

“Pilate on Trial” John 18: 28-40 Shane Hatfield 5/23/21

Alright, if you’ve got a Bible, open it up to John 18:28. We’re going to continue to study the glorious truths of the gospel that we find in the gospel of John. If you’ll remember, last week we began Jesus’ trials and we studied what scholars call His Jewish trial. He was brought before the Jewish leaders, Annas and Caiaphas. They represented the Jewish people and they brought Jesus before them so that they could try Him, and they found Him guilty of blasphemy. Now they are bringing Him to Pilate, and we’ll look at that today. Last week, we learned that the church is a family of sinners who are saved by grace. It’s not through our religious traditions, it’s not through our religious effort, it’s by God’s grace and mercy alone.

This week, we’re going to study this new trial with Pilate, and before we read the passage, I just want to set the scene for you and let you know what’s going on here. Pilate is the Roman governor over Jerusalem and Judea. When Rome would capture an area, they would install their own governors over those areas who were in charge of implementing Caesar’s rule. So, you’ve got Pilate representing Rome, and then you’ve got Jesus who is the King of Heaven. You have two political leaders coming together in this trial, meeting each other, right? And as you look at Pilate, I want you to imagine that he represents the kings and the kingdoms of this world. You really have the King, and the kingdom of heaven, and the king and kingdoms of this world, meeting right here. What I hope we see as we look at this passage is that Jesus is the great King and the good King, and the kingdom of heaven is greater than all the kingdoms of this world, and that Jesus is making a gracious offer both to Pilate and to the Jews and to us to be a part of His kingdom.

So, let’s read that from John 18:28-40. Hear the word of the Lord:

“<sup>28</sup> Then they led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the governor's headquarters. It was early morning. They themselves did not enter the governor's headquarters, so that they would not be defiled, but could eat the Passover. <sup>29</sup> So Pilate went outside to them and said, “What accusation do you bring against this man?” <sup>30</sup> They answered him, “If this man were not doing evil, we would not have delivered him over to you.” <sup>31</sup> Pilate said to them, “Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law.” The Jews said to him, “It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death.” <sup>32</sup> This was to fulfill the word that Jesus had spoken to show by what kind of death he was going to die.

<sup>33</sup> So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” <sup>34</sup> Jesus answered, “Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?” <sup>35</sup> Pilate answered, “Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?” <sup>36</sup> Jesus answered, “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.” <sup>37</sup> Then Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.” <sup>38</sup> Pilate said to him, “What is truth?”

After he had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, “I find no guilt in him. <sup>39</sup> 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?"<sup>40</sup> They cried out again, "Not this man, but Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a robber."

John said that Jesus did many signs, and He taught many things, but He recorded these things that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, and in Him have life, so let's listen to Him.

Last week, as I introduced the sermon, I talked about the Watergate scandal. There was a man involved in that Watergate scandal called Chuck Colson and in 1969 all of Chuck Colson's dreams came true. He had been working his entire career, trying to get ahead, trying to achieve, trying to climb the political ladder, and finally in 1969, he did it. He became the special counsel to Richard Nixon. But he was one of the henchmen that was involved in the Watergate scandal in 1962. So, as Watergate began to grow and the scandal began to get worse and worse, President Nixon and his advisors had to have a scapegoat. They had to have somebody to blame everything on and so, they fired Colson. He became the scapegoat and they blamed everything on him. So, Colson left Washington D.C., he went back home, and he began his law practice.

One day, he met with a CEO named Tom Phillips and as he met with Tom, what he didn't know before he met with Tom was previously, recently, Tom had been to a Billy Graham crusade and at that Billy Graham crusade Tom had realized that his life was empty and meaningless, and so, he gave his life to Christ. Whenever Chuck Colson came into his office that day, Phillips said, 'I want to tell you the gospel. I want to tell you about Jesus Christ and how He changed my life.' Well, Colson wasn't ready to hear it, and so, he left that day and didn't think anything about it, but as Watergate got worse and worse and worse and the stress on Colson got worse, he began to get more introspective, he began to think more and more about his sins that he had committed in Watergate and how he was a part of this terrible scandal. And so, he called up Phillips and said, 'I want to meet again,' and so he met with Phillips and Phillips pulled out "Mere Christianity" and he read chapter 9 on pride. As Phillips began to read this chapter and Lewis began to describe pride and how pride eats away at you and destroys you and how it causes you to be self-centered and it destroys everything around you, Colson could see how his sin had impacted him and how it had impacted the world. Phillips prayed with him and Colson got into his car and began to drive home. As he began to drive home, the floodgates opened, and he began to cry. He cried so hard that he couldn't drive, so he pulled over to the side of the road and there on the side of the road, he gave his life to Christ. He submitted himself to the Lord.

