

Bible Fellowship Teaching Plan for John 18:19-37 (August 23, 2026)
Jesus on Trial

Central Truth: Jesus is the true King whose kingdom is not established by worldly power or force, but by the truth He came into the world to reveal, and He remained faithful to His mission even when unjustly accused, abused, and condemned.

John's purpose (20:31): "These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

Key Passage (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.'"

Opening Question: Which is more difficult: to hold to the truth and do the right thing when nobody's watching or while everyone's watching?

Lesson Objectives: 1) understand the circumstances surrounding Jesus' arrest and Jewish and Roman examinations; 2) recognize the contrast between Jesus' truthfulness and the deception and hypocrisy of His accusers; 3) understand what Jesus meant when He said, "My kingdom is not of this world;" 4) explain how Jesus' kingdom differs from earthly kingdoms in its source, methods, power, and purpose; and 5) recognize the importance of hearing and responding to the truth of Christ.

Background: Jesus has been betrayed by Judas who met Him in the Garden of Gethsemane with a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, armed and carrying lanterns. As the Lord is being taken

to Annas for the first of three Jewish “trials,” Peter denies the Lord for the first time. Annas, a former high priest, still retained the title even though his son-in-law, Caiaphas, was the current high priest.

I. Jesus Is Brought Before Annas (19-24)

A. Annas asked about Jesus' disciples and teaching.

1. This should have been information he already had and knew.
2. The question exposes Annas' dilemma of trying to catch Jesus saying something that would stand up in a Roman court.

B. Jesus defers to others to answer the question.

1. He had spoken openly to the world and said nothing in secret.
2. He had nothing to conceal.
3. Annas' own guards could testify of His teaching (John 7:45-46).

C. A guard insultingly slaps Jesus for His reply.

1. Jesus responds: “If what I said is wrong, bear witness about the wrong; but if what I said is right, why do you strike me?”
2. Jesus does not retaliate. He simply exposes the injustice.

Teaching Point: Truth does not need secrecy, manipulation, or violence to defend itself.

D. Annas sends Jesus--bound--to Caiaphas

II. Peter Denies Jesus a Second and Third Time (25-27)

A. John and Peter accompany Jesus to Annas' courtyard.

1. Peter tries to blend in and keep warm near the fire.
2. He was asked if he were not one of Jesus' disciples.

3. He denied it, saying, “I am not”--the second denial.
4. A relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off when Jesus was arrested was sure he had seen Peter with Jesus, but he denied it--the third denial.
5. Luke tells us that, at that moment, the rooster crowed, and Jesus’ and Peter’s eyes met.

B. A striking contrast:

<u>Jesus</u>	<u>Peter</u>
Bound	Free
Interrogated	Asked
Facing death	Trying to avoid all risk
Speaks the truth	Denies the truth
Remains courageous	Gives in to fear

(Peter's failure is not the end of his story--stay tuned!)

Application: Fear can make a faithful disciple act faithlessly, but failure doesn’t have to be final when we return to Christ.

III. Jesus Stands Before Pilate (28-37)

A. The Jewish leaders take Jesus to Pilate

1. The leaders refuse to enter Pilate's headquarters because they fear ceremonial defilement, yet they are simultaneously pursuing the death of their Messiah and the Son of God.
2. The passage presents a devastating picture of religious zeal for external purity combined with moral corruption of the heart.
3. Unable to execute Jesus themselves according to Roman law and out of fear of the people, the religious leaders needed the governor to put the Lord to death.

B. Pilate asks, “What accusation do you bring?”

1. A formal requirement of judicial procedure as well as perhaps an attempt to thwart their attempts
2. The Jewish leaders essentially respond, “He is guilty because we say He is guilty, and you must put Him to death.”
3. At this point, they fail to provide Pilate with a legitimate, Roman, capital charge. Their only concern is that Jesus must die.

C. Pilate tells them to judge Him themselves

1. They reply that they’re prohibited from executing someone
2. Crucifixion was the sole prerogative of the Romans
3. Dying as the result of being nailed to a cross was how Jesus had described His death.

D. Pilate then returns inside to question Jesus, asking, “Are you the King of the Jews?”

E. Jesus asks Pilate to clarify his understanding of the question

1. Did he believe Jesus was a threat to Rome or
2. Was he begging to see the truth of the gospel?
3. Pilate shows his disdain for the Jews by saying they have turned Him over to him.

