

Jesus - what's the verdict?

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[0 : 00] Let me just say a word about what we're trying to do. What we're doing is we're seeking to meet God, and we believe that God meets us, in particular through the words that he has left in Scripture.

So this is not a sort of a simply a literary exercise. It is a devotional exercise. We come to listen to what God has to say to us, and we believe that God's word is a living word, and that we have a living relationship with the Lord through his word.

That's just the way he set it up to be. And let me also say that in terms of as a church, this is what we have found to be a very helpful way of doing things, just to go through the Bible a bit at a time and just keep on doing that.

And one of the things that does is it prevents any particular hobby horse or something like that being our main thing that we think about.

God is setting the agenda of what we're thinking about through the passage of Scripture, and that's what we're aiming to do, to let God set the agenda and to listen to what God says.

[1 : 21] So, having made that introduction, I want to ask you this question about Jesus.

What's the verdict? And I set that up as an introductory question. In Greek, in the original, there's one word that covers verdict, judgment, condemnation, all these things.

Here's the question. What's the verdict to do with Jesus? He's put on trial. Is he guilty or is he innocent?

Jesus is put on trial. Is he worthy of worship or worthy of death? That's the question that is at the back of all the texts that we're looking at.

Is he a king or is he a criminal? That's the decision that is being hammered out in the story.

[2 : 40] And that, of course, is the decision that every human being has to come to. It is the decision every human being has to come to.

What do you think is the verdict? There is such a thing as avoiding a decision. So, I was thinking of an illustration of this, and I was thinking of Mark and Rachel, and I was thinking, for most of us, if we were asked, if you had a baby, what would you call the baby?

I think many of us could avoid that decision and we say, well, not really a very relevant decision. I'll put that off for months or years or probably come to no conclusion at all because it just isn't a question that I have to deal with.

However, Mark and Rachel probably will have to make a decision. They may already have made a decision. But I think if we said to Mark, what are you going to call your child? And if in two or three years' time, he still hadn't reached a decision, I think we would say that was a bit irresponsible.

Now, with the Lord Jesus, there is a decision to be made. Make it well. It says in the Bible, this is the judgment, this is the verdict.

[4 : 00] Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. Just as when the baby comes, you've got to choose a name.

You can't put it off. Jesus says, light has already come into the world. I've already come. You have to make a decision. The decision needs to be made.

And it goes on to say, whoever does not believe is condemned already because they have failed to believe. This idea of making, coming to a conclusion about who Jesus is, is not something you can put off.

You need to arrive at a decision. In the story, we will find the decision that some people made. Take him away. The Jewish mob is going to be shouting.

And they're going to be shouting it. They're not going to be writing a petition and arguing. They're going to be shouting it. Take him away. Is that the decision that you're at?

[5 : 06] People make that decision. That is the conclusion they come to. They might do it in a very vociferous way. They might do it by, in a very respectable way, the BBC, I think, makes it a matter of almost a policy to say, Jesus is not king over us.

I was listening to the Today program and it's sort of assumed that Christianity is not for us. It can be done by humour.

But that's the decision that's being made. Take him away. We don't want him to be king. We don't want him. It can be made just by ignoring. But that is a very serious decision to make.

Take him away. Some people in the story reach that verdict. There's another verdict. A bit later on, Thomas is going to come to this conclusion.

Thomas, who gets put down as doubting Thomas. Thomas comes to the conclusion, Who is Jesus? My Lord and my God.

[6 : 23] That's the conclusion he comes to. To come to that conclusion, to reach that verdict, I think is rightly described as faith. Faith isn't climbing Mount Everest.

Faith is just agreeing with what God has said is the correct state of affairs. And that's what Thomas did. My Lord and my God. Now maybe some of you are coming to that conclusion.

Maybe some of you have reached that conclusion. Many of you have reached that conclusion some time ago. It is to say of Jesus' person, that's who you are.

My Lord. My God. It's to receive his promises because he says certain things about himself. I am the way, the truth, and the life, for example.

It's to receive those promises. It's to receive his claims where he says, one day, all the nations of the world will be assembled and the king will sit upon his throne and divide the sheep from the goat.

[7 : 36] Jesus says, I'm going to do that. And to say this of Jesus is to say, I respect that claim, I believe that claim. And to receive his authority that if he is Lord, then you can't say no to him.

