

VII. The Apostles' Creed in Biblical Perspective

"I Believe..."

"Suffered Under Pontius Pilate"

John 18:28–19:16

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We are going to start by looking at John 18. This is God's Word and God's Word is true. John 18:28–19:16 says [28] *Then they led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the governor's headquarters. It was early morning. They themselves did not enter the governor's headquarters, so that they would not be defiled, but could eat the Passover. [29] So Pilate went outside to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?" [30] They answered him, "If this man were not doing evil, we would not have delivered him over to you." [31] Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law." The Jews said to him, "It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death." [32] This was to fulfill the word that Jesus had spoken to show by what kind of death he was going to die.*

[33] So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" [34] Jesus answered, "Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?" [35] Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?" [36] Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world." [37] Then Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice." [38] Pilate said to him, "What is truth?" After he had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, "I find no guilt in him. [39] But you have a custom that I should release one man for you at the Passover. So do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?" [40] They cried out again, "Not this man, but Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a robber.

19:1–16, [1] *Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged him. [2] And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head and arrayed him in a purple robe. [3] They came up to him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and struck him with their hands. [4] Pilate went out again and said to them, "See, I am bringing him out to you that you may know that I find no guilt in him." [5] So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Behold the man!" [6] When the chief priests and the officers saw him, they cried out, "Crucify him, crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no guilt in him." [7] The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has made himself the Son of God." [8] When Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid. [9] He entered his headquarters again and said to Jesus, "Where are you from?" But Jesus gave him no answer. [10] So Pilate said to him, "You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?" [11] Jesus answered him, "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin."*

[12] From then on Pilate sought to release him, but the Jews cried out, "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar." [13] So when Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judgment seat

at a place called The Stone Pavement, and in Aramaic Gabbatha. [14] Now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover. It was about the sixth hour. He said to the Jews, "Behold your King!" [15] They cried out, "Away with him, away with him, crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar." [16] So he delivered him over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus...

The grass withers, the flower fades, the Word of God abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

The Apostles' Creed is an economical distillation of Biblical truth concerning New Testament Christianity. The word economical in this statement means it's not wordy. It doesn't contain all the essential truths but what it does have is essential truth of New Testament Christianity that is rooted in Apostolic teaching. It was created as a discipleship tool and to protect against false doctrine. In it is a statement that we are going to look at in this study which is 'suffered under Pontius Pilate.'

I don't know if what I'm about to say is true or not but I'm hoping it is because it's too good not to hope that it's true. No greater challenge exists under the sun that the Sunday school teacher of fifth graders and if it's a Christian Sunday school class there is always a 'johnny' in it. The teacher had taught them about the life of Jesus and decides to give these fifth graders an assignment to be creative. He told them to take out a piece of paper and draw a picture that depicts some part of the life of Jesus. After 30 minutes she picked up the pictures and Johnny gave her his. She looked at his picture and was astonished because on his paper was this large airplane with four people in it.

She said 'What is this Johnny?' He answered 'You said to give an event in the life of Jesus so look at the title on my picture which says 'the flight to Egypt.' That's funny people, I just want you to know that. The teacher said 'Ok, the flight to Egypt is in the Bible although it isn't quite the way I explained it. So who are the four people in the plane?' Johnny said 'Mary, Joseph and the baby Jesus.' 'So who is the fourth one?' He said 'That's Pontius the Pilate.' Do you know how long I've waited to do a sermon where I could tell that story? In fact, that may be the reason I was led to preach the Apostles' Creed from this text of Scripture.

Interestingly, out of the picture that Johnny drew three of the four are in the Apostles' Creed—Jesus of Nazareth (I believe in God's Son, Jesus the Christ, the only Son of God), the Virgin Mary and now Pontius Pilate (suffered under Pontius Pilate). We can certainly see Jesus and Mary in the creed, but why an unconverted as far as we know, pagan governor who can't even muster the moral courage to render a true verdict in a courtroom of innocent, even though he repeatedly says 'innocent'? Why in the economy of so few words would he be mentioned in this creed? They have clearly thought through the words that are going to be in this creed as it comes in its original form and then written out in Latin.

What becomes abundantly clear in the Apostles' Creed is it focuses on two things – who God is and what God has done. Who God is—God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, One God being three Persons in His being. What God has done—Creator/Maker of heaven and earth—now that's not all He has done but you can't get the Gospel right if you don't understand the doctrine of Creation and that God is the Creator of all things, visible and invisible. So the creed puts that part of what the Father has done present for us because it's foundational to the Gospel. To say I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son our Lord is to say you believe He is the Redeemer and then there is the Holy Spirit. So what God does is creation, redemption, providence, coming King and Judge.

