



Pilate's View

On the Outside Looking In #2 • March 29, 2026

Opening



“You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, **all whose thoughts are fixed on you!**” (Isaiah 26:3, NLT)

Keeping your thoughts fixed can be hard! Amen?!

I'm only three sentences into my sermon at this point, and I guarantee that some of you are already losing focus, like Dug the golden retriever in Pixar's movie *Up*. Dug could barely get through a sentence before having his attention... “SQUIRREL!!”... stolen away by a quick movement in the corner of his eye. This morning, what is your... “SQUIRREL!?” What is going through your head...*right now*? What is one distraction happening *in this moment* around you that threatens to take your mind off Christ?



- **Temperature** (“*Is it a little warm in here? Is the thermostat set at 82°?*”)
- **Song** in your head (“*...and every knee will bow before the Lion and the Lamb*”)
- **Perfume** (*Sniff* “*What is that? Warm vanilla? With a hint of citrus? Who is it?*”)
- **Traffic** (“*That guy just drove by fast...and it sounded like he has muffler issues*”)
- **Chores** (“*Will Steve move on to the point?! I've got laundry to do today!*”)

In some situations, it's easy to recognize the distractions, like when you are sitting at a restaurant with your wife while the TVs are playing a hockey game behind her.

We all lose focus. We lose focus while cooking, while reading, while watching a movie, while talking to our kids, while taking a test. And for the most part, those distractions aren't consequential; they don't hurt us too much.

But you know other times distraction is devastating. If we lose focus while driving? If we lose focus during surgery? If we lose focus while shooting a

gun? If we lose focus while defusing a nuclear device? If we lose focus while saying our wedding vows?

Lost focus is bad when the stakes are high!



Series Tie-In

As we prepare for Easter, we have been looking at Jesus through the eyes of some people who were on the wrong side of the cross – people who were on the outside looking in. We are asking:

- **How did they see Jesus?**
- **What errors or mistakes did they make?**
- **How can we avoid making those same mistakes?**
- ...and MOST importantly, if we find ourselves on the outside, **how can we cross over to become an insider?**

Last week we looked at Caiaphas the high priest, and we learned that *knowing better is not enough*. Whether our blind spots are intentional or not, we need to *see Jesus and repent!*

Today, I want to look through the eyes of another outsider with great influence. He shows up at a key moment in the story. He is **Pilate, the Roman governor**, and he is going to show us a thing or two about what we need to focus on...without distraction!



Getting to Know Pilate

[Camera opens. Pontius Pilate stands on a balcony, looking out, then turns toward the camera with a measured, confident expression.]

“Pontius Pilate. Governor of Judea.

Yes, it’s a complicated job. Politics, pressure, keeping the peace... not exactly a quiet life.

But when I do get a moment? I appreciate the finer things—Roman architecture, a well-run province, a good conversation that doesn’t turn into a debate.

I’m a practical man. I deal in facts, not rumors. I listen, I weigh things carefully... and I try not to get dragged into other people’s chaos.

Some say I'm cautious. Others say I'm decisive when it counts. Either way, I know how to handle responsibility.

So, if you're looking for someone steady, thoughtful... and not easily shaken by a little tension—we'll get along just fine.

Just try not to ask me to settle your disputes first thing in the morning!"



Pontius Pilate, in the stories of history, shouldn't stand out. Being governor of the province of Judaea from 26-36 AD is about as notable as being the governor of Montana from 1963-1973. It's an important role, but it's not one that most people outside the area would notice or care about. No one *should* remember Pilate... but we *do*!



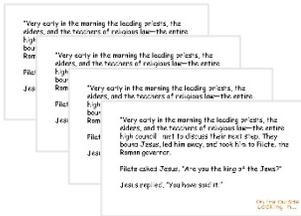
Pilate is a prominent figure in the New Testament gospels, and his name is read in every church during every Easter season of every year. He features in each gospel message; he is also singled out in the historic Apostles' Creed, showing up alongside Mary the mother of Jesus as the only people named in the text (apart from the divine names of the Father, the Son/Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit). As such, his name is familiar to us.

