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The Miracles of Calvary

Miracle #1 - The Dream of Pilate's Wife

Matthew 27:15-26

Introduction

There are at least twelve miracles that surround the events that occurred in connection with the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus. These events occurred just before, during, or immediately after His crucifixion. Together they provide an amazing list of occurrences that confirm the miracle of God's redeeming grace. Our series on miracles surrounding Calvary begins with a miracle that often is overlooked. Perhaps this is because it is only mentioned in one verse, Matthew 27:19, and it relates to the wife of Pilate who was one of the protagonists in the final scenes of the drama of redemption.

It is clear from Matthew's account of the events leading up to Calvary that Pontius Pilate was not pleased with the idea of the crucifixion of Jesus. According to Pilate's own testimony in Matthew 27:23-24, he asked, "What evil has He done?" and then literally washed his hands of the matter stating, "I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it." Just prior to these statements he made a vain attempt to get the chief priests, rabbis, and people to let him grant Jesus the traditional pardon offered each year at Passover, 27:15-18. At that moment a messenger came to Pilate who was sent by His wife. This was the message, "Have nothing to do with that just man, for I have suffered many things today in a dream because of Him," Matt 27:19.

Jewish reckoning of time counts the beginning of each new day to be at sundown and continues through the night, the daylight hours and concludes with the next sunset. As we reckon time we would say she received the dream during the previous night. Let us consider the following:

I. The Wife of Pilate, Who Was She?

Her Heritage. Pilate's wife is unnamed in the Bible but historical records show that her name was Claudia Procula. The name is of Roman origin and we know little else about her. Other than her Roman name we know little else. We do know that a person of Pilate's stature would have been in the upper social and political ranks of the Roman Empire, which means she probably was from one of the aristocratic families. As a

Roman she grew up in polytheism. She worshipped the pagan gods of Rome. The emperor was considered to be divine and any thought otherwise would be considered treason for a Roman citizen.

Her Transformation. Whether it was the dream or by some other means she came to know about Jesus. She intervened in her husband's deliberations about what to do with Jesus. Historical records outside the Bible suggest that some time before the trial she met Jesus. In a letter translated from Latin, attributed to Claudia, she wrote of seeing Jesus perform a miracle. She did this while heavily veiled to conceal her identity. Later, her crippled son was in a group of other children and he was healed by Jesus. The letter states that as a result she became a believer. In a group of letters in the British Museum written in Syriac dating from the sixth century AD from Pilate to Herod, he states that after the resurrection his wife went to Galilee to see for herself whether Jesus was the same man who was crucified and concluded that He was the same person. The same letters written in Greek also exist in a museum in Paris.

Her Recognition. One very significant fact that strongly suggests she did become a believer is her recognition by ecclesiastical groups whose tradition has early roots in Christianity. The Eastern Orthodox Church or Greek Church, split from Roman Catholicism in AD 1054 over the primacy of the Roman church. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church goes back even farther to the Coptic Orthodox church that was part of the council of Chalcedon in AD 451. According to tradition this church was established in Alexandria, Egypt by Mark the apostle in AD 42. Claudia Procula was venerated by the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church as Saint Prokla. In the second century AD one of the early church leaders, Origen in his *Homilies on Matthew*, states that as a result of her dream she became a believer. She also is mentioned in other writings written in the fourth century AD including the Acts of Pilate and the Gospel of Nicodemus.

Her Name in the New Testament? There is one occurrence of the name Claudia in the New Testament in 2 Timothy 4: 21 in a greeting from Paul to Eubulus, Pudens, Linus, and Claudia. There is no way prove the identity of Paul's reference. Two historical novels, *The Bride of Pilate*, by Esther Kellner in 1959 and *Pilate's Wife: A Novel of the Roman Empire*, by Antoinette May, 2006 both use the name Claudia. May presents her as a blood relative of Augustus Caesar. Cecil B. DeMille in his 1927 production of *King of Kings*, used the name "Procula," for

Pilate's wife. These literary and film productions were based on historical research so that we can be reasonably sure of the name of Pilate's wife.

