

John 18:38 – 19:16

11th November 2018 am Hill and Arcadia

A divided heart

I couldn't help noticing **a repeated phrase** in this narrative telling of the unfolding engagement between Pilate, the Jews and Jesus...

This phrase **first occurs** after Pilate's brief interrogation of Jesus in ...*John 18:38b* ...*(Pilate) went back outside to the Jews and told them, "I find no guilt in him".*

It occurs again after **the offer by Pilate** to release Jesus; with the crowds pressing instead for the release of Barabbas. With Pilate then having Jesus flogged and humiliated ...*John 19:4* *Pilate went out again and said to them, "See, I am bringing him out to you that you may know that I find no guilt in him."*

The crowds keep calling for Jesus to be crucified and again Pilate's verdict in *John 19:6* *When the chief priests and the officers saw him, they cried out, "Crucify him, crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no guilt in him."*

The crowds simple will not relent. They want Jesus dead. And so again after another conversation with Jesus, Pilate now even **getting a bit nervous** about who Jesus is... *John 19:12* *From then on Pilate sought to release him..."*

There we have four **explicit statements** showing that Pilate did not believe that Jesus was guilty.

The facts concerning the accusations brought against Jesus are **informing Pilates's conscience** – not guilty – not guilty – not guilty – not guilty; therefore confirming what Matthew records

Matthew 27:18 *For he (Pilate) knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered him up*

He knows that Jesus is innocent. He tries his level best to avoid giving the crowd what they want. He repeatedly shares his verdict with them that he finds no guilt in him...

Yet after all of that... *John 19:16* *So he (Pilate) delivered him over to them to be crucified.* He knows what is right but he does what is wrong.

What on earth **is going on** in Pilates mind and heart? He knows Jesus is innocent yet he still deliberately hands him over to be executed.

He has a problem...

1 The problem of a divided heart

Pilate is the Roman governor. He is **a man of status**. He is a man who wields great authority. He is a representative of what then was the most powerful nation in the world.

He is a man who ought to have been the source and the upholder of **justice and equity**. There is however a struggle going on in his mind and heart.

It is a struggle that can be likened to a **tug of war**.

On the one side he is convinced in his own conscience that he should acquit the prisoner before him. On the other side, even though he knows what is right, he is afraid of acting on that knowledge.

Four times he tries to convince the Jews but **then the fear** of not keeping the crowds happy gets the upper hand. He sacrifices justice in favour of pleasing the crowds.

Pilate made a **decision**. He considered the love of man's good opinion weightier and more important than the murder of an innocent man. He considered his own popularity as more important than doing what was right.

JC Ryle: "Never did human nature make such a contemptible exhibition. Never was there a name so justly handed down to a world's scorn as the name which embalmed all our creeds – the name of Pontius Pilate."

But I must add that Pilate does **not stand alone** in doing this kind of thing. Suffering with a divided heart is a problem common to us all – in varying degrees of severity.

Pilate is an unconverted man has a divided conscience and a hard heart. What we **can't help noticing** is that far too often the people of God suffer with a divided heart.

1.1 It is a lingering disease

After entering the Promised Land Joshua sees that the people of Israel are tempted to go after the gods of the Amorites. **Without mincing his words** he challenges them to choose one or the other.

Joshua 24:15 And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."

A similar **strong challenge** goes out from Elijah to Israel.

1 Kings 18:21 And Elijah came near to all the people and said, "How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." And the people did not answer him a word.

God exposed Israel's divided heart though the prophet *Hosea 10:2 Their heart is false; now they must bear their guilt..*

Paul in his usual forthright way puts the matter bluntly to the *Galatians 1:10 For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.*

Jesus had earlier confronted his hearers regarding the habit and practice of being more interested in man's applause rather than pleasing God.

John 5:44 How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?

Dear friends the disease **lingers on**; even among us here today. You will find this war regularly raging in your heart as well.

1.2 It is a fearful disease

Physically we know that arthritis in the hand or foot is painful and can really be a nuisance. Bad eyesight or even no eyesight is really tough. I have two friends who have both lost a leg but they manage well with a prosthetic limb.

You can live with hand, foot, eye and leg problems but you are **at great risk** with heart disease.

In the same way that physically we see the heart as a vital organ, **spiritually** your and my spiritual heart condition is crucial.

Jeremiah describes the condition of **a sick heart** *Jeremiah 17:9 the heart is deceitful above all things.*

Jesus did not **mince His words** either about the seriousness of a divided heart in *Matthew 7:8 This people honour me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; 9 in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.*

Even more scary about this disease is that while we can hide it from each other and even pretend with ourselves that it is not present, it cannot be hidden from God.

Jesus rebukes the church at Thyatira in need of **repentance** in *Revelation 2:23 And I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart and will give to each of you according to your works.*

It is **not surprising** to see Solomon urging *Proverbs 4:23 Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the spring of life.* But what will happen if you do not keep your heart with all diligence?

1.3 It is an identifiable disease

A century ago men and women **died at an earlier age** because heart disease was not as detectable as it is today. With the advent of medical science and technology it is possible to identify heart disease by looking for the manifesting symptoms.

If you are 60 or older and you are overweight or have diabetes, high cholesterol or high blood pressure and you experience chest discomfort, nausea, indigestion, heartburn or stomach pain you had better get to doctor soon.