There are places in the Gospels where people say, no, Lord. Peter says it, no, Lord. But you actually can't put those two words into the same sentence. What verdict are you reaching about Jesus?

I think John's Gospel is set up in this way. There are witnesses. There's evidence given. And the thrust of it is that the readers should come to a conclusion.

I think that's particularly the case in the bits that we're going to read. So you form a verdict on Jesus. But I think the deeper truth is that in so doing, he forms a verdict on us.

Let's look at the text. Previously, from the beginning of chapter 18, we'd followed the course of his arrest and his betrayal.

[9 : 06] The word in Greek is to do with handing over. And the word crops up all the way through. Jesus being handed over to Pilate.

Handed over to death. Handed over to be crucified. And if you remember last time, John seemed to set up for us a series of contrasts. Contrast of method.

That Jesus was engaged in prayer while his opponents were busy arranging weapons. Jesus, when asked, says, I am.

And Peter says, I am not. Jesus speaks in terms of drinking a cup. Peter talks in terms of wielding a sword.

Jesus says his words are open and good. Whereas the implication is that he speaks in a way which is hidden and evil.

[10 : 14] These contrasts came out in the last part that we looked at last week. And Jesus is now moved from the high priest's family home where Annas and Caiaphas or wherever they were.

He now goes to the Roman governor's palace. It's technically the praetorium. And it gets translated governor's palace or Roman governor's palace.

And that's where he goes. And now as we follow the text carefully we see it's marked by a movement from inside to outside. If you can imagine a doorway.

And there's inside the praetorium inside the Roman governor's palace and outside. And the first thing we're told is in verse 28 that the Jews led Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor.

By now it was early morning so lots of shenanigans have taken place through the night and it's sort of getting towards six o'clock in the morning something like that. And to avoid ceremonial uncleanness the Jews did not enter the palace.

[11 : 26] They wanted to be able to eat the Passover so Pilate came out to them. So it's set up in this sort of way there's inside and outside.

And outside is where the Jews feel they can be clean and inside this Gentile Roman governor's palace where all sorts of unclean things would have happened eating sausages or whatever they might have done would be contamination perhaps just in being there or maybe the dust on the floor or something like that and they didn't want to go in there.

They wanted to be able to eat the Passover meal or meals it was an extended festival and they wanted to be fully paid up participants in the whole thing.

They didn't want it to be cut short by them becoming defiled. See if they as you know if they had gone into the Gentile place they would have become defiled and they'd have to go through a long procedure to get clean again and by which time they would have missed all if some or if not all of the Passover celebrations.

And the Jews are saying we want to be fully paid up members of the redeemed community. That's what they're saying isn't it? We don't want to go in there because we want to stay clean we want to be part of the Passover eating community.

[12 : 58] So Pilate has to come out to them which I suppose I don't know what sort of mood that would have put him in but that's what he does anyway. So the Jews bring Jesus and I've sort of put him on the screen here as being handcuffed behind not that I know how he was bound but he was presumably bound and Pilate comes out to them and please let's just follow the course of this conversation.

So Pilate comes out and says what charges are you bringing against this man? So there's Pilate out he comes and asks this question what are the charges?

it's a court it's a trial and you need to bring charges what's he accused of? Is he double parking or not paying his television license or what is he accused of?

It's a good question. Here's the answer if he were not an evildoer if he were not a criminal we would not be handing him over.

Notice the handing over and the idea of an evildoer a criminal. I'm not sure that that's much of an answer. They say they're almost saying well you have a bit of a cheek asking us because we're very responsible people and we wouldn't have brought him here if we hadn't got a lot of good charges.

[14 : 38] He's an evildoer and that's why we're handing him over. That's what they're saying but I don't think it's a good answer is it? If he were not an evildoer we wouldn't be handing him over. It's not an answer to the question.

So the very fact that we're handing him over shows that he's an evildoer. Now I'm very fascinated by the way Pilate conducts himself through all this interview.

I mean what frame of mind is he in? Is he just being difficult? Is he in a bad mood because his wife has been tossing and turning all night?

Does he feel he owes the Jews nothing? They're coming and asking for a favor basically and does he feel I'm not going to? Or is there a sense in him that if this is a trial let's at least do the proper thing and he says judge him by your own law.

Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law. I think that's a fairly shrewd answer actually. You're Jewish people this is clearly some sort of internal squabble.

