

Shall I Crucify Your King?

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[0 : 0 0] took to the palace of the Roman governor. 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 if we're paying close attention here, we notice that John skips right over the part where Jesus stood before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin. All the other gospel writers mention this, and if we compare with them, we see that Jesus went straight from Annas and his house to standing before Caiaphas and the Jewish leaders, the Sanhedrin, and then now they lead Jesus from there to Pilate, and it's still early in the morning.

Pilate was the Roman governor. For those of you who are maybe less familiar with some of the history here, the Romans had come a while back, and they had conquered the whole region, and so they were in power, they were ruling, and Pilate was the governor of this region on behalf of Caesar, the Roman emperor.

And with Roman rule, there were, of course, soldiers present in Jerusalem where all this is taking place. So functionally, Pilate is the highest authority in the land.

But, of course, these large empires of ancient times, they didn't totally obliterate all of the local government, provided that certain conditions were met. Taxes had to be paid and other things.

[1 : 3 2] And the Jewish people were permitted by Rome to have their ruling council, the Sanhedrin, and to have their priesthood and leaders at the temple. And even in this region, a king.

They had a man named King Herod. But, of course, Rome was very choosy about who they allowed to serve in these positions of leadership. They wanted to ensure that they would have the compliance of their conquered peoples.

So it was very early in the morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness, they did not enter the palace because they wanted to be able to eat the Passover. So according to Jewish law, if they'd entered Pilate's palace, it would have made them ceremonially unclean and unable to participate fully in the Passover.

So according to John, that's why Pilate came out of the palace to them. Verse 29. 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.

[2 : 5 0] This took place to fulfill what Jesus had said about the kind of death he was going to die. So the Jewish leaders, they present Jesus to Pilate, and Pilate asks what the charges are, and here in John's Gospel, it seems that they didn't really have a good answer to the question, at least at first.

If he were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you. Well, that doesn't answer the question. It's almost like they're saying, He's guilty. Trust us.

Pilate basically says, Why don't you deal with this yourselves? Take him. Judge him by your own law. And it's here that the truth of why they've come to Pilate comes out.

We have no right to execute anyone, they objected. Essentially, they're saying, We have tried him. He is guilty. He deserves to die for what he has done, but we can't execute him because according to the Roman law and how things are going in the nation right now, only the governor has the authority for capital punishment.

There's also, perhaps, an unstated desire here for the religious leaders to have Pilate do their dirty work for them, as if that may lessen their guilt in the matter.

[4 : 11] You see that there's a whole lot of religious posturing going on here on the part of the religious leaders. So Pilate takes Jesus in and he questions him.

Verse 33. 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? This conversation between Pilate and Jesus is fascinating. Pilate asks Jesus point-blank whether he's the king of the Jews.

Now imagine for just a moment that you were Jesus' attorney and you were there in the room. What would you say if you had to give an answer on Jesus' behalf?

Are you the king of the Jews? Well, that really opens up a big conversation, doesn't it? First of all, there's already a king of the Jews, at least in name and position, a man named Herod.

[5 : 20] He probably wouldn't appreciate somebody else claiming to be king. Next, we might wonder what Pilate's getting at here. Jesus has been very popular among many people.

Might it be in the best interests of this whole situation to replace Herod with this man who happens to encourage people to pay taxes to Caesar and whose teaching, if followed, could bring some really good change in this region.

Perhaps Pilate wonders whether this man in front of him is of royal lineage. Is that why so many are talking of him as being the king? There was this whole triumphal entry thing that happened just a few days ago and they were proclaiming him king of Israel.

He's been referred to as the son of David, that great king of old. And then we, of course, add to all that the expectations of the people regarding the Messiah, a coming king of God's choosing who would rule the nation according to the word of the prophets long ago.

Is Pilate asking whether Jesus is the Messiah? So this is not the easiest question to answer, is it? Depending on what Jesus says, there could be some serious consequences.

[6 : 40] Notice what Jesus does say in reply. He doesn't answer the question. Instead, he asks a counter-question. Is that your own idea?

Or did others talk to you about me? He probes deeper into where Pilate has even got this notion that he might be the king of the Jews.

Pilate replies, Am I a Jew? Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What is it you have done? Pilate won't answer Jesus' question either.

And if I had to guess at what Pilate means here, it's probably something like, I'm not a Jew. I don't understand what's going on here between you and the Jewish leaders.

All I know is that they're the ones who have handed you over to me. So what have you done? Pilate knows that the Jewish leaders have a problem with Jesus.

[7 : 45] But now he's trying to figure out what's the problem? Is it something wrong that he's done? Or is it the problem with the religious leaders? And again, amazingly, Jesus doesn't give a direct answer to the question.

He gives Pilate something else to think about. Verse 36. Jesus said, My kingdom is not of this world.

If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place. Fascinating.