But outside of the church, Pilate was relatively insignificant. Here's what we can piece together from ancient sources:

Pilate is appointed to the position as governor of this Roman province in 26 AD (a few years before Jesus' public ministry), and he is quick to show control and authority over the local population. He pulls some power moves, taking actions that deliberately offend the Jewish faithful – like setting up images of the Roman emperor (a religious figure of his own), taking funds from the temple to pay for civil engineering projects...and not shying away from the spilling of blood. But these types of moves weren't unique to Pilate; his behavior might be shocking by today's standards, not by his. Eventually, he was removed from office for one action that did cross a line...ordering a massacre of religious zealots. He was taken out of office, and after that, who knows? Some writers indicate that he may have ended his life by suicide, but details are scarce.

It is a notable life, but not one that begs for attention in history classes or many pages in the history books.

Why, then, is he so memorable? The answer, of course, is...**Jesus**. Pilate's interaction with and decision about Jesus is a key part of the story of our Savior. Here's one account, from the gospel of Mark:



*“Very early in the morning the leading priests, the elders, and the teachers of religious law—the entire high council—met to discuss their next step. They bound Jesus, led him away, **and took him to Pilate, the Roman governor.**”*

Pilate asked Jesus, “Are you the king of the Jews?”

Jesus replied, “You have said it.”

Then the leading priests kept accusing him of many crimes, and Pilate asked him, “Aren’t you going to answer them? What about all these charges they are bringing against you?” But Jesus said nothing, much to Pilate’s surprise.

Now it was the governor’s custom each year during the Passover celebration to release one prisoner—anyone the people requested. One of the prisoners at that time was Barabbas, a revolutionary who had committed murder in an uprising. The crowd went to Pilate and asked him to release a prisoner as usual.

“Would you like me to release to you this ‘King of the Jews’?” Pilate asked. (For he realized by now that the leading priests had arrested Jesus out of envy.)

But at this point the leading priests stirred up the crowd to demand the release of Barabbas instead of Jesus. Pilate asked them, “Then what should I do with this man you call the king of the Jews?”

They shouted back, “Crucify him!”

“Why?” Pilate demanded. “What crime has he committed?”

But the mob roared even louder, “Crucify him!”

So to pacify the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He ordered Jesus flogged with a lead-tipped whip, then turned him over to the Roman soldiers to be crucified.” (Mark 15:1–15, NLT)

That's why he matters. Pilate gives the order to crucify Jesus. Jesus "suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and buried."¹

But...Jesus almost didn't!



A Man Who Looks

Why? Because Pilate is a **man who looks**. And of any of the people in positions of power, he came the closest to seeing Jesus for who He really is.

Seeing Jesus Today

You and I currently live in a world where we look at Jesus all the time. Have you noticed how often Jesus shows up in our daily life? Not even at church, but in culture Jesus appears frequently and prominently.



Go to any choir concert, and what do they sing? I've been at my fair share of concerts (myself, my kids), and whether the conductor is a believer or an atheist, they perform musical compositions that speak of faith and of Jesus (whether in Latin, or Old English, or in the words of an African spiritual).

Go to any art museum, and what do you see? There are paintings of fruit... and the human figure... and stuff that raises your eyebrows... but there are also scenes of Scripture. Artists have been inspired to showcase Jesus and His life prominently.

Go to any sporting event, and what is proclaimed? Victors have John 3:16 written on their face or their shoes. They stand on the podium or the winner's circle and they state, "First of all, I want to give thanks to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ..." They claim that they can do all things through Christ who gives them strength.²

Go to any radio station or Spotify playlist, and what do you hear? You'll hear Jesus' name mentioned frequently...in reverence or in curses. His name is taken on faith or taken in vain, but He is never taken for granted! No other person is mentioned as much as Jesus.

On the day when He returns, there will be no other name that matters:

¹ (from the Apostle's Creed).

² It's a misapplication of Philippians 4:13...but still a nice thought.

... of the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2:10-11, NLT)

"... at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2:10-11, NLT)

But even now, we can't look anywhere without seeing Jesus.