Note: Dreams in the Bible

Dreams were considered to be one avenue of divine communication. Revelation of God's will in dreams is characteristic of early patriarchal times. A good example is found in the dream of Jacob in *Genesis 28:10-22; 31:24*, in which God reveals His will for him as the inheritor of the covenant of Abraham. Dreams also played a significant role in the life and ministry of Joseph, *Gen 37:1ff*. Solomon's reign began with God giving him guidance through a dream, *1 Kgs 3:5-15*.

Dreams were not limited to believers but God also communicated with the rulers of the pagan world powers, Philistia, Egypt, Babylon, see *Genesis 20:3; Genesis 40:5; Genesis 41:1*; the Midianites, *Judg 7:1*; Job's friend, Elihu, *Job 33:15*; *Daniel 2:14-45; 4:1-27*. In the New Testament dreams played a significant role in the life of Joseph and Mary, see *Matt 1:20; 2:13, 19, 22*. Dreams were a frequent means of authentication of a true prophet or identification of false prophet, *Deut 13:1-5*.

This is only a representative list of dreams in Scripture. In these examples dreams were used by God to: (1) Restrain evil as in His warning Abimelech, *Gen 20:3*; (2) Reveal His will as in his revelation to Joseph, *Gen 37:1-11*; (3) To encourage believers as in the case of Gideon, *Judg 7:13-13-18*; (4) To protect believers as in the case of Jacob, *Gen 31:22-25* and the Magi in *Matt 2:12*; (5) To instruct believers as in the case of Joseph and Mary, *Matt 1:19-25*. (6) To warn unbelievers of their sins as in the case of Nebuchadnezzar, *Dan 4:1-27*; (7) To instruct His servants the prophets, *Num 12:6-8*; (8) To be a sign for revelation to elders in the last days, *Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17*.

II. Pilate's Wife: What Did She Do?

Her Dream. We do not know the content of her dream. Any speculation would be guesswork. Regardless of the content we can observe the effect of the dream on her life and the life of Pilate. A Roman citizen whose husband was a governor would hardly have been a believer in the God of the Jews. Even much less likely would she have been a fan of a controversial radical who had gained the ire of the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. There had to be some dramatic event in her life that prompted her intervention and dramatic message, "I have suffered"

(Greek *pascho*) meaning to suffer anguish of mental, physical, and or spiritual pain.

The timing of this dream was more than mere coincidence. At the very moment that Pilate and the Jewish leaders were debating the fate of Jesus, Pilate's own wife testified that she had a dream that disturbed her about what might be the fate of this innocent and just person known as Jesus. It was a miraculous divine intervention into these deliberations that she was willing to give testimony to the innocence of Jesus.

Her Message to Pilate. Whether Pilate's wife ever met Jesus in person can never be proven. What we do know is that in the midst of the discussions of Pilate with Jewish leaders she sent a messenger to her husband with these words, "Have nothing to do with that righteous, innocent man, for today I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of Him," Matt 27:19. Only the Holy Spirit of God could have revealed the character of Jesus. We can be sure that the Holy Spirit of God had come to her in a dream and revealed this too her.

Her Impact on Pilate. Pilate often is seen as cowardly refusing to do what was right in these deliberations with the Jewish leaders. On careful examination Pilate tried in several ways to give the Jewish leaders every opportunity to avert taking Jesus' life. **First**, in Matthew 27:11-14 he gave Jesus the opportunity to speak in His own defense and urged him to do so. **Second**, in Matthew 27:15-18 he placed two men up for release and pardon at Passover according the custom of the day. One of the two was a notorious criminal named Barabbas, see 27:16, the other was Jesus. Pilate knew of their hatred for Jesus, 27:18, and hoped in spite of their feelings they would take the chance to release Jesus and condemn the obvious criminal Barabbas.

