

# He Loved to the End

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[ 0 : 00 ] In John chapter 18, verse 33, that verse that began our reading, scripture reading this morning, Jesus of Nazareth is asked a question that determines whether he lives or whether he dies.

Pilate asks him this question, are you the king of the Jews? It's been about three years since Jesus began his teaching ministry and this is the question that is on everyone's mind.

This is the question that has attracted so much attention to him throughout the land of Palestine. The Jewish authorities, they don't like this attention. They don't like the growing popularity of this rabbi from Galilee.

So they arrest Jesus. They bring Jesus to the Roman governor Pontius Pilate. They tell Pilate that Jesus is a threat to the Roman emperor. That Jesus is making himself out to be a king over the Jewish people.

And so Pilate calls Jesus in for questioning. Pilate looks him over and he sees a seemingly ordinary Jewish man dressed in ordinary clothing.

[ 1 : 13 ] A man covered in cuts and bruises. A man suffering from sleep deprivation. Suffering from violent treatment that he's received at the hands of the Jewish authorities throughout the previous night.

And you can hear the derision in Pilate's voice as he asks, Are you the king of the Jews? Now if you were in Jesus' place, how would you answer that question?

This has been a brutally stressful night of anguished prayer to God of close friends who have betrayed you and abandoned you. Of abuse of authorities, of trials that are designed to condemn you to death.

And now you're standing before the most powerful man in the province of Judea. And your answer to this question determines whether you die or whether you have the opportunity to live.

What do you say to save your own life? Jesus doesn't try to save his own life. Jesus tries to save Pilate's life.

[ 2 : 22 ] When Pilate asks him, Are you the king of the Jews? Jesus answers in John 18 verse 34 with a probing question of his own. Do you say this of your own accord?

Or did others say it to you about me? What Jesus is doing is he's testing Pilate. With a single question, Jesus has now reversed their roles.

And now it is Pilate who is on trial. Is Pilate interested in knowing for himself who Jesus really is? Or is Pilate simply going through the motions of justice as a cynical Roman magistrate?

Well, Pilate replies, Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done? Pilate's reply is meant to carry a tone of ridicule in it.

Am I a Jew? Why should I care whether you're really this king of the Jews? But his defensive answer tells Jesus what he wants to know. That deep down, below all of that cruelty, below all of that cynicism, below all of that political ambition, Pilate really does want to know who Jesus is.

[ 3 : 37 ] Jesus looks at him and he sees in front of him a man that his father has placed in his path. A man that his father has put in front of him as his neighbor.

So Jesus chooses not to defend himself. He chooses not to protect himself. Jesus chooses instead to move toward his neighbor. To move toward this Roman governor in love.

And he says to Pilate in verse 36, My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting that I might not be delivered over to the Jews.

But my kingdom is not from the world. This interrogation, as far as Jesus is concerned, will be conducted on Jesus' terms.

This answer to the question, it gives Pilate the answer to that first question he asked, whether Jesus was a king. The answer is yes. If he has a kingdom, he must be a king. But Jesus is not so much concerned with Pilate's question as he is concerned with offering the truth to Pilate.

[ 4 : 44 ] His kingdom isn't meant to be a kingdom driven by human ambition. It isn't meant to be a political dynasty that challenges the Jewish and Roman authorities. His kingdom is something that Pilate has never encountered before.

But Pilate interrupts him. So you are a king. He is still playing the cynic. But Jesus has captured his attention.

Pilate senses that this is no ordinary insurrectionist. This is no zealot terrorist. This man is not behaving like an ordinary man does. He is not cowering before Pilate.

He is not pleading for his life. He is not defending his innocence. This is a man who is so bold that he has taken control of the questioning. He is speaking to Pilate on his own terms.

He is cutting right through Pilate's public face to the man underneath. And Jesus loves his neighbor. He looks at the man underneath and he loves him.

[ 5 : 45 ] And he knowingly replies in verse 37. Pilate says, Jesus loves his neighbor.

He loves Pontius Pilate. So Jesus tells him that he has come as a better king than Caesar. He has come as a witness to the true character of God.

And he offers Pilate the chance to become his follower. To be born again into a new family. To know God the Father. To experience the oneness with God that Jesus himself knows.

Will Pilate listen to his voice? Will Pilate ask to know the truth? In verse 38, Pilate replies, What is truth?

He pulls his head back into that shell of cynicism. That has protected him for so many years. That has gotten him to where he is. Pilate does want to know who Jesus is. But he is afraid of what it might cost him.

[ 7 : 09 ] Better not to pull on this thread. Better not to find out if Jesus offers a way to solid life-giving truth. Better to live as the old Pilate than to die as a new man.

