

Power of Persuasion 6-4-06

Matthew 27:11-26 (NIV)

¹¹ Meanwhile Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. ¹² When he was accused by the chief priests and the elders, he gave no answer. ¹³ Then Pilate asked him, "Don't you hear the testimony they are bringing against you?" ¹⁴ But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge--to the great amazement of the governor. ¹⁵ Now it was the governor's custom at the Feast to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd. ¹⁶ At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Barabbas. ¹⁷ So when the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them, "Which one do you want me to release to you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?" ¹⁸ For he knew it was out of envy that they had handed Jesus over to him. ¹⁹ While Pilate was sitting on the judge's seat, his wife sent him this message: "Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him." ²⁰ But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed. ²¹ "Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" asked the governor. "Barabbas," they answered. ²² "What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?" Pilate asked. They all answered, "Crucify him!" ²³ "Why? What crime has he committed?" asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, "Crucify him!" ²⁴ When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. "I am innocent of this man's blood," he said. "It is your responsibility!" ²⁵ All the people answered, "Let his blood be on us and on our children!" ²⁶ Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

Jesus shared the Last Supper with His disciples the night before our passage. He went to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. Around midnight He was arrested. The High Priest held an illegal nighttime trial with false witnesses. They reconvened in the morning to give it a semblance of legitimacy. Now in the early morning they brought Jesus to Pilate to try to get Rome to crucify Him.

The key characters in this passage are the chief priests and Pilate. They often worked together as a team with different interests. Pilate, representing Rome, selected and controlled the High Priest. It would be perfectly in place for the chief priests to deliver an insurrectionist to him. They wanted to keep their positions and power, and they can only do that by cooperating with Rome. (John 11:49-50)

Pilate is in a somewhat precarious position with Caesar. His sponsor in Rome that got him his appointment was executed for treason. His actions had incited several showdowns, one of which he crushed with particular ferocity. Rome did not like unnecessary violence in a subjugated area, because it was often counterproductive and showed a lack of skillful leadership on the part of the procurator. Pilate's position in Judea as Governor was tenuous at best.

The chief priests had to bring a charge that Rome would consider worthy of such severe punishment. Their charge was blasphemy (Leviticus 24:15-16), but Rome did

Commented [notes1]: 49 Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, "You know nothing at all!
50 You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish."
John 11:49-50 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: 15 Say to the Israelites: 'If anyone curses his God, he will be held responsible;
16 anyone who blasphemes the name of the LORD must be put to death. The entire assembly must stone him. Whether an alien or native-born, when he blasphemes the Name, he must be put to death.
Leviticus 24:15-16 (NIV)

not care about the Jews religious differences. They changed the charge to one Rome would consider, revolution. ¹¹ *Meanwhile Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied.* I am struck with the brief clarity of Jesus' answer. Up to the previous night, Jesus was somewhat vague with the public, not wishing to hasten the end of His ministry (Matthew 16:20), but now is that time. He does not hesitate or dodge. *"Yes, it is as you say!"* Keep in mind that in saying that Jesus knew the consequence was the horror called crucifixion.

Commented [notes3]: 20 Then he warned his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ. Matthew 16:20 (NIV)

¹² *When he was accused by the chief priests and the elders, he gave no answer. ¹³ Then Pilate asked him, "Don't you hear the testimony they are bringing against you?"* Their accusations did not deserve a reply. They knew they were not true, and apparently Pilate had a hint of it as well. He had seen enough legal proceedings that he knew when someone was being sacrificed. His spies had probably informed him of the confrontations between Jesus and the chief priests. (Matthew 23:27-28) Pilate pushed Jesus to respond. ¹⁴ *But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge--to the great amazement of the governor.*

Commented [notes4]: 27 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. 28 In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness. Matthew 23:27-28 (NIV)

John tells us more details of the conversation that took place between Pilate and Jesus. ³³ *Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?"* ³⁴ *"Is that your own idea," Jesus asked, "or did others talk to you about me?"* ³⁵ *"Am I a Jew?" Pilate replied. "It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me. What is it you have done?"* ³⁶ *Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place."* ³⁷ *"You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."* ³⁸ *"What is truth?" Pilate asked. With this he went out again to the Jews and said, "I find no basis for a charge against him."* John 18:33-38 (NIV)

Then something happened that is recorded only in Luke. Pilate discovered that Jesus was from Galilee. That region was governed by Herod, so thinking he could escape having to deal with another potential uprising, he sent Jesus to Herod who was in Jerusalem for the feast. Luke tells us that Jesus never said a word to Herod. Herod had long desired to see Jesus and witness a miracle. (Luke 23:8) After killing Jesus' cousin, John the Baptist, he was afraid that the spirit of John was in Jesus. (Mark 6:16) Herod, son of Herod the Great, was a superstitious and paranoid ruler. He could not get Jesus to say or do anything. (Luke 23:9) *Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. Dressing him in an elegant robe, they sent him back to Pilate.* Luke 23:11 (NIV)

Commented [notes5]: 8 When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had been wanting to see him. From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform some miracle.