F. Jesus explains the nature of His kingdom

1. His Kingdom is not of this world.
2. Jesus really is a King.
3. His kingdom is fundamentally different from earthly, political kingdoms.
4. His kingdom does not advance by force. If His purpose had been political revolution, His followers would have fought to prevent His arrest, but they did not.
5. The rule that He will exercise will be over hearts and minds. As a result, the authority of the Lord Jesus ultimately can’t be blocked or

overpowered by physical force or the most powerful human institution. Through it all, His answer made a clear distinction between the purely theocratic and spiritual kingdom and the purely earthly and political kingdom that had been a theme of His teaching since the beginning of His ministry.

Teaching Point: Religious liberty is the foundation for all other freedoms

G. Jesus' Kingdom advances as people embrace and follow the truth: "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."

1. Jesus' Kingship is inseparable from truth.
2. Jesus came to proclaim truth by exposing sin, redeeming sinners, and calling people to follow Him.
3. Truth is a major theme in John's Gospel
 - a. John 1:14: "the Word became flesh," "full of grace and truth."
 - b. John 3:21: "Whoever lives by the truth comes into the light."
 - c. John 8:31-32: knowing the truth brings freedom.
 - d. John 10:27: Jesus' sheep hear His voice and follow Him.

H. The proper response to truth is faith and obedience

1. "Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."
2. To hear Jesus' voice means responding in loving obedience to His authority and following Him.

VI. Summary: Three Responses

- A. The religious leaders rejected the Truth: they had already made their decision, and they were willing to manipulate the legal system, distort the evidence, and use Roman authority to accomplish their objective.
- 2. Peter denied the Truth: he knew and loved Jesus, but caved under pressure.
- 3. Jesus stood for the Truth: He remained completely open, calm, courageous, and faithful, for He had nothing to hide.

Personal Challenge: Authentic disciples of Jesus are called to follow His example--to live in the light and stand for truth regardless of the cost.

Questions for Reflection

- 1. Why does Jesus emphasize that He had taught openly?
- 2. What does Jesus mean when He says, "My kingdom is not of this world"?
- 3. What does Jesus mean by saying that He came into the world "to testify to the truth"?
- 4. Have I ever allowed the fear of people to keep me from openly following Jesus?
- 5. Am I more concerned about appearing righteous than actually being righteous?
- 6. Do I sometimes try to accomplish God's purposes through worldly methods rather than spiritual means?
- 7. When God's truth confronts something I want to hold onto, do I submit to the truth or try to find a way around it?
- 8. Is Jesus' voice something I merely hear, or is it something I faithfully obey?
- 9. Where am I tempted to compromise truth because standing for it would be uncomfortable or costly?

Applications

1. Live openly for Christ. There should be no “secret” version of Christianity that we practice privately while hiding our allegiance to Christ publicly.
2. Let truth--not fear--control your decisions. Peter's three denials show how quickly fear can overcome conviction.
3. Don't confuse religious appearance with spiritual reality. The leaders were concerned about ceremonial defilement while pursuing the execution of God's Son. Examine your life to see if there's any area where outward religious activity has replaced inward obedience.
4. Remember what kind of King Jesus is. He doesn't advance His kingdom through force. His kingdom changes people through truth, grace, conviction, repentance, faith, and obedience.
5. Stand for truth even when truth is costly. Determine beforehand that your commitment to Christ will not depend upon whether following Him is convenient, popular, or safe.
6. Remember that your failures are not final. Peter failed spectacularly, but Jesus restored him. If you've failed Christ in some way, don't run from Him. Run back to Him.

Summary: In the darkness of that Thursday night, Jesus stood before Annas, Caiaphas, and, eventually, Pilate. Around Him were fear, deception, political maneuvering, religious hypocrisy, violence, and self-interest. Yet Jesus remained remarkably different:

He was calm when others were frantic.

He was truthful when others were deceptive.

He was innocent when others were corrupt.

He was courageous when others were afraid.

He was restrained when others were violent.

He remained faithful when others abandoned Him.

Peter denied Him. The religious leaders condemned Him. Pilate hesitated to defend Him. But Jesus never abandoned His mission. He told Pilate exactly who He was: “You say correctly that I am a king.” And He explained why He had come: “For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth.”

