

Accused

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Date: 24 March 2019

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[0 : 00] Today's reading is taken from John chapter 19 verses 1 to 16 and that can be found on page 1091 of the church Bibles.

That's John chapter 19 verses 1 to 16 on page 1091. Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged him and the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head and arrayed him in a purple robe.

They came up to him saying hail king of the Jews and struck him with their hands. Pilate went out again and said to them see I am bringing him out to you that you may know that I find no guilt in him.

So Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them behold the man. When the chief priests and the officers saw him they cried out crucify him crucify him.

Pilate said to them take him yourselves and crucify him for I find no guilt in him. The Jews answered him we have a law and according to that law he ought to die because he has made himself the son of God.

[1 : 21] When Pilate heard this statement he was even more afraid. He entered his headquarters again and said to Jesus where are you from? But Jesus gave him no answer.

So Pilate said to him you will not speak to me. Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you? Jesus answered him you would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above.

Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greatest sin. From then on Pilate sought to release him but the Jews cried out if you release this man you are not Caesar's friend.

Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar. So when Pilate heard these words he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judgment seat at the place called the stone pavement in Aramaic Gabbatha.

Now it was the day of preparation of the Passover. It was about the sixth hour. He said to the Jews behold your king. They cried out away with him away with him crucify him.

[2 : 30] Pilate said to them shall I crucify your king? The chief priest answered we have no king but Caesar. So he delivered him over to them to be crucified.

Claudia thanks very much for reading. Please do keep John chapter 19 open. Now as John said earlier this is the second in our series of talks looking through John's account of the trial of the Lord Jesus and then his crucifixion and resurrection over these few weeks leading up to Easter.

And I thought it would be helpful for us as we start to be clear as to why John writes this eyewitness account of Jesus' life and ministry.

It's always helpful isn't it whenever you pick up a book to ask the question why has this book been written? So you know is it a guide book to lead me or a history book to give me information or a novel to entertain me?

So just turn on a page to John chapter 20. And like so many of the Bible writers John tells us his purpose in writing. It's not simply to tell us events.

[3 : 47] John chapter 20 verses 30 to 31. This is his summary of why he's writing. Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book.

But 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.

Notice for you that John writes so that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, that he is God's promised king. And that we believe that he is the Son of God.

In other words the one who reveals God to us. Who does what God does. Who says what God says. And notice well to believe not simply in a kind of academic way.

But to actually grasp the significance of it and to hold on to it. Why? Well because it's by believing in Jesus and by continuing to believe in Jesus.

[4 : 47] Belief in John's gospel is both believing as a one-off thing but then continuing to believe in Jesus. By doing that we have life as he puts it.

Eternal life. Life with God now in this world. Life with God in the next. Christ. And therefore leading up to Easter as we look at the arrest, trial and crucifixion of Jesus.

And then the resurrection of Jesus in John's gospel. That is God's purpose for us. I think it's thrilling and exciting. Which of course is why it's such a great thing to be here on a Sunday morning looking at John's gospel together.

So much more important I guess for many of us. There are lots of other things we could have done this morning. But actually what better thing than to come and look at John's gospel together this morning. Indeed if you haven't yet done so it would be well worth reading through these chapters of John's gospel.

It wouldn't take you long to read through chapters 18, 19, 20 and 21. They're great chapters to read. And I think my prayer over these few weeks is that these chapters will indeed strengthen us in our confidence in Jesus.

[5 : 54] For some of us to challenge us as well. As we look not only at the facts but also the implications, the significance of that first Easter.

Well today we're leaving off where we were picking up where we left off last week. At the trial of the Lord Jesus before the Roman governor Pontius Pilate.

Just like last week John writes both so that we understand the claims of Jesus and understand who he is. And yet he's also writing to challenge us about our responses.

And just like last week I think we're going to find that as we look at these verses we are challenged about whose side are we on. Are we on the side of Jesus or are we on the other side?

And you'll see that is reflected in the outline that's on the back of the service sheet there. First of all Jesus Christ carries out the eternal plan of God. And then two warnings about rejecting him.

[7 : 01] First of all then Jesus Christ carries out the eternal plan of God. Because throughout John's gospel Jesus makes it clear that his death lies at the very heart of God's plan.

Indeed it is to die that Jesus came into the world. I've put a number of verses there on the outline. You could either look at the outline or turn to the verses themselves.

But first of all John chapter 3 verses 14 to 16. Let me read them. John chapter 3 verses 14 to 16.

Where the Lord Jesus says, And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. Notice that word must, verse 14, so must the Son of Man be lifted up in order to fulfill the plan of God.

