

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

Sunday, February 1st, 2015, 10:00 a.m.

Teaching #1781 - Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church

THE THINGS THAT BLOCK OUR MINDS TO OBVIOUS TRUTH

John 19:1-16 - "Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged him. [2] And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head and arrayed him in a purple robe. [3] They came up to him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and struck him with their hands. [4] Pilate went out again and said to them, "See, I am bringing him out to you that you may know that I find no guilt in him." [5] So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Behold the man!" [6] When the chief priests and the officers saw him, they cried out, "Crucify him, crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no guilt in him." [7] The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has made himself the Son of God." [8] When Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid. [9] He entered his headquarters again and said to Jesus, "Where are you from?" But Jesus gave him no answer. [10] So Pilate said to him, "You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?" [11] Jesus answered him, "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin." [12] From then on Pilate sought to release him, but the Jews cried out, "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar." [13] So when Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Stone Pavement, and in Aramaic Gabbatha. [14] Now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover. It was about the sixth hour. He said to the Jews, "Behold your King!" [15] They cried out, "Away with him, away with him, crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar." [16] So he delivered him over to them to be crucified."

There are so many features in this account that baffle the mind. We find ourselves groping for explanation at so many points. And the waters get murkier the more thoughtfully the details are pressed.

The text opens with Pilate telling the hollering crowd he can't find any fault whatsoever in anything Jesus has done (4). And this declaration of innocence comes right on the heels of Pilate having Jesus almost beaten to death (1-2). We're left asking the question, "Really? This is how you treat someone in whom you *can't* find any guilt? How do you treat real criminals?"

As if that isn't enough, today's text closes with the Jewish people - and what's more, the official Jewish religious leaders - pledging allegiance to the Caesar of the Roman oppressors rather than any descendant of Abraham or King David (15). These Old Testament scholars seem to have totally switched sides. They want Jesus stoned for blasphemy and then pledge no other Lord but Caesar. What's that all about?

There must be an explanation for the topsy-turvy nature of these events. Nothing seems normal. And the explanation, as we'll unfold in today's teaching, is no one quite knows how to handle the One on trial. The condemned has become a hot potato forcing irrational actions from those who refuse to acknowledge Him on His own terms. Then and now one has to approach the truth about Jesus Christ *with* the grain rather than *against* it.

1) **JESUS LOOKS LIKE A KING WITH ABSOLUTELY NO POWER**

John 19:1-5 - "Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged him. [2] And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head and arrayed him in a purple robe. [3] They came up to him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' and struck him with their hands. [4] Pilate went out again and said to them, 'See, I am bringing him out to you that you may know that I find no guilt in him.' [5] So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, 'Behold the man!'"

The charge of blasphemy is not the first charge the Jewish leaders brought against Jesus. That would come later. To see the nature of the first charge and the purpose of the kingly mocking Jesus would receive from Pilate we need to look back to Jesus' dialogue with Pilate in last week's text:

John 18:33-39 - "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?”*”

Notice all those references to a *king* and a *kingdom*. It’s all this kingdom talk that is coming back on Jesus in today’s text. The Roman Caesar had left the Jewish people pretty much alone in their religious customs and devotion. And the priests and scribes and pharisees all loved the freedom to exploit their power to the max. Because Jesus was so openly popular with the people they wanted Him out of the way. And the best way to do this, on their reckoning, was to present Pilate with the concocted threat of a Jesus who was setting up a kingdom as a rival to Rome’s power.

But even Pilate could see through their ridiculous case. When Pilate has that crown of thorns and that purple robe thrown on the beaten body of Jesus it’s his way of trying to appease the Jewish mob. It’s Pilate’s way of saying, ***“Some kingdom! Look at this pathetic man - “Behold the man!” - There is no threat in this king’s power. You should pity him. Not crucify him.”***

Pilate clearly hopes *seeing* Jesus so broken and mocked might soften the heart of the people. Most people can be sterner with punishment at a *distance* than they are when actually forced to *see* the brutality of it *up close*. It’s one thing to believe in capital punishment. It’s another to have to throw the switch. Pilate hopes the people will be reluctant to push for any more punishment for this bloody, humbled, powerless king.