Luke 23:8 (NIV)

Commented [notes6]: 16 But when Herod heard this, he said, "John, the man I beheaded, has been raised from the dead!" Mark 6:16 (NIV)

Luke tells us that this ended a feud between Pilate and Herod. (Luke 23:12) They now had something in common. The robe may have been a royal white that kings of Israel wore. Herod probably thought it humorous, but it surely infuriated the chief priests.

Commented [notes7]: 9 He plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer. Luke 23:9 (NIV)

¹⁵ *Now it was the governor's custom at the Feast to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd. ¹⁶ At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Barabbas.* There is no record of this custom; it must have been something that Pilate started to try to

Commented [notes8]: 12 That day Herod and Pilate became friends--before this they had been enemies. Luke 23:12 (NIV)

correct his bad image. Barabbas means son of a father. We do not have a record of the actual charges against him. The gospel writers call him a murderer and an insurrectionist. (Luke 23:19; John 18:40)

¹⁷ So when the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them, "Which one do you want me to release to you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?"¹⁸ For he knew it was out of envy that they had handed Jesus over to him. Pilate knew the tension was between the chief priests and Jesus, not the public. He knew it was about their envy of the following and respect that Jesus had with the public. Pilate had surely heard of the crowds approval of Jesus during the Triumphal Entry. Yet, Pilate knew Jesus was not a threat. His band of followers had a zealot or two, but that was not the direction of Jesus' preaching. (Matthew 5:41) Jesus' teaching weakened the standing of the chief priests and therefore made them easier for Rome to manipulate.

So Pilate offered them Barabbas or Jesus, apparently hoping they would choose Jesus and he could get back to other business. Son of a father, or Salvation of God, called the Messiah, which do you choose, petty thief that pretends to be an insurrectionist or this preacher savior? But let me put it a different way. Which will you choose, someone who is telling you what you want to hear, or the One that is challenging you to surrender your life to God? It is interesting that the chief priests were most concerned with Jesus' claim to be "the Son of God". (Matthew 26:63) Pilate is offering them a choice between son of a father (Barabbas) or Son of the Father! Man's way or God's way!

¹⁹ While Pilate was sitting on the judge's seat, his wife sent him this message: "Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him." God is always reaching out to the lost. The Holy Spirit is reaching out to every heart that is willing to listen in the smallest way. The wife of Pilate was open to hear and the faithful Holy Spirit warned her. She then warned Pilate. God gave Pilate a chance. Up to this point I believe Pilate's motivation was political. After this I believe it was fear of God that caused him to try time after time to release Jesus. When you read all four gospel accounts, it is surprising to see how many times Pilate tried to release Jesus.

The Holy Spirit is at work in every unbeliever's heart to turn him or her from error to truth. (John 1:9) We saw it in Jesus' dealings with Judas. We see it here in the work of the Holy Spirit that reached out through Pilate's wife. If God is faithful to try to reach those who were responsible for killing His only Son, don't you think He is faithful to reach out to those you are praying for, your children, friends and loved ones? I am sure He is! What is happening in this passage is evidence that Jesus was heading to the cross for all who will receive Him. But it is up to them to decide what they will do with that dream or circumstance or moving within their heart. (John 12:46)

²⁰ But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed.²¹ "Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" asked the governor. "Barabbas," they answered. How did the crowd go from Hosanna to son of David to preferring a killer? (Matthew 21:9) We are not told how the leaders persuaded them, just that they did. I imagine that it went something like

Commented [notes9]: 19 (Barabbas had been thrown into prison for an insurrection in the city, and for murder.) Luke 23:19 (NIV)

Commented [notes10]: 40 They shouted back, "No, not him! Give us Barabbas!" Now Barabbas had taken part in a rebellion. John 18:40 (NIV)

Commented [notes11]: 41 If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Matthew 5:41 (NIV)

Commented [notes12]: 63 But Jesus remained silent. The high priest said to him, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." Matthew 26:63 (NIV)

Commented [notes13]: 9 The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. John 1:9 (NIV)

Commented [notes14]: 46 I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness. John 12:46 (NIV)

