

Jesus on Trial (part 2)

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Date: 06 April 2025

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[0 : 00] John chapter 18 verse 28. Then the Jewish leaders took Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman Gummider.

! By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness, they did not enter the palace, because they wanted to be able to eat the Passover. So Pilate came out to them and asked, What charges are you bringing against this man?

If he were not a criminal, they replied, we would not have handed him over to you. Pilate said, Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law.

But we have no right to execute anyone, they objected. This took place to fulfill what Jesus had said about the kind of death he was going to die.

Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, Are you the king of the Jews? Is that your own idea? Jesus asked. Or did others talk to you about me?

[1 : 09] Am I a Jew? Pilate replied. Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What is it you have done? Jesus said, My kingdom is not of this world.

If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place. You are a king then, said Pilate.

Jesus answered, You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.

What is truth? retorted Pilate. With this, he went out again to the Jewish gathered there and said, I find no basis for a charge against him.

But it is your custom for me to release to you one prisoner at the time of the Passover. Do you want me to release the king of the Jews?

[2 : 17] They shouted back, No, not him. Give us Barabbas. Now Barabbas had taken part in an uprising. Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged.

The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They clothed him in a purple robe and went up to him again and again, saying, Hail, King of the Jews.

And they slapped him in the face. Once more, Pilate came out and said to the Jews gathered there, Look, I'm bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against him.

When Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, Here is the man. As soon as the chief priests and their officials saw him, they shouted, Crucify! Crucify!

But Pilate answered, You take him and crucify him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against him. The Jewish leaders insisted, We have a law, and according to that law, he must die, because he claimed to be the son of God.

[3 : 36] When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid, and he went back inside the palace. Where do you come from? He asked Jesus. But Jesus gave him no answer.

Do you refuse to speak to me? Pilate asked. Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you? Jesus answered, You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above.

Therefore, the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin. From then on, Pilate tried to set Jesus free, but the Jewish leaders kept shouting, If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar.

Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar. When Pilate heard this, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge's seat at a place known as the stone pavement, which in Aramaic is Gabbatha.

It was the day of preparation of the Passover. It was about noon. Here is your king, Pilate said to the Jews. But they shouted, Take him away!

[4 : 56] Take him away! Crucify him! Shall I crucify your king? Pilate asked. We have no king but Caesar, the chief priests answered.

Finally, Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified. So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. So we're continuing this morning to think about the journey that John records of Jesus towards the cross. And we come to the second trial that Jesus faces.

Last week, he was before the Jewish religious leaders. And the big question there, as we were thinking about it, was related to truth. But this time, as he stands before Pilate, who represents the Roman Empire, we can think about power.

Here is Jesus standing before the man who represents the might of Rome, the greatest empire, the most powerful empire to date. And at a human level, it might seem something of a mismatch.

[6 : 13] Here is Jesus, this man who has no wealth or status. He has no position or power within society. He has very little recognition or honor beyond a very small circle of followers.

But yet, as we come today, 2,000 or so years later, we recognize that the empire of Rome is gone. It's of interest to historians, but nobody else.

But the kingdom of Jesus is one that grows and continues to grow. And that billions of people since this moment have come to worship him. So we can learn some really interesting things about power from our trial scene here.

So we're going to think about the limits of power. We're going to consider the problem of power. And we're going to see how Jesus transforms power for a few minutes together. First of all, thinking about the limits of power takes us to the question and answer in verses 33 to 36 of chapter 18. Are you the king of the Jews? So it was a question that the religious leaders wanted an answer to as well. There is this driving concern. Is Jesus a political figure?

[7 : 30] For Pilate, perhaps, is he a threat to Caesar and the authority of Rome? Is this another freedom fighter Messiah that they are going to need to send troops to crack down on?

How does Jesus answer the question, are you a king? In a sense, he says, well, yes, I am. But another way, no, I'm not, or at least not the way you think.

Verse 36, my kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders, but now my kingdom is from another place.

I am a king, I have a kingdom, but it doesn't work according to the usual operating systems. My kingdom is not of this world. And because of that, and we've seen this already, Jesus won't use force.

