

John 18:1–40 // The Passive // *Can't Believe* #5

We're in week #5 of our *Can't Believe* series in which we're looking through the Gospel of John at various people who *couldn't* bring themselves to believe in Jesus.

This weekend we're going to look at someone who couldn't believe in Jesus because he was passive: he just didn't think the issue was that important. He didn't put that much "weight" on it.

Passivity is a general problem in human nature, particularly our culture. Passivity is when you don't direct active energy to something, even when you should. Passive people just kind of go with the flow; let things unfold as they will.

Sometimes you're passive about something because you just don't place a great deal of importance on it.

- Many men are passive in leading their families. These same men are incredibly type-A about their jobs... they plan and strategize. But when they come home they just shift into autopilot and let their marriage and kids just kind of turn out as they will.
 - In 20 years when their marriage falls apart they can't figure out why. If you had showed the same attentiveness to your career that you did to your family you'd have been fired in a month.
 - Some of you men show more intentionality with your fantasy football team then you do with your family. That your marriage has lasted as long as it has is surprising.
- The problem is not that you're passive about everything, it's that you're active in some things but passive in the most important things.

Sometimes you are passive because it takes less courage to not make a decision than to have to make one either way.

- I see this a lot with guys who figure out how, functionally, to get dates with girls without ever having to ask them out.
 - They always arrange mysterious ways for the two of you to get together. We call it the 'sneak-a-date.' "Oh, look, we're here together again." But they don't want to put themselves on the line to officially ask her out because that could lead to a rejection.
 - They can't even bring themselves to update their facebook status to "in a relationship."
 - If anybody looked at how much time you spent together; how much you text message; they'd say you are dating, but you don't have the courage to call it that. You have what we call "friend-ationships."
 - You are passive. You're just hoping to glide your way into success.

There are certain things in life that you have to make a decision on. They're just too important.

- My engagement
- Throughout John 18 Jesus is going to confront the passive with the need to make a decision. To reckon with what they think about him and decide on it.

You can make a decision at the end today: **baptism**.

- Public profession of faith. Jesus commanded that you do it as an outward symbol of your faith.
- We've had a lot of people trust Christ the last few weeks. A college friend told me that 4 of her friends have trusted Christ during this series the last few weeks. When you decide to follow Jesus he says one of your first acts of obedience should be making it public.
- Or maybe you trusted Christ a while ago, but you've never taken this step.
- You say, "I'm not prepared." We have a change of clothes, towels, everything you'll need, and a changing area—we're prepared for you.

John 18:1–40

As the chapter opens, Judas has betrayed Jesus and he shows up in the Garden of Gethsemane with a group of armed soldiers.

⁴ Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, “Whom do you seek?”

- Don’t miss the odd juxtaposition of phrases in this sentence. *If Jesus knew all that was about to happen, why did he ask? Didn’t he know?* Here we go. Jesus is forcing them to acknowledge what they are doing.
- He’s going to do this several times in this chapter.
- So many people go through life without evaluating what they are doing with Jesus, because, like I said in the intro, sometimes it’s easier to postpone a decision than to make one. But here’s the thing: a postponed decision can have the same effect as a no decision. For example, a lot of people get in trouble with their retirement because they just never get around to saving for it when they are young. It’s not that they ever said, ‘I’m *not* going to save for retirement, I’m going to risk it all and work until I’m 80;’ but failing to decide *to* save for retirement was, in fact, a decision to *not* save for retirement, because it had the same result: you show up in your 70’s with 60’s with nothing to retire on.
- So Jesus is constantly in this chapter forcing the question: where do you stand with me?

So ⁵ They answered him, (we seek) “Jesus of Nazareth.” Jesus said to them, “I am he.” (In Greek there is no he, it’s just “I am,” which was the Hebrew name of God.) ⁶ When Jesus said to them, “I am he,” they drew back and fell to the ground.