Commented [notes15]: 9 The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Hosanna in the highest!" Matthew 21:9 (NIV)

this. "Jesus is never going to resist Rome, but Barabbas has shown his willingness to do something. What do you want sermons or action? Jesus is convincing the people we can have religious freedom and be under Rome. We have to get rid of Him." It is very common for those who have squelched their consciences to accuse others of the things they are guilty of. It was these religious leaders that were spiritually compromising with Rome. Persuasion, it can be godly or demonic. It is affecting our lives for good or evil every day. We are using it to affect others for good or bad every day. (Acts 19:26)

Commented [notes16]: 26 Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands: Acts 19:26 (KJV)

²² "What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?" Pilate asked. They all answered, "Crucify him!"²³ "Why? What crime has he committed?" asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, "Crucify him!" Now the crowds are doing the persuading. Those we influence, influence others. Pilate asked for a specific charge, but the crowd is worked up into a frenzied mob. All they can do is scream for blood.

²⁴ When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. "I am innocent of this man's blood," he said. "It is your responsibility!" The mob could not be reasoned with, so Pilate was persuaded to let them have their way. People can exert such influence over one another and that such horrible acts can come about through persuasion. It should cause us all to consider how our culture is persuading us and how we are persuading others. Our great persuading factor should be the Spirit and Word of God, and the life of Jesus. Jesus example in these final hours should persuade us of His love for us.

²⁵ All the people answered, "Let his blood be on us and on our children!"²⁶ Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified. Critics of The Passion movie did not want this verse to be uttered in the movie. They consider it anti-Semitic, pointing the blame for the death of an innocent man on the Jews. But there it is, written by a Jew who was trying to faithfully record the events he witnessed. I say, "Yes, let His blood be on them as it is on me, not in wrath but in mercy, atoning for my sins and that of my children." Jesus was then flogged, a way of making those sentenced to crucifixion unable to resist. We will not go into the horror of it. I do not know if The Passion portrayed it accurately. I do know Romans called it Half Death, and that sometimes defendants died in the process. Assistants were medically trained to tell those who executed the punishment when to stop and when to continue. They brought the person as near to death as possible while trying to keep them alive to suffer longer.

Luke tells us that after scourging Jesus, Pilate tried one more time to release Him. (Luke 23:16) That was when the chief priests finally told Pilate the real charge. ⁷ The Jews insisted, "We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God." John 19:7 (NIV) This frightened Pilate and he took Jesus back inside and questioned him one more time. Romans believed that at times the sons of the gods visited the earth to test mankind. He tried again to have Jesus released, but the chief priest played their trump card. "If you release the One who claims to be a king, then you are not a friend of Caesar." (John 19:12) It was blackmail. They played on Pilate's fear of losing his position, and it worked.

Commented [notes17]: 16 Therefore, I will punish him and then release him. " Luke 23:16 (NIV)

Commented [notes18]: 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." John 19:12 (NIV)

Today, societal shouts of freedom from moral restraint, of tolerance for every kind of selfish indulgence, are growing louder and louder. They yell, "Crucify Him in your conscience." What He endured for me is more persuasive in my heart. Which persuasion is winning in your heart today? Some of the priests of our day are trying to persuade us to choose Barabbas of a different kind, of doing things our way instead of God's way. They try to persuade us to yell for freedom from the restraints of the Word of God. They encourage us to call for the death of Christ in our educational, entertainment, and political worlds. They yell, "Give us freedom to indulge ourselves without your criticisms or fear of laws against our sin. Let us be a secular society." They would blackmail us as they blackmailed Caesar. "If you stand up for the Bible, you are no friend of our society!" Will fear cause you to capitulate?

Who is persuading you? Is it the world's call for selfish living, or are you persuaded by the selfless sacrifice of Jesus Christ?

Because we live in a democracy, the way of selfishness may be the way our nation eventually goes. You can cast your vote, but you may not be able to change the outcome. You do, however, have a choice of what will influence your daily life. You can refuse to join the crowd in their shouts to crucify Him. In fact, you can shout to set Him free in the hearts and minds of men and women. If you are fully persuaded by the life of Christ, your joy and enthusiasm for life can persuade others that this life in Christ is of much greater value than indulging our selfish nature. Your love can persuade others that a life of love is more joyful than one of selfishness. But you have to be fully persuaded first.

The celebration of communion should persuade us of the great fruitfulness that comes out of obedience to God. Jesus obeyed to the death on the cross, and that sacrifice resulted in the greatest transformation in the hearts and minds of people that the world has ever seen. He did not demand His rights, or insist on pleasing Himself, or doing things His way. Instead, He let go of His rights, and of living to please Himself, and even His own will to do the will of the Father. The results of that offering are peace, joy, and life to millions. The path to fruitfulness begins with being persuaded by His example, rather than the shouts of the world.