It was at this key moment that Pilate's wife sent a messenger to him. She was very aware of the deliberations that were taking place and that Jesus' life was in the balance. She shows herself to be a woman of courage and compassion. Her situation is not unlike our own. God shows us the right thing to do but it is never east to go against the pressures of the world. Her words are recorded in God's word as a testimony of her faith, her insight, her courage, and her compassion. Of her courageous deed, the great old expositor Matthew Henry says the following:

The tenderness and care of Pilate's wife, in sending this caution, thereupon, to her husband; *Have nothing to do with this just man*. First, this was an honorable testimony to our Lord Jesus, witnessing for Him that He was a just man, even when he was persecuted as the worst of malefactors: when His friends were afraid to appear in defense of Him, God made even those that were strangers and enemies, to speak in his favor. . . . Second, it was a fair warning to Pilate; *Have nothing to do with Him*. Note God has many way of giving checks to sinners in their sinful pursuits, and it is a great mercy to have such checks from Providence Pilate's lady sent him this warning, out of the love she had for him. She feared no rebuke for meddling wit that which belonged not to her, but let him take it how he would, she would give him the caution. Note, it is an instance of true love to our friends and relations, to do what we can to keep them from sin; and the nearer they are to us, and the greater affection we have for them, the more solicitous we should be not to suffer sin to come or lie upon them, Lev. 19:17.

Third, while Pilate was deliberating on his answer the chief priests and the elders persuaded the people that they should ask for Barabbas and condemn Jesus. The multitude made their decision and cried out that Pilate should release Barabbas, Matt 27:20-21. Pilate forced these leaders to bear the responsibility of their actions when he asked them, "What shall I do then with Jesus, who is called Christ (Messiah)?" 27:23. It was at this point that literally and figuratively Pilate washed His hands of the matter. It was a civil and religious matter for which the chief priests, elders, and people bore ultimate responsibility, 27:24. The priests, elders, and people then pronounced a curse upon themselves saying, "His blood be upon us, and on our children." The Pilate released Barabbas to them and scourged Jesus and delivered Him to be crucified, Matt 27:25-27.

III. **Her Message to Pilate was an Message for Us!**

God Can Use Anyone He Chooses. Think about it! There is no more unlikely candidate than the wife of Pilate to stand up for Jesus in the midst of the debate of the Jewish leaders and Roman authorities. Truth indeed has no boundaries. She is like Peter at Caesarea Philippi when he was asked by Jesus, "Whom do men say that I am?" Matt 16:13-20. When Peter answer correctly, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," 16:16, Jesus responded, "Blessed are you Simon Bar-Jonah, for

flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven," 16:17. Claudia revealed to Pilate, "Have nothing to do with that righteous man!" Her message was a warning that Pilate have no part in doing harm to with those who wanted to crucify Jesus.

God often works through His Holy Spirit to reveal truth through His Word, through a spouse, through a friend, through a stranger, or through a dream. But this also means that if God could use the wife of Pilate He can use you and me to share the good news of His saving grace through our Lord Jesus Christ.

God Can Use Any Means He Chooses

God can use any means He chooses to reach out to those who are lost. He primarily uses His Holy Word, the Bible. But He also can use other supernatural means and can speak through preaching the word, dreams, as with Pilate's wife. He can use visions, miraculous signs in the heavens and on earth but none of these are valid means unless they come in the power of the Holy Spirit. Joel 2:28-32 declares that this would come in the latter days. It came to pass in a partial fulfillment on the day of Pentecost as testified by Peter in his sermon in Acts 2:16-24. Some say these are not longer valid means and God doesn't use them any more. But Joel also said that the final fulfillment of his prophecy will be in the latter as stated they would be part of the last days.

Note the word "afterward" in 2:28 and in 3:1 the restoration of Judah, Jerusalem, and the gathering of all nations to Jerusalem, 3:2-3. Jesus said in His Olivet Discourse that these signs will come again for a final time in the last days as He returns to gather believers from the four parts of the earth, Matt 24:29-31, 42-51 and Peter at Pentecost said they would be part of the revelation of the last days, Acts 2:17. The key factor in Joel's message was the coming of God Holy Spirit in power. So also it was at Pentecost, Acts 2:1-21 and so it will be in the last days, Zech 12:10-13:1; Act 2:17. It is a sad commentary that in our day we seek to use every means to reach the lost, but do not seek the power of the Holy Spirit.

