

December 6, 2015  
Sunday Morning Service  
Series: John  
Community Baptist Church  
643 S. Suber Road  
Greer, SC 29650  
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*To Ponder . . .*

Questions to ponder as we prepare to hear from John 18:28-40.

1. What is the significance of Pilate's statement to the Jews, "What accusation do you bring against this man?"
2. What is the significance of the Jews' reply, "If this man were not doing evil, we would not have delivered Him over to you."?
3. How does Pilate's moving back and forth between Jesus and the Jews illustrate a common scenario in life?
4. How would you apply this truth to modern life: "Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice."?

### **CHRIST'S KINGDOM IS OUT OF THIS WORLD**

#### **John 18:28-40**

Last Spring a movie series titled *AD the Bible Continues* ran for several weeks around the time of Easter. As is true of nearly any topic Hollywood undertakes, the producers took quite a bit of liberty with this story and arrived at some rather novel interpretations. However, to the producer's credit, he cast the character of Pilate quite well. That is my opinion of course, because no one in our age really knows a lot about Pilate.

However, based on descriptive statements like the one we see in our text, we should be convinced that Pilate was thrust into a very difficult dilemma. What was he supposed to do? On one hand, only about four years before this event, the "king" of Rome, Emperor

Tiberius, appointed Pilate to serve as the prefect of Judea. We call the position "governor" simply because we understand that term better.

Pilate was responsible to keep the peace in one of the most volatile provinces in the Roman Empire. Tiberius stationed as many as 1,000 Roman soldiers in Jerusalem at Pilate's disposal to help with the task. But while Pilate had to answer to "King Tiberius" in Rome, at the same time he needed to pacify the rulers of Judaism, who were represented by the chief priest Caiaphas. Valerius Gratus, who was governor before Pilate, had appointed Caiaphas to that very important office.

Caught between loyalty to Emperor Tiberius and favor to religious ruler Caiaphas—and all the powers they represented—Pilate now had to deal with the King of Kings. You really have to feel sorry for the guy, in spite of the fact that he probably tended to be an angry and arrogant bully. He was caught in a no-win quandary. If he satisfied the Sanhedrin's request to kill Jesus, he would need to explain to Rome why he consented to the execution of this popular Teacher and doer of good works. If he didn't consent to the Sanhedrin, there would certainly be a riot and Emperor Tiberius would likely un-appoint him from his office. But at the same time, his conscience kept telling him that Jesus was innocent. And to add to his misery, God plagued Pilate's wife with a dream that caused her to warn her husband to let Jesus go free.

Pilate's dilemma is the same that all sinners face. On one hand, we who are born in sin desire to be kings of our own lives. But along comes the preacher who tells us that King Jesus who created us is our only rightful king. Add to that conflict the multitude of clamoring voices in this world that vie for our loyalty and attention. Who do we serve? To whom are we loyal? Who do we truly acknowledge to be our king? Because Jesus' kingdom is not of this world or even like the kingdoms of this world, it is easy for sinners like Pilate to ignore Him. But it is eternally dangerous to ignore King Jesus because in the end, He will reign as King and only those who are also not of this world along with Him will enter His kingdom.

**Kings and Rulers Set Themselves Against God and His Anointed (vv.28-32).**

The story picks up in the middle of action that we studied previously. Here we see the hypocrites proceeded in their plans to have Jesus accused, sentenced, and crucified (v.28). As soon as possible, they set the King before the governor. *Then they led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the governor's headquarters. It was early morning (v.28a).*

Normally Pilate's headquarters were in Caesarea in the palace Herod the Great had built for himself as a beach house. But during significant feasts (like Passover) Pilate would be in Jerusalem to command the Roman cohort in case of any trouble. The Roman soldiers were stationed at the Antonia Fortress right beside the temple. They were stationed close by the temple to watch for riots which might develop during the Jewish feasts. Pilate would be in town for the same reason but would stay at the Praetorium. That Greek word is translated *headquarters* in our text.