The question is not simply, “What did Pilate do with Jesus?” The more important question is “What will I do with the truth Jesus has revealed?” The King is still speaking. The question is whether we will hear His voice and follow Him.

Sunday School Lesson for August 23, 2026
John 18:19-37

Welcome to Sunday School on the go from the First Baptist Church in Tallassee. I'm Jim Glass, one of the teachers in the Pairs and Spares Class, and, in our current study, we've been discovering how John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, reveals the life and ministry of the Lord "so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

On this fourth Sunday in August, as we see that purpose played out in every word on every page of this precious book, John has invited us to join him as he follows the Lord Jesus from the Garden of Gethsemane where He was arrested through each of the interrogations Jesus endured before Pilate sentenced Him to death. In today's study from chapter eighteen, Pastor Trey will speak to the first eighteen verses where Jesus is betrayed, arrested, and brought before Annas, a former high priest where He's questioned about His disciples and His teachings. It's also in this passage that we read of the first time Peter denied the Lord, just as Jesus said he would, even though Peter had promised Him that he would follow Him wherever He went, even if it meant that he had to lay down his life.

So, it's Thursday night--late Thursday night. It's been an incredible week. He had been welcomed into Jerusalem as the Messiah by throngs of cheering people who laid palm branches at His feet. In the Temple, He tossed out the money-changers and those who sold sacrificial animals for the second time, and, for the next four days, He taught openly in the temple courts, and the religious leaders took no action to arrest Him since the people believed He was a prophet.

When Thursday night came, Jesus gathered His disciples for their last meal together. He told them He was going away, but that He would send another Helper Who would teach them everything they needed to know. After

the meal, as they made their way into the Kidron Valley, He talked to them about vines and branches and fruit, saying that, apart from Him, they could do nothing, but as they abided in Him they would bear abundant fruit. And He prayed for them and for us that their joy and our joy would be full.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, the Lord Jesus asked His closest three disciples to pray with Him, but exhausted and drained from a busy week, confused and disoriented by some of the things Jesus had told them, it was impossible for them to stay awake. Three times, Matthew tells us, He went back to His disciples to wake them up and ask them to watch and pray.

And then, it happened. Judas showed up with a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and they arrest the Lord, but not until after they drew back and fell to the ground when He announced, “I am” for the last time. Peter tried to defend Him and actually cut off the ear of a servant of the high priest, but Jesus told him to put his sword away, and He restored the man’s ear.

After His arrest, Jesus was taken to “Annas, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year.” In verse nineteen, the beginning of our focal passage for today, Jesus is in the court of Annas as John explains: “The high priest then questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching.” You may be wondering how Annas and Caiaphas could both be called the “high priest” even though there was only one high priest serving at a given time.

Because Annas had previously served as high priest, he still retained the title, and it would have been a mark of respect to send Jesus first to the elder high priest so he could advise his son-in-law on this difficult case.

Two other notes about the background to what happens next. First, you might be curious as to how John was able to be present in Annas’ court as well as in the other places Jesus was taken that night. John’s mother was Salome, the sister of Jesus’ mother, Mary. Mary’s cousin was Elizabeth, a “daughter of

Aaron” as Luke tells us in verse five of the first chapter of the gospel that bears his name. Elizabeth’s husband, Zechariah, was a priest who served in the Temple. It’s quite possible that John was known to the high priest because of his family connections, although we can’t say for sure.

Second, John tells us very little of the trial of Jesus before Annas and Caiaphas compared with the details he provides about the trial before Pilate. The reason for this difference is probably due to the fact that the trial before the Sanhedrin was useless until the decision had been ratified by the Roman governor. If their Roman masters could see their zeal to deal with this Man Who claimed to be the King of the Jews and they helped eliminate Him, maybe the Romans’ hatred of the Jews could be eased and they could avoid any greater persecution, or even improve their position in their eyes. Such, it seems, was the plan of Caiaphas.

Lining up all four gospels, we find that the trial of our Lord by the Jews was held in three phases: before Annas, before Caiaphas, and before the entire Sanhedrin at dawn. The trial before Annas would have been the most influential because of his age and seniority. It was held in his court--verse fifteen--most likely the open space in the center or in front of his luxurious residence which may have actually been a part of his son-in-law’s official palace as you see in this artist’s rendering. The second trial before Caiaphas included the leaders of the Sanhedrin, and, because it was held at night, it had no binding, legal authority. The third trial was held at dawn before the entire Sanhedrin, and it was they who passed the final sentence against Jesus for blasphemy, a conclusion that had really already been decided.