Jesus claims point blank to be a king. To have a kingdom. Even to have servants or subjects. But not in the way that we might expect.

He claims to be king of a kingdom that's not of, not from this world. That's quite the claim. We could follow Jesus' logic here.

[8 : 51] If Jesus' kingdom is not from this world, then where is it from? Out of this world. Heaven. That's what Jesus has been teaching.

The kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of God. Now I'd love to ask Pilate just what was going on in his mind as Jesus heard, said this to him.

Most people claiming something like Jesus just claimed you wouldn't take too seriously. You might think they were mad or crazy. Or was there something about this Jesus that made Pilate wonder deep down inside if Jesus was speaking the truth?

Pilate comes back with these words in verse 37. You are a king then, said Pilate. Now we don't know the tone of these words.

Was Pilate just trying to pin Jesus down as claiming something? By your own words, you admit it, you are a king. Or was Pilate saying this with a tone of mockery? You are a king then.

[10 : 02] Perhaps because he thought Jesus' claim was laughable. Or was it more inquisitive? So then, you are a king? We don't know how Pilate said this, but Jesus replies, 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.

Wow. Again, what a reply from Jesus. And here again, there's more debate about what Jesus meant when he said, you say that I am a king. It's possible that Jesus means, yes, you said it.

I am a king. Some don't agree. They think he means, you say that I'm a king. Those are your words, not mine. I think the first option makes more sense, that this was sort of a colloquial way of saying to Pilate, you're right.

You've said it. I am a king. And then Jesus goes on to explain why he has come into the world and what he has come to do.

[11 : 15] 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 a thing to say to the most powerful man in the region. I love it. Jesus is fearless. He knows exactly who he is.

He knows why he has come. He doesn't hide the truth. He doesn't pretend to be just an ordinary human being. He says, my birth, my coming into this world has a purpose.

I'm here to testify, to bear witness to the truth. And everyone on the side of truth, everyone of the truth listens.

to me. Another amazing claim of Jesus. And think about this. Jesus is basically saying, there's two kinds of people, Pilate.

[12 : 14] There are those who are on the side of truth or of the truth and there are those who are not. And Pilate, I myself am the line in the sand between the two sides.

Everyone who listens to me is on the side of truth. and everyone who doesn't implied is not. What an amazing claim. Jesus sets himself up as the ultimate authority of truth in this world.

And that before the Roman governor. Pilate responds, what is truth? truth? Again, there's speculation about Pilate's tone here.

Some think Pilate was sincere in this question. Some not. Some see Pilate as kind of a philosophical thinker in this moment. You know, what is truth?

Most people, I think, take Pilate's words as a sort of rhetorical dismissal of Jesus. Like, what is truth? death? Like, can we even know it?

[13 : 26] Whatever Pilate meant, he had already come to the verdict in his mind for Jesus. With this, he went out again to the Jews 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?

They shouted back, no, not him, give us Barabbas. Now, Barabbas had taken part in an uprising.

So, whether Pilate believed all that Jesus said to him in private, we don't know, but he made it quite clear that he had found no basis for a charge against Jesus. And it seems in the moment he tried to come up with a way to release Jesus.

According to Matthew's gospel, Pilate knew that it was out of envy that the Jewish leaders had handed Jesus over to him. And so Pilate tries to make a play here. He tries to do the opposite of what the religious leaders want and release Jesus and he tries to do this by appealing to the crowd.

[14 : 52] Let's give them a vote. Maybe they really like Jesus and it's just these leaders who don't like him. He gives them the chance to make a decision based on this annual custom of releasing a prisoner each year.

He gives them the option. You can have Barabbas or you can have the king of the Jews released to you. You can have an insurrectionist who's been thrown in prison for his part in an uprising and another gospel, murder, or you can have Jesus, the king of the Jews.

Probably Pilate thought this would be a sure way to secure Jesus' release. After all, Jesus might have made a few enemies, but many loved him, right? But Pilate's play fails.

The crowd shouts back in response, No! Not him! Give us Barabbas! Matthew actually tells us in his gospel that the chief priests and the elders of the Jews went around in the crowd and stirred up the people to ask for Barabbas instead of Jesus.

So Pilate's first attempt here to release Jesus failed. chapter 19 verse 1. Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged.

[16 : 19] The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They closed 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. Now we might wonder, well, why did Pilate decide to have Jesus flogged? Luke gives us the clue.

According to Luke, this was another attempt by Pilate to have Jesus released. He knew that Jesus hadn't done anything to deserve death and so he had this hope of satisfying the Jewish leaders by having Jesus punished and then releasing him.

perhaps this will be enough, a sort of public humiliation that will squelch Jesus' public following and make the Jewish leaders appear in the right.

Now what kind of flogging was this? The Romans had three kinds of floggings that they would regularly administer. The fustigatio was a less severe beating that they gave for relatively light offenses, troublemakers.