We can see very clearly there, can't we, that Jesus is speaking of his death by crucifixion. He must be lifted up. And that it's those who believe in him who will have eternal life, who won't perish on the judgment day.

[8 : 25] Or the next quote from John chapter 12 verses 31 to 33. Where again the Lord Jesus explains what his death will achieve.

John chapter 12 verse 31. Now is the judgment of this world. Now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.

He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die. Again, it's through Jesus being lifted up, his crucifixion, that all sorts of people will be drawn to him for eternal life.

Well now back then to John chapter 19 as Jesus stands on trial before the Roman governor Pontius Pilate. Who says to Jesus in verse 10.

You will not speak to me. Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you? And Jesus replied, completely extraordinary.

[9 : 38] It's so ridiculous if it were not true. Jesus answered him, you would have no authority over me at all unless it has been given you from above.

Isn't that so striking? The Lord Jesus has been arrested. He's already faced one trial on trumped up charges. He's been flogged to within an inch of his life. He's about to be crucified.

He looks so powerless. And yet actually, you look at those two men and who in reality is the one who is powerless. It is Pontius Pilate.

As Jesus carries out God's eternal plan. Pilate, the representative of the Roman emperor, the most powerful man on the planet at the time.

Why he is powerless to act as Jesus carries out the eternal plan of God. And verse 11 shows, doesn't it, the only reason Pilate has any authority over Jesus is precisely because Jesus is doing what he came to do to carry out the plan of God.

[10:47] I take it that's why John also tells us about the flogging that Jesus received in verses 1 to 3. Let me read them for us. Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged him.

And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head and arrayed him in a purple robe. They came to him saying, hail, king of the Jews, and struck him with their hands. John doesn't dwell on the details beyond that. He was a particularly brutal form of torture. And I take it he doesn't dwell on the details more than that.

Because the significant lies not so much in the details, but simply in the fact of his suffering. 700 years earlier, the prophet Isaiah had predicted that precisely this would happen.

Flip back to Isaiah 53. Page 742. And here is Isaiah's extraordinary prophecy of the one who will suffer and the one who will die for the sins of God's people.

[12:18] Have a look at Isaiah 53, verses 3 to 6. He was despised and rejected by men.

A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And as one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. Yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions.

He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace. And with his stripes we are healed.

All we, like sheep, have gone astray. We have turned everyone to his own way. And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

[13:23] The suffering of the Lord Jesus so clearly foretold 700 years beforehand. And yet notice not simply his suffering, but also his innocence.

Verse 9. Did you notice when Claudia read John chapter 19 that three times Pontius Pilate declares the Lord Jesus to be innocent?

He does it in the bit just before the section that was read to us in chapter 18, verse 38. And then chapter 19, verse 4.

And then chapter 19, verse 6. Each time he says, I find no guilt in him. The suffering of Jesus, the innocence of Jesus, predicted 700 years beforehand.

Clearly not dying for his own sin, but for the sin of others. It is extraordinary, isn't it? We can't even predict what's going to happen in the next year or the next five years.

[14:38] You know, with so much in life. How Brexit is going to be resolved, if it is going to be resolved. Who's going to win the Rugby World Cup in the autumn, if you're looking forward to that.

What the fashions and colours are going to be on the catwalks in a few months' time, if you follow those things. Well, how extraordinary that 700 years before the event, the suffering and innocence of Jesus Christ are foretold.

I guess it's the equivalent, isn't it, of someone way back in 1300, 700 years ago, during the reign of King Edward I, King of England.

It's predicting that in 700 years' time, at the beginning of the 21st century, a particular person will be born, the precise nature of his death and what his death achieved.

Or someone today predicting that in 700 years' time, that is going to happen. It is quite extraordinary. And all because here is the Lord Jesus Christ carrying out the eternal plan of God, the innocent suffering of Jesus, just as God said it would be.

[15:51] Pilate has no authority over the Lord Jesus, except the authority given to him, such that the plan of God can be accomplished. Pilate has no authority over the Lord Jesus Christ.

Pilate has no authority over the Lord Jesus Christ.

Pilate has no authority over the Lord Jesus Christ. Maybe that some of us here this morning, actually, we doubt God's love for us. Perhaps even in the last week, events have conspired or something has happened and we've thought to ourselves, does God really care for his people? Does God care for me? I guess for all of us, that is a question we ask from time to time, at which point we need to consider the death of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ, his love, as he carries out the eternal plan of God. And of course, as we do that, and the answer to the question, does God love me?