So, John tells us in verse nineteen that “The high priest then questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching.” If Annas didn’t know about his teachings by now, why had Jesus been arrested in the first place? If he was supposed to be acting as an impartial judge, why would he conduct this preliminary inquiry to begin with? And why at night? There are so many

things wrong with this picture, but truth and justice were the least of the high priest's concerns at the moment.

This was not a court at all, but simply an attempt to entrap Jesus and use His words against Him in the trial that would be held before the Romans, for only they could carry out a formal execution. To find a way for Him to be eliminated was the only thing on which they had made up their minds. Some pretext had to be found, so they tried to get Him to say something that would serve their purpose. That's why Annas asked Him about His disciples and His teaching.

How does Jesus reply to Annas' questions? He passed by the question about His disciples and, by His calm answer, He shows that He saw the trap they had set for Him. Verse twenty: "Jesus answered him, 'I have spoken openly to the world. I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me what I said to them; they know what I said.'" Alexander MacLaren writes, "Cunning outwits itself, and falls into the pit it digs for the innocent."

As the Jewish leaders huddle secretly in the middle of the night to pass judgment on Him, Jesus tells them He has nothing to hide. MacLaren writes, "His teaching loves the daylight. There are no muttered oracles, no whispered secrets for the initiated, no double voice, one for the multitude, and another for the adepts. All is above-board, and all is spoken 'openly to the world.'"

If our Lord had intended to arouse sedition and rebellion, if He really intended to overthrow the government, He would have found a place to hide and train His followers in secret until the time was right; but He didn't hide, and no one was held back from hearing His words. "I have spoken openly to the world. ... I have said nothing in secret." "Ask anyone. I have nothing to hide."

He did have, of course, private conversations with Nicodemus, for example, and with His disciples when they asked for clarification of some of His parables, but none of the information shared with them was hidden or concealed from anyone who heard the Lord. In fact, as He prepared to send His disciples out on their first missionary endeavor, He told them in Matthew, chapter ten, verse 27, “What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops.”

If Annas wanted to know about His teachings, all they had to do was ask any of the thousands who gathered in the Temple for the various feasts He attended and addressed the crowds. Or he could ask his own officers of the court whom he had sent to arrest the Lord back in chapter seven but didn’t because His words had rung true in their hearts and they could not bring themselves to arrest Someone Who spoke with such power and authority they surely recognized was from God.

John tells us in verse 21 that “When he had said these things, one of the officers standing by struck Jesus with his hand, saying, ‘Is that how you answer the high priest?’ Jesus answered him, ‘If what I said is wrong, bear witness about the wrong; but if what I said is right, why do you strike me?’” What had He said that was wrong? Nothing! What charge could they legitimately bring against Him? None! So, one of the guards, possibly trying to show Annas that he could control their Prisoner slapped Jesus in the face intended to be an insulting rebuke rather than to inflict any injury to Him.

We can easily imagine that John was enraged by his Master being treated that way, but how did Jesus respond? “If what I said is wrong, bear witness about the wrong; but if what I said is right, why do you strike me?” If He had said anything contrary to the truth of God’s Word, Jesus was willing to discuss that, but if what He’s said is true, then surely He shouldn’t be treated so disrespectfully. MacLaren writes, “An unjust judge breeds insolent underlings, and if everything else fails, blows and foul words cover defeat, and treat calm

assertion of right as impertinence to high-placed officials. [Annas] degraded his own dignity more than any words of a prisoner could degrade it.”

Annas quickly recognized that nothing could be gained from any further questioning on his part. No crime had been alleged, neither had one been established. Jesus should have been released. But Annas treated Him as a criminal and “sent him bound”--verse 24--“to Caiaphas the high priest.”

Meanwhile, John directs our attention back to Peter whom he had left “outside the door” to the courtyard--verse sixteen. John had entered the courtyard with Jesus but turned back to bring Peter in. The woman at the door to whom he spoke recognized Peter, and it was she who first confronted Peter with the question of whether he was a disciple of Jesus. It was a simple, non-threatening question, but Peter had denied that he was one of the followers of Jesus.