[15 : 57] You sort it out don't try and lay it on me. You do it. Judge him by your own law. And I you know you just think about it a little bit.

The Jews are very proud of their law weren't they? The law was given to them by God. You would imagine them saying well our law is the best law that there can be.

We're very happy to do that. But this is what they say. They say literally it is not lawful for us to kill anyone.

translated that we have no right to execute anyone. It's a rather strange answer isn't it?

It is not lawful for us to execute anybody or it is not lawful for us to kill anybody. Well if it's not lawful presumably you shouldn't be doing it.

[16 : 55] And who talked about killing? So you've already made up your mind have you? You've presented this prisoner for a trial but you know exactly what you want the answer to be. It's all very strange.

This we have no it is not lawful for us we have no right to kill anyone the Jews objected. This happened so that the words Jesus had spoken signifying the kind of death he was going to die would be fulfilled.

As you would be aware at that time in history the Jewish execution method would have been stoning and the Roman execution method would have been crucifixion.

There were stonings that happened if you think in the book of Acts Stephen was stoned wasn't he? But it wasn't really by due process of law that was by mob violence.

And the Jews are under Roman occupation the Jews don't actually have the right to inflict the death penalty. So as you can see this is moving towards Jesus being crucified which is exactly what he said would be the case.

[18 : 12] He said consistently things like if I am lifted up I will draw all men to myself. The son of man must be lifted up like the snake in the desert and the lifting up is the way that crucifixion occurs.

Jesus never anticipated that he would be stoned to death. This occurred to fulfill what Jesus had said concerning the type of death he would die.

So before we move on let's ponder what this part of the text is saying. I think it's saying to us that there were no substantiated charges put against Jesus.

The charges are unsubstantiated. It moves us into the area of irrational hatred and the Bible says that human opposition to God in general is not rational.

It is not fair. God is not a nasty God whom we would be perfectly right to avoid. The God of the Bible is a good God and a generous God and the Lord Jesus of the Bible is an honest person and a good person and a kind person.

[19 : 36] So to try and kill him is irrational. There's no good reason for it. Where does that come from? It says that he's innocent.

He died a death he did not deserve to die. And you can fill in the other half of it as we go on, that we who deserved to die, he took our place.

But this book certainly shows that he's innocent. And it raises all sorts of questions about consistency. As it's portrayed here, the way this segment of Jewish society operated concerning their own constitution, if you like, the law of Moses.

That's something they took great pride in. They would have said, we're being faithful to the law of Moses. It's Jesus who isn't. He's the upstart. He's the one who's spoiling everything.

We're being faithful. But it does raise a question, are you being faithful? You are trying to work outside your own law. Very strange, isn't it?

[20 : 56] I think there's a deep inconsistency there. I think it's relating back to the whole thing that Israel in her history was given all those privileges, all that spiritual education over generations and generations, just so that she would recognize the Messiah.

But what they've done is turned it on its head and say, we have all this heritage, this means we're going to be against Jesus. Jesus is headed towards a Roman death, not of stoning, but of crucifixion.

And ponder, please, the irony of what his accusers are saying. They're saying, we think, this is our verdict on the situation, that it would be unclean for us, to have your Roman dust on our feet.

That would be unclean. That would exclude us from God's favour. But to have blood on our hands, there's no problem.

It's a very deep irony, isn't it? Certainly, go into your house, no, we certainly wouldn't do that. Oh, terrible. kill Jesus? Yeah, that's fine.

[22 : 23] It's a deep irony. We don't want your dust on our feet, but we don't mind your blood on our hands. And I wonder what sort of verdict is being reached here. What sort of verdict is being reached concerning Jesus?

What sort of verdict is being reached concerning people who would rather have his blood on their hands than Roman dust on their feet? What would you have done in that situation?

Let's go on to the next part of the story. Again, we're inside and we're outside.

In this case, we've gone back inside. Verse 33, Pilate then went back inside the praetorium, inside the palace, and summoned Jesus. So now, it's a sort of semi-private interrogation, interview, whatever you call it.

And here's Pilate's question. Are you the king of the Jews? Jews? What an excellent question that is.

[23 : 46] So, are you the king of the Jews? I know Herod. I know all his cronies. I know what they're like. Wouldn't trust them as far as I could throw them.

And if that's the king of the Jews, then that affects my opinion of all of that. But I'm asking you, are you really the king of the Jews?