Asking Questions

Pontius Pilate didn't have the same cultural exposure we do, but he *did* see Jesus. On an early spring morning, he had no choice. The priests and crowds thrust Jesus into his lap and forced him to see.

Now Jesus was standing before Pilate, the Roman governor. "Are you the king of the Jews?" the governor asked him. Jesus replied, "You have said it." (Matthew 27:11, NLT)

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Matthew, Mark, and Luke include short descriptions of the conversation between Jesus and Pilate; John includes additional details. But the thing that struck me as I was reading these passages was the approach Pilate took in his dialogue.

Pilate **asked questions**.

Matthew 27:11-14

- "Are you the king of the Jews?"
- "Don't you hear all these charges they are bringing against you?"
- "Aren't you going to answer them? What about all these charges they are bringing against you?"
- "Your own people and their leading priests brought you to me for trial. Why? What have you done?"

- *"Are you the king of the Jews?"*
- *"Don't you hear all these charges they are bringing against you?"*
- *"Aren't you going to answer them? What about all these charges they are bringing against you?"*
- *"Your own people and their leading priests brought you to me for trial. Why? What have you done?"*

Unlike Caiaphas, who last week simply **couldn't** or **wouldn't** see Jesus, Pilate seemingly **tries to see** Jesus...through questions.

Takeaway: If you are on the outside looking in, asking questions is a worthwhile activity! If you don't know enough about who Jesus is, it pays to be curious!

"If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking." (James 1:5, NLT)

Jesus stays mostly silent as Pilate asks (*because He wasn't trying to avoid the cross – it was His divine plan to die on the cross as a voluntary sacrifice to pay for your sins and mine!*). But in the times where He answers, He gives Pilate critical information to go on.

"Jesus answered, 'My Kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my followers would fight to keep me from being handed over to the Jewish leaders. But my kingdom is not of this world.' Pilate said, 'So you are a king?' Jesus responded, 'You say I am a king. Actually, I was born and came into the world to testify to the truth. All who love the truth recognize that what I say is true.' (John 18:36-37, NLT)

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Pilate is a **man who looks** and has a chance to really see and understand Jesus.



A Man Who Looks Elsewhere

But it turns out he was also a man who **looks elsewhere**.

He wasn't just “on the outside looking in...”

He was “on the outside looking ***past***.”



Like sometimes when you are driving, and you approach a red light. You want to make a right hand turn, so you are looking intently at the traffic to the right, left and center, craning your neck to see past cars and verify if the intersection will be clear enough for you to turn...but never once do you look at the traffic signal to see that it has a green right turn arrow!

As you read through the Gospel story, Pilate has every chance to see Jesus, yet he looks past Him to instead see crowds...and leaders...and Rome.

Pilate is inclined to ask more questions of *others* than of Jesus!

He asks their opinion about **crimes**. He asks them about alternate acts of mercy - offering to release a prisoner of their choice. Through it all, he listens more to the crowds than to the man in front of him.

We can understand his reasons for doing so. Pilate cared about his job, and allowing the location population to get out of control wouldn't look good on his performance review. He was motivated to keep the people content, to avoid trouble, and to keep bringing in tax revenue for the Empire.

So, Pilate looked right past Jesus. He listened to the crowd, and he waffled and weaseled and waited until he couldn't any longer.

And finally he gave in.

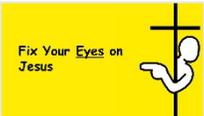


"When they saw [Jesus], the leading priests and Temple guards began shouting, 'Crucify him! Crucify him!'"
"Took his own life and crucified him." From Acts: "I find him not guilty." (John 19:6, NLT)

"When they saw [Jesus], the leading priests and Temple guards began shouting, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

"Take him yourselves and crucify him," Pilate said. "I find him not guilty." (John 19:6, NLT)

Pilate understood Jesus' innocence, but he lost focus on what mattered. He paid attention to the people rather than to the Man he should consider!