Then we get to the center part of the creed where if you number all the words in the Latin form you will find that exactly three fourths of the words used in the creed are devoted to the

second affirmation of Jesus Christ. It doesn't focus on what Jesus taught but it focuses on who He is and what happened to Him. Notice how the second part focuses on Jesus.

The following is the Apostles' Creed;

*I believe in God the Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth;
**I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended into hell.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and will come again to judge the living and the dead.**
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body
and the life everlasting.*

So why this phrase—suffered under Pontius Pilate—in the middle of three fourths of the Apostles' Creed? Four valuable words are used here. One of my great prayers after we finish this series on the Apostles' Creed is that when you recite it after this that you will never mumble it again and that you will enter into it with these truth revealed to us by the Holy Spirit through the Apostles. That is why with each one of them I'm taking you back to the Scripture where it was inspired by the Holy Spirit through the Apostles teaching and why they are so important to be put in this creed. Suffered under Pontius Pilate doesn't deserve mumbling either. It is there for a distinct reason.

I think this phrase—suffered under Pontius Pilate—is included in this creed for two reasons that we need to understand when we recite this. The first thing is, with this statement you are confessing with Christianity the historicity of Christianity, that Christianity is being affirmed as a historical reality. It is not a matter of philosophical speculation or a matter of myth. I think it is Bishop Sprong who said, 'Christianity is built around a Man who may or may not have existed but we have an entrance myth called the Virgin birth and an exit myth called the resurrection.' Now that's the statement of unbelief but in the Apostles' Creed we say what we believe and part of what we are saying when we say 'suffered under Pontius Pilate' we are affirming that this is a real event by real people in real time. It is historic. We also affirm the historicity of Jesus of Nazareth, the Virgin Mary who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and gave birth but also of the real person Pontius Pilate.

This creed is also following the pattern set by the Apostles for when they began to speak of these matters, they speak of the birth, the death, then the resurrection of Jesus which are the essential truths. Now in the creed we go from Jesus' birth to jumping 33 years to when He suffers under Pontius Pilate, but even as we do it we find ourselves not only with a historical Mary but a historical man who is humanly speaking is in charge of this moment whose name is Pontius Pilate. He is a real historical person in charge of this moment in Jesus' life. In other

words, the real death on a cross, the real burial, would never have happened, humanly speaking without Pontius Pilate.

As we saw from the reading they could have held their own trial but they wanted a death on a cross which is fulfilling a prophecy—that He would suffer upon a tree. They said they couldn't do without Pilate, why? It is because Pilate is *persona publica*—he is the one who is appointed by the ruling authority in the providence of God in the Roman Empire. The emperor Caesar has put this man in authority right here so all of the military, legal, political, economic power can see he is in power as he sits in that stone pavement seat called Gabbatha. There is all of human authority and Jesus will not get to that cross humanly speaking unless Pilate allows Him to go there. He will not be buried in a tomb unless Pilate allows it to be done. He will not suffer unless Pilate authorizes it. Pilate is the pivotal moment in history of the work of redemption. Humanly speaking will take on more meaning in just a few more minutes. All of the prophecy in Isaiah 52 and 53 is being fulfilled when it says He is being despised, rejected, forsaken by man, crushed under the wrath of God and suffered under Pontius Pilate.

Here I'm making this as a historical point and yet up until 1961 this was denied. All these critical theologians and critical commentaries said there was no outside record other than the Scripture of any governor named Pontius Pilate and said it was another myth. They wanted to be shown somewhere in Roman history where his name was used. Later on that was found but they had denied his existence until 1961. Some Italian archeologists were digging around the area of Caesarea by the Sea. Why is that area important? It is because it is one of the areas that Herod the Great built one of his palaces and after his death it became the governor's headquarter. The governor's headquarters was not in Rome or Jerusalem. The governor would go there to stay in Herod's son's old palace but he would live in Herod's grand palace. In 1961 right outside in a trash heap they uncovered a stone that said 'temple dedicated to Tiberius the emperor by Pontius Pilate.' There it exists, a real historical figure. The key is, in that moment in that place he is Rome. He is the one appointed by the Caesar to enact the laws of Rome.

Jesus will go through six trials—three Jewish and three Gentile. In our Scripture reading from John 18 we were given a summation of the three Gentile ones. First Jesus was sent to Pilate and when he found out Jesus was a Galilean he sent Him over to Herod. Herod was glad to see Him because he had heard a lot about Him but he didn't want Him in his courts either so after he mocked Him he sent Him back to Pilate and told him he had to do something about it for he couldn't pass the buck somewhere else. So Herod says to Pilate 'what will you do' and this is where we get to our second point/reason.