In former times, the praetorium had been the palace of Herod the Great. Now it was the residence of the governor in Jerusalem and, therefore, also the place where the people would come to seek justice and judgements. Imagine the foolishness of self-appointed, passing rule-makers leading the Eternal Judge to the place of judgment to be tried by a mere mortal. Reading such things, we cannot help but remember that God who sits in the heavens laughs (Psalm 2:4). The picture gets even more ridiculous!

As the religious rulers of men set themselves against God, they protected themselves against sin. *They themselves did not enter the governor's headquarters, so that they would not be defiled, but could eat the Passover (v.28b).* It was the Feast of the Unleavened bread. Many meals were taken during the week. The chief meal would be the Passover Supper. Jesus and the disciples had observed the Supper a night early on Thursday as was allowed. One theory holds that the Jews in the north (like Galilee, home area of Jesus and the disciples) reckoned days from sunrise to sunrise like we do. At the same time, Jews in the south, around Jerusalem, would reckon days from sunset to sunset. This would allow for Passover observations from sunrise on Thursday to sunset on Friday. This would be beneficial in that the thousands of lambs could be slain and the Passover meals eaten on two different days. The Sanhedrin members would observe the Passover Supper that Friday evening.

These religionists surely did not want to miss observing this most important religious tradition because of ceremonial uncleanness by entering a Gentile residence. So they stayed out of Pilate's house. Could they not have done a cleansing ceremony? Yes, but, depending on the defilement, that took time. Also, the bigger issue was what the people would think if they saw the religious leaders coming out of a Gentile's house.

Therefore, from a distance, they delivered over the King of Kings, the final Passover Lamb, to the passing governor for execution. This same picture has been repeated over and over throughout Church history. Multitudes of religious people are, and have been, so careful not to break good traditions, but all the while they harbor eternally-damning sins in their hearts day after day. As long as they look good to the people, they conclude that everything is okay. As long as they show up at church on Sunday dressed in their best Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes, it doesn't matter to them that they were secretly committing adultery or getting drunk or abusing their family the night before.

In the proceeding events, the governor demonstrated fear of man but no fear of God. When the leaders of the sanhedrin showed up with Jesus in tow, Pilate questioned the hypocrites' motives. The governor desired to know what problem the hypocrites had with Jesus. *So Pilate went outside to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?" (v.29).* Pilate's response, ***"What accusation do you bring against this man?"*** was actually the opening of the official hearing for Jesus. It was kind of like "Hear ye, hear ye. This court is now in session."

The chief priest and his people brought Jesus to the "judgment" seat, the courtroom as it were, of the governor. Everyone expected some kind of official decision. Pilate had to be aware that these leaders had some kind of evidence against this "Jesus from Nazareth" because he had granted them the use of several Roman soldiers to arrest Him. So what is the official accusation that would require the death sentence?

The hypocrites implied that the governor was a fool for asking. *They answered him, "If this man were not doing evil, we would not have delivered him over to you" (v.30).* This response is such a cop-out. In reality, the hypocrites knew they did not have a case that the

pagan Roman governor would understand. No doubt Pilate was in somewhat of a quandary regarding Jewish beliefs and traditions. He probably felt something like the conclusion Festus drew regarding Paul when he explained to King Agrippa, *“When the accusers stood up, they brought no charge in his case of such evils as I supposed. Rather they had certain points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who was dead, but whom Paul asserted to be alive. Being at a loss how to investigate these questions, I asked whether he wanted to go to Jerusalem and be tried there regarding them”* (Acts 25:18-20).

Just as surely, most people are probably a bit confused when they hear the news that Jesus of Nazareth was really God in the flesh who died on the cross to pay the penalty for their sins. There is so much information in that simple statement that is “out of this world” that it probably surprises most people when they first hear it.