- Clue #1 that this was a bad idea. The guy says his name and you get knocked on your can. “Who you looking for?” “Jesus.” “I am he.” Bam, you are on your back staring up at the stars. At that point I think would have packed up and gone home.
- The guy’s voice is so powerful he could summon dead men out of graves; his name so powerful it knocked armed soldiers to the ground.
- This is not someone to be trifled with.

So he reaches down to help them up and ⁷ So he asked them again, “Whom do you seek?” And (this time) they said (much more meekly, I might add), “Jesus of Nazareth.” SIR. If it’s not too much trouble.

⁸ Jesus answered, “I told you that I am he. (Remember—Just a minute ago, You said, “We’re looking for Jesus” and I said, “I am,” and you all went *bam*? Remember? So, if you seek me, let these men go.” ⁹ This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken: “Of those whom you gave me I have lost not one.” (Something very important Jesus in how Jesus said that that we’ll come back to).

¹⁰ Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest’s servant and cut off his right ear.

- Peter’s kind of late to the party, because, remember, he’s been napping. So he’s grumpy and groggy and he comes in swinging.
- By the way, he’s not aiming for the ear. He’s not Zorro; he’s trying to turn the guy’s head into a canoe.

(The servant’s name was Malchus.) ¹¹ So Jesus said to Peter, “Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?”

- In Luke’s account of this, he adds that Jesus then reached down, picked up the guy’s ear and re-attached it (Luke 22:51).
- Which is **clue #2** that this is a bad idea. He reattaches you ear after it’s been hacked off?
- Imagine being Malchus: one minute you’re ear is ringing and your head throbbing in pain and you are staring at your ear on the ground; the next minute he’s reattached it and the pain is gone.
 - You’re like, (feeling ear) “Did he just put my ear back on? I can hear again. Well, does it look normal? Is it on straight? Is it the same height as the other one?”

¹² So the band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound him. ¹³ First they led him to Annas, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year.

¹⁴ It was Caiaphas who had advised the Jews that it would be expedient that one man should die for the people.

- Throughout this chapter John notes these statements by Caiaphas that Caiaphas means to be harmful to Jesus but turn out to be prophecies fulfilling God's plan.
- John includes them to show you that at all points in these proceedings God is fully in control.

¹⁹ The high priest then questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. ²⁰ Jesus answered him, "I have spoken openly to the world. I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret.

- Nobody's got a secret *YouTube* of me at a fundraiser or Loyola University saying things to an inside group I don't want the public to know about. It's all been public.

So... ²¹ Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me what I said to them; they know what I said." ²²

When he had said these things, one of the officers standing by struck Jesus with his hand, saying, "Is that how you answer the high priest?" ²³ Jesus answered him, "If what I said is wrong, bear witness about the wrong; but if what I said is right, why do you strike me?"

- The restraint here is almost unbelievable... I was thinking that if I were Jesus I would have said, "Is that how *I* answer the high priest? This whole priestly system was established to point to me, and in just a few hours that's all going to be obsolete. And how are *you* going to feel when you see *me* coming on the clouds of glory?"
- If I were Jesus I would dropped an "I am" or at least a "truly, truly" and knocked everybody on their cans again.
- Which is why God probably didn't tag me to play the role of Jesus.

²⁸ Then they led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the governor's headquarters. It was early morning. They themselves did not enter the governor's headquarters, so that they would not be defiled, but could eat the Passover.

- And, of course, the irony in this... Here they are crucifying Jesus, the embodiment of goodness; God in the flesh, but they don't want to walk into the house of the Roman governor so as not to be defiled.
- The corrupting and blinding power of religion is unbelievable.

²⁹ So Pilate went outside to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?" ³⁰ They answered him, "If this man were not doing evil, we would not have delivered him over to you." ³¹ That's not really an answer. So Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law." The Jews said to him, "It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death."