Look out for **the symptoms** – not only physically – but look out for the detectable symptoms of spiritual heart disease.

When a person's heart is divided, one of the most frequent symptoms is **formality** in his or her worship.

This can be seen when someone has an obsessive focus on external things or what we could call the shell of religion.

The carcass of religion is present but there is no vibrant life with God.

It presents itself when there is obsessive focus on liturgy or worship styles or dress or constitutions or traditions; which all have their place but not without **the essence** of loving God with heart and soul and mind and strength.

If you suffer with this symptom you will always looking to give attention to every jot and tittle on the lesser things – *“as one who will stand up (Spurgeon) to defend every old rusty nail in the church door”*.

Beware lest you are someone who fights tooth and nail **for the form** of religion but really lacking in spiritual life and power. It may be that you have a creed (statement of faith in your head) but there is no authentic and vibrant faith in the heart.

When there is **no spiritual life within** it can be so easy to deceive yourself by the supply of outward activity and ceremony.

Another symptom to look out for is that of **inconsistency**.

Spurgeon: *“You must not see him always, if you would have a good opinion of him. You must be guarded as to the days on which you call upon him. Call him on a Sunday and you will find him like a saint; don't call him on a Saturday night as you might find him very much like the worst of sinners.”*

It is a dangerous thing to follow the church and yet follow the world. It is very telling if a man or woman can come up and sing the spiritual songs of Zion at a Sunday worship service and at another time be at home in a drunken stupor at Presley's.

Spurgeon: *“What is it if you can drink one day at the table of the Lord and another day at the table of devils?”*

You must have **a divided heart** if you lead an inconsistent life flopping between the sacred and the secular..

Another indication of spiritual heart disease is that of **spasmodic religion**.

Their walk with God can be likened to having **malaria**. They are sometimes hot and feverish, and then suddenly chilly and cold. They take up their walk of faith and then lay it down again proving and exposing a diseased and divided heart.

One final symptom worthy of mention is that of **flippancy**.

Whereas joy ought to be the experience of every believer, **being frivolous** with God and with our dealings with God is an abomination proving a fatally diseased heart.

There is no fear of God before the eyes of anyone with a **false heart**. Pilate's concern for applause and acceptance from the crowd eclipsed any thought of pleasing God and doing what is right.

When given a glimpse of the holy nature of the Lord in the temple, **Isaiah's response** was one of awe and even dread... *Isaiah 6:5 And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"...*

1.4 It is a disease with consequences

When as a professing believer your heart is divided you **will not find** what you are looking for.

With regard to yourself you will be **an unhappy person**. After all who can be happy with a perpetual tug of war raging inside of you.

Spurgeon: *"The soul must find a nest for itself, or else it cannot find rest. The bird that would seek to rest upon two twigs would never be at peace, and the soul that endeavours to find two resting places, first the world and then the Saviour, will never have any joy or comfort."*

A united heart is a **happy heart**. David says, *Psalms 86:11 Teach me your way, O LORD, that I may walk in your truth; unite my heart to fear your name.*

People who are neither **this nor that**, neither one thing or another are always uneasy and miserable.

Another sad effect of a divided heart is that of being **useless in the church**.

Fruitfulness is the result of **single minded** devotion to God *2 Peter 1:8 For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

1.5 It is a treatable disease

In anger and frustration with Jesus, **Pilate says** *John 19:10 You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?*

To this **Jesus replies**, *John 19:11 You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above.*

Jesus is making it **absolutely clear that** neither Pilate nor the mob is in control of what is happening that day; there is an infinitely higher power at work in it all.

This raises **an obvious question**: If God really was in control, why all this cruelty and injustice?

The only possible answer is that this is **how things had to be** as God had designed them. This is the fulfilment of what Isaiah had prophesied seven centuries earlier...

Isaiah 53:10 Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.

All this was happening in perfect accord with **God's set plan and purpose** *Acts 2:23 this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.*

After describing how **Pilate gave in** to please the crowds, John tells us *John 19:16 So he delivered him over to be crucified.*

That is nothing other than **God accomplishing** His purpose *Romans 8:32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?*

God does to His Son what He ought to have done to His enemies, in order that from then on He need never act in such a way towards those who receive His gift.

This is the core of that great **spiritual transaction** that underpins the gospel and provides legal support for its message.

And as such **God's salvation** is offered to sinful men and women to treat their terrible and fatal heart disease.

Conclusion

Do you suffer with **heart disease**? To what degree do you suffer with a divided heart?

Could it be that you are **like Pilate** often know what is right but always make decisions that are for your self-interest?

Know today that it was **not Chris Barnard** who did the first heart transplant. God has been transplanting hearts down through the ages; removing hearts of stone and replacing them with hearts of flesh... God saves people from their sin.

Ezekiel 36:26 And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

Could it be you are like **Ananias and Saphira** who thought they could get away with lying to the Holy Spirit by pretending to be generous? Peter asked Ananias in *Acts 5:4 Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart?*

Know as in the case of this couple... *You have not lied to men but to God.*"

We probably **all have** a measure of heart disease.

The treatment in each case is the same – humble confession and repentance from sin and receiving God’s free gift of salvation by believing all that Jesus did was for you.

Going forward with the help of God with a strong and healthy spiritual heart, to love the Lord with all you heart and mind and strength?

1.6 It is a treatable disease