[17 : 36] The flagellatio was a brutal flogging that they gave to criminals, people whose offenses were quite serious. And lastly there was the verberatio, the most terrible scourging of all, one that was always associated with other punishments including crucifixion.

Now the exact sequence of events is a little unclear here when you compare all four gospel accounts. Was Jesus flogged once before Pilate presented him to the crowd and then led away to be crucified or was he flogged before and then after flogged again?

It's difficult to make a judgment about these things and see how these accounts all fit together but if indeed Jesus was flogged twice then likely the final flogging would have been that most severe form.

And the earlier would have been likely less severe given that Pilate intended to release him. This most severe flogging, the verberatio, was horrific.

The victim was usually stripped, naked, tied to a post, and beaten until the soldiers were exhausted or until the commanding officer called them off.

[19 : 00] For victims who like Jesus were not Roman citizens, the favored instrument was a whip with leather thongs and these thongs were fitted with pieces of bone or lead or metal.

These beatings were so savage that the victims sometimes died just from them. eyewitness records report that such brutal scourgings could leave victims with their bones and their insides exposed.

But John's emphasis as he tells the story is not so much on the brutality of this, but on the shameful humiliation of it.

John tells us of how they mocked Jesus. They dressed him up like a king with a purple robe. They put a crown of thorns on his head and they said, Hail, King of the Jews, and repeatedly slapped him.

literally gave him blows. Once more Pilate came out and said to the Jews gathered there, Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against him.

[20 : 20] When Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, Here is the man. Behold 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.

So Pilate's second attempt to release Jesus failed. the Jewish leaders were not satisfied with this punishment. They wanted him dead. Notice the details that John gives us here.

In verse six, As soon as the chief priests and their officials saw him, they shouted, Crucify! It was the Jewish leaders, the chief priests, Annas, Caiaphas, and their family that led the charge.

They didn't leave an instant for the people in the crowd to have pity or compassion on Jesus or to have a differing opinion. They just started shouting right away and in no time the entire crowd was shouting, Crucify!

[21 : 46] Crucify! Which means kill him, execute him on a cross. Crucifixion was the way the Romans did their executions.

They nailed people to wooden crosses and hung them up to die. Pilate answered, You take him and crucify him.

As for me, I find no basis for a charge against him. This is the third time Pilate has spoken these words. I find no basis for a charge against him.

This man does not deserve to die. He hasn't done anything deserving of punishment. Pilate seems to be saying, Listen, if you want to crucify him, go ahead, I give you permission.

Go and execute him yourselves. What's going on here? It sounds like Pilate is fully aware that to execute Jesus would be an injustice.

[22 : 48] To just sentence him to death without a criminal charge would make him guilty of injustice. So this seems to be Pilate saying, I don't want any part of this.

You kill him if you want to. Leave me out of this. Pilate was not known in the history books as an upright man, but at the least it seems that he had a conscience.

He knew that this was not right. Verse 7, 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.

When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid and he went back inside the palace. Where do you come from?

He asked. But Jesus gave him no answer. Pilate now seems quite conflicted inside.

[23 : 55] I can't help but wonder what was going on in his mind right here. What if it's true? Could he really be from heaven sent by the gods or by the God of the Jews to be their king, to speak the truth?

What if he is the son of God? Remember, Pilate was no stranger to all that had been happening. The stories of miracles and healings abounded. The teaching of Jesus had spread like wildfire through the nation on the lips of Jesus' disciples.

What if it's all true? So he questions Jesus.

Jesus does not answer. When Pilate heard this, sorry, where do you come from?

He asked. Jesus gives him no answer. Pilate says, do you refuse to speak to me? Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?

[25 : 08] So Pilate gets upset that Jesus won't answer his question. He tries to intimidate Jesus. how dare you, you refuse to speak to me? Don't you realize your life is in my hands?

I can set you free or I can have you killed. Answer my question. And I marvel at Jesus' response here.

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.

Amazing. Jesus acknowledges, yes, you do have power over me, but only because God, my Father, has given it to you.

In other words, yes, my life is in your hands, but you will answer to God for what you do with me. Jesus says, therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.

[26 : 28] Now, I'm not going to speculate about all that means, but at the very least, notice what Jesus is saying here. He's saying, Pilate, should you crucify me?

you will indeed be guilty of sin. And this time it seems Jesus' words leave an impression. Verse 12, from then on Pilate tried to set Jesus free.

And the tense of that verb is not just a one-time thing, but he was trying, he was making continual effort for some span of time here 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.

[27 : 40] 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, 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.

Right to the end, we see this reluctance of Pilate to give in to their demands. In fact, it almost seems as if Pilate's ready to install Jesus as their king.

Here's your king. Shall I crucify your king? Are you sure you want me to do this? And the answer of the chief priests, Annas, Caiaphas, and family is we have no king but Caesar.