He gave them liberty to do what they wished with Jesus. They were free to judge the King. *Pilate said to them, “Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law”* (v.31a). He understood that the Jews had their own laws that supposedly were based on the Old Testament Scriptures. He understood that Rome gave the Jews liberty to keep and enforce most of those laws. He also understood what these Jews wanted to do with Jesus. So in response to their disrespectful reply, Pilate told them to dispose of Jesus their own way. Which was tantamount to saying, “Get out of my court.”

There was a problem that prevented the religious hypocrites from taking Jesus away with them. While Rome allowed them to enforce their unique laws, they were not free to kill the King as they desired to do. Therefore, *The Jews said to him, “It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death.”* This was to fulfill the word that Jesus had spoken to show by what kind of death he was going to die (vv.31b-32). Rome did not permit the Jews to exercise capital punishment, though some of their rules called for it (i.e. adultery, kidnaping, etc.). So the Jews insisted that Pilate and the Romans kill Jesus. But they weren't in charge. They had to press this issue in all their pride and stubborn rebellion because God had already determined the means for providing the sacrifice for sin. The Jews thought they were in charge and could manipulate the governor. The governor thought he was in

charge and could throttle the Jews. Jesus knew He was in charge because He is the King.

### **In Truth, Jesus Is King of Kings (vv.33-40).**

A governor who ruled in this world was trying to appease religious rulers of this world regarding the Son of God who is not from this world. In that process, Jesus pointed out that His kingdom is not of this world (vv.33-36). Pilate wondered if Jesus is the King (vv.33-36). At some point, the accusation must have been made. *So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, “Are you the King of the Jews?”* (v.33). In fact, this was part of the accusation the Jewish leaders made to Pilate. Luke wrote, *And they began to accuse him, saying, “We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king”* (Luke 23:2).

Therefore, Pilate asked Jesus if He was indeed the King of the Jews. A Jew would understand that idea better. For three years Jesus had taught that He was the promised Messiah. Because He also exposed the religious rulers' sins, they had to figure out a way to twist Jesus' teaching to indict Him. “Oh yes! Messiah will be the Jews' king!” come to think of it. That was where they would direct their attack. Therefore, Pilate wanted to know if Jesus believed that He was Messiah.

Why does Pilate want to know? Jesus pressed that question. *Jesus answered, “Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?”* (v.34). This is not sarcasm. If Pilate wondered about Jesus' Kingship on his own accord, then Jesus would be more than happy to talk to him further about who He really is. If Pilate was simply repeating what the members of the Sanhedrin had said about Jesus, then his conclusion is already toxic and Pilate is biased against truth and justice. This principle is found all through the Bible. As long as a person is seeking truth, God will graciously reveal more light. For example, consider Jesus' invitation: *“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you”* (Matthew 7:7). God had said the same kind of thing through Jeremiah in the Old Testament. Through him God promised, *“You*

*will seek me and find me. When you seek me with all your heart” (Jeremiah 29:13).*

But when a person refuses to bow to King Jesus and only wants to argue with Him, God gives no more light. That is why Jesus told these same kind of Jewish people, “*You will seek me and you will not find me. Where I am you cannot come*” (John 7:34). At a later time, Jesus said to them, “*The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going*” (John 12:35). The lesson is clear. Don’t argue with the King. Love Him and obey Him.

Surely Jesus must have done something wrong. Why else would He be at the governor’s judgment seat? *Pilate answered, “Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?”* (v.35). Literally, he asked a question that expects a negative response. Like, “I am not a Jew, am I?” Pilate could not care any less about someone who thought he was the king of the Jews. Who cares what happens to the Jews and their king? However, if this is the only accusation the Jews could come up with, it was not sufficient for any punishment. “What was the real crime?” Pilate wondered.

Here is the truth of the matter. *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”* (v.36). Neither Pilate nor the Emperor nor the Jews had any reason to fear Jesus’ reign because it wasn’t confined to this world. If Jesus was king of a normal, earthly, passing kingdom, His citizens, servants, and followers (who were at times in the thousands) would have fought to free Him.

