

**THE GOSPEL OF BELIEF - Studies in John's Gospel - Part sixty-seven**

Sunday, January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2015, 10:00 a.m.

Teaching #1779 - Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church

**THE TRIAL OF PILATE BEFORE JESUS**

**John 18:28-40** - "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. [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] 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." [32] This was to fulfill the word that Jesus had spoken to show by what kind of death he was going to die. [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." [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. [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."

John's account of Jesus before Pilate is *five times longer* than his account of Jesus before the High Priest, Annas (29 verses compared with 6). The encounter of Jesus with the power of the Roman governor is obviously very important to John. He gives more detail to it than any other gospel.

The first verse of our text tells us this all took place in the "*early morning*" (28). This was Jesus' last day on earth. The most important single day in the history of the universe was beginning. It was the "*early morning*" of the day that changed everything about the terms of our eternal destiny.

Significantly, John tells us it was the dawning of *Passover* morning. This was Israel's great celebration of her delivery from the bondage of Egypt by the hand of the Lord. And the Apostle John means for us to put two and two together as this day of Jesus' crucifixion fell on Israel's celebration of exodus through the death of those slaughtered Passover lambs back in Egypt. John means for us to take note of that final early dawn of the deeper emancipation to which all the other sacrifices merely pointed. The Lamb of God was dying for the eternal deliverance of those very Jews who were screaming "*Crucify Him!*", and those Pilate-like Gentile powers who were putting Him on trial.

Another detail. There is a lot of *movement* in John's account. The scene unfolds around *two separate areas*. The Jews are in the *outside court of the praetorium*. This is where the mob screams and protests and demands Jesus' death. The officials of Rome are in the *inside chamber of the praetorium* where cooler heads and analysis prevail. They sense Jesus' *innocence* in the inner chamber. They *cry out for his blood* in the outer court. And Pilate is constantly caught in the middle, moving back and forth in his desperate negotiations. He goes back and forth seven times in our text.

My own opinion - it really can't be proved - is this is what Jesus was pressing Pilate about when He asked that strange question in **verse 34** - "*....Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?*"

This is Jesus' way of telling Pilate certain truths can't be the negotiations of *popularity* or *political correctness*. Some truths are useless unless they're *convictions*. Whatever Pilate believes about Jesus must be just that. It must be what *Pilate* believes about Jesus. Jesus knows He's talking with a man who has all sorts of hooks pulling in opposite directions. "*Pilate, where are you in all of this? Where is your own head? Don't form your ideas about me to make someone else happy. If you're just spitting out other people's opinions you will never come to terms with knowing me.*"

And the take-home-from-church truth today is we all stand before Jesus *by ourselves*. You can't parrot someone else's truth. Where are *you* at with Jesus Christ, God the Son? Don't confuse what your *parents* tried to teach you about Jesus, or what your *church* says about Jesus with *your own* convictions - the truth about Jesus that is being fleshed out in *your* daily decisions and actions. Our text really is the account of the trial of *Pilate* before *Jesus*.

1) **THE TRIAL OF JESUS, GOD THE SON, IS ITSELF A UNIQUE REVELATION OF GOD'S GRACE TO ALL WHO WILL PAY CLOSE ATTENTION**

**John 18:28-32** - "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. [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] 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." [32] This was to fulfill the word that Jesus had spoken to show by what kind of death he was going to die."

The recorded details of Jesus' death are not just legal red tape. John points to the *reason* for this interchange between the Jewish people, the religious leaders, and the powers of Rome. God's hand is pulling all the strings in this account. And John wants us all to *see* it unfolding according to divine plan.

Why can't the Jewish people kill Jesus by themselves? That's what they tell Pilate in **verse 31** - "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.'"

But what can this mean? John records at least *three previous occasions* where the Jews wanted and tried to kill Jesus:

**John 8:59** - "...So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple."

**John 10:31** - "The Jews picked up stones again to stone him."

**John 11:8** - "The disciples said to him, 'Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?'"

But there was a problem with Jewish capital punishment. Notice that in each of those three accounts the people were trying to *stone* Jesus. *That* was the Jewish law regarding putting criminals and blasphemers to death.

This is why Jesus *must* go to this Roman governor. *Father God* is orchestrating the death of Jesus in keeping with God the Son's own predictive words. We studied these words - **John 12:31-33** - "Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. [32] And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.' [33] He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die."

Or, consider Jesus' words as He explained His death to *Nicodemus* in **John 3:14-15** - "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, [15] that whoever believes in him may have eternal life."

Notice, Jesus wasn't just going to *die*. He was going to be "*lifted up from the earth*" - *hoisted* up on a cross. And lest we think Jesus was talking about something else - say, His resurrection, or ascension - Jesus removes all doubt by *explaining* He was describing the *means of His death* in **John 12:33** - "He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die."

He would be "*lifted up*." Not *stoned*. And being "*lifted up*" meant going to Pilate. *Romans* lifted up their criminals. Not *Jews*.

