

Matthew 27:19 - While he was sitting on the judgment seat, Pilate's wife sent him a message. "Have nothing to do with that righteous man," she said, "since I have suffered many things today in a dream because of him."

According to oneirologists, people who study dreams, the average person has three to five dreams per night, and some people have as many as seven dreams in one night. However, at least 95% of all dreams are not remembered. Do you have many memorable dreams? Or any dreams that really bother you? Maybe like one of those falling or being chased dreams? Or worse yet, one of those dreams that was a replay of something bad you had done. I think almost everyone has had at least one of those dreams where you wake up with a start in the middle of a cold sweat. Well, scientists tell us our dreams are often a result of what we are thinking about when we're awake. Our hopes and fears and anxieties that we hold back in our subconscious come back out very vividly while we are asleep. So it makes sense that when we are most bothered by things or most tense, that's when the nightmares and worst dreams are going to come. Well, tonight Pilate's wife tells us about a dream she had that really bothered her. Whether this dream was sent by God – like the Wise Men's dream not to go back to Herod or Joseph's dreams to take Jesus and Mary to Egypt and then back to Israel – we don't know that. Or whether maybe it was more natural, something brought on by her own worries and subconscious. Either way, this dream really had her shook. As Matthew's gospel presents this woman as an uneasy unbeliever. Troubled by questions and needing the answer.

Tradition tells us Mrs. Pilate went by the name Procla, or Claudia Procla or Procula. No reliable history tells us whether that was true or not. In fact, the only reliable historian to say anything about her seems to be the Gospel writer, Matthew. And he only gives us this single verse. Which is more than any of the other Gospels give us. But it fits right in with Matthew's special emphasis in his account of the Savior. His is the only one that mentions dreams at all, and every one he mentions is directly about Jesus. And writing mainly to the Jewish people, Matthew especially wanted them to see their part in all this. He pictures their involvement in a very detailed way. Not at all excusing the actions of Pilate, but still he makes sure everyone knows Pilate really wanted to let Jesus go. And here we see his wife wanted him to let Jesus go, too.

Not exactly for the right reason. As she says, "Have nothing to do with that righteous man, since I have suffered many things today in a dream because of him." She had had a frightening dream, and now her thoughts were bothering her. Giving her enough trouble that she would interrupt her husband's very important work. We're told Pilate was sitting on the judge's seat when the message was delivered. He had already heard the charges and the testimony. He had already listened to the Son of God tell about his powerful kingdom that is not of this world and his relationship to the God of all. He had already presented the mob with its choice of having the innocent Jesus or the nefarious criminal Barabbas released. And now as he sits on the judgment seat ready to declare his official decision, there is this strange interruption. The governor's wife is in such distress she felt she had to send word even though he was in the middle of his official duties. What kind of dream could have bothered her that much?

Well, it was a dream about Jesus. Now it doesn't seem likely that Pilate would have had time to discuss the details of this case with his wife. The mob had just brought Jesus to the palace here early, early in the morning. And I'm sure she wasn't in the habit of telling her

husband how to handle his cases. That wouldn't have gone over very well back then. In fact, it was still pretty rare for governors to even take their wives along to these outlying provinces. And yet the questions her dream brought up troubled her to this extreme. She knew just enough about Jesus to scare her. She was a very uneasy unbeliever.

Yeah, she knew the questions. And as with other unbelievers who are perceptive enough to at least know the questions, she was very uncomfortable with them. This dream about Jesus brought some disturbing thoughts to the front of her mind. She says she had "suffered a great deal" because of those questions. Disturbed and uneasiness are common feelings for unbelievers. She was troubled. Bothered by this Jesus situation, but maybe not quite able to put her finger on what it was about him. Well, God's Word helps us with that. It tells us all people, believers and unbelievers alike, have His law written in their hearts. That law that tells them God has certain standards he expects followed, whether they know who he is or not. And all people have consciences to react to that natural law. And when we go against that law, as we all do, the conscience does its thing. It bothers us. Implies a higher power is upset and will punish. And whether people realize it or not, it makes them uncomfortable with their sins, even if they can rationalize them with their minds. When it comes down to it, sin and the punishment it deserves from God bring up some disturbing questions.