- Now, the Jews could have called a lynch mob and stone Jesus, like they would do with Steven later, and Pilate would have turned his head, but the problem was that Jesus was too popular among the people for the Jewish leaders to get away with that.
- They needed to be rid of Jesus but not have the people blame them for it. So they are trying to coerce Pilate into doing it.
- But John adds...

³² This was to fulfill the word that Jesus had spoken to show by what kind of death he was going to die. Again, John is showing that this is all playing right into God's plan.

- You see, Caiaphas also knew that the Romans would crucify Jesus, and the Jewish law said that if you died by hanging on a tree that was proof you were cursed by God. So this was a way that he could force the people conclude that Jesus was a fraud. "*See, God cursed him. He died on a tree and Deut 21:23 says that everyone who dies hanging on a tree is cursed by God. So that's proof he's bad.*"
- But God's plan all along has been for Jesus to die on a tree cursed by God, and Caiaphas is executing it

perfectly, even if unintentionally. What Caiaphas intended to thwart God's plan actually fulfills it, which is how God mocks Satan and bad people.

Now, Pilate is in a difficult position. Pilate, you see, was already on thin ice as a governor. History tells us that he had made some colossally boneheaded decisions after becoming governor.

For example:

- When Pilate first came into office he wanted to do so with a bang, so he marched through Jerusalem in this huge parade with these large **banners bearing the image of Tiberius Caesar** celebrating the glory and power of Rome, and then he had those banners hung everywhere in Jerusalem, including at the Temple. Well, having anyone's image displayed at the Temple, much less a pagan emperor, was blasphemy to the Jews, so they were enraged. Pilate agreed to meet with them in the amphitheater to discuss it. Once there, he surrounded them with soldiers and threatened to kill them. The Jews called his bluff—many of them laid down and bared their necks. Pilate caved and eventually removed the images.¹
- On other occasion, Pilate needed some money to for a **new aqueduct** so he extorted a huge amount from the Temple treasury. Robbing God's temple to pay Pilate's bills? Well, again, the Jews staged a protest, so Pilate sent Roman soldiers—dressed as normal citizens—to beat many of the Jewish protestors to death.²
- Luke 13:1 refers to an event in which Pilate, during a ceremonial sacrifice, had killed several Galileans while they were offering their temple sacrifices so that their **blood got mixed with the blood of the sacrifices**.³
- Well, the result of all these bonehead maneuvers was that **the Jews hated him** and **Rome was annoyed with him**. All Rome wanted was peace and the collection of taxes. Emperor Tiberius was particularly annoyed with Pilate, and he had placed him on probation.⁴
- So Pilate by this point is under a lot of pressure. He can't handle another riot. If so, he'd lose his job. So the Jews use that. They say in chapter 19, *"If you don't kill this guy, you can't call yourself a friend of Caesar. If you don't do what we want we'll complain to Caesar."*

³³ So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, "Are you the King of the Jews?"

³⁴ Jesus answered, "Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?" ³⁵ Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?" ³⁶ Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world."

³⁷ Then Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice."

Notice Pilate's reaction: ³⁸ Pilate said to him, "What is truth?" After he had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, "I find no guilt in him."

- This guy is no threat. He has no political aspirations. He considers himself a "spiritual" king to bears witness to eternal truth? He's no threat to Rome and there's nothing worthy of death in him.

³⁹ But you have a custom that I should release one man for you at the Passover. So do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?" ⁴⁰ They cried out again, "Not this man, but Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a robber.

¹ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke Volume 2: 9:51–24:53*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, p. 1205.

² Ibid.

³ R. H. Stein, *Vol. 24: Luke*, New American Commentary, 369.

⁴ Charles Swindoll, *Behold the Man!*, 52–53.

