

On the way to Calvary - Hilary McDowell
Week 5 Choices
Friday - Truth's Shadow



Jesus Before Pilate

Very early in the morning, the chief priests, with the elders, the teachers of the law and the whole Sanhedrin, made their plans. So they bound Jesus, led him away and handed him over to Pilate.

"Are you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate.

"You have said so," Jesus replied.

The chief priests accused him of many things. So again Pilate asked him, "Aren't you going to answer? See how many things they are accusing you of."

But Jesus still made no reply, and Pilate was amazed.

Mark 15:1-5 (NIV) Read also verses 6-20

Standing before the Roman procurator, Jesus looked even more vulnerable than before the Jews - at least, it seemed so to the traveller. After all, they were his own people, of his nation and religion, his kith and kin, and she had imagined he might stand some chance with them. Here the whole weight of the Roman Empire was aligned against him - an empire that cared little for Jews or their God.

But the strangest process of law was taking place in this second courtroom and she could hardly fathom what was going on. Many accusations were levelled at Jesus, from political treason to tax evasion (Luke 23: 1-2), and the amazing thing was that Pilate believed none of it. Was this official of the Roman government trying to get at the truth? It wasn't until the elders and chief priests and scribes insisted that Jesus was making a claim to kingship of the nation of Judea that Pilate took notice. After all, the empire had to be protected at all costs from a local uprising.

She watched the stately procurator look into Christ's eyes and put the question to him directly: 'Are you the King of the Jews?' There was something in Pilate's eyes then - was it fear, or genuine integrity and respect for his own law? She wondered. Did the shadow of truth fall, even then, across Pilate's heart as he

tried to goad the Lord into building a case for his own defence? Jesus remained silent and Pilate's mind was still undecided.

'She told him, you know,' came DC's voice from the bench behind. The traveller turned to face the dream carrier, her eyebrows raised in question. 'Pilate,' he said, stabbing a thumb to the front of the court, 'he had due warning from his Mrs, I carried the dream to her myself. Look, here comes her messenger now.'

Sure enough, a slave had been admitted to the courtroom and was hastily delivering a message to Pilate. All judgement halted while he took note of his wife's warning. Tracy knew the words from Mathew 27 very well: 'Have nothing to do with that innocent man...', She held her breath. This could be it, she thought. This could be the moment when Pilate resists the fears for his future, his position, his livelihood, and allows truth - truth he knows, for he fully realises that the priest's chief motivation for bringing the prisoner to him is envy (v.18) - allows that truth to direct his actions and set Jesus free.

Desperately, Pilate grabbed at a straw. Tradition allowed him to be merciful to one prisoner during this period of annual feasting. Swinging the weight of the court into action, he offered the gathered crowd a choice of prisoner to be set free, pitting Jesus against a criminal called Barabbas.

DC muttered his own comments on Pilate's merciful offer. 'He's proud of this tradition, you know. He thinks it secures his popularity with the people - well, perhaps not popularity exactly, but something less than hatred. This choice between Jesus and a common criminal, Pilate imagines, should get him out of trouble. "No contest," he thinks. "Jesus, the popular hero, flavour of the month with lepers and lawyers alike, healer, teacher, all-round good egg - no problem, it's as good as done." Besides, he imagines he won't be to blame if something goes wrong. But something's going badly wrong with his plan, all right! He tried to manipulate the situation, to procure the honest outcome while hanging on to his own popularity and position. But he can't have his cake and eat it too. See, Tracy? Pilate's a bit too sharp for his own good, eh?

But when DC looked again at where the traveller had been, she had already gone. Quite a surprise really, for him, as he was accustomed to doing the disappearing act himself.

He found her outside the courtroom, tears streaming down her face, watching a group of soldiers bent on a task. They were laughing and joking and roughly pushing each other in mock posturing, but one of them was making something on the ground, and it was to this soldier that Tracy had gone. While the loud shouts of 'Crucify him, crucify him!' rang across the courtyard from the lips of

the crowd, Tracy stood staring down at the twisted circle of sticks and thorns being woven together in the soldier's hand.

'It's for him, isn't it?' she wept.

DC nodded, but could not speak.

'I almost chose this one,' she whispered through her tears. 'In my dream, DC, with the objects you gave me, I almost chose the crown of thorns, to change things, like you promised I could.'

'What would you have done with it, Tracy?' he asked her.

'I would have offered to wear it for him, DC,' she replied.

'You wear it? Are you sure?'

'Well, no one can remove his dying agony. Even though, Simon of Cyrene was able to carry the weight of the wood for a little way, only Jesus could grace the cross of Calvary. I know now that I could not, and should not, try to change that - and I could not ease any of his suffering.'

'I had to allow you to learn that lesson for yourself, Tracy.'

'But I would have worn the crown with pride, for it would be a privilege, DC - every thorn-prick a royal duty and every drop of blood an honour.'

'You have spoken well,' said DC, smiling, 'and more accurately than you know. For you indeed bear all the heritage of a royal princess, daughter of the King of kings, and every painful duty of family relationship, work or poor health will adorn your forehead like crowning jewels. Wear it well, dear traveller, for each droplet from your forehead is precious blood, bought by his royal sacrifice, and one day you too shall walk free from an empty tomb in joy, to be with him for ever.'

Dear Lord,

What do I do with your majesty? Could I choose a jewel for you to wear? Would the sound of my offerings of praise be a necklace for your forehead? Would a bracelet of my prayers adorn your wrist? Would my daily steps of obedience crown your head with glory? Or do my sins prick your skull with thorns of sadness? Do I stand with Pilate after all?

No, no, dear Lord, let me share your pain in every choice I make - embracing a thousand lesser daily crosses on my way through the labyrinth of this world's trial of head and heart and soul. Help me to bear each thorn with quiet determination, to cultivate the love that you have shown me and reflect it back to others. Help me to experience the truth that it is by embracing suffering, not with resignation but in your strength, that we find ourselves freed from the tyranny of pain in this world and the next. Amen.

