

Two Years in the Life

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[0 : 00] You will not forget to bring us under the condemnation that we deserve, and that we may not forget the forgiveness that you have won for us.

We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. The text is in John chapter 19, verses 1 to 16, and you might find it helpful to have that passage open in front of you, as I'm simply going to trace the story to begin with.

As chapter 18 closes, the crowd were presented with Jesus and with Barabbas, and they chose Barabbas.

And Pilate turned to them and said, of Jesus, I find no fault in him. And over again and over again and over again, through this 19th chapter, Pilate says again and again, I find no fault in him.

But he had a dilemma on his hands, and as chapter 19 opens, Jesus is delivered to be scourged.

[1 : 39] And though the gospel just treats it with a word, it was a terrifying and horrible experience, in which the prisoner was taken and bound to a pillar, and then such a whip as would open wounds on your back or front, was applied to his back, to the point where I think the purpose of the scourging, which was generally reserved for men who were condemned to death, the purpose of the scourging was to make death seem a good alternative to what they were undergoing.

And so they scourged him. When that was through, the soldiers who had been put in charge, one of them twisted a crown of thorns.

And I'd like to suggest to you on this Passion Sunday that you might find it a memorable thing to go out into the brambles of the countryside with a pair of snips and cut yourself a few good lengths of thorn and twist them into a crown and keep them on your mantelpiece to remind you of this this week.

But this man, probably not without drawing blood on himself, took the crown of thorns, took the bramble and twisted it into a crown of thorns and placed it on the head of Jesus.

Then some other creative individual found a purple robe and threw it over his shoulders so that you get this powerful picture of the Lord Jesus.

[3 : 47] And as he stood there in his kingly robe with his crown, the soldiers went up and knelt before him.

Having knelt before him in homage, they then stood to give him the gift of their homage and they said to him, Hail, King of the Jews, and struck him on the face.

Pilate took Jesus from them, presented him again to the Jews, hoping that in some way they may be appeased and may be satisfied with what their victim had already suffered.

And in all his degradation, he said to them, Here is the man. The chief priests and the officials were ready for that offer and immediately they cried out, Crucify him.

We are not satisfied. So Pilate turned to them and said, I find no basis for the charge against him.

- [5 : 10] You take him and you crucify him. Then the Jews explained to Pilate again, We have a law and the law is against blasphemy and this person has claimed to be the son of God. And a clearer example of blasphemy could not be found. It was blasphemy only in the sense that if you go out after church and drive somebody else's car home, you're stealing a car.
- If you go out and drive your own car home, you're not stealing anything. Someone who has not the grounds for saying, I am the son of God, says so, then he is undoubtedly a blasphemer and needs to be dealt with.
- But if in fact the son of God stands up and says so, how can he be a blasphemer? At that point was lost on them.
- Pilate, watching this, became more afraid. There was a kind of mortal fear that had taken hold of Pilate. Though he was the judge and had the right to condemn, he was the one who stood in fear of what was happening.
- [7 : 07] So he took Jesus inside the praetorium and he said to him, where do you come from? As if to find some further evidence that could be used to condemn him or to pardon him?
- And Jesus didn't answer him so much as it were. Because Pilate already knew and there was nothing more could be said.
- Pilate was upset by this and he said to him, don't you know that I have the power to crucify you and I have the power to let you go.
- Jesus then became the judge and Pilate, in a sense, became the suppliant who stood before him and Jesus said to him, your power, which belongs to your office as the governor of Judea, is given to you from above.
- It's not your power. The power you have as a person is all that belongs to you. People who delivered me to you, Caiaphas and the chief priests, they are the guilty ones, primarily because they have betrayed me to you.
- [9 : 00] When Pilate saw this, he again said, I find no fault in this man.
- And so, the Jews now cornered Pilate and they stopped talking about their biblical laws from Leviticus about blasphemy and they said, which terrified Pilate, you are no friend of Caesar.
- This man has made himself a king. Now, this was treasonous and Pilate could deal with that in his authority because no one could make himself a king.
- And there's a peculiar confirmation or convergence because the Jews with contempt said, this man has made himself a king.
- Pilate, from his perspective, had come to recognize that whoever this man was, he was a king. And that, in a sense, settled the case for Pilate.
- [10 : 31] And he called for a court to be set up. No longer was he in any sense confronting Jesus man to man.
- He now was the judge and he set up the court and the details are given in the passage you have in front of you. The place was called the pavement.
- The time was the day of preparation. The hour was six o'clock in the morning. It was the day of the preparation for the Passover.
- And Pilate, in his role as judge, brings Jesus before him. There's some suggestion in the text that Jesus was even seated before them as on a throne.
- And Pilate turned to the Jews and said, all right, here is your king. He said it because he believed it.

[11 : 41] He said it because he was contemptuous of those to whom he said. The Jews' response was instant, away with him, away with him, and crucify him.

And Pilate cornered him and said to them, shall I crucify your king?

And the chief priests, the religious officials, the officers, with what must have left the taste of dung in their mouths, cried out in betrayal of all they were, in betrayal of the covenant they held to them, in betrayal of the history that they belonged to, they cried out, we have no king but Caesar.