- Pilate knows he's being played, so he comes up with what he thinks is a pretty ingenious solution. And under normal circumstances it would be. He appeals to a custom where they would release one Jewish political prisoner on Passover as a sign of good will.⁵
- So Pilate gives them what he thinks is a ridiculously easy choice. And it was a ridiculously easy choice. Jesus or Barabbas. Barabbas was an insurrectionist and a robber. He's harmed a lot of people, and he deserves to die. He's a menace to everyone. They have to choose between him and Jesus, the one who had fed 5000, raised the dead, and taught people to love their enemies.
- The people, however, incited by the Jewish leaders, call out for the release of Barabbas.

Which gives you perhaps the clearest picture anywhere in the Gospels of what this whole thing is about. Barabbas is a bad man, and a rebel. Jesus the picture of innocence. Jesus will die; Barabbas will go free.

Think about if you are Barabbas. He woke up that morning assuming he'd be dead by sundown, but that evening he is sitting down having dinner with his friends and this strange man, who embodied perfect goodness and virtue, is hanging on the cross in this place. We know that 3 men were scheduled to die that day. On either side of Jesus were two other thieves and robbers, just like Barabbas. Barabbas was supposed to be that one in the middle.

Scholars point out that Barabbas' name is a very strange one. "Bar" in Hebrew means "son of." "Abbas" means "father." So Barabbas means "son of a father," or "son of a man." Anybody here not the son of father? You see, "Barabbas" by his very name, represents every man.⁶

Like Barabbas, we are rebels against the rule of God. Jesus, a man of perfect goodness, will die in our place. He was bound so we could go free.

The gospel is about one word: substitution. The way we say it at the Summit: *Jesus in my place*. This theme runs throughout the chapter:

- **You see it in vs. 8.** When the soldiers came to take Jesus, Jesus said, "If you seek me, let these men go." (18:8) The word translated "let these men go," is *aphiemi* (a-FEE-ay-mee), which is the word for "forgive." Literally, "forgive them" or "release them."⁷ Jesus says, "Take me. They'll be forgiven; they'll go free."
- **You see substitution in vs. 11** in Jesus' statement to Peter after he cuts off his ear. "Shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?" (18:11)
 - The cup was an Old Testament picture of the wrath of God. **Isa 51:17**, a prophecy of the Messiah: **Isaiah 51:17**, "Wake yourself, wake yourself, stand up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of the LORD, the cup of his wrath, who have drunk to the dregs the bowl, the cup of staggering."
 - God's wrath contained in a cup. I've heard it described as the fury of Mt. St. Helen's in a coffee cup. Or Krakatoa.
 - Jesus has just talked to God about this cup in the Garden of Gethsemane. There Jesus had said, "Let this cup pass from me." The cup was so overwhelming that it made him stagger, like Isaiah 51:17 prophesied. It knocked him on his face. Just staring into it made the capillaries in his face burst and he sweat great drops of blood.
 - It was the cup of God's wrath for my sin. For your sin. The father gave it to Jesus and he drank it to the dregs for us. **Substitution.**

⁵ "The Roman governor [would not] release **whomever** the people wished, allowing them to choose from all the prisoners in custody at the time. Instead, . . . a few offenders were selected by Roman officials and those names were given to the people as candidates from which to choose. Rome would grant an automatic pardon to the prisoner the people selected from the names proposed to them." (John MacArthur, *The Murder of Jesus*, 179)

⁶ Leon Morris, *Reflections on Gospel of John*, 635.

⁷ Same word used in Lord's prayer, "Forgive us our debts." (Matt 6:12).

