

# CHRIST WAS AT CROSS PURPOSE WITH PILATE

By David L. Burris

Who was this Jesus? That was the initial question Pilate had been forced to face. Those that have Orientalized Christ have offered that Pontius Pilate faced a Pentalemma Question between Jesus as Light, Legend, Lunatic, Liar, or Lord. Those who have Humanized the Historic Christ have claimed that Pilate was deciding in Tetralemma in an obvious selection of simple Legend, not Lunatic, Liar, or Lord. C. S. Lewis referencing those Biblical Era Jewish & Roman perspectives prominent – pointed to the question as more likely an issue of Trilemma – the very same inescapable question faced today – Was Jesus Lunatic, Liar, or Is He Lord?

C. S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity* & in a 02-01-1942 Armed Forces Radio Broadcast in *The Shocking Alternative* said: “A man who was merely a man who said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral leader[Legend or Light]. He would either be a lunatic...or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. Let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open for us.”

C. S. Lewis offered three possible solutions to this Trilemma as regards the Biblical Christ: 1. Liar – he was not who he was and knew so. It follows that he would have also been a fool in not

recanting – instead dying for the false claim.; 2. Lunatic – he was not who he thought he was and he did not know it. In other words, we could categorize his case psychoanalytically as Patient Zero of the Messianic Complex; 3. The Lord – He was who He said He was in John 8:58;10:30 and His life, death, and resurrection prove it to be so. Subsequently, the early apologists narrowed the choice to one basic between “Aut Deus Aut Malus Homo” or “Either God or a Bad Man.” However, it is of significant importance for us to note that - at the time of these events - in Antiquity’s Baltic Culture of the Mediterranean Rim – A Bad Man Categorization Was Inclusive of a Madman!

Bad Man or Mad Man were the two choices before Pontius Pilate on the fateful occasion of Christ’s questioning – the pivot point of the great hinge of human history. Pontius Pilate was dutifully & keenly focused on insuring he did not have another rebellious Simon of Peraea or Judas of Hezakah. However, by way of Pilate’s few questions & Christ’s short responses – this dialogue unintentionally reveals – through the process of elimination - solution to the Jesus Trilemma – Lunatic, Liar, or Lord?

Primary sources like Josephus, Philo, & a credible letter written by Pilate in report to the Roman Emperor provide more context to our story. In other words, in answering the “why” of the savior’s sacrifice - the what, when, & how are revealed in

providential intersect and it was all in special juxtaposition during the encounter of Jesus Christ Before Pontius Pilate!

By way of Philo's complaints to the Emperor concerning Pilate's lack of suitability for office - we see God's finger of choice in setting the stage for this particular meeting & the asking of these specific questions. Philo portrays Pontius Pilate as insulting, naturally inflexible, as having a vindictive temper, corruptly having taken the temple tribute building the aqueduct and as guilty of murdering the innocent – not condemned by trial. Governor Pilate had on previous assignment been chastised for lack of sensibility as occupier toward indigenous religions & of harsh suppression of non-violent protests - putting soldiers into angry crowds to control hecklers & as enforcers to permanently silence potential troublemakers. In other words, Pontius Pilate was on disciplinary watch and in danger of demotion.

Given these malicious tendencies & his probationary status – he was determined both to be proactive to potential problems and to maintain a low personal profile during that time dash on the resume most endangering of career advancement for Palestine's Roman Governors – JEWISH PASSOVER.

Pilate's chief focus during Passover was crowd control. The Antonia Fortress at the time of Acts 21: 37 housed a garrison in headcount of approximately 600. In preparation for Passover, the Roman Governor traveled with the Roman Cohort of his Caesarea Palace to supplement Jerusalem's Antonia Garrison.

The total force available for this observance was typically about 2,000 soldiers. Yet, in mention to his friend Seneca he wrote that only half the usual number were “in readiness” on this particular occasion – the difference in manpower was needed elsewhere.

Eusebius & Tertullian both reference Pilate’s Report to Emperor Tiberius when he writes as to the cause of the unruly Passover crowd’s unrest & screams for the death of our Savior this day. Pontius Pilate writes: “...Temple of the Jewish nation, (where) all the multitudes of the Jews come together, and delivered to me a certain man named Jesus, bringing against him many groundless charges; and they were not able to convict him in anything. And as heresy of theirs against him was that he said the Sabbath was not their right rest.” (Mark 2: 23-28.)