So he's already showing he's different to the Roman Empire. He's different to so many of the great men of history. He's already said to Peter, put your sword away. I don't want you to fight this. And Jesus says, I would and I could summon legions of angels to help me, but that's not God's way.

[8 : 41] And so I won't use force because my kingdom is from another place. Here is a king standing before the might of the empire and this kingdom looks and feels so very different.

He won't resist, he won't fight, he won't use force. Why? Because Jesus understands this is God's way. Verse 34, this took place to fulfill what Jesus had said about the kind of death he was going to die.

Here is God's king, Jesus, and he has come to lay aside power, to sacrifice himself. He voluntarily gave up his life to death as a substitute for his people.

No king, no Caesar, no empire, no emperor, no president operates in this way. It is not their default setting to say, I have power, but I'm going to give up power in order to serve others.

Jesus is a different king. Jesus didn't come to bring some kind of political regime change because that always requires force. Jesus came to bring heart change and that requires grace and love and sacrifice.

[10 : 02] And so the way of Jesus in his life was so different. His was a kingdom marked by grace. that transformed lives.

It saw those who were naturally excluded being welcomed. It saw those who were filled with shame coming to Jesus and being honored.

Those who were needy could have their needs met and satisfied in Jesus and those who were profoundly aware of their sin and guilt could have that forgiven.

It's a very different kingdom. It's a very different operating system. It's interesting to trace then what happens to the church after Jesus returns to heaven and sends the spirit because the way of the early church was absolutely the way of Jesus.

To look at the story of the first church in the book of Acts and in the first couple of centuries is to discover here are a group of people who are doing mission from the margins of society with a clear understanding.

[11 : 08] We are a people who've been changed by God's grace and we want to follow the way of grace. We follow a loving saviour and so we want to live lives of love and service and as a tiny minority they turned the power of Rome on its head.

They turned the Roman Empire upside down. I've been reading this week a book by a sociologist called Rodney Stark called The Triumph of Christianity and he's asking the question how is it that this tiny group of followers of Jesus could have such a massive impact on the Roman Empire? And some things that historians and sociologists notice is that unlike Rome which said mercy was weakness for the Christian church mercy was a great virtue.

they saw that Jesus was full of kindness and compassion and so they lived with kindness and compassion to others. That made a huge difference. Another thing that made a huge difference is that they followed the example of Jesus when it came to how to treat women.

They gave rights and honour and a place of security to women not regarding women as playthings and again that made a huge difference in society. When the great plague came when smallpox arrived in the empire when people were running for their lives when they were literally throwing their own family members out onto the streets the Christians were different because they stayed and at great risk to themselves would nurse their own friends and family but also strangers that nobody else was caring for and these actions following the example of Jesus had a massive impact.

[12 : 53] So they lived the message and they spoke the message and people flocked because they saw here is a better community. Here is a safer, kinder, more respectful community.

It includes people and it's got a message at its heart of love and grace. It's the way of Jesus. It's not about power and force, it's about love and grace.

Well that was then but what about now? Shouldn't it be the way for the church in the 21st century? That we too are called to do mission on the margins following the way of Jesus.

Next week, Saturday, Hope Church Leith have got an open day. See their new building, come and meet the community and as Derek was writing, inviting people, he said this, it's striking, it's very Derek, as he was talking about who's this church going to be for.

He said he wants it to be for the last, the least and the lost. Why? Because that's the way of Jesus, that's the way of grace. As Christians, as a church, we won't change the world by political force and we shouldn't try.

[14 : 08] That whole idea of Christendom, well it failed, trying to impose a set of values and a religion. But we can change society, we can change our communities by grace and love.

Imagine the possibilities. As we think about the people that work with us, as the people who live around us, in the confusion, in the anxiety, in the loneliness that so many people experience, if we determine to be a community that recognizes the dignity, the worth, the value of every person that we meet, if we care for neighbors because our hearts have been changed and gripped by grace, if we refuse to exclude but always choose to welcome, when we want to show mercy to those both who are like us and those who are unlike us.

Imagine how different this city would be if Christians in our city, if we acted this way. just like the first church, just like Jesus, but clue is on the margins.

But that doesn't stop God's kingdom. And what our world needs to see, what we need to see, are the limits of power.