- You see **substitution** in vs. 32 when it talks about the “*kind of death*” Jesus had to die, one by hanging on a tree. Those who hung on a tree showed they were cursed by God. We had been cursed by God because of our sin but Jesus hung there in our place.
- You see **substitution** in Caiaphas’ accidental prophecy in vs. 14 that one man would die for the people. One man would die, and all the Barabbas-es would go free.
- You see substitution in how Jesus responds to Pilate.
 - Chapter 19 says that eventually Jesus stood silently before Pilate (19:9). Matthew records that Jesus was accused of “many things’ by the chief priests and Jewish elders, but he gave no answer. Pilate finally said to him, “Don’t you hear how many things they accuse you of?” **But he would give no answer, “not even to a single charge, so that Pilate the governor was greatly amazed.” (Matthew 27:12-14)**
 - When you are accused in a court of law and you are silent—you make no defense—that is universally understood as a concession of guilt.
 - Jesus, who had never done any wrong, plead guilty at his trial. Not because he *was* guilty, but because he was consenting to my guilt, and yours.
 - Jesus went to the cross an innocent man, but he would die a guilty one.
 - Because **2 Cor 5:21** says that God made him who knew no sin to become sin for us... that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. *Substitution. Jesus in my place.*
 - **Isa 53:5** says that he was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities and the Lord laid upon him the iniquity of us all. *Substitution.*

The one word that describes every event in this story is the word “*substitution.*”

- You and I are Barabbas. Every time a person puts their faith in Jesus a rebel goes free. We (the disciples, the soldiers, the Jewish leaders, the Roman rulers, Barabbas) crucified Jesus. And he took it. He took our curses, willingly, so that he could release us from the curse of God against us.
- John Stott says, “Before we can begin to see the cross as something done for us, we must first see it as something done by us.” **John Stott**

BTW, are you looking for an assurance that God will forgive you and accept you if you come to him? This whole chapter screams it.

- The character chosen to play you in this chapter is the worst kind of person: a rebel, murderer and extortionist: Barabbas. Which shows you that no matter who you are, Jesus’ death can free you.
- You see God’s willingness to forgive in the severity of the beating they gave to Jesus.
 - In John 19:1 Pilate has Jesus beaten.
 - The Romans used a whip called the “Cat of 9 tails.” (describe)
 - Historians say it was not uncommon to see one of those whip straps latch onto a man’s **rib** and send it flying off of his frame); we are almost certain he was at least partially **disemboweled**.
 - The flaps of the whip would have sliced through his skin and shredded it like a ribbon. When they were finished Jesus would have been left as a crumpled, bloody heap.
 - *You want a measure for how wide, how high, how deep, how broad the love of God is? The cross is the measure of that love. You want to know if God loves you and can save you? Measure your answer by the greatness of the sacrifice he made for you there and the price he was willing to pay to save you.*
 - I repeat: **John Owen**: “The greatest unkindness (the greatest insult) **you can do to Jesus is to doubt his love for you.**”
 - The price he paid, he paid because of your sin. To save you from your sin. There is no sin so bad, so wickedness so great, that the blood of Jesus cannot wash it away. Your sin is great; God’s grace is greater still.
- You see God’s willingness to forgive in Jesus’ aside to Peter after Peter cuts off Malchus’ ear.

- Again, if I were Jesus, after that stunt I would have been like, “Let all these my disciples go... Except for him. You can take him. He’s an idiot.” But Jesus takes Peter aside and says, “Peter, don’t worry about this. I’ve got it all under control like I said. And I’m going to build my church around you, and make you the leader of it, you, a guy who slept when I most needed him, who impulsively slashes ears one minute and denies me to middle school girls in the next.”
- These stories combine to show you that there is no one too wicked that Jesus cannot save and no one too weak or damaged for Jesus to use.

Two things are contrasted in this story: the gravity of Jesus and the levity of Pilate

Pilate could not believe simply because he did not give the question of Jesus enough weight. Really, his opinions about Jesus’ innocence were irrelevant because his convictions either way on the matter lacked the gravity to change his course.

- When Jesus presents him with the truth he says, “*What is truth?*” What is truth? Truth is everything! It’s what you build your life on! It’s not a commodity or a luxury. It’s life’s most important question!
- Even when he’s convinced of Jesus’ innocence, he won’t act on it. He defers, “washing his hands of the matter,” saying “it’s too costly to render an opinion right now.”

