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The Good, The Bad, and The Roman Officials: A Comparison of the Depiction of Pilate in the  
Books of John and Matthew

John and Matthew provide contrasting depictions of the scenes of Pontius Pilate within the story of the crucifixion. Both points of view highlight different elements of the story and of the Roman Government. The scenes that are described in the Gospel of John depict Pilate as a hesitant figure seeking truth before giving in to the crowd while in Matthew he is depicted as being more understanding of Jesus but still ultimately, giving in to the crowd.

In both gospels the way that they speak about Judas differs from the way they speak about Pilate. John and Matthew take contrasting standpoints in regards to the sympathy they feel for their peer, Judas, and a Roman official, Pilate. In his gospel, Matthew attempts to present a sympathetic perspective on Judas. He suggests that Judas feels the remorse of condemning an innocent man. (Matthew 27.3-4). While in the gospel of John he glazes over the way that Judas felt about his betrayal saying “Now Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples” (John 18.2). and then does not refer to Judas again during his description of Jesus' arrest.

Matthew had more problems with the government as the text shifts when Pilate enters the narrative. In Matthew he says ‘When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. “I am innocent of this man’s blood,” he said. “It is your responsibility!”’ (Matthew 27.24). This reveals the feelings

of both John and Matthew towards the Roman officials. John wishes to shed light on the fact that Pilate believed Jesus was an innocent man. In his gospel it takes Pilate a long time to figure out whether or not he sees that it is fit to release Jesus to the Crowd to be crucified. He seemed to not want his people to think that he felt the same way as them, hence the reason that he gave Jesus up to the crowd in order to let the people decide his fate rather than what was custom, Pilate himself taking the life of Jesus. John states Pilate even comes back just before Jesus is nailed to the cross and states, ‘once more Pilate came out and said to the Jews gathered there, “Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against him”’ (John 19.4). This is not the first time in the book of John that we see the public deciding what to do with the life of another. Earlier in the book when a woman is sent to be stoned for being caught in the act of adultery (John 8.2). This is when Jesus says ‘*When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.”*’ (John 8.7) This brings a full circle element to the story that reveals that the people who were once followers of Jesus no longer outwardly believe his teachings and are ultimately the cause of his death. This is important to the way in which John felt about Roman officials because this act tells the reader that John believed Jesus more than he did any official or other disciple.

In conclusion, the gospels of Matthew and John have very differing viewpoints and ultimately must come to the same conclusion. The difference is in how they get there and why. John believes that the Roman officials rightfully should not have been the one to decide the fate of Jesus Christ and sees more sympathy for Pilate. On the other hand, Matthew views Roman officials as more of a powerful figure that confidently and a little carelessly decides the fate of Jesus while having sympathy for Judas. Pilate’s hesitancy in John and power in Matthew

contribute to the way that the reader understands the story as a whole as well as deciding how they view Pilate as a character and reveals how the author believes that Matthew and John felt about the Roman government.