Pilate is fascinated by Jesus. Pilate even defends Jesus. But Pilate won't open himself up to Jesus. Jesus loves his neighbor, Pilate.

He loves him to the end. But now he knows that Pilate has not been given to him by his Father. He is not of the truth. The next time in chapter 19, verse 9, that Pilate speaks to Jesus.

He asks him, Where are you from? Jesus gives him no answer. And so Jesus is led away to be crucified as an enemy of the state of Rome.

He is condemned as the king of the Jews. He is severely beaten, like an animal, paraded through the city streets, stripped of his clothes, nailed to a cross, elevated as a public spectacle.

[ 8 : 14 ] Four Roman soldiers take his clothes. They play a game of dice to divide up the possessions of a dead man. He is left to suffer, naked and alone, stripped of his dignity, stripped of his humanity and his glory.

The Apostle John writes in chapter 19, verse 25, that standing by the cross of Jesus are his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas and Mary Magdalene.

Jesus is suffering the rejection of his friends, his people, his government, and even his own father.

He is bearing the awful weight of the sin of the world. The evil actions that you and I have committed as we have failed to love our neighbors as Jesus did, failed to love one another in God's family, failed to love God our Father.

Jesus is suffering a greater agony than any human being has ever suffered before or since. But John says in verse 26, that Jesus doesn't descend into a pit of self-pity and self-absorption.

He isn't consumed and controlled by his own suffering. Jesus looks beyond his cross and he sees. He sees his mother. She's standing there in anguish, pierced to the heart, as she watches her son die in misery.

[ 9 : 32 ] And who is going to comfort her? Who is going to care for her? Who is going to provide for her needs in the days to come? Jesus looks and he sees beside her a man that John could only call the disciple whom he loved.

And John is probably referring to himself, his single greatest impression of Jesus. It's how much Jesus loves him. Jesus treats him like his own brother.

And now Jesus asks him to act as his own brother would act. He says to his mother, Woman, behold your son. And in verse 27, he says to the disciple, Behold your mother.

Jesus loves his family. He loves his mother. He makes sure that she has a son who will take her into his home to comfort her, to provide for her on the days to come. And Jesus loves his disciple. On the cross, he reminds them that he is part of God's family now. He is Jesus' brother. He is loved by his father, just as Jesus is. [10:42] So in the middle of his agony, Jesus loves his family. He loves them to the end. And the time of Jesus' death is coming. It's coming much more quickly than anyone standing there would have expected.

Jesus knows what his father sent him to do. His father sent him to reveal who he is, to invite people to turn from their sin, and to embrace a new relationship with God. And Jesus knows that his father sent him to be the man of sorrows, a man who will suffer on behalf of his people, a man who will bear the punishment for their sins. Jesus' ancestor, King David, once wrote about his suffering.

If you were to read it later, it would be Psalm 22, in which David writes, Dogs encompass me. A company of evildoers encircles me. They have pierced my hands and feet. I can count all my bones. They stare and gloat over me. They divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots. And now Jesus experiences all of these things in their final and ultimate form, and he experiences a pain beyond what David could imagine, when in Psalm 69 he wrote, Reproaches have broken my heart, so that I am in despair.

[12:00] I looked for pity, but there was none, and for comforters, but I found none. They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink.

Jesus feels the ache and the madness of that thirst tearing at his mouth, and at his throat, and he cries out, in verse 28, I thirst. The soldiers dip a sponge in a jar of sour wine, and they offer it on a pole for him to drink.

John writes that this isn't an accident. Jesus does this to fulfill the scripture. Jesus does this to be the perfect suffering servant of God.

In the final moments of his life, Jesus has one thing on his mind, to be everything that his father called him to be, to do his will perfectly, to obey him with his whole heart.

Jesus loves his father. He loves him to the end. And after this final act of love for his father, Jesus knows that his love has been made perfect. He has loved his neighbor, even when ridiculed and threatened with death.

[13:12] He has loved his family, even while enduring his own suffering. He has loved his father, even when his father has led him to take on the guilt of sin, and to be punished for it, to free you and me from the penalty that we deserve to receive.

And so Jesus cries out, verse 30, It is finished. He has finished everything that he was meant to do. Jesus has perfectly obeyed his father's will.

He has lived a life that is perfectly right in every way. Perfectly driven, perfectly controlled, by love. And when God looks at you, and when God looks at me, when he looks at people who are united with Jesus Christ, because we have faith in him, when God looks at people like you, and people like me, he sees people who have been made right, like Jesus Christ.

He looks at you and me, and he sees his own son, who loved to the end. Our God and our Father. Amen.