“Gravity” means weight. Levity means “weightlessness.” (It’s where we get the word “levitate.”)

In this chapter you see Jesus showing the utmost gravity, and in contrast to that is Pilate’s levity. Jesus’ seriousness through this bothered Pilate, no doubt.

- You see Jesus’ power (he knocked people down with his name; healing Malchus’ ear—you know that got talked about).
- Why does he refuse to defend himself? Supposedly this guy has power. “My soldiers say that when he just said his name they fell down; my soldier Malchus claims this guy reattached his ear after one of Jesus’ guys cut it off.”
- Why is he willing to endure the beating silently, even when he’s innocent, even when he could speak up and clear himself?
- Plus (and we didn’t even read this), but Pilate’s wife had a dream that night and sent him an urgent message in the middle of this trial, saying, “*This man is innocent. Have nothing to do with him.*” (Matt 27:19).

And Pilate responds with “what is truth?” *What is truth?* Truth is what is standing in front of you! And it’s more than truth: it is truth and grace. Truth is incarnated in front of you and is soon going to be dismembered in front of you to *save your soul!* And you respond with a flippant, “What is truth?”

The gravity Jesus walks through this chapter here requires some verdict one way or the other. But Pilate isn’t courageous enough to decide for or against Jesus. He won’t join in the crucifixion or stand up to defend Jesus. He just defers; postpones the decision.

You want to know who Pilate is today?

- **He is the one who refuses to decisively decide whether or not Jesus is Lord.** You’re like, “Yeah, I’m not *against* Jesus. I believe in him. I guess I’m a Christian.” But he’s not Lord of your life. That’s something you’ll decide on later. You’ll come to church occasionally, be a good person, but become a full-on disciple of Jesus. That’s for later. Make no mistake: Pilate represents you.
 - Jesus said, “He who is not for me is against me; which means that if you haven’t decisively decided for Jesus, you are still in the category, like Pilate, of those against him.”
- **Or here’s another kind of Pilate today: a group of people who describe themselves as “atheists.”**

- Theist.
- Atheist.
- Agnostic.
- Apatheist: Who cares?

Every once in a while, something will rattle you, like Pilate gets rattled.

- A funeral: Feels surreal. But what if it's the closest to reality that you'll ever come?
- Some moment of fear where you realize how fragile life is
- Or you have a moment of conviction
- Or you feel the despair and pointlessness of life
- Or, you get a sense of Jesus' uniqueness by reading the Bible or hearing somebody preach about him.
- Or, you see Jesus' power demonstrated in the life of your friends, like Malchus' friends saw in Malchus with the whole ear thing.

And you have this moment of gravity, like Pilate had, but you sweep it away with levity. 19:8 says Pilate was scared. But he quickly snapped himself out of it and covered up his fear with urgent political decisions. "These aren't issues politicians as important as me have the luxury of dealing with."

- **It was not unbelief that sent Pilate to hell, but indifference.**

That's what the philosopher Pascal said: at the end of the day it's not unbelief that keeps people from Jesus, but indifference.

- **My friend, do you realize how serious this is?**
- **Charles Spurgeon:** *"Trifle not with Christ, whose hands and feet were nailed to the accursed tree for sinners such as you. Trifle not with his precious blood, for that is your only hope of redemption. Trifle not with the Holy Spirit, for if he should leave you to perish, your case would be hopeless. Trifle not with the gospel; what would the lost in hell not give to hear another proclamation of mercy! The devil does not trifle; he is very earnestly seeking your destruction. God and Christ and the Holy Spirit are not trifling with you, and (I am) not trifling with you either."* ~ Charles Spurgeon

Many people can't believe simply because they don't give this question the proper weight. This theme comes to a head in Pilate, but it appears all through the book of John:

