuse to admit that that is what they are doing. However, God’s Word makes it clear: those who do not come to Christ in faith and repentance are, in fact, crucifying Christ in their hearts. Paul said that those who come close to salvation, yet “*fall away,*” and refuse to repent, are crucifying to themselves “*the Son of God afresh,*” and putting Him “*to an open shame.*”

Pilate seemingly “meant well”; but his “good intentions” were worthless. A sinner must repent and believe on Jesus to be saved. By the way, what ever happened to Pilate? For one thing, he was removed from his position of governor a few years later. Apparently, he sent his soldiers to slaughter a group of Samaritans in a village near Mount Gerizim, on the grounds that they were followers of a false messiah named Dositheos; however, the Samaritans claimed that these men had been unarmed. They voiced their complaint to Vitellius, the governor of Syria; and Vitellius dutifully reported this incident to Emperor Tiberius. Tiberius summoned Pilate to Rome to be tried for this crime; however, Tiberius unexpectedly died before Pilate arrived.⁷ We don’t know if Pilate ever stood trial or not; but we do know that not long afterward, in A.D. 37, Pilate committed suicide.⁸ How tragic that this man had had the privilege of looking the Saviour in the face, and of hearing His voice, chose to ignore that holy voice, and crucify Jesus. I don’t know whether the Holy Spirit ever convicted Pilate’s heart again; but if He did, Pilate resisted the Spirit’s call to his dying day.

Pilate tried to *wash away* Christ’s blood from his hands; yet, the irony is that in order to be saved, and go to Heaven one day, you must be washed *in* Christ’s blood. When you believe on Jesus, it is as though you are washing your filthy, sin-stained garments in Christ’s precious blood; and when you wash your garments in Christ’s blood, all sins are washed away. What

emerges is a pure and spotless white “robe”—the robe of Christ’s imputed righteousness. *This* is the robe that you must wear if you would enter the pearly gates of Heaven!

Revelation 1:5-6 / 5:8-10 / 7:9-14 / 19:7-8

Conclusion: As we close this morning, I would ask, “Do *you* have the robe of Christ’s righteousness?” Have *you* washed your robes in the blood of the Lamb? In other words, “Are you saved?” Has there been a time in your life when you personally repented of your sin, and asked Christ to save you? If not, please don’t be like Pilate! Don’t try to wash your hands *of* Jesus’ blood. Don’t persist in your self-righteousness, and insist that you are a good person, and that *you* are not guilty of Jesus’ blood. Instead, confess that you are a sinner, and wash your entire being *in* the blood of Jesus, by believing on Him! To those who are saved, I would ask, “Are you lukewarm in your service to the Lord?” If so, get on fire for the Lord again! Return to your first love, and serve Christ with all your heart!

¹ “Theagenes of Thasos,” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theagenes_of_Thasos

² *Ibid.*

³ Robert J. Morgan, *Preacher’s Sourcebook of Creative Sermon Illustrations* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Publishers, 2007), p. 271.

⁴ Flavius Josephus, *The Jewish War* (2.9.2) and *Antiquities of the Jews* (18.3.1), excerpted from “Pontius Pilate,” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pontius_Pilate.

⁵ Philo, *Embassy to Gaius* 38, excerpted from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pontius_Pilate.

⁶ John R. Rice, *A Verse by Verse Commentary: Luke* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1971), p. 323.

⁷ “Pontius Pilate,” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pontius_Pilate.

⁸ *Ibid.*