

A Republican in God's Monarchy

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[0 : 0 0] my name is andrew sheed and i thank you very much for your welcome we're really looking forward to spending a week together uh celebrating and rejoicing in the wonderful things that god's done for us in jesus i want to take a few minutes of your time this morning to look at the most significant event in recorded history i'm talking about the crucifixion of jesus christ and what makes it so unique is the way that it demands a response a choice from every person it confronts i'd like us to reflect on this choice today and i'm going to do it uh by thinking about the encounter between jesus and pilate that was just read to us this was an encounter that left pontius pilate with precisely the choice that faces each one of us and uh if this is a choice that perhaps you've not considered before then i do hope and pray that you'll find the courage to go where pilate did not dare to go and make the best choice you could ever make let's pray heavenly father we do pray that you would tell us the truth about your son the lord jesus you would show us the truth about ourselves and that you would give us the strength and wisdom to choose the truth and live for jesus sake amen well pilate's life is quite well documented we know from roman historians that he was appointed governor of judea by the emperor tiberius in 26 a.d about four years before jesus was murdered and he had the job for about 11 years before he got the sack he was indecisive and morally weak and he covered this up by being stubborn and brutal in the title of this address i've called him a republican um i thought this could be thought of as a day in the life of a republican in god's monarchy um but perhaps on second thoughts democrat would be a better label because his choice was clearly dictated by the will of the crowd we've just heard quite a big chunk from the history of jesus life and i just want to focus on three episodes from that piece of history three episodes that mark uh the steps in pilot's relationship with jesus uh first of all when pilot is challenged to consider who jesus really is uh secondly when pilot is challenged to consider who he himself is and finally when he is forced to make a choice it would be helpful i think if you could turn to the passage in your bibles john chapter 18 and 19 it's somewhere around page 880 i think or 881 in the bibles in front of you the whole sequence of events that we've uh heard read to us was set in motion by some very shrewd politics from the jewish leaders uh they wanted jesus dead uh but they didn't have the power to do it so what do they do they come to pilot with a motive that they know he will not be able to ignore that is sedition or rebellion against caesar so pilot's question to jesus in chapter 18 verse 33 is a strictly political one are you the king of the jews now jesus immediately takes control

he couldn't answer yes to that question because he wasn't a rebel leader but on the other hand he couldn't answer no because he actually was a king so what he does is he opens pilot up verse 34 do you ask this on your own or did others tell you about me now look at pilot's response to that question he starts out indignant but he ends up curious he says i'm not a jew am i your own nation and chief priests have handed you over to me what have you done now why did they do you in he's thinking the jews hate having to crawl to the romans you must really have done something quite interesting and at this point pilot is ready for jesus real answer verse 36 jesus answered my kingdom is not from this world if my kingdom were from this world my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the jews but as it is my kingdom is not from here and so jesus points out firstly that he can't be the leader of a resistance group because nobody's resisted however he does claim an authority over people's lives and it is an authority that has nothing to do with political power well this really gets pilot interested so you are a king he says and jesus spells it out for him in a gently confronting way verse 37 jesus answered you say that i'm a king for this i was born and for this i came into the world to testify to the truth everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice now this is such a crucial statement that we need to pause and think about it for a moment verse 37 i'm going to read it again you say that i am a king for this i was born and for this i came into the world to testify to the truth so what sort of a king is jesus claiming to be seems to be