But there is another power working in these determined religious leaders stronger than the emotion of pity:

2) **RATHER THAN EXECUTING JESUS THEMSELVES THE JEWISH LEADERS INSIST IT BE THE WORK OF ROMAN AUTHORITIES**

John 19:6 - “When the chief priests and the officers saw him, they cried out, ‘Crucify him, crucify him!’ Pilate said to them, *“Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no guilt in him.”*”

At least at this point I think we can all sympathize with Pilate. He clearly sees no crime worthy of punishment in Jesus. But he knows if things get out of control his delegated position from Rome will turn sour. He needs peace among the people.

The solution seems obvious. Let the Jews crucify Jesus. They will be happy and Pilate can keep his conscience clean. It’s a win-win. The Jews get what they want. Jesus won’t be around to cause any more trouble. And Pilate is off the hook. Why can’t this work for Pilate? Sure, it’s wicked. But it isn’t complicated.

Strangely it’s the Jewish leaders who don’t seem satisfied with Pilate’s offer. But why? What’s really going on here?

With just a little study we can see why Pilate’s offer isn’t acceptable to the Jewish religious leaders. They’re *afraid* to crucify Jesus themselves. And with good reason. The Jewish leaders can’t kill Jesus without deeply angering the common Jewish people with whom Jesus had such a passionate following. Matthew makes this case in his account:

Matthew 21:45-46 - “When the *chief priests and the Pharisees* heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking about them. [46] And although they were seeking to arrest him, *they feared the crowds, because they held him to be a prophet.*”

I said earlier Pilate couldn’t arouse sympathy in the heart of these religious leaders because there was a stronger force at work in their hearts. Now we’re ready to look at it in *Mark’s account* of the very same trial of Jesus:

Mark 15:6-11 - “Now at the feast he used to release for them one prisoner for whom they asked. [7] And among the rebels in prison, who had committed murder in the insurrection, there was a man called Barabbas. [8] And the crowd came up and began to ask Pilate to do as he usually did for them. [9] And he answered them, saying, “Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?” [10] *For he perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up.* [11] But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release for them Barabbas instead.”

The leaders were *envious* of the popularity of Jesus with the people. And *envy* trumps *sympathy* any day of the week.

These religious leaders *envied* the kind of trust and love Jesus received from the people. They couldn't afford to keep that kind of leader around. Jesus was a threat to their prestigious and affluent position.

So when Pilate says, "You go ahead yourselves and crucify Jesus," they know they can't possibly do that and keep any kind of credibility with the people. There's a lot happening in this text. The mere presence of Jesus - beaten and bound - is still messing things up for everyone.

3) THE EVIDENCE OF WHO JESUS MIGHT ACTUALLY BE BEGINS TO HAUNT PILATE

John 19:7-11 - "The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has made himself the Son of God." [8] When Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid. [9] He entered his headquarters again and said to Jesus, "Where are you from?" But Jesus gave him no answer. [10] So Pilate said to him, "You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?" [11] Jesus answered him, "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin."

These are extremely challenging verses. John means for us to notice something happens to Pilate when he hears these new charges of blasphemy on the part of Jesus. John makes it clear that Pilate was *affected* by these words, but doesn't tell us specifically *why* Pilate suddenly became *"even more afraid"* (8).

But there might be some clues. Not insignificantly, *Matthew* tells Pilate's wife had just delivered a strange message to her stressed-out husband - **Matthew 27:17-19** - "So when they had gathered, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?" [18] For he knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered him up. [19] Besides, while he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, "Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much because of him today in a dream."

Now, Pilate was not a *believer* in Jesus the Christ. But you don't have to be a believer to be *superstitious*. Pilate is, at the very least, *spooked* by the combination of this strange, fearful dream from his wife and the declaration of the religious leaders that Jesus made no bones whatsoever about being *divine*. *This* is the man Pilate has just had beaten half to death!

But there's more. As soon as Pilate can get Jesus away from the crowd he naturally wants to know the nature of the person he's dealing with. And the first thing he needs to know is *where did Jesus come from* (9). And, frustratingly, Jesus doesn't answer him.