Political power is limited. It can make some changes, but it cannot change hearts. We need to see the limits of force. force. And instead to be gripped by this kingdom from another place.

[15 : 41] This king with a different set of values. Because what our world needs and what we need is grace and truth, not expressions of raw power.

Jesus' message and his message about power is always going to sound so different to the world. So different to what we hear in our news, but it's a message we need to hear.

Because it connects to, the limits of power connect to the problem of power that Pilate and his actions and reactions demonstrate.

So there's a popular phrase and an idea I think that people admire, maybe we've heard it, the idea that truth speaks, you know, speak truth to power. power. We admire those who speak up, who take risks to stand up for what is right, to stand up for justice, even in the face of powerful figures

who would resent it.

I don't know how many of you saw this week the story of the senator in the States, Cory Booker. And we come across that story and all the kind of the stuff that was happening in the news. This guy gave a 25-hour speech.

[16:55] An incredible act of endurance. He was asked how he managed to do it. He had to fast for days. He had to go without water for days because you weren't allowed any bathroom breaks. So he took this deliberate stand.

He said he felt this was something he had to do. This wasn't about political left and right. He felt like he wanted to make a stand for what he saw as a right and wrong issue. As he was seeing the impact of government policies, he wanted to make a stand and say there are certain things that I believe are wrong.

And the world took notice because of that 25-hour stand. Truth speaks to power. We admire it, I think, when we come across those examples in the Bible.

Think about Daniel and his friends standing against the might of an empire. No, we will not bow down to your statues. No, we will not worship the king as if he were a god.

And we admire John the Baptist, perhaps, as he confronted the religious leaders, calling them a brood of vipers because they're hypocrites, challenging King Herod for being immoral, speaking truth to power.

[18:09] power. And we hear Jesus speaking truth to Pilate. And Pilate is not ready to listen.

Verse 37, we have Pilate saying, you are a king then. So at this point it seems as if Pilate said, okay, I understand power, I understand kingship and rule and authority.

Okay, we're speaking the same language right now. I get Jesus, he's in the power business as well, but what does Jesus say? Verse 37, you say that I'm a king.

In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.

Not in the power business, Jesus is in the truth business. He's come to testify to truth. It is true that he is the eternal son of God. It is true that he is a king, but he's a different kind of king.

[19:11] He's the servant king. It is true that he's come to build a kingdom, but that's not by raw aggression. It's by a kingdom of love and sacrifice. What will Pilate do with this message?

It's one of the things that John's gospel records for us. Jesus makes these great claims, great statements about who he is and why he came and how do different people react.

And as we read John's gospel, there's always that invitation drawing us in. How do we respond? How do we react to the truth claims about Jesus? So the gospel begins with some really positive responses.

So we've got John who writes the gospel. He says, Jesus is God. And he reveals the glory of God to us. We look at Jesus and we see the glory of God. We have John the Baptist saying to people, listen, this is the Lamb of God.

He's been sent to take away the sin of the world. You should all listen to him. We have Andrew excitedly coming to his brother saying, listen, we found the Messiah. Come and meet him. After a wedding, when Jesus turns water into wine, the disciples believe because they see Jesus' glory.

[20:23] But we also see lots of negative responses. We thought about a lot of them last week. The attempts especially of the religious leaders to get rid of Jesus, to kill him, to stone him.

But we also meet the people who walked away. They found his claims to truth too hard to take and so they simply stopped listening. They doubted his identity, rejected his teaching, rejecting his offer of salvation.

So here's our question today. What will Pilate do in this moment? Pilate in verse 38 makes that famous statement, what is truth?

But he never waits for the answer. What is truth? Retorted Pilate and with that he went out. And the striking thing, and you would have heard it as we heard the text read, is that Pilate clearly knows Jesus is innocent.

He is working so hard to find a way to have Jesus released, but at the same time he will have Jesus beaten and mocked with a crown of thorns and the robe placed on him.

[21:44] And ultimately, he will hand Jesus over to be executed. Why? Because Pilate values power more than he values truth.

The turning point is there in verse 12. As soon as the crowd starts shouting, anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar, it's at that point that he's going to hand Jesus over to be crucified. Pilate is standing before Jesus. He is the way and the truth and the life. He is the one who's come from God. He reveals the truth of God.