[17:38] Does God love his people? Is God committed to his people? We see the answer is always yes. So, Jesus Christ carries out the eternal plan of God.

Secondly, therefore, don't reject Jesus because you fear what others think. Because, you see, John reveals the motives of the other characters here, both Pilate and the crowds as they reject the Lord Jesus.

And each one is a warning to us. So, first of all, let's look at Pilate. Last week, we saw, didn't we, that he's a warning to us. He's a warning against rejecting the truth.

A warning against saying that we want to hear the truth, but in reality, not being interested in the truth. That question of his, what is truth? Well, today we see the real motives that drove Pilate's actions.

And he is very simply afraid of the crowd. He is afraid of what others think of him. As such, we see his complete lack of integrity as he does not what is right, but actually he simply goes with what the crowd wants him to do.

[18:57] He goes with what is convenient, what is politically expedient. Have a look again at verses 38 to 40 at the end of chapter 18. Pilate said to Jesus, what is truth?

After he had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, I find no guilt in him. But you have a custom that I should release one man for you at the Passover.

So do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews? They cried out, not this man, but Barabbas. Now Barabbas was a robber.

The crowd, it seems, give the wrong answer. I guess he's expecting them to say, yes, release the king of the Jews. But they give the wrong answer as far as Pilate is concerned.

And yet rather than releasing Jesus, knowing that he's innocent, instead he has him flogged, hoping to satisfy them. And then again, verse 4, Pilate again declares Jesus to be innocent.

[20:01] But the Jews insist, verse 7, we have a law. And according to that law, he ought to die, because he's made himself the son of God. How does Pilate respond?

Very striking, verse 8, with fear. When Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid. Like many Romans, perhaps, Pilate was superstitious.

The thought that he might have offended a local Jewish deity makes him nervous. Verse 12, Pilate tries to set Jesus free. But again, he is held back by fear.

From then on, Pilate sought to release him. But the Jews cried out, if you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar.

At that point, Pilate is thoroughly rattled. His career depends on the favor of the Roman emperor. An unfavorable report sent to Rome would be dangerous for him.

[21:02] And so this man of rank and status and position, who should have been a foundation of justice, sends an innocent man to his death.

He knows the right thing to do. And yet he will not do it. Pilate, if you like, shows us how to reject Jesus without ever saying no.

There are some questions in life, aren't there, which demand a yes or no answer. For example, at a wedding, the groom is asked, will you take her to be your wife? Will you love her, comfort her, honor and protect her, and forsaking all others be faithful to her as long as you both shall live?

That question demands a yes or no answer. Imagine if there was an evasive answer instead. Well, you know, I'd love to say yes.

Or, that's an interesting question. Or, isn't the sun shining brightly today? You know, all sorts of things. No, it demands a straight answer.

[22:07] Well, as does the question about the Lord Jesus. Pilate is a warning to us not to reject Jesus because we fear what others think.

He won't give a straight answer. And, instead, he is pushed by public opinion and by the fear of other people. So, I might say that if you're looking into the claims of Jesus Christ, it's always lovely when we have people here who are, and we very much hope that Grace Church is somewhere where you can come and investigate the claims of Jesus Christ.

If you are doing that, can we see we must be honest with ourselves and ask ourselves, is our problem with the facts about Jesus? Perhaps we're not sure about the facts or we don't believe the facts.

Or, actually, is our problem with the implications of the facts? Pilate knew the facts. It was the implications that rattled him.

And, I take it that's why in verse 9, when he asks Jesus, where are you from? The Lord Jesus gives no answer. The Lord Jesus, who is so patient explaining things to his disciples and others, and yet he will not answer those who he regards as time wasters.

[23 : 32] Those who, at the end of the day, will hear the truth, but refuse to act on the truth. Pilate's real problem is not his question at the end of chapter 18, what is truth?

No, his real problem is being confronted with the truth and then not acting on it. Now, it may just be that some of us are exposed at this point, like Pilate, perhaps we know the truth, but we fear the crowds.

We fear people in the office. We fear people at school or friends or families. We fear what others would think of us. John records this to bring us to our senses.

What others think of us can matter. It can matter so terribly much to us, as it does to Pilate. But what a foolish man he was for what others thought of him to matter more to him than the truth that Jesus Christ speaks, and so to reject Jesus.

In fact, I was talking to someone just a couple of weeks ago, and I think this is precisely his issue. Not a matter of the intellect. Not a matter of having questions, which he wanted answers to.

[24 : 55] No, he had the answers regarding the Lord Jesus. Not a matter of the intellect, of the facts, but a matter of the will instead. And of course, those of us who are disciples of the Lord Jesus, we're not immune from this, are we?