In verse 25, while Jesus was being interrogated, Peter had found a place near the fire pit, not only to warm himself, but also to learn what would happen to the Lord while trying to remain as inconspicuous as he could. Matthew tells us that “another servant girl” told those around the fire, “This man was with Jesus of Nazareth,” but he denied it. John tells us in verse 25 that they asked him, “You also are not one of his disciples, are you?” And John tells us that, now for the second time, he denied it and said, “I am not.”

But now, a third person challenges Peter in verse 26--one who was not only present when Jesus was arrested but who was actually related to the man whose ear Peter had cut off. He asks, “Did I not see you in the garden with him?” Peter’s cornered now and desperate for some way to convince the man that he was mistaken. John graciously spares us the details of the oaths and curses that Matthew and Mark tell us about but doesn’t refrain from telling us of this third denial. It was probably at this very moment that the guards passed by with Jesus on their way to Caiaphas when Luke tells us in chapter 22, verse sixty of his gospel, “And immediately, while he”--Peter--“was still speaking,

the rooster crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, 'Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.' And he went out and wept bitterly."

We can only begin to imagine the crushing grief that must have torn at his soul in that single glance, a grief turned to inexpressible joy when Peter heard the angel's message recorded for us by Mark on resurrection morning, "Go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you," followed by that breakfast on the shore of the Sea of Galilee where the Lord graciously and publicly restored and commissioned him. More on that later.

John doesn't tell us what took place in Caiaphas' house--the calling of witnesses and the lack of consistency in their stories; Caiaphas' enraged demand recorded by Matthew, and the Lord's wondrous confession followed by the high priest's charge of blasphemy and the consensus of those present that He deserved to be killed; the abuse He suffered; the early-morning--perhaps pre-dawn--meeting of the Jewish council and their decision to hand Him over to Pilate--all those details passed over by John, perhaps because that part of the story had been told well enough by the other gospel writers.

Which brings us to verse 28 and perhaps the most hypocritical act ever witnessed on the part of the Jewish leaders: "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." Never mind that they would have the blood of the Son of God on their hands by the end of the day. As long as they kept themselves ceremonially clean by not entering the governor's palace, they could still participate in the holy, Passover meal.

The governor, of course, was Pontius Pilate, appointed by Emperor Augustus as the Roman procurator of Judea, Samaria, and Idumea--the region

south and west of the Dead Sea. As prefect, procurator, or governor--the titles have very similar meanings--Pilate became well-known for his disregard for the religious sensibilities of the Jews. For the Jewish leaders to seek the help of this despicable governor who had nothing but contempt for them and their religion says much about the lengths they had gone to in order to have Jesus killed.

The hall of judgment that Jesus was taken to was the place where the Roman governor heard and acted on various cases that were brought before him as you see in this artist's rendering of what it might have looked like. We don't know exactly where Pilate met with Jesus--either the fortress Antonia just north of the Temple or the magnificent palace on the western side of the upper city.

Because the palace was home to a Gentile, the Jewish leaders couldn't come in themselves lest they should become ritually impure and disqualified from participating in the week-long Passover feast. Certainly, such a paltry excuse for remaining ritualistically pure / paled in comparison to their objective of killing the Son of God. As one commentator writes, "These men were about to pollute their souls by unscrupulous testimony which was to bring Jesus to a horrible death, yet were unwilling to incur ... ceremonial uncleanness while giving that testimony."

John tells us that "it was early." A Roman court could begin deliberations at sunrise. Since Pilate had probably been warned that an important case was to be brought before him--after all, it was **his** soldiers who had gone to the garden just a few hours before to arrest Jesus--any delay in bringing Him to trial could cause a serious disturbance, so, some scholars think that it could have been as early as four or five o'clock in the morning.

Both the Jewish leaders and the governor faced some very real difficulties. Jesus couldn't be safely arrested when it was daylight because they feared the

people would revolt, and the Sanhedrin couldn't legally pronounce a sentence of death at night, so, they had had to wait until daybreak to condemn Him.

Then there was the problem of the law that required a day to pass between sentence and execution. If they brought the case to Pilate and were able to convince him of the necessity of putting Jesus to death, the governor could set the time of the execution for whenever he wanted. In this way, they shifted all blame for violating several laws of trial and punishment from themselves to Pilate.