He would bring people back to life in proper relationship with God. But Pilate, he chooses his own God. Ultimately, he chooses power over truth.

He chooses power over Jesus. One of the things that we see, so we admire, when people speak truth to power.

[22 : 45] It's a really attractive quality, but it often meets with very fierce opposition because it means someone's power and control is being threatened. And so there is that effort to fight and to silence the truth.

Maybe you remember that famous scene in the movie A Few Good Men. As you get to this climactic trial scene, you have Jack Nicholson shouting across the court, you want the truth, you can't handle the truth.

And we see it all through the pages of scripture and through history. Daniel and his friends will that the king would get rid of them by throwing them into a fiery furnace or throwing them to the lions.

John, as he speaks, truth to power to Herod, he's beheaded.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, as he spoke against the Nazi regime, was killed by them. Martin Luther King, as he spoke for civil rights, ended up assassinated. The problem is apparent because people love power so much and will cling to it at all costs.

There is a very real problem with power. It can serve truth and it can serve people, but it can also be very self-serving so that we would resist the truth.

[24 : 01] We would build our identity on the power and influence that we have. And again, this isn't just for power-hungry leaders over there.

This is for all of us right here. We will all have some measure of power and control, some measure that we will want to hold on to. So whether we're a child or whether we're an adult, and whether we're looking at ourselves today and we think, well, I'm at the bottom rung of the ladder or whether we're at the top of the tree, there are going to be places where we have power.

That might be in a company, it might be in a community, it might be within our family, it might be in a team, or it might just be in our own lives. And we need to beware to draw lessons from Pilate, to be aware of our own hearts, that temptation that we will all have to use power for selfish reasons, to take our influence and say, I'm going to use my influence to make sure it's my agenda, it's my needs, it's my ego.

Sometimes we feel that we just need control and we need status. But more than that, the warning of Pilate is that we beware the temptation in our own hearts to walk away from Jesus and His truth. where we don't want that truth to get too close to us because we understand the implications. If I walk towards Jesus, if I submit to Him as Lord, then He's in charge and not me.

[25 : 42] Then there's going to be power and control and influence that I have to give up. Jesus spoke a bit, denying ourselves to follow Him. That can be really hard. Well, you and I may not have Pilate's power, I imagine we will all face Pilate's temptation to make power and control an idol that rules us.

Martin Luther has a really helpful definition of what an idol is in our hearts. He said this, he said, a God is whatever we expect to provide all good and in which we take refuge in all distress.

Whatever you set your heart on and put your trust in, that, I tell you, is your true God. And we can do that with power. If I have power, then I've got the good life.

If things are going badly, well, at least I've got my status. We can set our heart on, I want to be somebody, to be a person of significance. Jesus challenges our hearts because He says to follow me involves sacrifice.

It involves being willing to deny ourselves daily, to deny our claim to power daily in order to follow Him, to have Him as King.

[27 : 10] How can we do it? Why should we do it? That leads us to our last thought. Let's think about how Jesus transforms power. This takes us into chapter 19.

And what becomes clear is there is this moment of recognition where Pilate goes from thinking, I'm the man, I'm in charge, I'm calling the shots, to all of a sudden understanding that he's not.

And Jesus speaks to him. Chapter 19 and verse 7, Pilate hears the Jewish leaders say of Jesus, we have a law and according to that law he must die because he claimed to be the Son of God. And when Pilate heard this he was even more afraid. So Pilate is beginning gradually to realize the man in front of me though he looks weak, though I have humiliated and beaten him, he is a force far greater than I am.

But still he tries to hold on to his power claims. Listen to him in verse 10, do you refuse to speak to me? Pilate said, don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?

[28 : 24] Like so many people, he's persuaded government, that's where power is, that's where influence is found. Listen to Jesus, you would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above.

Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin. You would have no power unless God had given it to you and this was God's plan all along.

And we have this remarkable truth that while evil things are happening God takes up these evil actions of the Jewish leaders and of Pilate in order to accomplish his good plan of salvation.

We discover that this is God's plan Jesus already told us. The Bible tells us it's God's plan that his son dies as a sacrifice to be our savior.