Wow. We are loyal subjects to the emperor alone. I mentioned before how there was a lot of religious posturing going on.

[28 : 52] Well, here's a different kind of posturing. Here the religious leaders are posturing saying, if you don't give us this thing that we want and put him to death, if you don't execute him, we're more loyal to the Roman emperor than you are.

This statement represents the outright rejection of Jesus as their Messiah. Just as John told us right at the very beginning of his account, back in chapter 1, verse 11, Jesus came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

And with that, Pilate finally gives in to their demands, and he does what he knows is sin and hands Jesus over to be crucified. We're going to continue the story next week, but let's take a moment to reflect on what we've heard this morning.

How should we respond to this? There's lots of different ways this could touch us. This is the very heart of the gospel that we're getting to. John really does seem to highlight the utter wickedness of these Jewish leaders, their blatant rejection of Jesus.

They will not have him as their king, even though he is God's Messiah. They will not be content with his being punished and humiliated.

[30 : 16] They want him dead, and they want Pilate to do it for them. The hypocrisy here is staggering. In the midst of all this, John highlights Jesus' innocence, Pilate is no saint, he's no righteous man, but even Pilate, the Roman governor, a Gentile, knows that Jesus has not done anything to deserve this.

Three times, I find no basis for a charge against him. He hasn't done anything wrong. Yet even though Jesus suffers greatly here and is the victim, we also see through John's eyes that he is in fact the hero of this whole story.

Isn't it awesome how Jesus responds to Pilate again and again and again? We just see this great wisdom of Jesus, carefully deciding when to answer and when not, when to answer directly and when to counter with a question.

We see his wisdom. we see Jesus' confidence. He knows who he is. He knows why he has come. He's not embarrassed or ashamed one bit to tell Pilate the truth.

I am a king and of a kingdom that's not from this world. And I have been born, I have come into this world to testify to the truth.

[31 : 47] And everyone on the side of truth listens to me. What confidence, confidence, what boldness to speak like this to the most powerful man in the region, the man who stands judge over him.

I love it when it comes to verse 11 of chapter 19. And Jesus says this, 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. Notice what happens in this moment. It's like Pilate's the judge and Jesus is the one on trial.

And it's almost like they switch places for a moment. One minute Pilate's claiming to have power over Jesus and the next minute Jesus is telling Pilate what his verdict is going to be. He's going to be guilty before God if he crucifies Jesus.

Suddenly Pilate's the one on trial. What will he do in this moment of testing? And he's trying and trying to set Jesus free. It's amazing. Jesus just has this authority.

[32 : 56] This way of bringing God's truth to bear on any situation and it unseated Pilate from his judgment seat. Jesus is the hero of this story.

We see his wisdom. We see his confidence. We see his boldness. We see his authority. We hear his penetrating words. And all of this in the face of injustice, cruelty, hatred, envy, corruption, slander.

It's amazing. Perhaps the greatest emphasis here though in John's telling of this story is on whether or not Jesus is king.

That's what all of this turns on. It's the first question Pilate asks. Are you the king of the Jews? It's the subject of Jesus' conversation with Pilate.

My kingdom is not from this world. It's the title Pilate gives to Jesus. Your king. It's what Jesus is mocked for with the robe and the crown.

[33 : 58] It's why the religious leaders say Pilate must condemn him or be no friend of the emperor's. We have no king but Caesar. And the clear message of all the gospel accounts is that Jesus is the king.

God's chosen king. The Messiah. Do you hear what Jesus said? My kingdom is not of this world.

It's from another place. Yes. He really did claim to be a king. Heaven's king. Do you believe Jesus?

Jesus? We saw and heard how they treated Jesus here. Rather than accepting him as king, they rejected him.

Rather than bowing reverently, they mocked him. Rather than listening to him and obeying his word, they conspired against him and put him to death. But as we hear it today, what about you?

[35 : 00] how will you respond to Jesus, your king, the one that God has sent from heaven? Will you receive him as your king?

will you worship and honor him? Will you listen to him? Will you serve him? Will you obey him? Will you let the truth that he is king change the way you're living?

The reason I was born and came into this world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me, said Jesus.

Are you listening to him? Are you taking his words seriously? Are you on the side of truth?

These words spoken long ago to Pilate penetrate even us today. And so I want to urge you this morning, open your life, open your heart to Jesus.

[36 : 12] your king. Let him examine you. Let him speak his truth to you. He loves you.

He's going through all of this because he loves you. Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we marvel at how you conducted yourself in these horrible moments.

It reminds each one of us that we are guilty, we are sinners, we fall short of your glory. But we thank you that you came to save us, that you loved us still, that you are a merciful God, and that you died on that cross for our forgiveness.

Lord, we put our trust and our faith in you, and we say thank you. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.