- **John 5:44**, "How can you believe, you who receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?"
 - Glory: *kabod*, weight.
 - How are you ever going to believe when you care so much about what everybody else thinks and so little about what God thinks?
- **John 7:17**, If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority.
 - If you're willing to follow truth wherever it leads, you'll see whether Jesus is the truth.
 - Pilate couldn't know truth because he wasn't resolved to obey truth whatever the cost, wherever it would lead. He dismissed Jesus' claims because to obey them would have been too politically costly, something he wasn't willing to trade.
 - There are many people who won't seriously consider the claims of Christ seriously because of what it will mean for their lives if they do.
 - I once knew a Muslim girl named **Carolene**: "There's no way I could believe this because it would mean XYZ."

If Jesus is who he says he is, then what he says about eternity is more important than ANYTHING else in your life. Don't make Pilate's mistake of taking eternal things too lightly.

Judson's Conversion:

Adoniram Judson was the first American missionary. He left America in February of 1812 and set sail for South Asia. He would undergo persecution in Jesus' name like few people ever have. He was the first Christian ever to go into Burma. After a painful life of ministry, which included the loss of his wife and several children, he would leave over 7000 Burmese believes.

But I want to tell you about the decision that led to all those decisions. Adoniram Judson was raised in a Christian home, but when he went off to college at Brown University, Judson was lured away from the Christian faith by a fellow student who became a close friend, a young man named Jacob Eames. Eames was a philosopher who rejected all revealed religion, including the Bible. Eames ridiculed the God of the Bible, and Judson's faith, already fragile, crumbled under Eames' assaults.

He kept his loss of faith hidden from his parents until after his graduation, when on his 20th birthday—August 9, 1808—he announced that he was no longer a Christian. He had been valedictorian of Brown University, and left for New York for promising career writing for the theater there.

While in New York, Judson found little fulfillment as a playwright, and grew quickly disillusioned. But God was beginning to work in his heart. One night, while traveling through a small village, he spent the night at a local inn. The only available room was next door to a man who was dying. All night the man groaned and cried out in desperation. Judson was so tormented by the despair in the man's cries that he could not sleep.

Judson began to wonder, *"Is this man prepared for death? That's really all that matters now. Am I?"* His philosophy taught him that death was nothing—a door into an empty pit, but that brought him little comfort listening to a man that was actually dying. At the same time he could hear the voice of his friend Jacob Eames mocking him: "Really, Judson? You're this weak? Are you really the valedictorian of Brown University? Spooked by a little superstitious religion?" Judson was ashamed of his fear.

But still, those groans, oh, those groans...

The next morning, as sunlight filled his room, the sense of despair lifted and Judson felt ashamed for having given in to such weakness. He got dressed, went downstairs, and asked at the front desk about the man in the adjoining room. "He is dead," was the simple reply.

Judson politely asked, "Do you know who he was?" "Oh yes. Young man from the college in Providence. Name was Eames, Jacob Eames."

Judson could hardly move. He didn't leave the inn for hours. He later reflected on that moment:

"Lost. In death, Jacob Eames was lost—utterly, irrevocably lost. Lost to his friends, to the world, to the future. Lost as a puff of smoke is lost in the infinity of air. If Eames' own views were true, neither his life nor his death had any meaning. . . . But suppose Eames had been mistaken? Suppose the Scriptures were literally true and a personal God real? . . . For that hell should open in that country inn and snatch Jacob Eames, [my] dearest friend and guide, from the next bed—this could not, simply could not, be coincidence."⁸

⁸ Courtney Anderson, *To the Golden Shore: The Life of Adoniram Judson* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1956), 32–45.

Conclusion:

So what are you going to do with Jesus? You have to decide. You have to give a verdict. Is he the Lord, and have you surrendered your all to him? Have you believed his message, which is that you are hopelessly lost with him, eternally lost, and that he came to do a saving work for you that you could never do on your own? That he paid a debt for you through his life and death that you must have if you are going to enter eternity with God?