saying that his job as king is to testify to the truth so rather unusual job description for a monarch isn't it so what's he on about well if we'd had time to read from the beginning of this history we'd have seen that when jesus talks about truth he doesn't mean any old truth he means the truth about god there are a couple of examples i'll read you from earlier in this book at the beginning we read grace and truth came through jesus christ no one has ever seen god but jesus has made him known or another one jesus said i am the way the truth and the life no one comes to the father but by me so when jesus testifies to the truth he is he claims to be no less than god's unique representative the one that when we listen to him we hear god speaking that's the sort of king jesus claims to be well a claim on that scale has major implications and jesus makes this very clear to pilot remember what he went on to say at the end of that verse everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice now when jesus says everyone he means everyone it is impossible for you to submit yourself to anyone else's king and still be on the side of truth now in our post-modern society that is a very offensive claim isn't it that there is only one right way to live only one truth only one valid choice now we're the options generation we want freedom we want inclusiveness we we want to be free to choose our own truth but jesus confronts us with a single exclusive uncompromising demand for absolute loyalty there's no room to move here those who reject jesus words swallow a lie and this lie defines them it owns them and controls them how a poor old pilot like so many others he's found his interrogation of jesus deteriorating into jesus interrogation of him this defenseless prisoner has just asked him in so many words are you prepared to have me as your one and only true king well pilot's reply isn't very promising is it he carefully avoids the challenge and terminates the conversation with another very modern sounding question what is truth what is truth that's the philosopher's question isn't it now the uh the pluralist's question the agnostics cop-out pilot didn't wait for an answer you notice like so many people who love asking that sort of question pilot erected it in front of jesus like a barrier to keep truth at bay and and to preserve his independence from god's claims over him and this refusal to face truth this embracing of the lie is the beginning of pilot's downfall and by verse 38 we see the process underway when pilot decides on a path of compromise a sort of anglican middle way he doesn't put his neck on the line by releasing jesus but he does decide jesus is a good man well can i say that is a complete furphy no one who is just a good man claims to be god in human form and depends total allegiance to himself and no other deciding that jesus was just a great moral teacher is simply not an option jesus forces each of us to make a much harder choice than that well that's the first meeting between these two men when as i said pilot is challenged to think about who jesus is and to do him justice pilot does make a genuine attempt to get jesus off i think the whole flogging and mockery that he ordered was designed to primarily to drum up sympathy when pilot says in verse five here is the man he what he means i think is do you really think that this sorry site is going to challenge caesar's power as we know that tactic failed but what it did achieve was it forced the jewish leaders to admit what their true motives were right chapter 19 verse 7 the jews answered him we have a law and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the son of god we didn't really want to have to tell you that but you've made us now that was a bad tactical mistake on the part of the jewish leaders you see for a roman it was a real possibility that somebody could actually be a son of the gods they were notoriously superstitious so pilot's second meeting with jesus begins in verse 8 with fear with fear where do you come from and jesus doesn't answer he just waits for pilot to expose himself look at verse 10 pilot therefore said to him do you refuse to speak to me do you not know that i have power to release you and power to crucify you you see what pilot's problem is pilot was under the illusion that he was the one in charge that he was the one who is in control and as soon as that comes out then jesus speaks and he does two things first of all he punctures that illusion of control and then he confronts pilot with his guilt verse 11 jesus answered him you would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin see how gently he accuses pilot of sin just sort of slips it in as an assumption that pilot's sin is real enough it seems that pilot was guilty simply of believing that he was the one with the power that he was the one with the running of things i assume that we're all much the same you and i that most of us don't think of ourselves as especially bad people of course we're not perfect but most of us live basically law abiding decent lives many of us live moral even religious lives but that's not the problem is it that's not the problem the problem is that we live them as our lives we cling to this illusion of control we believe that it's my right to live my life my way well if you learn one thing from this encounter between jesus and pilot let it be this jesus is king jesus is king and this means that a life lived with