Fix Your Eyes on Jesus

What Pilate *should have done* was keep his eyes on Jesus! He should have listened. He should have kept asking and investigating the Messiah, tuning out the cries for crucifixion and making the crowds wait. Instead, he stayed on the outside looking in...never bowing his knee to the King of Kings, never discovering what Truth really was.

Don't be like Pilate!

How can we avoid making that same mistake?

We need to fix our eyes on Jesus. Nowhere else. We need to set our sights on Him! Just like it says in Hebrews 12:

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne." (Hebrews 12:1-2, NLT)

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Note what this passage says about our Jesus-focus. We should:

- **Embrace the huge cloud of witnesses.** We have others – past and present – who share our faith and who have been faithful in the past. We should be motivated by the Abrahams and Joshuas and Pauls and Timothys of this Bible, or the Erwins and the Saathoffs who served as ministers in TCC's own past. They point to Jesus, and we should take their encouragement!



- **Read the stories of Christians who have gone before you to help you keep a similar focus!**³



- **Strip off everything that slows you down.** We already know that distractions in the room (of temperature and movement) might you're your attention off a sermon, but distractions of the heart and soul can take our attention off Jesus.
 - **What is a “weight” that slows you down?** Is it your focus on body shape? Is it your worry about paying bills? Is it your ambition at work? Is it your commitment to getting your kid on the best travel ball team? Is it digital distraction to avoid anxiety and stress?
 - **What is a “sin” that trips you up?** Is it lying? Is it theft or cheating? Is it lust or pornography? Is it substance abuse or addiction? Is it gossip? Is it an out-of-control temper?

Those choices and habits can trip get in the way of following Christ! So, strip them off!

- **Confess those items to a close Christian friend and pray for the Spirit to help you change.**

And then...



- **Run with endurance.** Build up your ability to serve Him. You might not read the whole Bible but start with a chapter today. You might not be able to pray for an hour but start with 5 minutes. You might cave to a temptation today but try again tomorrow. Build your endurance, keep learning how to live in a way that pleases him.
 - **Keep adding, a little at a time.**

That's how we'll keep our eyes on Jesus!



Conclusion

Lost focus is bad when the stakes are high!

Pilate had the chance to see Jesus, but he chose to look elsewhere. He was distracted from the One Who Could Save, and he became the one who killed

³ Ex: “The 100 Most Important Events in Christian History” by Curist, et al.

Him. Pilate allowed himself be (“SQUIRREL!”) distracted...and he took his eyes off Jesus.

Church, don't be like that! Let your prayer be that of Psalm 119:37

“Turn my eyes from worthless things, and give me life through your word.” (Psalm 119:37, NLT)

Fix your eyes on Jesus. Look for Him. Look at Him. And don't allow anyone or anything to get in your way!



Prayer

Invitation

All of us need to fix our eyes on Jesus. So let us help you. During our invitation song, if you would like prayer as you determine to follow Him (for the first time or yet again), then we invite you to come forward.

Please stand as we sing.

Sermon Notes

Getting to Know Pilate

(Mark 15:1-15)

A Man Who Looks

(Philippians 2:10-11; Matthew 27:11; James 1:5; John 18:36-37)

A Man Who Looks Elsewhere

(John 19:6)

Fix Your Eyes on Jesus

(Hebrews 12:1-2; Psalm 119:37)

Sermon Discussion Questions

- Read Mark 15:1–15. What role did the crowd and religious leaders play in influencing Pilate’s decision?
- In what ways did Pilate genuinely try to understand Jesus?
- Why do you think asking questions is an important step for someone exploring faith?
- What pressures or fears seem to have influenced Pilate’s final decision?
- How can you avoid “looking past” Jesus and instead focus on Him?
- Hebrews 12:1–2 calls us to “fix our eyes on Jesus.” What does that practically look like in your daily routine?
- Who are some “cloud of witnesses” (past or present believers) that encourage your faith? How can you intentionally learn from them?
- What is one “weight” (distraction) you need to remove to better focus on Christ? Why would removing it help?
- What is one “sin” that may be tripping you up right now? What’s your next step in dealing with it?
- What is one small, realistic way you can begin building spiritual endurance this week (Scripture, prayer, accountability, etc.)?