The phrase 'suffered under Pontius Pilate' is Christianity affirmed officially. It's documented, it's declared, officially in the context in the sovereign hand of God, in the ruling empire of Rome and it is documented by dialogue and exchange. Pontius Pilate will initiate what needs to be done for Jesus to suffer, then the cross, then buried, then the place of the dead and then raised on the third day. Things begin to transpire when Jesus gets there. There are five questions Pilate asks that he wants answers for. This is part of the reason they included the phrase 'suffered under Pontius Pilate' in the creed. Then two questions are asked of Pilate. Then Pilate makes two declarations.

The first question Pilate asks to Jesus is 'are You the King of the Jews,' implying are You the Messiah, are You the Anointed One, the Prophet, Priest and King promised through the Jews to come as the Messiah to deliver them and rule over them. It's interesting to note Jesus was asked this question by the chief priests, by the people and by Pilate. Jesus never answered the chief priests or the people but He did answer Pilate by saying 'You have said so yourself and you wouldn't have been able to say so had it not been given to you.' You cannot say Jesus is the

Messiah unless the grace of God allows you—either through a saving relationship where you confess Him as your Savior and Lord or in common grace you just acknowledge that He is who He says He is. Pilate inadvertently acknowledged Him in common grace, not savingly and Jesus says ‘you have said so because it was given to you.’ To confess Christ is a work of God’s grace because the natural heart says ‘no’ to Christ, ‘give me Barabbas.’

Then from the judgment seat Pilate asks this question that is directed toward the people—‘do you want me to release Jesus?’ and they reply ‘no, we want Barabbas.’ They would rather have the murderer, the terrorist, the insurrectionist, the thief. That is the heart of man—no to Jesus and yes to sin. You will find other accounts of Pilate in Matthew, Mark and Luke as well and I’m drawing on these accounts as well where Pilate gets a counselor to come that He did not turn down at the judgement seat but this is called his wife and she gives him some advice—‘have nothing to do with this righteous man for I have suffered much in a dream on account of Him’ (Matthew 27:19). Here she gives her verdict and the court hasn’t even moved forward yet.

Then Pilate asks a third question which is also directed to the people—so what shall you have me do to this Man? Their answer is quick—crucify Him! It is not simply put Him to death or to punish Him but to put Him to death on a cross. You can see the prophecy of the suffering Messiah having to hang upon a tree, for cursed is He who hangs upon the tree. They don’t stop there in their answer for then the people make this statement—let His blood be upon us and our children (Matthew 27:25).

The fourth question Pilate asks is to the people again—what evil has He done? The people say ‘He claims to be a King but we have no king but Caesar.’ How quickly we look to the kings and rulers of this world as our deliverers. Here are people who ought never to have said that if they went to synagogue school at all. We will honor Caesar but he is not our king ultimately for the Lord is our King. We have a whole Old Testament teaching us that. The kings that rule over us are to be honored, respected and prayed for but they are not where our hope is. The people say the evil is that He says He is King. You do know nothing has changed today for the exclusivity as Jesus is Lord and Savior is still a scandal. They will take any king but Jesus. It is still a scandal unless the Holy Spirit works in the heart.

Then Pilate asks Jesus a question—do You not know that I have the authority to crucify You or release You? Jesus says ‘You would have no authority if it had not been given to you.’ Caesar didn’t put you here, I put you here. There is no authority established apart from the sovereign hand of God. Please remember that. We live in a society where we get to vote for those in authority and you ought to exercise that right prayerfully, thoughtfully and passionately, but if the vote doesn’t go your way, realize that there is never an election that out votes God. He uses a Cyrus, a Nebuchadnezzar and a Pontius Pilate. You would not have had this authority if it had not been given to you. Then Jesus says ‘I tell you the truth, I am the King.’ Then Pilate says which has been said all the way from the Garden, ‘What is truth?’ As far as Rome was concerned truth was whatever Caesar said and the power of Rome said it was. But Jesus says ‘I am the Way, the Truth and the Life’ (John 14:6). So the questions have been asked.

Now two questions will come to Pilate as *persona publica*. Question one will come from Joseph of Arimathea. Normally the body of one crucified is thrown into a pit, a criminal pit and Joseph asks of Pilate ‘Can I have the body of Jesus to lay in my tomb for I have one nearby?’ Pilate affirms it and the Scriptures are fulfilled—that His body would be laid in a new tomb of a rich man.

Another question comes to Pilate and this time it’s from the chief priests. They say ‘He has been teaching that on the third day He is going to rise again so His Disciples may come and steal the body, will you seal the tomb and place a guard by it?’ Pilate says ‘see to it.’ Another

historical truth which is the resurrection and it's supernatural dynamic and theological impact is going to be affirmed here as Pilate answers 'yes' to that question and the guards are put in place over the tomb.