Are you the sort of top specimen of what your nation can produce? Are you king of the Jews? Is that the way he's asking it?

Is he asking it out of shrewdness or out of, that's the question. Are you king of the Jews? And Jesus replies. Well, he doesn't reply directly.

He said, well, who put you up to that? Is that from you or from others? I suppose he's doing this thing where somebody asks a question, you ask a question back.

[24 : 57] Do you really want to know? is that a genuine question? Or is there an agenda behind it? Has somebody else put you up to that? Has somebody put that thought into your mind and you're just asking the question because of that?

It's a good question, isn't it? How about you? You, when you ask the question, is Jesus king of the Jews? Is that something you really want to know?

Or are you only asking it out of pressure? from somewhere else? If I may say, it is an excellent thing for you to want to find out for yourself.

Maybe your mum and dad have raised this question. Well, don't ask it just because of mum and dad. Maybe your friends have put this question to you. Well, don't ask it just because of your friends.

Ask it because you want to know. don't avoid the decision. Don't put it off as if it's irrelevant. You need to know your answer to this question.

[26 : 04] Is Jesus king of the Jews? And you need to form a conclusion, a well grounded conclusion and stick to it. Well, I don't think Pilate was asking it that way.

Jesus says, is it from you or from others? Is this your own idea or did others talk to you about it? To which Pilate answers, am I a Jew?

I'd love to know the expression in his voice when he said that. It's a sort of a sarcastic answer, isn't it? Because we know perfectly well he's not a Jew. Am I a Jew?

Says Pilate. And then this irony, you're only here because of you Jewish lot. It is, it was your people and your chief priests who did the handing over.

What is it you've done? How have you managed to annoy them so profoundly? Who are you? What are you up to? Why are you here?

[27 : 25] What's going on? Jesus, again with John's gospel, you find that conversations don't go in a straightforward way.

There's all sorts of things happening behind the scenes and Jesus doesn't answer any of those questions that Pilate's just asked, but he does answer this, my kingdom is not at this world.

If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my handing over, but my kingdom is not from here. here. Although the NIV translation that we have makes it a positive statement, my kingdom is from another place. In fact, it's a negative statement.

It's not of this world, not from here. I think Pilate's going to find this very difficult to deal with. you're a king, but your kingdom is not of this world.

[28 : 35] What are you saying? That you're not involved in some sort of power struggle like all the others are. My kingdom is not of this world.

If it was like that, then all those things about force, and getting swords, and fighting, that's what we'd be doing. We're not doing that. I told them to stop doing that.

That's not the way it works. That's not how my kingdom operates. My kingdom and my claims are not on the level of all the other claims that you have going on. I'm not a politician.

I'm not a military leader. I don't work like that. That's not how my kingdom is. Pilate seizes on that. You are a king then.

You are a king. You are a king. You have a kingdom. You are a king. And then Jesus replies with this rather what's the word?

[29 : 31] It isn't quite direct and it isn't quite indirect. He says, you are right. I am saying I am a king. It translates something like well you said it. So Jesus isn't totally endorsing what he says

because Pilate probably has the wrong idea of what a king is in the case of Jesus.

He's not saying yes I totally agree with what you just said. He said if you want to put it like that yes. I mean you're saying it you said it. You are a king.

Well you said it. And then Jesus puts it this way. He says for this reason I was born and for this I came into the world to testify to the truth.

If you like that brings us back to this whole idea of a trial with witnesses and testimony me and Jesus says that's what I've come into the world for to testify to truth.

That's why I'm here. Of all the voices around you and all the pressures I am the truth. Everything else is distortion, lies, evil, selfishness, unreliability.

[30 : 51] I am telling you the truth. I came to testify to the truth and everyone of truth hears my voice.

It's rather reminiscent of the idea of the good shepherd, isn't it? The sheep hear my voice. False shepherd they don't listen to but my voice they hear.

And here's Jesus in the praetorium testifying to truth and I wonder whether any sheep will listen to his voice. I've come here to testify to truth.

Who's listening? What would you have done? What conclusion would you have reached? How would you have responded? it? What's Pilate going to say?

Well actually what he says is truth. What's truth? Come on. Be a realist.

[31 : 56] How many platoons of soldiers does truth equal to? how many votes is truth? How much money is truth?

Truth, I don't deal in truth says Pilate, I'm a soldier. What use is truth? And that's the little conversation that they had.

