

Roman Rulers in Christ's Day

Scripture: Luke 3:1 – 2 (p. 60)

Matthew 27:11 – 26 (p. 32)

Given 3/8/20

Let us look first during this Lenten message series at the Roman Rulers in Christ's day. Some parts of this message will be historical information and other parts will be my thoughts on how this information should affect us. So, let us start with some historical information.

The Rulers of the occupying nation of Rome in Christ's day were first - Tiberius Caesar, the Roman emperor who ruled from 14 AD to 37 AD. The Roman emperor included the name 'Caesar' in their title to honor Julius Caesar and Tiberius ruled the Roman Empire during the entire time of Jesus' adult ministry and 4 years beyond his death.

In the Gospels, Tiberius Caesar has only a cameo appearance. When Jesus' opponents challenged him on the question of the Roman tribute, Jesus asked for a coin with Tiberius Caesar's image on it and Jesus answered them – 'Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's but render unto God the things that are God's.'

Tiberius Caesar never knew of this unknown subject of Jesus in Jerusalem. He did not hear of his birth or his death. He died before Christianity began to impact on Rome. He never knew how this man of God would become infinitely greater than his own imperial self.

The second Ruler of the occupying Roman government was Pontius Pilate. Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea from 26 AD to 36 AD. This time would cover Jesus' ministry in the land of Judea with 3 extra years at the beginning and end of Jesus' ministry. Archeologists in Caesarea have discovered a cornerstone that Pilate placed there in honor of Tiberius Caesar so we know that Pilate's official title was 'Prefect of Judea'.

Far more is known about Pilate from non-biblical sources such as the Roman historians. These secular sources agree perfectly with what we know of Pilate from scripture. Pilate had the same problems with his Jewish subjects as did all other Roman governors before him and after him. The Jewish people believed that it was heresy for Rome to rule in Judea because they were not Jewish.

Pilate's post as Prefect of Judea was not an honored post in the Roman Empire. It was considered a punishment to be appointed to this outpost of the Roman Empire. So as far as Rome was concerned, Pilate did a fine job keeping the peace in Judea. He upheld the Roman military standards, collected taxes, and built aqueducts to improve Jerusalem's water supply.

Pilate lasted 10 years as governor. This was the second longest tenure of any Roman governor in Judea. Pilate did run into some trouble around Jesus end time of ministry. Word had gotten out to Rome that there were many disturbances in Judea so Rome told Pilate that any more trouble and he would be replaced as Prefect of Judea. I want you to understand that if Pilate was replaced as Prefect of Judea, there was nowhere else he could go within the Roman Empire because Judea was the lowest governorships. Of course, Pilate played a critical role on Good Friday.

Both of these Rulers of Roman authorities never understood Jesus. Pilate was impressed by Jesus and Pilate, we believe, had some understanding from his wife of Jesus the Holy Man but he decided to keep the peace rather than release an innocent man.

In Matthew 27:19 it says - *While Pilate was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent him a message saying – ‘Have nothing to do with that righteous Man, Jesus, for last night I suffered greatly in a dream because of Him.’*

Pilate decided to save his job rather than listen to his wife’s note. Gentlemen, did you hear that – Pilate did not listen to his wife which is something I would never do! (Wink at Sherri)

Pilate decided to save his job rather than do what was right. Pilate decided to appeal to the mob rather than stick his neck out for a holy man. Pilate decided to pronounce an innocent man guilty! In many ways part of Christ’s sacrifice was to save Pilate’s position as Prefect of Judea.

So, what do we learn from these Roman Rulers – we need to appreciate the care with which Luke sets the stage for the One, Jesus. We need to understand that Jesus eclipses the power of the emperor. We need to know that the power Jesus’ had was far stronger than any Roman Rulers or any current Ruler. Jesus’ power far exceeds the power of any ruler ever in history!

Also, we need to understand that many times in our lives – we are Pilate! We make decisions to save face rather than follow Jesus’ teachings. Did you hear that – We did not listen to Christ’s teachings and lessons, we hide our faith in Jesus.

We decided to shy away from doing what was right. We decide to appeal to the mob of this world rather than stick our neck out for the Divine Christ. We decide to pronounce our loyalty to earthly things and ignore heavenly things! In all ways Christ’s sacrifice was to save us!

And finally, we need to understand that God permitted an earthly judge in Pilate to adjudicate the case of Jesus, his only Son. We need to understand that the allowing by the Judge of the Universe, God, to have his only Son adjudicated by Pilate is a testimony to the lengths that God will go to save us from our sins. It is mind blowing to understand that God allowed a human being to rule in Jesus' case. We need to know that Christ's sacrifice for us upon a cross was the atonement of our sins. We need to understand that our God has much more mercy for us than we could ever ask for!

Oh, we can learn a lot for the Roman Rulers in Christ's Day!

Let us pray:

O God, your power is beyond any on earth. Your mercy is beyond our understanding. May this season of Lent lead us to these understandings so that when we come to the tomb at the end of Lent, we will see your glory in the emptiness of that tomb. AMEN.