



PREVIEW ONLY

## Pilate and the Prisoner

### What's So Good About Good Friday?

by Paul Ellis

**What** In Jerusalem, a bound man is brought to the governor for judgment. But who is the real prisoner?

Themes: Easter, crucifixion

**Message** We are all prisoners in need of a Savior

**Who** Minimum 4 characters with doubling; 7+ characters without

NARRATOR (for table readings; otherwise replace with lines for direction)

PILATE, the governor of Judea

CAIAPHAS, the high priest

AIDE, Pilate's assistant

JOSEPH of Arimathea, a secret disciple

NICODEMUS, a secret disciple

JESUS, the condemned man

A Roman SOLDIER

Angry MOB who react with adlibbed lines

**Props** Water and a wash basin.

**Time** 15 minutes

**Ages** 11+

**Source** John 18:28 – 19:42, Luke 23:44-47, Matthew 27:50-54, 57-60

**Bonus** Free leader's guide with fun facts, discussion questions, and illustrations.

© 2021 Paul Ellis. Original purchaser may make copies of this script. All other rights reserved.  
Produced by KingsPress, PO Box 66145, Beach Haven, Auckland 0749, New Zealand.

**Narrator** Pontius Pilate hated his job. He hated the hot Judean sun, and he hated the dust that got into the folds of his robes. But most of all, he hated the old men outside his door.

**Aide** Sir, they insist on seeing you as a matter of importance.

**Pilate** The sun is barely up! Why can't they make an appointment like everybody else?

**Aide** Sir, the whole Council is here.

**Pilate** The entire Sanhedrin? Well bring them in, and let's find what they are complaining about this time.

**Aide** Sir, they refuse to enter the Praetorium. They say it will make them unclean for the Passover.

**Pilate** *(Rolls eyes)* Of course it will, superstitious fools. Very well, I'll speak to them outside.

**Narrator** Pilate wrapped his cloak around him and affixed his ceremonial sword. Stepping out into the dawn light, he was met by a crowd of robed men.

**Pilate** *(Annoyed)* Caiaphas, what brings you to my house at such an hour?

**Caiaphas** My apologies if we interrupted your sleep, Roman, but there's a matter that demands your attention.

*The high priest points to a man whose hands were tied.*

**Caiaphas** *(Cont'd)* Earlier this morning, the Council found this man guilty of blasphemy. He deserves to die.

**Pilate** *(Yawns)* I am very busy. I don't have time for your religious squabbles.

**Caiaphas** *(Insistent)* This man is a lawbreaker.

**Pilate** *(Shrugs)* Then judge him according to your law.

**Caiaphas** You know that we don't have the authority to put anyone to death.

**Pilate** Didn't you stone a woman for adultery just last week?

**Caiaphas** This is different. This man claims to be the Christ, a king.

*The bound man looks calm despite the situation.*

**Narrator** For the first time, Pilate looked at the man with the bound hands. He didn't look like a king. But Pilate could ill afford to lose the support of the Council.

**Pilate** I don't have time for this. Alright, bring him inside.

**Narrator** Inside the courtyard, the bound man stood before the Roman governor.

**Pilate** So, are you the king of the Jews?

**Jesus** *(Calmly)* Are you asking because you want to know? Or because they put you up to it?

*Pilate starts to lose his patience.*

**Pilate** What do I care? I have better things to do than trouble myself with provincial politics. It's your people who have brought you here. What have you done?

**Jesus** My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my followers would fight to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. My kingdom is not from here.

**Pilate** So you are a king.

**Jesus** It is as you say. Because I am a king I was born to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who cares for truth recognizes my voice.

**Pilate** Truth, huh. Be careful what you say. There is only one king and it is Caesar. Do you understand?

**Narrator** The man remained silent.

**Pilate** You want truth? I'll show you truth. See this sword? It means I hold the power over your life and death.

**Jesus** You would have no authority over me unless it had been given to you from above.

**Narrator** Pilate staggered as though struck. Who was this man? He didn't talk like a criminal. Pilate shook his head to clear his thoughts, then he led the man outside to the waiting crowd.

**Pilate** This man is not guilty of any crime. I'm letting him go.

**All** *(Angry shouts)* Do your job, Roman!

**Caiaphas** This man is stirring up trouble in Galilee and here in Judea.

**Pilate** *(Relieved)* Galilee, you say? Then he's not my problem. Herod is in town for the feast. He can deal with this. Now go, you've wasted enough of my time!

*The crowd leaves, not happy, but taking Jesus with them.*

**Narrator** As the crowd dispersed, Pilate breathed a sigh of relief. That was nicely done, he thought to himself. Now maybe he could do some work. But an hour later, he heard angry voices outside his window. The Council had returned, and they had brought the bound man.

*Pilate addresses the waiting crowd.*

**Pilate** Let me guess, Herod found no fault in this man. Neither do I, and certainly nothing deserving of death.

**Caiaphas** This man is endangering the peace.

**Narrator** Pilate pinched the bridge between his eyes. As governor, he was charged with keeping the peace. If things got out of control, it would be his head on the line. But this man was no troublemaker. Suddenly, he had an idea.

**Pilate** Is it not the custom for Rome to release a prisoner at the Feast? Why don't I release the king of the Jews?

**Narrator** Pilate beamed with pleasure. Why, he was full of good ideas this morning. But the chief priests shook their heads in fury.