So, verse 29, "Pilate went out to them and said, 'What accusation do you bring against this Man?'" not because he didn't know, but because proper judicial procedure apparently required a formal statement of charges. Some scholars also see in the question a weak attempt to thwart their intentions and further embarrass and frustrate the Jewish leaders. Additionally, Pilate may have been trying to find a way to remove himself from the proceedings. In Matthew, chapter 27, verse nineteen, Matthew tells us that "While Pilate was sitting on the judge's seat, his wife sent him this message: 'Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him.'"

"They answered and said to him, 'If this Man were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him to you.'" In other words, "Take our word for it; He's guilty--we've already decided that, and we don't need to present our evidence to you--just do what we want you to do." Part of the charge for which they had condemned Jesus--that of blasphemy in calling Himself 'the Son of God'--was not a crime according to Roman law, and for them to use this as their justification to demand His execution would probably have had the whole matter dismissed. Only later--chapter nineteen--would they add the charges of sedition, forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, and assuming the title, "King of the Jews." So they stood on their made-up dignity and authority and tried to bully him into carrying out their decision--"We have condemned Him;

that's all you need to know. We want you to carry out the sentence at our bidding."

In response to their insolent demand, Pilate scornfully replies, "Take Him yourselves, and judge Him according to your law." His answer reveals the extreme contempt Pilate had for the Jews and the hypocrisy of their religion as he saw it. It may have been customary for the governor to review and approve cases already decided by the Sanhedrin, but, in this case, Pilate, contrary to their hopes and expectations, balked at their demand. He saw their thirst for blood and wanted to humiliate them and make them admit their dependence on him. Additionally, Pilate seems to have done his best to avoid being involved in the case, perhaps influenced by his wife's dream. So, we see him trying to return the case to the Jews, send Jesus to Herod, suggest that he release Jesus in honor of the feast, and propose that he simply have Jesus whipped and let go. In fact, John tells us that Pilate declared Jesus innocent three times.

The Jewish leaders reply, "We are not permitted to put anyone to death." This had been the law / at least since 30 AD--just three years before. If Jesus had been killed by the order of the Sanhedrin, Pilate may have overlooked it, but the chief priests weren't sure if they could win the support of the people, and their only safe course was to get official government sanction for their decision.

This, John says in verse 32, happened "to fulfill the word of Jesus which He spoke, signifying by what kind of death He was about to die." In Matthew, chapter twenty, verse nineteen, Jesus had said, the chief priests and teachers of the law "will condemn him to death and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified," and Jesus spoke of being "lifted up" in John, chapters three, eight, and twelve. This would not have happened if He were to be killed by stoning. Had the Sanhedrin executed Him as a blasphemer or a false prophet, He would have been stoned, but that's not how Jesus said He would die. The Jews had other forms of capital punishment, but

crucifixion was not among them. Crucifixion was exclusively a Roman punishment, and only the Roman authorities could carry out such an execution.

In verse 33, John writes, “Therefore Pilate entered again into the Praetorium, and summoned Jesus and said to Him, ‘Are You the King of the Jews?’ Jesus answered, ‘Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about Me?’ Pilate answered, ‘I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You to me; what have You done?’ Jesus answered, ‘My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm.’ Therefore Pilate said to Him, ‘So You are a king?’ Jesus answered, ‘You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.’”

Pilate’s whole attitude in this inquisition reveals his utter contempt for the people he ruled. His question, “Are you the King of the Jews?” is recorded by all four gospel writers, and, in all four, there is an emphasis on “You,” as if to say, “You, this One Who has been brought before me bound in chains, betrayed by one of your own--are You the King of the Jews?” It seems that Pilate didn’t believe that Jesus was a dangerous leader of a band of rebels bent on overthrowing the Romans as he had been told. One commentator suggests that “There is almost a touch of pity in the question, and certainly the beginning of the conviction that this was not a very formidable rival to Caesar.” At the moment, Pilate apparently didn’t think Jesus looked like a king. Maybe Jesus was delusional. The charge against Him, after all, was ambiguous and contradictory--Jesus had no intention of being a political leader.