We have carefully set our scene with uninspired but reliable supporting documents and they have given insight into this moment in time and its two main characters. For instance, we can now understand Pilate’s highly unusual action in John 18: 29 -31. The NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible in footnote comments that the Roman Governor would not normally “come out to meet” but instead wait for accusers to bring formal charges; We can now understand this episode as related to his preemptive refusal of jurisdiction - as in combination - proactive & protective to his vital interests. However, the Jewish leaders sensed this stratagem of Pilate’s to avoid the hot seat of judgment & out maneuvered him – making Jesus out as

a danger to Rome & as a threat to Tiberius - who was already second guessing Pilate's every move.

From other similar sources we can gather related reliable information of insight beyond the administrative mindset of the Roman Governor – the mind deeper at work in asking Pilate's last & unanswered categorically rhetorical question of Jesus – “What Is Truth?”

As we have already mentioned, one of Pontius Pilate's friends of personal correspondence was Lucius Seneca – who was also - at that time - the boyhood tutor of the future Emperor Nero. Lucius Seneca – simply known as Seneca - was the most famous of Stoics. As a Stoic tutor – his teaching on truth is noteworthy.

Pythagoras in the Sixth Century B.C. said: “Truth is so great a perfection that if God would render Himself visible to men, He would choose light for His body and truth for His soul.” Allen Plant in his paper *Stoic Distinction Between Truth & The True* states: “What the difference amounts to is that truth is supposed to be **corporeal** whereas the true incorporeal.”

Bombshell to Pilate – the answer to your question – is standing before your face – Jesus Christ, the Son of Man - as claimed in John 14: 6 - the physical embodiment of absolute truth. Pilate got his answer unspoken - without Christ having to say anything further.

However, what is of even more background significance to this final question is how it reveals the position taken by Pilate in his correspondence exchange with Seneca. In the philosophical

debates of this period – the only ones framing their position with – “What is Truth?” – were the Epicureans. The followers of Epicurus were moral truth relativists equivalent to those today considered proponents of a Situation Ethic; Classic & modern practitioners of both theories have been accused of a de facto amorality. In other words – Pilate was not only a pragmatist – worried about maintaining position - but a moral relativist from whom the facts were extremely flexible. To sum his situation – Governor Pilate was feeling increasingly “boxed in” and would attempt an administrative “triangulated” solution – a non-violent escape. This was not to be because although he was looking for a bloodless way out – Jesus was not. In this contest of the wills between an Ordained Power focusing on crisis containment versus Ultimate Authority finishing an Earthly Ministry & fulfilling an Eternal Purpose – Pilate would lose. (Matthew 26: 53 - & - John 19: 11)

## **PART TWO**

At this time we will turn to the main question asked of Jesus before the Great Sanhedrin & similar by the Roman Governor. Although the questions are connected similar - they were answered in two slightly different but significant ways by the Savior: ASKED - Mark 14: 61 ASV “Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?” & John 18: 33 “Are you the King of the Jews?” ANSWERED – Mark 14: 62 “I am; and you shall see the SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING WITH THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN.” & John 18: 34 “Are

you saying this on your own initiative(of thyself), or did others tell you about me?” At this point - it is important to note that the Jewish Leaders had been trained theologically in expectation of the Messiah as military leader and literal King – so in a manner of speaking - both they and the Roman Governor had the same intended meaning to their question.

Moving forward we intend to illuminate with laser focus John 18: 34 as being perhaps that verse containing the most legally significant sentence in human history. Barnes’ Notes on the New Testament @John 18: 34 in expounding on “of thyself” – “From any conviction of your own mind, or any apprehension of danger. During all the time you have been praetor, have you seen anything in me that has led you to apprehend sedition, or danger to the Roman power?”

I believe Barne’s is correct as far as he goes – but I am also of the strong opinion that there is a much more depth to this verse. In my lifetime, I have heard Bible scholars suggest on several occasions that – Pontius Pilate was here reaching for an Insanity Defense - but Jesus sabotaged his effort. After studying this verse comprehensively, I have come to share this viewpoint. I believe - *Jesus & Pilate Were of Crossed Purpose!*

The Insanity Defense Rationale is as follows: High Priest’s Jewish Legal Question of Dangerous Lunacy – “Are You The Christ?”; Prefect Pontius Pilate’s Roman Legal Question of Harmless Lunacy – “Are You The Jewish King?”; Christ’s Carefully Crafted Answer To Pontius Pilate – “You Say It!”