Now, I said this was a particular revelation of God's grace. John tells the whole church age the details of Jesus' death weren't random. Jesus' death didn't just *happen* the way the death of approximately 150,000 people a day *seems* to just happen. The death of Jesus was a *visibly divinely planned event*. It was *timed*. It was full of *purpose*. Father God *advertised* the death of His Son in advance so this fallen world could more easily *recognize* its Redeemer on that cross.

2) **THE NATURE OF JESUS' REPLY TO PILATE SEEKS OUT PILATE'S SOUL - AND EVERYONE ELSE'S SINCE**

**John 18:33-36** - "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.”**

There is nothing in John’s account that prepares us for Pilate’s question about the *kingship* of Jesus in **verse 33**. But **Luke** reveals the accusation of the crowd immediately before Pilate’s “king” question - **Luke 23:2-3** - **“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 [Messiah], a king.’ [3] And Pilate asked him, ‘Are you the King of the Jews?’ And he answered him, ‘You have said so.’”**

There is no good answer to Pilate’s question - **“Are you King of the Jews?” (Luke 23:2)**. It is both **“yes”** and **“no.”** No, Jesus never came to establish an **earthly political kingdom**. Neither Pilate nor Herod had anything to fear from a competitive earthly reign.

But yes, Jesus was the promised king - the **Messiah** - to whom the prophetic Scriptures pointed. So there **was** a kingdom, but not the **kind** of kingdom Pilate was picturing. The King standing before Pilate was much bigger and much more important than that. His was a divine, eternal kingdom.

### 3) **THE POWER OF CHRIST’S KINGDOM IS RESISTIBLE NOW - NOT ADVANCED BY POWER, WEALTH, OR THE VOTE OF POPULAR CONSENT**

**John 18:37-38** - **“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.’ [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.’”**

I said in the introduction the details of Jesus before Pilate seem so important to the Apostle John. He labors over the details. Pilate is the classic example of **truth** being sacrificed for **expediency**. He will put aside what is **true** for what **works best at the moment**.

Everyone knows Pilate’s classic, oft repeated line, **“What is truth, anyway?”** We all know the famous line because it’s so effective. It’s not an **argument** with truth so it doesn’t take the mental energy. It’s not a **denial** of truth so it doesn’t leave you feeling like the traitor you are. The line is so effective because it’s a **brush-off**. It leaves the feeling things can be reconsidered later. There’s nothing **heretical** sounding in it - “Who knows? There’s **your** truth. There’s **my** truth. There’s what seems true right now. There’s what feels best in my own inner spirit. Blah, blah, blah, blah....”

The truth Pilate can’t deal with is confronting him in the face. The truth is right there. It’s in Jesus’ just-stated sentence - **John 18:37** - **“....For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth....”**

Jesus isn’t just repeating the same idea twice. There are **two** different things being said. **First, He was born**. That describes His **physical, human birth**. But that’s not everything we need to know about Him. That’s not the **whole truth**. **Second, he said, I have come into the world**. That’s His divine, eternal Person making **entrance**. He didn’t start existing, like you and I started existing, at physical birth. He is **God the Son**, who came and took on human flesh.

He was both **born** and He **came into** the world. You can’t say that about anyone else. That’s the **truth** about Jesus that **isn’t** true about anyone else. Jesus **came into this world**, in His own words, **“...to bear witness to the truth” (37)**. What truth? The truth about God - that His is holy and redeeming in nature - and the truth that He **channels** His saving work **through Christ alone** (there were no **others** sent by the Father on this saving mission).

All of this also bears witness to another truth - the truth about **us**. This is the truth that we are surely in such a situation that we can’t get ourselves out of on our own. Our own sinful condition, whether we like to admit it or not, isn’t **self-correcting**. We’re not going to grow out of it. We’re not going to evolve out of it. And both the **devoutly religious mob** crying, “Crucify Him!”, and the **power-brokers of the great Roman Empire** must embrace for themselves Christ’s saving work or be eternally damned.

All of this, says Jesus, the Messiah, is simply **“the truth.”** And what we see unfolding in John’s account is this truth about Jesus is rarely a **convenient thing to accept**. There are almost always other things pre-empting it. The truth about Jesus will always take you out of your way. And it isn’t forced with the might of sword, or power, or popular vote. People, then and

now, must see the value of the truth for what it eternally is. And they have to embrace it *for themselves*.

4) **THE STRANGE ACCOUNT OF BARABBAS AND WHAT IT PICTURES**

**John 18:39-40** - "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."

All the gospel accounts force us to look at the irrationality of this exchange. It makes no sense. It's as though all the gospel writers are warning readers of our endemic, fatal inclination toward bad decisions regarding God the Son. They are forcing us to face the moral blindness of rejecting such gracious, life-giving truth. There is no logic to rejecting grace and embracing a "robber" - a "thief" - like Barabbas - or the Devil, who, in Jesus' famous words, comes "like a thief to break in and steal" our hearts and our hope.

Let's close re-thinking this strange Barabbas account. It's full of light. It's John's way of telling all who will listen that ***He who did nothing wrong was condemned for everything, so that we who have done everything wrong would be condemned for nothing.***

That's the great truth staring us all in the face today. God be praised!