In Pilate’s question asking Jesus to make a plea of “guilty” or “not guilty,” Jesus doesn’t give a direct answer. He wants Pilate to clarify for himself what he means: “Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you

about Me?” “During the whole time you’ve been the governor, have you seen anything in Me that would lead you to think I was a threat to the Roman authorities? Are you asking the question because you yourself are concerned about the answer--wondering if what I’ve said about the blessings that come to those who seek the Kingdom of God could apply to you, or are you merely repeating something others have put in your head?” If Pilate was asking for himself, then what he meant by ‘a king’ was simply another temporal ruler like the emperor, and His answer would be “No.” If he was simply repeating the accusations created by the Jews, then, ‘a king’ could mean the prophetic King of Israel, who was not a rival to an earthly ruler, and the answer would be “Yes,” but that “Yes” would have given Pilate more reason to crucify Him than the “No.”

Pilate answered with the proud and haughty tone of a self-important Roman military judge: “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You to me; what have You done?” With Roman pride he declares that he’s not a Jew, so it’s not possible that he could have asked the question in a Jewish sense. He had asked the question based on what he had been told by the Jewish leaders: “Your own nation and the chief priests delivered you to me”--probably spoken with a tone of profound contempt--even disgust, given the confrontational and contentious relationship between the Romans and their unwilling subjects.

Still, because the request for Pilate’s ruling on the decision by the highest religious authorities in Israel required his attention, he asked, “What have You done?” The Sanhedrin had condemned Jesus, not for claiming to be King of the Jews, because that wasn’t a capital offence, but for blasphemy by claiming that God was His Father. But what they considered a crime meant nothing in Roman law. It would have been useless to bring Him before Pilate and accuse Him of blasphemy. So Pilate wants to know what it is that He’s done to provoke such fierce hostility from His own people and why it is that they were seeking to have Him killed.

Jesus answered by admitting that He was a King in a sense entirely different from that which had been claimed by the Sanhedrin--verse 36: "Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm.'" The religious leaders had charged him with attempting to set up an earthly kingdom and of calling for a revolution against Caesar. Jesus' double-sided answer declares that He did, in fact, rule over a kingdom, but first shows what that kingdom is not, and then what it is.

First, it is "not of this world," in spite of being in the world. It was being established and developed here, but it had nothing in common with earthly kingdoms, powers, or authorities, neither was it increased by the world's means or methods. It was the kingdom Daniel had written about in chapter two of his prophetic message--a spiritual kingdom of which saints were to be citizens. And this He declares before Pilate so that they both would be perfectly clear about His Kingdom and His claim to be a King. As a result, Pilate *could* convince himself that this "kingdom" was no threat to Rome, especially since Jesus offered no resistance when He was arrested.

But Jesus didn't stop there. The most convincing proof that Jesus offered of the spiritual nature of His Kingdom was the fact that He didn't allow the use of force to promote His claims: "If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews." The kingdoms of the world are defended by the force of human will and effort; they maintain armies and engage in wars. If the kingdom of Jesus had been like that, He would have energized the multitudes that followed Him to prepare for battle. He would have armed the hosts of people who welcomed Him to Jerusalem the week before. He would not have been alone and defenseless in the garden of Gethsemane; instead, His servants--had they been seeking worldly power and prominence--would have been doing everything they could to **keep** Jesus from being captured.

The word for “servants” here is the same word that’s used elsewhere in John for the temple police--the “officers” of the Sanhedrin. With this word, Jesus is telling Pilate that He, too, has “officers” or “servants” just like the high priest, but, contrary to the Jewish leaders, He’s not using His servants to rise up and defend Him by force. These “servants,” by the way, were probably not His disciples or other followers, but the more than twelve legions He told Peter were ready to respond to His call when He was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane. Again, worldly powers would not be used to advance His Kingdom, because His Kingdom is not of this world.

Jesus then repeats His first confession about His kingdom at the end of the verse: “As it is, My kingdom is not of this realm.” The rule that He will exercise will be one over hearts and minds. As a result, the authority of the Lord Jesus ultimately can’t be blocked or overpowered by physical force or the most powerful human institution. Through it all, His answer made a clear distinction between the purely theocratic and spiritual kingdom and the purely earthly and political kingdom that had been a theme of His teaching since the beginning of His ministry.

Pilate fixates on the mention of Jesus’ Kingdom and responds to Jesus’ answer with more attention than he had shown previously. One commentator suggests that “He thought that ... some mystery of danger might [still] lurk behind the words of Jesus. There was nothing more acutely dreaded by the early emperors than secret societies. It might be some such association Jesus intended to form. To allow such a society to gain influence in his province would be a gross oversight on Pilate’s part. He therefore seizes upon the apparent admission of Jesus and pushes Him further with the question, ‘[You are] a king then?’”