me on the throne and my interests setting its goals is a life of defiance no matter how moral and upright it may be it is nevertheless a life of treason let me ask you when you take an honest look at jesus what do you see when you take an honest look at yourself what do you see and if you don't like what you see what are you going to do about it finally pilate has to make a choice as we all do in those final frantic moments before the crucifixion pilate and the jewish leaders are both using jesus to drag each other down at first pilate is forced to choose between jesus and caesar right verse 12 pilate tried to release him but the jews cried out if you release this man you're no friend of the emperor everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor so pilate's forced to choose and what does he do he gets back at the jews by making them choose verse 15 pilate asked them shall i crucify your king the chief priest answered we have no king but the emperor they had different reasons but each of them rejected god's monarchy and nailed his king to a cross and pilate nailed something else to the cross as well it was his act of petty revenge against those who had outmaneuvered him but in a final ironic twist this was also a proclamation of god's verdict on the trial it's moments like this that prove he's really in control verse 19 pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross it read jesus of nazareth the king of the jews you remember back in their first conversation

jesus had told pilate that his kingship was not of this world and that his reign revealed god's true nature and now pilate has unwittingly installed jesus on his throne nailed him to it in fact now the truly amazing thing about jesus kingly power was the way that he chose to use it not to aggrandize himself and instantly pulverize all opposition no his choice of throne shows us what it means to put to death one's claims to power instead jesus used his power to win us we treasonous subjects a royal pardon not only that but from the cross jesus also offers us a share in his resurrection to a new and imperishable life i know there are many who will not believe that jesus holds the power of life and death and that view might have something to be said for it except for the fact of jesus resurrection from the dead the historical data of the empty tomb of the risen flesh and blood christ changes everything everything i've been saying this morning is made by the resurrection from theory into fact right for a nice story to a vital personal challenge jesus is king and you have to choose whether to be his subject or not you can't not choose not choosing is choosing jesus himself said i am the resurrection and the life those who believe in me will live even though they die that's how he chooses to exercise his power it's a wonderful choice that he allows us to make well i began by saying that the crucifixion of jesus demands a choice from each of us and there really is no escaping the king's command that we give him our allegiance all of us have got someone or something calling the shots and this day in the life of pilate has been recorded for us because it shows us that enormous choice that we are faced with right first of all we are faced with jesus claim that he is king and then we're faced with the humiliating fact that the way that we live is treasonous by nature we are republicans in god's monarchy we're convicted of treason and deserving of death but finally we're faced with this this wonderful choice either we can do what pilate did we can refuse to accept jesus claim and we can nail him to the cross get rid of him of course the problem is that jesus did not stay dead and this choice has an awful reckoning attached to it or else we can take a good look at jesus as he reigns from the cross feel the tug of his love for us feel the weight of his royal summons to kneel at his feet feel the challenge and joy of death to self and rising to new life and if you've never thought about these things before and you're thinking about them for the first time today is a very important day for you i urge you in god's name choose carefully choose well acknowledge that jesus is the only way to god

[20 : 18] and having done that abdicate abdicate from the throne of your life and ask god's forgiveness ask god to forgive you for the way you've treated jesus and invite him to rule as your king and you as his subject from this day on that's the challenge and in a minute i'm going to give you the opportunity to make that choice should you wish to do so i'm going to pray a prayer which i'll invite you to repeat silently after me i'm going to tell you what the prayer says so you can think about it before we say it together i'll say this i'll say dear god thank you that your son the lord jesus has shown us what you're really like please forgive me for the way i've been living i invite you into my life help me to live your way from this day on but before we pray that i'd like to finish by telling you about a conversation i had a while ago a man called philip was telling me about the day he became a christian just a few months previously he just reached that stage of life where he was beginning to wonder whether that was really all there was to it when a friend shared the love of jesus with him and everything started to fall into place he committed his life to jesus and i can still see his smile as he told me that even now he wakes up every morning almost bursting with the joy

of what god has done for him but the decision wasn't easy he said that as he looked back over his life he became aware that from time to time he had had glimpses of jesus but each time he turned his back and the opportunity had passed but this time he told me this time i told myself that i was not going to turn my back and it may be that jesus is speaking to you for the first time today please don't turn your back the opportunity might never come again let's pray dear god thank you that your son the lord jesus has shown us what you're really like please forgive me for the way i've been living i invite you into my life help me to live your way from this day on right amen you you