Then Pilate was finished. And he handed Jesus over to be crucified without ever passing sentence on him.

He gave him up to the will of the Jews as it happens. you see, all the way through this story, there is a peculiar ambivalence, something that is, that just, I think, has to hold you totally fascinated.

[13 : 37] First, because Jesus is alone at the beginning of the story. He is alone at the end of the story. He stands outside, outside of everyone and everybody.

He stands utterly and completely alone. And anyone who would have been bold enough to identify themselves with him would have had to have had some kind of super human strength to be able to do it.

But, you see, there are, there's in a sense, three issues that he had to face, or that he forces us to face. He, he was taken by the soldiers, you see, and I think the soldiers, in a sense, represent our culture.

and the soldiers took him and having scourged him, then the robe, then the crown of thorns, then one by one they went up to him and knelt before him and struck him on the face and said, Hail, King of the Jews.

You see, they had to. I'm sure there were soldiers there that would love not to have done it. But their membership in the military, the fact that they were surrounded by their peers, the fact that this was a moment of derision and ridicule, they were compelled to do it.

[15 : 29] It's like teenagers are compelled to wear the same clothes, and like we are compelled to behave the way our culture dictates.

So, soldier after soldier, despite what he may have felt in his own heart, was compelled to go up and offer to Jesus this homage and strike him on the face to ridicule him.

The culture demanded that they ridicule the one whom indeed they should worship. as indeed our culture demands that we ridicule the one whom we should worship.

For in compliance with our culture, we worship what we should ridicule, and we ridicule the one we should worship.

then if you turn to the Jews. Now, the Jews have given to the whole world religion.

[16 : 50] They know what religion is. They know what it means. They know where it comes from, and they're not liable at any point to compromise what has been given to them.

And religion almost always expresses itself just as it does in this story. It comes up to people and says, we have a law, and by that law, you ought to die.

religion condemns and condemns and condemns. You see, these men condemned Jesus with their religion.

We have a law. But do you see what happened? In fact, in condemning Jesus, they were condemning themselves and the religion they professed to believe.

the function of their religion, as was written in the scriptures over and over and over again, that they had read over and over and over again, is that there was a man of softness, that the creator would come to his creation and be crucified.

[18 : 20] The function of religion in that moment was to acknowledge that this is indeed the son of God.

And all religion was able to do was to point to him and say, this is a blasphemer, total failure of religion.

The third level is with Pilate. Now, you see, Pilate, like us, knew better than he could be.

We know better than the demands our culture makes on us, but that doesn't give us freedom to depart from it. And we often know better than our religion teaches us.

We use it as a place to hide from responsibility so often. And Pilate knew better concerning the person of Jesus and said again and again, I find no fault in him.

[19 : 42] But then he was cornered and when he was brought to the test, he had to turn him over to be crucified.

The Jew said you're no friend of Caesar. Caesar. And Pilate might have said, but I have a friend who is greater than Caesar.

I think he knew that. Somebody who stood far above even Caesar. But he couldn't say it.

So he took on himself, as it were, the robes of office and used his role in one of the great civilizations of the world that prided itself on truth and on justice.

And he said, my commitment is ultimately to Caesar. You can take him out and crucify him. you see, that kind of loyalty is the loyalty our civilization demands of us too.

[21 : 18] it's, it's, there's a biography of Thomas Moore in, and there's a book that's just been written and a write-up of it in the Manchester Guardian last week.

And one of the statements of Thomas Moore when he was up against his king, his Caesar.

Thomas Moore was, as you know, condemned and beheaded. But before he was beheaded, he said, I am the king's good servant, but first I am God's.

You see, that was the decision Pilate couldn't make. He said, I may be God's good servant, but first Caesar.

So, the question that leaves us with, you and me, is the question of what happens to us by reason of our involvement in the culture we belong to, the generation which we may pride ourselves in being a part of.

[22 : 57] What happens when that generation cannot but ridicule the person of Jesus? That culture condemns itself.

what happens when we belong to a religion that says, crucify him because we have a law, and by that law he is condemned.

And so misses the whole point and meaning of the revelation which is at the center of that religion. the revelation that would have lifted Jesus up to the worship of all, that religion condemns him.

And if the civilization and the whole structure of our society says, God, yes, but Caesar first, what happens?

Well, the simple fact is that because of that reality, in this story of the condemnation of Jesus, we all stand condemned.

[24 : 28] him. Now, you don't have to go to this story to find that there are those who are quite willing to condemn him. But the uniqueness of being condemned before Jesus is that he is the one who then is prepared to take your condemnation on himself and alone to walk out and be crucified and pray, Father, forgive them for they know not what they did.

You see, with the condemnation that is ours and justly and rightly ours, there comes also the forgiveness from the same source.

There are many sources of condemnation for us. There is one source of forgiveness. Remember that there is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ, in Christ Jesus.

that's the story and we as a church are torn by the fact that Jesus said, no one comes to the Father but by me and no one can so clearly establish our just condemnation and having established it can offer us forgiveness.

And so indeed it is true that no one can come to the Father but by me. And we must hear these words from the Lord Jesus himself.

[26 : 37] amen.