Let's ponder it. As Jesus says, I am a king, but my kingdom is not of this world. Jesus' kingdom is not of this world.

We can't expect this world to replicate the kingdom of Jesus or to express the kingdom of Jesus. It might get a little bit closer or a little bit further away. We might have governments that are more corrupt or less corrupt. And we would like our governments to be less corrupt.

[32 : 56] We would like to see systems that deal more fairly rather than less fairly. But Jesus says, in the end of the day, my kingdom is not of this world. My kingdom extends into the world.

My kingdom intrudes into the world. I call people from this world into my kingdom. But you can never identify my kingdom with any of the kingdoms of this world.

We're not to expect that to be the case because Jesus says it isn't the case. And Pilate is saying, I'm not an idealist.

Truth, I'm not an idealist. I'm a military governor. I'm not inhuman. I don't think he was being inhuman. I think he was in some way trying his best.

Well, trying, at least trying, for some sort of justice to be done. But all his Roman instincts and his experience and training isn't going to enable him to hear the truth of Jesus, to be on the side of truth.

[34 : 10] He just hasn't got what it takes. He's a pragmatist. You know, pragmatist, what works? What is truth? Truth doesn't work. And I wonder what verdict is being reached at this point.

Is what verdict is Pilate reaching, but perhaps the other way around, what verdict is being reached on Pilate? If he was of the truth, he would listen to the voice of Jesus.

But I don't think he is. And I don't think he is going to listen to the voice of Jesus. I think he is going to go down some other route, as we shall shortly see. If you are on the side of truth, if you are of the truth, you would hear my voice, says Jesus.

What would you do? What would you have done? Which side are you on? Which truth carries the weight with you? Which kingdom do you belong to?

Which kingdom do you serve? Which king do you serve? What would you have said? Let's follow on a bit further.

[35 : 30] So again, we're outside and inside, and Pilate now goes out again. With that, he went out again to the Jews and says, I find no basis for a charge.

No basis for a charge. I mean, he said some very odd things. He said a lot of things I don't understand and didn't agree with. But honestly, there is no basis for capital punishment for this prisoner.

I find no basis for a charge. Tell you what, I find no basis for a charge. Passover is a time of release.

That's your national calendar, isn't it? Passover is one of your Jewish festivals. It goes back to the time when you were prisoners in Egypt and you were released from that and you were set out for your promised land.

That's your Jewish stuff, that is. And by history, your history says that Passover is a time of release for the people of God by the kindness and power of God and by your local custom.

[36 : 44] Don't know how long the custom's been working, but there is a custom at the moment to release a prisoner. We could release a prisoner. So there's a time of release.

Let's release the prisoner. What prisoners have we got inside? We've actually got at least two. We've got Jesus and we've got Barabbas.

which of those two shall I release? Up to you. Whom would you rather have freed? Jesus is by some at least termed the king of the Jews.

Barabbas is a tried and what's the word tried and convicted felon. He's it says text tells us Barabbas had taken part in a rebellion.

He was a rebellionist least least least but Jesus there is no charge no charge no proven charge not even anything coming close to that.

[38 : 00] Barabbas is rightly convicted the idea of what he is he is he got to take part in rebellion. Yeah, I think that's a good translation. Sometimes it's translated thief but it's more than just taking stuff.

It is used for somebody who's against the king, against the powers that be. That's who he is. And again, a verdict is reached.

Who would we rather have set free? Who's the person who deserves to be set free? Who should we have? And you can hear the cries, set Jesus free, he's done nothing wrong.

Oh no, it doesn't say that, does it? And they shout out, don't want him, set free Barabbas.

Barabbas. Now I don't know how many people you could get into that place where this conversation was taking place.

Presumably not the whole of Jerusalem, presumably not the whole of Jerusalem would have said this, but enough people making enough noise. Get rid of Jesus, set Barabbas free.

[39 : 11] And we're going to have to leave the story there, but let me just ask you to think about it from Barabbas' point of view. He's guilty. He is justly condemned.

And in a few minutes time, he's going to be saying, I was set free, but it should have been Jesus walking the streets free.

Jesus died. should have been me. And if you're a Christian, you are saying in your heart something very similar to that.

I was set free. It should be Jesus. Jesus died, and it should have been me. continue the story at a later time.

continue the story. continue the story. continue the story. continue the story. continue the