The kind of questions that made Pilate's wife very uneasy. Questions like, "What is going to happen if this innocent Jesus is unfairly executed? What is it going to mean that my husband is involved? And who is this Jesus anyway?" And then her conscience would toss in those other questions that would bother any unbeliever who would stop long enough to think about it or to be honest with himself. Questions of accountability for sin. What comes next after violating the will and commands of a perfect and all-powerful God? Oh, and speaking of what comes next, how about what comes next after this life is over? Not knowing the answers to those kinds of questions is uncomfortable, to say the least. To the point of where now this wife of the Roman governor is almost panicky. Which is actually not an uncommon attitude for unbelievers. Sure, we see the ones who can kind of cover it up with false bravado or numb themselves temporarily past the point of obsessing on it. As they struggle and search to find ways to fill in the emptiness and helplessness those questions leave unanswered. As they feverishly lose themselves in their work or in the accumulating of things or experiences that help them forget for a while. But you can only run so far. You can only ignore it for so long. And eventually those questions catch up. When the job isn't going so well. When family and friends don't seem to be there. When health or the ability to enjoy certain pleasures goes downhill. Loneliness and failures. Or anything that shakes people up. And they can't hide from it any longer, and the questions start to hit home. What other explanation can there be for the frantic grasping at straws and falling for outrageous ideas and complete despondency and giving up of so many people, even people who seem to have everything? What other answer can there be for the huge number of people wandering through life dazed and confused, nothing solid to stand on, not knowing why they are here or what will happen to them. No wonder there is so much depression and despair, substance abuse, social dysfunction, emotional problems, and so many who will try almost anything to feel a little better.

Like Pilate's wife, they are troubled by questions. And like Pilate's wife, they need answers. Actually, like Pilate's wife, they need *THE* Answer. And ironically, really sadly, she was so close to the right answer. She had figured out that at least part of it had to do with this

man on trial before her husband. She says, “Have nothing to do with that righteous man.” If only she had known how right she was. Righteous man. Righteous the way the holy God demands. Not only innocent of the crimes for which he was being charged. Innocent of any sins. It had never happened before. And it never will again. A man on this earth completely without any sin. All of us have the stain of sin from birth, and actually conception on. And we all prove it every day. We go against God’s will. But this Jesus never did. His trials before Annas and Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin and Herod and Pilate all bore that out. No charges could be found to stick. Even paid off, coached false witnesses couldn’t get their stories together. Every step of the way it became more and more obvious. Jesus was innocent. And here the plea of Pilate’s wife underscores that fact. Jesus was righteous.

And that’s what he had come to be. Since none of us could keep the righteous demands God has set before us; since all we could do was earn ourselves a one-way ticket to hell; and since God loved us and wanted us in his heaven – Jesus came to save us from our desperate situation. And to do that, he needed to keep God’s holy law for us perfectly. Which he did. He spent his thirty-three years walking this earth without ever once disobeying the heavenly Father. So when he suffered through the hardships and trials and mocking and torture and finally death on the cross, he did so innocently. He suffered not for anything he had done, but for all the sins we and everyone else commit. This “righteous man” was treated as if guilty, so we who are guilty can be treated as innocent and righteous by the God of all holiness and justice. Thank God Pilate’s wife was right about Jesus in this respect.

But she was way off on the rest. Her answer was to have nothing to do with this Jesus. Like so many other unbelievers, she felt the answer was to keep Jesus out of her life, and the life of her family. Get away from him and put him out of her mind. Then she could continue on with her own life, doing things the way she wanted to. And that is an incredibly common thought. People want nothing to do with Jesus. Want to get away from him. In fact, a lot of people will even blame him for their problems. He’s what tries to hurt their self-esteem or curtail their “freedoms”. He lays a guilt trip on them. They would feel more comfortable if he weren’t around. Or so they think. And even those who don’t really have anything *against* Jesus, still he is kind of a drag. He gets in the way of some things I want to do and think; makes it hard for me to have certain friends or types of entertainment. But there again, after all the fun and games, those serious questions of life and death are still there. And then what?

See, that’s the problem with “have nothing to do with this Jesus.” The real answer is Jesus. Jesus *IS* the answer. He is the answer for the removal of our guilt. He is the answer for a right relationship with God. He is the answer for life right now, as he frees us from sin’s power to control us. He is the answer for the life to come as he frees us from sin’s guilt that would otherwise condemn us. The answers don’t get any more important than that. And they don’t get any better than that. Jesus. He kept all the laws we messed up. He paid the price we couldn’t. He gives us a perfect future in heaven. And he gives us the best present right now. Whether that opportunity or friend or health is there or not, Jesus is. He is the answer. And knowing that, we don’t have to be uneasy or fearful like the unbelievers. The questions may be troubling. But not when you know the answer. The right answer. The comforting answer. The saving answer. And we do. Amen.