Then comes two declarations by Pilate. One being—behold the Man—which God has sovereignly allowed Pilate to declare. By a man comes death, by this Man comes life (I Corinthians 15:21). There is one Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus (I Timothy 2:5). The second declaration Pilate makes is 'I find no guilt within Him.' Then he says 'Behold your King' and to affirm it with exclamation Pilate has this put on a plaque and placed on the cross in the three languages of the world—Greek, Aramaic and Latin—that would declare this is the King. At this point Pilate has already acknowledged five times that He is the Christ. Now he adds three more to it—Behold the King—and had it put on a plaque. Who is dying here? It is the Messiah. The most powerful man under the power of the Roman Empire that is available to do it by the appointment of Caesar so plagues is at that moment. So what is the implication?

Here is the takeaway. This is what you are saying when you say the statement 'suffered under Pontius Pilate'—the historical and official moment as Jesus stood before Pilate reveals who is sovereign, who is innocent and who is going to suffer that the guilty might not only be forgiven but declared guiltless and innocent. Without this pivotal hinge moment in history that official declares it and sets in motion everything else that is coming in this creed—crucified, dead, buried, descends to the place of the dead, risen on the third day, ascends back into heaven—none of that humanly speaking would have ever happened without the sovereign allowance and sovereign decisions of Pontius Pilate, yet we see in the very trial that it's not Pilate that is sovereign, but it's God that is sovereign. Who is in control? It is not the accuser or the judge but the Accused One—is sovereign in the trial, is sovereign in appointing the one at the trial (Pilate) who would not be there without His authority. Please remember that.

In the moments where we might have the greatest despair because of the irrationality, immorality and the corruption of all that is around us by those who would rule over us, you remember that your confidence is not there to begin with, no matter how an election turns out. Your confidence never shifts for it's never directed to the one who is there but it's directed to the One who puts them there. He rules and He overrules. That doesn't mean you are irresponsible or apathy or you don't pray about it but it does mean your confidence is in the Lord who appoints Pontius Pilate to initiate the suffering that will save you from your sins. Seven times He is affirmed the Christ and seven times in the trial He is never guilty. He is always 'I find no evil, I find no guilt, this Man is innocent' yet He sends Him to the cross.

Here is the most pristine legal system—in fact, our legal system to a large degree is built on the Roman jurisprudence, but Pilate does not have the moral courage to do what the system demanded and that's to let Him go. The culture, the people, the politics took hold of him. If you get upset with one getting ahold of a supreme court, here is one right here, where the politics and the culture took over. Pilate kept trying to find a way to release Him. He sent Him to Herod to hopefully exchange Him with someone else. He knows he ought to release Him. He wants to release Him. Yet he cannot because a sovereign God is at work, showing the inadequacies of human court systems because there is another court system that is at work here.

Notice that Jesus never says 'I'm innocent' even though He is innocent, because there is another court in place, in session and it is the Divine court of God's judgment and He is not innocent because He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf (II Corinthians 5:21). Our sins and the wrath of God is laid upon Him. The court system that can't do what it ought to

do is sovereignly being used for what God appointed it to do—that He would go to the cross and pay for our sins that we could have everlasting life.

It is obvious who is in control here. It is the sovereignty of God and the sovereign Jesus, the One who is standing in the place of judgment. His innocence is seen all through the trials. Jesus never defends Himself. Why? The Romans system of justice is incapable of even doing what is right but the Divine court of justice is making another transgression—the Guiltless is taking the place of the guilty so that the guilty might be declared innocent. For [1] *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus* (Romans 8:1). Because [21] *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God* (II Corinthians 5:21). God put Pilate right there at this pivotal point to accomplish the Divine imperative—the Messiah would save sinners to the glory of God at the cross. As the hymn says;

*Were you there when they crucified my Lord,
Were you there when they crucified my Lord,
Oh sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble, tremble, tremble.*

It is this One (Jesus) that goes to that cross and suffers—my wrath for my guilt and seals my pardon with His blood because in my place He is the One who stood for me.

There is a moment in this text that is a frightening moment. It is when they say ‘let His blood be on us and our children’ yet in the sovereignty of God that’s my prayer everyday because He was crucified, dead and buried. O God let His blood be upon me and wash me clean because He took my place and I will be a God to you and to your children after you. Let it be upon my children. Let’s pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. Thank You for Jesus, for what You have done, what we could not do to save us for without You we cannot be saved. As the hymn says;

*Bearing shame and scoffing rude,
in my place condemned he stood;
sealed my pardon with his blood.
Hallelujah! What a Savior!*

Let this prayer be yours if you haven’t yet, ‘Jesus I do now receive You, more than all in You I find, You have granted me forgiveness, I am Yours and You are mine.’ Amen.

Power Point

Suffered Under Pontius Pilate

- I. Christianity is affirmed as Historical
- II. Christianity is affirmed Officially

LIFE TAKEAWAY

The historical and official moment as Jesus stood before Pilate reveals who is Sovereign, who is innocent, and who is going to suffer that the guilty might not only be forgiven, but declared innocent.