**Caiaphas** Not this man! Release someone else. Release Barabbas.

**Pilate** *(Shocked)* Barabbas?! Are you out of your mind? I was planning to execute him today.

**All** *(Chanting)* Barabbas! Barabbas!

**Narrator** Pilate was perplexed. He could not in good conscience release the most notorious rebel in Judea. The man was a murderer, for pity's sake.

**Pilate** Barabbas deserves to die. I will release the man called Christ.

**Narrator** But the crowd chanted all the more. Just then, an aide approached bearing a note from his wife.

**Pilate** *(Reads)* "Dearest husband. Have nothing to do with this righteous man. I had a troubled night because of a dream about him."

**Pilate** *(To Aide)* Bring Barabbas to me.

**Narrator** Pilate sat on a stool before with Barabbas on one side and the man on the other. Barabbas cursed the crowd and flecks of spit flew from his mouth. Even in chains he looked dangerous, more animal than man.

**Pilate** *(To the crowd)* Which one shall I pardon?

**All** *(Chanting)* Barabbas! Barabbas!

**Pilate** What do I do with the one who is called the Christ?

**All** Crucify! Crucify!

*Pilate looks conflicted.*

**Narrator** This was not going well. Pilate felt trapped between the crowd and his own conscience. The governor turned to a soldier.

**Pilate** An hour in the sun will silence this mob. Take the prisoner into the barracks and give him a taste of Roman justice.

**Narrator** The soldier led the man into the Praetorium to be scourged, while the crowd waited outside. Some time later, the man was brought back out. He was broken and barely able to stand. On his head was a crown of thorns, and on his back he wore a tattered robe.

*Pilate presents the man to the crowd.*

**Pilate** Behold, your king!

**Narrator** But if Pilate thought the sight of the tortured man would satisfy the crowd, he was sadly mistaken.

**All** *(Chanting)* Crucify! Crucify!

**Pilate** *(Exasperated)* Shall I crucify your king?

**Caiaphas** We have no king but Caesar! We have no king but Caesar!

**Narrator** Like a savage beast lusting for blood, the angry crowd began pressing upon the soldiers.

*Aide turns to Pilate, worried.*

**Aide** Sir, what should we do?

**Pilate** Bring me water and a basin. Quickly!

*An aide fills a basin with water from a skin. In front of the crowd, Pilate washes his hands.*

**Pilate** I wash my hands of all responsibility in this case. I am innocent of this man's blood.

**Caiaphas** His blood shall be on us and on our children!

**Narrator** Pilate could not look at the man he was about to condemn.

**Pilate** Release Barabbas. Crucify the other one.

*The crowd cheers in approval.*

**Soldier** What charge shall we post on the cross?

**Pilate** Write, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews."

**Narrator** Pilate dismissed the soldiers and retreated into his residence. Passover hadn't even started and already he was drained. He called for some wine and olives, but before he could finish the chief priests returned.

**Caiaphas** *(Angry)* Change the sign. He is not the king of the Jews!

**Pilate** What I have written, I have written. Now leave before I'm tempted to put up more crosses!

**Narrator** Oh how he hated his job! The constant demands, the endless petitions. Pilate wrapped his hand around his face and closed his eyes. He had calmed the angry mob, but he had condemned an innocent man to death.

**Pilate** *(To himself)* I had no choice.

*Pilate opens his eyes to a world gone dark.*

**Pilate** *(Cont'd)* Did I fall asleep? Has the sun set?

*A guard comes running with a lamp.*

**Aide** Sir, it is the middle of the day.

**Pilate**           *(Confused)* What is this foul darkness?

**Narrator**       Pilate shivered. From outside he heard growing cries of terror.

**All**               *(Off)* God save us!  
                      The end has come!

**Narrator**       Suddenly a rumble came from deep inside the earth. The ground trembled causing Pilate's wine cup to spill.

**Pilate**           It's an earthquake!

**Narrator**       Vicious cracks splintered the floor and raced up the walls. Heavy chunks of stone fell from the ceiling.

**Pilate**           May the gods preserve us!

*Pilate tries to cover himself and shakes in fear.*

**Narrator**       As suddenly as it had started, the shaking stopped. An eerie stillness fell over the land like a shroud. Then Pilate heard voices, a few at first, then more and more until the whole city was in an uproar.

**Aide**             Sir, it's the Jews – they say there are dead men walking in the city.

**Pilate**           *(Shocked)* What?!

**Aide**             The quake broke the old tombs, and now holy men are walking in the streets.

**Pilate**           By the hammer of Hercules! What is happening?

*A soldier enters, breathless from running.*

**Soldier**         Sir, there are reports that the temple curtain has been torn in half.

**Pilate**           Curtains?! Why should I care about curtains?

**Soldier** Sir, the curtain is as thick as your leg. No one could tear it. Yet the Jews are saying it has been torn from top to bottom. They are saying God did it.

**Narrator** A wave of terror washed over Pilate. The darkness, the earthquake, and now the temple. Surely these were signs. But what did they mean?

*Pilate looks terrified, but he has no time to compose himself as the Aide approaches again.*

**Aide** Sir, we've just received word from the soldiers stationed at the cross. They are saying that the man you crucified was the Son of God.

**Pilate** Roman soldiers said this?

**Aide** Yes, sir.

**Narrator** Pilate's mind was spinning. Were these events connected? Who was this man who had stood before him? As Pilate pondered these questions, a shaft of sunlight penetrated the gloom.

**Pilate** The darkness is passing. I want confirmation of these reports. Go!

You have reached the end of the preview.  
To purchase the entire script, please click:

**PURCHASE**