Pilate, I take it, act as a warning to us. Are we more concerned with what others think of us, perhaps our reputation and so on, than we are to act on the truth and live out the truth?

That may be a very timely warning for some of us this week, whether it's at work or at school or at home or meeting up with friends and family and so on. Don't reject Jesus because you fear what others will think.

Secondly, don't reject Jesus, or rather thirdly, don't reject Jesus because you're living for this world. Imagine for a moment that you are a Christian living in the first century.

You live in Rome at the heart of the Roman Empire. You've gone to the baths after work that your colleagues' conversation turns to Christianity. You're given the opportunity to explain that Jesus is indeed God's long-promised king, the one who was promised in the Old Testament that he alone offers forgiveness, at which point your colleagues raise an objection.

[26 : 20] But hang on a moment. If you are saying that this great king was promised 700 years ago earlier, 700 years previously in the Old Testament, what about the Jews?

Surely he was their king. Why didn't they believe in him? If they didn't believe in him, why should we? It's not much of an advert, is it, for his own people if they rejected him.

Now I take it that can still be an issue for us today. So John, notice, wants to show us very clearly how it is that these Jewish crowds, a mixture just of the crowds and the religious establishment, rejected Jesus.

And again, like Pilate, they do so not because they have kind of sat down and carefully weighed the evidence, listening to Jesus' claims, examining his life to see if his life backed up the claims.

No, they reject Jesus. And they do so simply because they are living for this world. They know Jesus is God's son and they reject him.

[27 : 37] Verse 7. The Jews answered him, We have a law. And according to that law, he ought to die because he has made himself the son of God. That is confirmed in verse 15.

They cried out, Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him! Pilate said to them, Should I crucify your king? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar.

They've made up their minds. They don't want Jesus to be their king. They want a political king who will kick out the Romans, not a heavenly king.

Their ambition is fixed on this world. They're not interested, it seems, in God's king. They're not interested in the eternal life that he brings. Instead, and shockingly, they give their allegiance to Caesar, the Roman emperor.

We have no king but Caesar. And that same basic allegiance to this world can cause people to turn their back on the Lord Jesus today.

[28 : 53] Indeed, perhaps that may be true for some of us. Perhaps for some of us, that's the very danger we face. It may be the job, fearing our career prospects if we are to follow Jesus or if we're

to continue to follow Jesus.

It may be our reputation amongst friends or colleagues. That's the image that we have that we fear will never quite be the same again if we began to follow Jesus. Or we can see the implications for our reputation if we carry on following Jesus.

Or it may be our family fearing what they think of us. Or it may be our friends. Or it may actually be having to cast aside our ambitions to follow Jesus.

Indeed, that same allegiance to the world can cause people who have begun to follow him to turn away from him. I guess that's a very real issue, isn't it, for us?

Living here in Dulwich in such a nice part of London in so many, many ways, everything this world has to offer can seem so attractive, so welcome, just the kind of thing which we feel we should be striving for and aiming for as we plan our lives.

[30 : 12] So easy to be deceived into thinking that actually the forgiveness that Jesus offers is somehow less than that. The forgiveness that Jesus offers, the life he offers with God, both now and in eternity, is somehow not so precious as everything that this world can offer.

That life with him, that the forgiveness he offers, is somehow not so wonderful as the things that this world can offer. It's odd to say it, isn't it?

It sounds odd saying it. And yet, in practice, in terms of the day-to-day decisions we make, we can so often make the kind of decisions which give the impression that Jesus is not so wonderful and his love for his people is somehow not so valuable.

So Jesus carries out the eternal plan of God and then two warnings. Don't reject Jesus because you fear what others think.

And don't reject Jesus simply because you are living for this world and for what this world prizes and values. Let's spend some time in quiet and then I shall lead us in prayer.

[31 : 38] You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Heavenly Father, we praise you for the Lord Jesus Christ.

We praise you that even at this moment of such great weakness, we praise you that you are accomplishing your eternal purposes, the forgiveness of sins through the suffering of your innocent king, your innocent servant.

We praise you that even at this moment the Lord Jesus is completely sovereign and in control of events. And we thank you too, Heavenly Father, for the way in which John writes his gospel framing this declaration of the Lord Jesus with these warnings.

And we pray, therefore, that we would so prize him and treasure him and value him and rejoice in him and the forgiveness that he brings, the life with you that he brings, that we would not reject him because of the fear of others and that we would not drift into living simply for this world like everyone around us.

And we ask it in his name. Amen.