The next confrontation between Pilate and Jesus must have been unnerving for Pilate - **John 19:10-11** - "So Pilate said to him, "You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?" [11] Jesus answered him, "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin."

This is surely unsettling for Pilate. He already has eerie suspicions about Jesus. And now Jesus announces everything Pilate holds dear about his own power and position and authority isn't actually *his* at all. Pilate is, like it or not, in the powerful hands of God Himself. And, to make matters worse, Jesus is bold enough to declare both Pilate - to a *lesser* degree - and the Jews - to a *greater* degree - were actually guilty of *sin* in the handing over and abusing of Jesus - **John 19:11** - "Jesus answered him, "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin."

Jesus introduces a new category to Pilate. He proves the nature of His kingdom when He starts talking to Pilate about *sin*. It's one thing to be confronted with *legal* issues and *political* issues. It's quite another to bring *sin* and *divine judgment* into the picture. Suddenly everything is *bigger - counts more* - than Pilate thought. This is a different kind of king, indeed.

4) LOYALTY TO JESUS ISN'T GENUINE UNTIL IT DEFEATS CONFLICTING INTERESTS

John 19:12-16 - "From then on Pilate sought to release him, but the Jews cried out, "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar." [13] So when Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Stone Pavement, and in Aramaic Gabbatha. [14] Now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover. It was about the sixth hour. He said to the Jews, "Behold your

King!" [15] They cried out, "Away with him, away with him, crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar." [16] So he delivered him over to them to be crucified...."

For the last two weeks we've been engaged in a study of traitors. Judas may be the first, but he's not the last to betray what should have been dear to his heart. **Peter** denies even being associated with Jesus, while trying to stay as close to Jesus as possible right up to the last minute. The Jews are willing to align their hearts with the Gentile ruler, the Caesar, rather than look in faith on the divine Messiah sent to redeem them. And Pilate will turn on his own conscience when his political future is at stake.

There is something about Jesus that **exposes** traitors. **It is the nature of our Lord's presence to reveal our deepest loyalties.** This is how it was **then** and this is how it is **now**. And this brings us to a wonderful point of personal application in the final moments of this challenging text.

Pilate stood his moral high ground for quite a while against formidable odds. He deserves credit for hanging in there. But it's what finally pushed him over the edge - what broke his moral back-bone - that we need to consider deeply. The character of Pilate melts in that tiny space between **verses 12 and 13** - "From then on Pilate sought to release him, but the Jews cried out, **if you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend.** Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar.' [13] So **when Pilate heard these words,** he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Stone Pavement, and in Aramaic Gabbatha."

This is a seismic shift. **Verse 12** - "...Pilate sought to **release him....**" **Verse 13** - "...when Pilate heard **these words** he **brought Jesus out....**" So those words, **if you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend,** turned Pilate into a traitor.

Every person - every person in this sanctuary this morning - has some interest that lies in wait to push Jesus Christ into second place. **Everyone** has this inner traitor-in-waiting. How you deal with that interest is the measure of your love for Christ and your spiritual identity.

This world works to find and exploit your dearest personal interest. Wealth, success, education, fitness, entertainment, sports - it doesn't matter what it is. There will be some screaming voice fanning those dreams to life. Or threatening to leave them unfulfilled if Jesus takes center stage. The Devil uses your **other** interests to make loyalty to Jesus as **unattractive and costly as possible.**

This is his only hope. He must keep people from seeing the beauty of Jesus Christ. He must keep people from **discovering.** He must delude them into thinking they're loose their freedom in the Lordship of Christ. They'll lose friends. Maybe they'll lose influence. But he has to keep the smoke in front of would-be disciples.

And he's good at what he does. He keeps just enough Christians right on the edge of serious venture in Christ's kingdom. Play this mental game as you leave today. **Other than going to church, if Jesus didn't exist, how would you live your life day by day.** And if there isn't much difference between that and how you **actually live** right now, then you're not a Christian at all. And you're missing out on life's very best.