- If you've never made that decision, I invite you to make it now.
- And to show it through baptism. Again:
 - Public profession: outward symbol.
 - We have everything that you need.
 - My friends are here.
 - I was baptized as a baby. This ought to be a profession of your faith. You ratify their decision for you.
 - Dozens of you will come: some who have trusted Christ a long time ago but never been baptized, some who have trusted Christ recently, in this series, perhaps, and never been baptized, and some who have trusted Christ today.
 - Last time we had whole families come. Dads saying, "We've never been baptized, and the whole family is going to do it today. We've got clothes for all of you. It's a special time, come on."
- Whomever you are, just come as soon as we stand to worship. Don't delay.

Bullpen:

So you've been put in this position. Jesus knocks you down. Twinge of conscience: know Jesus is truth. You can't deny what is happening to your friends.

- What do you do... **get back up**? Like the **soldiers**. Guy said his name and I fell down. Don't get back.
- **Equivocate**: what is truth? Encumber the issue with theology and philosophy. There's a difference between genuine questions and putting up smokescreens. Throwing out the furniture.
- Jesus is the one great reality you can't ignore. You can't have lukewarm reaction to Jesus. If so, you've never understood him. You can't understand the claims that He makes and have a lukewarm response
-
- Now, like Pilate, in various moments, you are bothered. Your conscience, like Pilate's wife, torments you. 19:8 tells us Pilate was afraid. You have these moments of gravity where you feel the weightiness of Jesus' claims.
- J.C. Ryle: *Christ (could not have been more) serious in His death for us—the Spirit is serious in striving with us—the truths of God are serious—our spiritual enemies are serious in their endeavors to ruin us—poor lost sinners are serious in hell—why then should we not be serious, too?*⁹
- If anybody looked at how much time you spent together; how much you text message; they'd say you are dating, you just don't have the courage to acknowledge it because that might set you up for rejection. You don't even

It's a friend-ationship.

And it takes courage to decide one way or the other. The cowardly way is to not make a decision. But in many things not making a decision has the same effect as deciding not to. And that is certainly true with ultimate things, with Jesus.

Pilate does not take *everything* lightly. He takes protecting his political position very seriously. But when truth comes up he equivocates, "what is truth?" Even when he's pretty convinced Jesus is innocent, it doesn't have the weightiness in his heart to put his post in danger.

But there's something that keeps troubling

¹⁵ Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he entered with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, ¹⁶ but Peter stood outside at the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the servant girl who kept watch at the door, and brought Peter in. ¹⁷ The servant girl at the door said to Peter, "You also are not one of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not." ¹⁸ Now the servants and officers had made a charcoal fire, because it was cold, and they were standing and warming themselves. Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself.

²⁵ Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. So they said to him, "You also are not one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it and said, "I am not." ²⁶ One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, "Did I not see you in the garden with him?" ²⁷ Peter again denied it, and at once a rooster crowed.

⁹ J.C. Ryle, *Thoughts for Young Men*, quoting Matthew Henry

Jesus says, "Let them go," (vs. 8), literally "forgive them." Me for them. He will (vs. 11) drink the cup in their place. The cup is the image of wrath.

So, you can stand back up. If you can stand on judgment day, don't you think you can "stand" now? When others criticize you, you don't need their approval because you have his? When someone wrongs you, you don't need to wrong them back because God has promised to right all wrongs and you will stand in justice on judgment day?

But how do I know he'll forgive me? I love this last scene with Peter. Peter has been to graduate school for 3 years with Jesus. He totally doesn't get it. Notice his response to Peter's assault on Malchus. Not, "I changed my mind; you can take him, too." Not, "I'm not giving my life for someone who is so dull hearted he'll not get it even after 3 years of patient teaching and so disloyal that he'll betray me up to my last hour." No, he takes Peter aside and says, "One more time, Peter, this is the gospel..."