Alexander MacLaren offers a different perspective: “Pilate did pick out of this saying an increased certainty that he had nothing to fear from this strange ‘King.’ [So with] half-amused contempt for a dreamer, and half-pitying wonder at such lofty claims from such a helpless enthusiast, [he asked], ‘[Are

you] a king then?’ One can fancy the scornful emphasis on that ‘[You]’ and can understand how grotesquely absurd the notion of his prisoner’s being a king must have seemed.” Unfortunately, we can’t tell from the text alone what motive inspired Pilate to ask the question.

However he asked it, Jesus responded by saying, “You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.” Jesus first admits that, yes, He is a King, but then immediately proceeds to explain His purpose for coming. He doesn’t claim that He was born to reign on earth, but that He was born to bear witness to and declare the truth through His words, His actions, and His very Presence in the world.

John has recorded this purpose since he began his story in verse fourteen of the first chapter when he said, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

Once again, Jesus explains the nature of His Kingdom. His Kingdom was not about asserting worldly power or collecting armies or subduing other people or nations in battle. Instead, it was all about presenting truth to all people and exercising dominion only by their embracing the truth. As a result, the only power exerted to restrict the wicked, convict the sinner, convert the heart, guide and lead His people, and sanctify them, is the power that is produced by applying truth to the heart, mind, and will.

People aren’t forced to become Christians. They are led to see that they are lost and destined for an eternity separated from a loving, merciful God; that they need a Redeemer--Someone Who would bear the eternal punishment for their infinite sin--something they could never do--; that the Lord Jesus has paid the penalty for their sin; and, believing that Jesus is the only way to be reconciled to God, submit themselves wholly and unreservedly to Him. This convicting power of the Holy Spirit is the only power ever used in the kingdom

of Christ. Any other power is worldly, and does not further the cause of Truth. Jesus claimed only to be a King of the truth, drawing to Himself all those who are motivated by a love of the Truth.

Truth, of course, is one of the key themes of John's gospel as well as his three letters. Jesus told Nicodemus in chapter three, verse 21, that: "Whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God." John, chapter eight, verse 31: "To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, 'If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.'"

Even in this very moment, Jesus is bearing witness to the truth so that Pilate himself would hear His voice and respond in faith: "If you belong to the Truth, if the pursuit and practice of the Truth is at the center of who you are, then you will know Me, and you will be saved."

He concludes His reply by saying, "Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." To hear His voice is to hear with a response of obedience to His righteous authority, just as He said in chapter ten, verse 27: "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me."

Tragically, the solemn revelation to Pilate of the true nature of Jesus' kingdom and of Himself / the King / fell on deaf ears. MacLaren writes, "A deeper mystery than Pilate dreamed of lay beneath the double designation of His origin; for He not only had been 'born' like other men, but had 'come into the world,' having 'come forth from the Father,' and having been / before He was born. It was scarcely possible that Pilate should apprehend the meaning of that duplication, but some vague impression of a mysterious personality might reach him. ... Let us see [to it] that we keep firm hold of all which that utterance implies and declares."

And Pilate's response--the response that Trey will speak to on Wednesday, revealed his total indifference to the truth.

In the tragic moments that John has led us through in our study today, we've seen the futility and the focus of the religious leaders to carry out one objective: the death of their Messiah, the very Son of God, regardless of the spiritual, moral, and national cost. We've watched the Roman governor try to evade his moral obligation while, at the same time, further humiliate the people he ruled and despised. We've seen Peter disastrously deny his Lord.

Yet, through it all, we've seen the Son of God gloriously following His commission to be the Savior of the world, just as the Word of the Lord through Isaiah had foretold: "He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. ... By oppression and judgment he was taken away. ... Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. ... [H]e poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors."

Thank you for being a part of our brief overview of the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus seen through John's eyes that's meant to lead you to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that, by believing in Him, you might experience the fullness of life that can only come in Him.

Next week, John takes us to a hill called Mount Calvary where he recounts the crucifixion of our Lord, pointing out such details as the sign placed above His head, the casting of lots for His garments, the Lord's entrusting of His mother to John, the Lord's final words, and His death in chapter nineteen, verses seventeen through 37.

As always, as it's still a good thing to do, keep calm, trust in the Lord, and wash your hands! God bless you!

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