God Qualifies Those He Calls. No one of us is too weak, too lacking, too unwise so that God cannot use them. Remember the call of Moses and his objections that he no ability, Ex 3:11; that he had no knowledge, 3:13; that he had no authority, 4:1; that he could not speak, 4:10; or that he had no desire to do God's bidding, 4:13. Amos was another Old Testament leader whose call was its own self-validating qualification.

Amos preached so forthrightly in Samaria that he was rebuked by Amaziah the priest of Bethel, Amos 7:10-13. In response he said that his call was his credentials, when he said, "I was no prophet, nor was I a son of a prophet . . . then the Lord took me . . . and the Lord said to me, Go prophesy to My people Israel," see Amos 7:14-17. In the case of Claudia we know nothing about the dream or how God placed this assignment on her heart. We know only that she was used by God to intervene with Pilate. She at least was willing to risk involvement in the difficult issue of what to do with Jesus. Her courage and her testimony set forth the prophetic truth revealed in the "Suffering Servant" in Isaiah 53:4-8.

Our Own Judgment Seat! When Claudia sent word to Pilate about her dream and gave him her instruction, he was seated on the judgment seat. He could have overruled the will of the Jewish leaders and the crowd. He could have set Jesus free. Feeling the pressure of the Jewish leaders and of the crowds who called for Jesus' crucifixion Pilate conformed to public opinion. He didn't want to risk upsetting the locals and then wind up having to answer to Rome for a major uprising. Before we become too critical of him let us be reminded that we all sit on a judgment seat whenever we consider the same question. Who is Jesus and what level of our commitment does He deserve. The Holy Spirit is the only one who help us correctly answer the question, Who is Jesus! But answer it we must. "Neither is their salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved," Acts 4:12.

Pilate revealed his true lack of commitment in attempting to prevent the death of the innocent Jesus when he asked the chief priests, elders, and the crowd, "What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ (Messiah)?" But the question of this hour is still, "What shall we do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?" It is then we are faced with a decision and must sit on our own judgment seat. It is there we must take great care to allow God to make this the most important judgment of our life. We must ask the Holy Spirit to show us the answer! The correct answer can only come through the Holy Spirit Who alone reveals and seals the truth of salvation, Eph 1:13-14, and alone who guides us in knowledge of the Father's will, John 14:15-18; 16:13-15. As Peter so succinctly put it, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," Matt 16:16.

Lessons

1. God meets us where we are and confronts us with the truth about the Gospel and about His Son, Jesus. Claudia received a message from God and in spite of her background she had the courage to act on God's revelation.
2. God plants the seed of the Gospel in our lives and it is amazing how it grows into faith and ultimately to bear fruit through us.
3. God often uses the confirming testimony of others about the change the Gospel brings to our lives. They can see the difference Jesus makes in us.
4. God sometimes uses supernatural means even today to reveal and confirm His perfect will in our lives.
5. Claudia's testimony had obvious impact on Pilate although there is no indication that he ever became a believer. In sharing the Gospel with others, including our own family, we have to share the message of Jesus' saving grace and leave the rest to God.
6. Claudia's witness is proof that God can use anyone regardless of their station in life.
7. Claudia also is a witness that God has always been and even now He is able to use any means natural or supernatural to communicate His perfect will. The key factor in Joel's vision, at Pentecost, and in end time will be the power of the Holy Spirit.
8. When God calls a person His endorsement is all the qualification one needs. But, it is important to recognize that the call of God to an assignment often includes a call to prepare, and to prepare well for success in His calling.
9. When we receive or share the Gospel each one must mount our own judgment seat and answer the question, "What shall I do then with Jesus who is called the Messiah!"