The cross is God's idea and he is driving the agenda. But nevertheless, Pilate is responsible for his own moral choice. So are the Jews.

[29 : 27] There is real guilt. But what they intended for evil, God intended for good. God intended for good. Where do you come from?

He asked Jesus. Jesus says you'd have no power if it were not given to you from above. And remember that all the time John's gospel has been saying to us remember Jesus is from above. Remember Jesus is the king who is eternal. He has unlimited power. He is God. He is God. He is not being forced.

He is not being dragged against his will. This is voluntary sacrifice. the same Jesus who just a few hours earlier took off his robe in order to wash his disciples' feet is the same Jesus who willingly goes on trial, who is willing to be clothed in a purple robe and mocked as they put a crown of thorns on his head.

It's the same Jesus who in chapter 19 and verse 23 will be stripped of his clothes as he hangs dying. Jesus is a king and he is a servant.

[30 : 56] And Jesus transforms power because he gives it up for the sake of others. He transforms power by embracing sacrifice so that he can embrace sinners by his grace.

For the king of heaven, real power is service. Not ruling by force. Not ruling for self-interest.

Not ruling to be seen as a somebody. Jesus came to save us by service and by sacrifice. And when our hearts are transformed by that truth, when our hearts are filled by that truth, that Jesus loved me and gave himself for me, that Jesus left the glory of heaven to become one of us in order to die for us, to save us, when we understand that, when we're moved by that love and that sacrifice, then we too are given the power to follow the way of Jesus from transformed hearts.

Here's how we can do mission on the margins, not grasping for power, but ready to serve and sacrifice. Following Jesus' pattern, relying on the power that he provides.

Let's pray to give thanks. God, our Father, we thank you for the willingness of Jesus to voluntarily come to this place, to come to this earth, to be arrested, to be tried, to be mocked, to be beaten, to be questioned, to be rejected, and to be killed.

[33 : 00] To do that out of love as an act of sacrifice, to save us from our sin, to bring us into your kingdom, to give us a new way of understanding power, and a new power within us to live the way of Jesus.

We pray that you'd help us to pursue lives marked by mercy, marked by loving sacrifice, that we too would be willing to give up power, to deny ourselves in order to follow Jesus, our humble servant king.

Help us towards this, we pray. in Jesus' name, amen. Now we come to the point of our service where we'll shortly come to the Lord's table, and as we do so, again we're taken to the cross of the Lord Jesus, in visible form.

As the Christian church, we should never stray far from the cross, it should be in our thoughts, in our words, in our songs. It should determine our actions and our attitudes, as we thought about from John's gospel.

It should influence our affections, how we love. I came across a quote this week I'm going to share from Tim Chester. He wrote this, when we go to the cross, we see our God dying for us.

[34 : 38] If you let any other God down, then it will beat you up. If you don't make it or you mess up, then you'll be left feeling afraid, downcast, or bitter.

But when you let Christ down, he loves you still. He doesn't beat you up, he dies for you. Jesus transforms power by his loving service and sacrifice.

And so as those who've been saved by grace, we come to the table. We come as those who are both blessed and broken. We come as those bringing nothing in our hands except our sin and our shame, and we cling to the cross for our salvation.

We come to receive these elements that represent his broken body and his shed blood, and we recognize as they point us to the cross, these are the source of our hope and our healing.

we come to the table knowing that Jesus meets with us, he is the host, that he speaks to us again of his grace, his mercy, and his love, and he would give us power to enable us to go into this world to live for him.

[36 : 05] Who is the Lord's supper for? It's for those who can say the Lord loves me and gave himself for me. It is for those who have given up looking to our own power and ability to save us, rather we are trusting ourselves entirely on God's powerful grace shown to us in Jesus to save us.

If that's your personal testimony and experience, then the table is for you. If you're a member of God's church, God's family, anywhere, then please come and share this meal with us. If you're here today and that's not yet your story, then just stay in your seats when other folks are coming up.

As we sing a song together, you can use it as words of God's invitation to you, that you too would come to Jesus, come to this one who is all-powerful and yet was willing to sacrifice and serve to save and to forgive you and me.

So in just a moment, we're going to stand as we're here.