According to Jamieson Fausset and Brown Commentary “An important question for our Lord’s case, to bring out whether the word ‘*King*’ were meant in a *political* sense, with which Pilate had a right to deal, or whether he were merely *put up* to it by His accusers, who had no claims to charge Him but such as were of a purely *religious* nature, with which Pilate had nothing to do.” Significantly, “You Say It” serves in a double capacity!

“Should this abused and rejected, this bound and bleeding Sufferer, with no apparent followers around him, actually betrayed by one of his intimate friends, deserted by the rest, and hounded to death by the fierce cries of Pharisee and Sadducee, chief priest and elder, answer in the affirmative, it might easily suggest to Pilate that he must be under some futile hallucination.” (Pulpit Commentary)

The Oxford Mental Health Handbook on Non Compos Mentis – “The assumptions of law include centrally the proposition that persons are fit for the rule of law; That they can be held responsible and are expected to be able to give and to comprehend reasons for action.” Bottomline, The Twelve Tables of Roman Law incorporated tests of mental competence that establish the conditions whereby to invalidate a contract or establish guardianship. Included among these tests are symptoms for what we would label today as Grandiose Delusional Disorder more commonly known as “Delusions of Grandeur.” To state more simply, although the Roman Emperors - beginning from 27 B.C. – through the Apotheosis



Ceremony of the Ancient Imperial Cult - thought themselves after death as demigods, if an ordinary person were as delusional to think themselves another living person, would make them a stranger to reason and categorize them as insane under Roman law.

The second half of John 18: 34 indicates that after Jesus would not follow the Governor's lead with his Harmless Madman Ploy – Pilate then went outside to inform the angry crowd that was awaiting his decision - that he could not find any fault in Jesus as a bad man either.

Officially Jesus had been examined of mind and it had been determined that He was not a Harmless Lunatic although signs(John 19: 19 – 22) indicated Pilate at that time was still fixed on his original assessment. The big question remained – Was Jesus a Liar? It seems reasonable that if He were a liar and facing death - He would have readily agreed to anything hinted by Pilate as a basis for escaping death. For those that believe Christ on Earth was both Fully Man & Fully God – we know He resourced both His Omnipotence & Omniscience – securing for its duration - His Earthly Ministry - until its fullness in time. At the start of Christ's Ministry in Luke 4: 16 – 30 – after revealing to the hometown synagogue that He was the Messiah of promise - we find Him on cliff's edge escaping death from an angry local crowd by “passing through their midst.” How but by the power of God can that be done? At the end of Christ's Ministry – He was not trying to escape death but rather

embracing it - as indicated to the Apostle Peter in John 18: 11. In fact, I believe, on this occasion, it was by His Omniscience that He knew what was processing through the Governor's mind and by that marginal twisting of word craft - purposely thwarted Pilate.

The final test of Jesus as either Liar or Lord would be His claim of power to self-resurrect after three days lying in the grave – i.e. Matthew 27: 62 - 66. Worthy of mention is a parenthetical in the Bezae Manuscript noting “and when He was laid there, they put against the tomb a stone which twenty men could not roll away.” Yet, in John Chapter 20 we learn that the stone meant as immovable was rolled away by an irresistible force & Jesus Christ Arose From The Dead!

Furthermore, Roman official & centurion testimony provide additional acknowledgement of the Miraculous Events surrounding Christ's death on the cross & His Resurrection from the dead. Matthew's account contains these testimonies in Matthew 27: 54; 28: 4. In written confirmation we revisit Pilate's Letter to Emperor Tiberius where it references the witness of the Roman Cohort: “He said about the beginning of the fourth watch they saw a soft and beautiful light over the sepulcher. He at first thought that the women had come to embalm the body of Jesus, as was their custom, but he could not see how they could have gotten through the guards. While these thoughts were passing through his mind behold, the whole place was lighted up, and there seemed to be crowds of

the dead in their grave clothes. All seemed to be shouting and filled with ecstasy, while all around and above was the most beautiful music he had ever heard; and the whole air seemed to be voices praising God.”

In conclusion, I believe we have answered the question first presented – Who Was Jesus? We have shown evidence to skeptic and seeker alike from both sacred scripture and of historic record in primary source proving both through the process of elimination and by way of witness report that – Jesus Christ was neither Lunatic or Liar but rather Lord. In summary, Jesus Christ was to the Jew as claimed – Lord of the Sabbath. Moreover, for the Gentile – **Jesus Christ Is Lord God Almighty!**