In this age, the kingdom of Christ is growing by numbers and influencing the sinful world as unnoticeably as yeast in bread (Matthew 13:33) or of wheat and tares growing side by side (Matthew 13:29). But there is no typical war between the kingdoms in this age. Therefore, there is no need for the people of the world to worry—YET! But one day that will all change. One day the King and His servants will fight in and against this very world. Paul reminded Pastor Timothy that Christ will come with great power *which he will*

*display at the proper time – he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords* (1 Timothy 6:15). John saw that *They [people of this world] will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful* (Revelation 17:14). He also saw that at that time, *On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords* (Revelation 19:16).

Jesus is King for sure. But He is not a normal king over normal people. Jesus is King over people who love truth (v.37). In spite of the Jews’ rebellion and Pilate’s doubt, Jesus really is THE King. *Then Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?”* (v.37a). Though confused, Pilate heard enough to conclude that Jesus is some kind of king. But Jesus is not just any king. Jesus is the King of truth. Indeed He was born to tell truth. *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”* (v.37b). Jesus affirmed that Pilate was right—He is a king. He is the true King, the King of truth. Because He is the King of truth, everyone who hears truth, embraces truth by faith, and loves the truth belongs to His kingdom.

This is the King who had taught His followers, “*If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free*” (John 8:31b-32). This King prayed for the people who embraced truth saying, “*For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me*” (John 17:8). That is the Kingdom of truth. That kingdom did not include Pilate who made decisions according to expedience. It did not include the Jews who were of their father the devil who is the father lies. It does not include the majority of people who have ever lived.

The default human condition is to be blind to truth. *Pilate said to him, “What is truth?”* (v.38a). Jesus essentially invited the human judge to embrace the truth and become a citizen of His kingdom. The proud and stubborn man was unwilling. He responded by implying that truth is not absolute. The modern foolish conclusion about truth is not modern at all.

People who are without the truth conclude that it is best to kill the King and give us the criminal (vv.38-40). The truth was that Jesus did not break any laws. *After he had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, "I find no guilt in him" (v.38b).* Pilate was just confronted with the truth from the King of truth. He walked back to the crowd of liars and insisted that his investigation turned up no guilt in Jesus.

This picture of Pilate going outside to talk to the sinners, returning Jesus, truth incarnate, and then going again to talk to the sinners is significant. He moved from one polar extreme to the other trying to decide what to do with Christ. That is the battle every sinner must fight. God has revealed so much truth about Himself in creation, in our consciences, and in the Bible. That Jesus Christ's sacrifice on the cross is the sufficient payment for the sinner's sins is evident. But the sinner struggles with coming to Christ and bowing before Him in humility to accept Him as Savior and King and going again to his peers, the people who are sinners like him, and doing what they suggest. The person who bows in humility before Christ wins the war.

Human nature, being devoid of truth, arrives at horrible conclusions. Pilate came to an awful conclusion. *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?" (v.39).* Pilate just declared that he found Jesus innocent of all wrongdoing. Then immediately he gave the hypocrites the opportunity to choose who Pilate would punish—Jesus the innocent man or a real criminal. Does that really make sense even to unregenerated humans?

Given the choice by the ruler, the crowd of hypocrites chose to release the criminal. *They cried out again, "Not this man, but Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a robber" (v.40).* They preferred to have a known and convicted criminal running free in their midst. They preferred to have Jesus gone and out of their lives. This is the picture of our world, our culture, our peers, our neighborhoods, our schools, our workplace.

The battle for truth rages hotly but remains virtually unseen by most people. Most people consider truth to be a matter of opinion. They cannot grasp the truth because they continue to reject the King of truth. They do not see or acknowledge His kingdom because it is

not of this world. But one day the King and His Kingdom will be painfully obvious to all who reject Him. The lesson of this story is clear. Do not vacillate between truth and error until it is too late like Pilate did. He faced truth incarnate and walked away. When we face the King of Truth, we must bow to Him and embrace Him as our Savior.