

## Pontius Pilate

*I guess we all want to be remembered after we die. To show we have achieved something. That our life is not just some meaningless speck in the long history of the universe. That something we have done has made a difference. But for some that happens in ways that they would not have chosen. Pontius Pilate for example.*

*Pontius Pilate was the Governor of Judea before whom Jesus was brought for judgment. We probably know the basics of the story and week by week we repeat his name as we recite the Creed together **“he was crucified under Pontius Pilate”**. Millions know his name; but they don’t really know him at all.*

*We don’t know what he really thought, or what happened to him afterwards.*

*The thoughts that follow are my musings at what might have been. Told from the perspective of Pilate as an old man....*

It still haunts me, that day.

On one level it was just another prisoner going to be crucified. Another fool trying to play clever with the Roman empire. Trying to be something he wasn’t. Getting what he deserved.

But on another level it changed everything. It certainly changed me.

As Roman Governors we are taught to make tough decisions – quickly and efficiently. It should have been a 2 minute job to decide about him. But it wasn’t and it still haunts me.

The things he said - ***You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above***

But I did have power – I had the power to have him put to death! He didn’t seem to be bothered. Calm as you like he was.

*Are you the King of the Jews?* I asked him. That’s what the High Priest Caiaphas said he had claimed to be.

***You say that I am a King. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.***

*What is truth?* I found myself saying.

What is truth indeed ?

Some might think that for a Roman Governor making a life or death judgement it is all about truth. But it isn't. It's about what's best for the empire. Nothing to do with truth.

So where does truth come into it? What is truth indeed? If only I'd known then. If only I really knew now. I've been trying to find out the truth ever since – that's why it still haunts me.

I just can't forget his face.

Not pretty – how could it have been after the beatings he had received – but calm, serene, almost as if he was in control of what was happening – and of what might happen. But he wasn't. I was!. ..... or was I?

All my training and experience said to me “just get rid of him. He's trouble”, but there was a voice deep within me. One I had never heard before or been aware of, telling me that this man was different. That I was dealing with something far more important, much further reaching, much more significant than a Galilean peasant.

The High Priest Caiaphas kept shouting at me – he must die.

The crowds yelled for his crucifixion.

Surely there was no decision to be made really. My job was to keep order here. If this man didn't die there would be a riot.

But ....

And then as I stood alone and thought, as I debated in my mind as to what should be done, my wife told me to have nothing to do with him. He was innocent. She had had a dream about him and was clearly troubled by it.

What she said echoed what my inner voice was saying. Let him be; let him go.

But ...

The crowd; the priests; the potential for things to get out of hand.

Out of hand.

Hands ..

I looked at my hands.

*Get me a bowl of water* – I said

And there in front of the priests, in front of the crowd, in front of him - I dipped my hands in the water and rubbed them together. *I wash my hands of this matter. I will not be held responsible for this man's death. You do with him as you will.*

I left them to it

I heard later that day that he was dead – crucified as they had wanted -, and that some of his followers had requested the body. Nothing wrong with that I thought.

Caiaphas had said we should guard the tomb – something to do with rumours about him saying he would come back from the dead. Utter rubbish. Foolish superstition. But for a quiet life I gave him some soldiers to guard the tomb – though I was sure it would be a waste of time.

And that should have been the end of it.

But it wasn't – turned out it was only the beginning. Which is why it still haunts me.

Two days later I was woken by a commotion. One of the soldiers who had been guarding the tomb was there. Talking but making no sense. It seemed the body was gone – even though they had been guarding the tomb. And some of his followers had been saying he was alive again.

Madness, utter madness.

The next few weeks we tried to round them all up. All his followers. To keep the whole thing quiet. Convinced it would all calm down. And I thought we had succeeded when – on another of those Jewish feasts – Pentecost I think – everything broke loose.

Dozens of his followers appeared from nowhere shouting and screaming about him, how he had come back from the dead and how this had been foretold centuries before; hundreds joined them and soon I had Caiaphas knocking on my door asking what we were going to do.

And I had no idea. I was out of my depth. It was all to do with their crazy religion. I couldn't get my head around it.

And it ruined my career.

Yes, I managed to stay Governor for a few more years, but I wasn't the same man. Things ticked over – just about. My deputies were good men. But they knew I had been broken deep inside.

Everyday when I woke up his face was there in my mind. His voice. His manner. It all still haunted me.

And then I was called back to Rome. It was after another minor uprising had gone badly wrong. Me dithering again. Unsure and unable to make a decision.

Its not good news being called back to Rome. The minimum is career in ruins. The usual is death. But luck (or was it luck) was on my side. Just before I got back there the Emperor Tiberius died. And custom has it that the new Emperor – Caligula in this case – dismisses any outstanding cases not heard.

So I was free. Or free-ish. A disgraced, broken man. Destined to live out the remainder of my days in quiet obscurity.

I often thought about that day. I relived the events; tried to make sense of the words he had said, of the vehement opposition to him; of the crowd; of the High Priests, of his face, of his manner. And of what happened afterwards.

What could I have done differently? As I kept going over it I began to realise that I had made a wrong call, but I also began to see that in some way everything had been stacked against him that day. The whole world – the way societies ran, the way people behaved, the selfish and fearful motives of those with power that they thought they could lose – all the mess and evil of the world seemed pitted against that one poor soul. Surely he couldn't win.

And now of course I am an old man – seemingly trapped by memories of the past; mistakes made and decisions taken.

And just a couple of weeks ago I came across a crowd gathered in the city square here in Rome.

Someone was speaking about a Jesus who had been crucified years before in Jerusalem and who had been raised from the dead. They said he was the Son of God – and that through him we could be sure of eternal life. They spoke of power, and healings, and miracles. They spoke of amazing things. Could this be the same Jesus who had stood in front of me?

The man who had been speaking suggested I speak to one of his leaders who was under house arrest, but who could still receive visitors and loved talking to them. A man named Paul. I went to see him; I was sure I had seen him in Jerusalem all those years ago; sure he was one of the High Priest's inner council; sure he recognised me.

We spoke for hours. He told of his encounter with this Jesus on the road to Damascus; he spoke of new life; of forgiveness and hope and he asked me if I wanted to be baptised and become one of his followers.

I needed to think; to try to make sense of all these loose threads which seemed to be coming together; I needed to deal with the past so that I could address this new future

I desperately wanted to be baptised, to be forgiven, to have this new start, to live in God's presence as he had said. But was it possible that this Jesus, this God, could forgive the one who allowed him to die? Could God be that gracious, that loving; that forgiving?