Gradually, his life changed. Gradually, he tried to incorporate his faith into his work more and more. But Watergate kept getting worse and worse, it became a national scandal, and eventually, he was presented with a plea bargain. They said, 'Look, you can confess to this small crime that you didn't do,' he knew he didn't do it, he said he did a lot of crimes, but he didn't do this one, they said, 'You can confess to this one and it will all be over with,' or you can go to trial for the truth. Colson said, 'I am not going to take the plea bargain. I am going to go to trial and I'm going to confess the truth.' And so, he went to trial knowing he was going to lose, knowing that the truth was going to take him to prison and endanger everyone else that was involved in that scandal. But he told the truth anyway. He was sentenced to three years in prison, but out of that experience in prison he began a prison ministry that shared the gospel with thousands and thousands of people.

Colson's story describes the destructive forces of power and pride and how they destroy us, and how they destroy the world around us, but it also shows the power of the gospel, the power of the grace and the truth of the gospel, to change us, and to change our world. I think it challenges us to think about how we live as Christians. This passage does the same thing, right? This passage challenges us to think about who our king is. Is it Jesus or is it power? Which kingdom do we serve? Do we serve the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of earth? And how will we serve? Will we serve with grace and truth or will we serve with pride and lies? So tonight, what I want you to see is that Jesus' kingdom is a kingdom of grace and truth and when you submit to Him, to His grace and truth, it will transform your life and it will transform our world. So, we're going to look at three things: the grace of the kingdom, the truth of the kingdom, and the challenge of the kingdom.

The first thing I want you to see is the grace of the kingdom. Jesus said in verse 36, "Jesus answered, "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." Okay? So, Jesus' kingdom did not originate here. He did not get His power from anything on earth. He wasn't a good man that made great teachings and people brought Him up to be the king. No, His power, His kingdom, came from heaven. It came from the triune God: the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit who existed before the foundation of the world in love. They created this earth as a home for God's kingdom. But when sin came into the world, the kingdom of heaven was separated from the kingdom of earth, and the whole story of the Bible and the whole story of the Old Testament and Jesus' life and then the New Testament revelation, is about God bringing His kingdom back to earth, and bringing His people back into that kingdom.

This kingdom doesn't originate here on earth, and because it doesn't originate here on earth, the way of this kingdom is different than earth. He describes that here in the middle when He says, "If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting." So, think about it, how is a kingdom established on earth now? And how was it established then? Usually, it's by some military force. It's through war. It's through battle. It's through conflict. If you think back to whenever Jesus was arrested, what did Peter do when Jesus was arrested? He pulled out his sword and he hacked the servant of the high priest over the head with his sword and he cut off his ear. What did Jesus say? He said, "Put your sword away." The sword was symbolic of military power. Jesus said, "Put your sword away," because His kingdom was not going to be established through military power, like the kingdoms of this earth. His kingdom is established through grace and that's what Jesus says here when He says, "that I might not be delivered over to the Jews." See, if His kingdom was of this world, then His servants would have fought with the sword to keep Him from being delivered over, but His kingdom is *not* of this world, and so, His servants did not fight to keep Him from being delivered over, because the very purpose of His existence, was to be delivered, to be given over, to become a suffering servant, to become a sacrificial lamb. Jesus established His kingdom by being condemned and suffering and dying. He established His kingdom, not through the sword, but through the cross.

One of the interesting things about this passage is that the trial of Pilate actually fulfills part of the Old Testament sacrificial system that had to do with the Passover. Passover was the feast that God instituted to celebrate the Jews being liberated from Egypt. As part of the

Passover, they always had a lamb that they would sacrifice. Well, the lamb had to be spotless. We talked about that last week. Now, what's interesting is they would bring the lamb into the house and the lamb would stay in the house for three days and they would observe it to make sure it was spotless. Well, Jesus' ministry was how long? Three years. It was basically a three-year trial of Jesus proving that He was the spotless Lamb, and now He's coming before Pilate to prove that He's the spotless lamb, that He is faultless, to be sacrificed for the Jewish people. That's how Jesus was going to establish His kingdom, not through power, but through His sacrifice.

Jesus said that in Mark 10:45 when He said, "the rulers of the Gentiles, they lord it over them." To lord it over them means to control them with power. "But it's not so among you. Whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant. For even the son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many." So, the way of the kingdom is not to be served, but to serve. The way of the kingdom is not power. Power would say, 'your life for mine.' The way of Jesus' kingdom is my life for yours. It's a way of sacrifice. It's a way of suffering. That's the way Jesus' kingdom was built. It was built on His sacrificial suffering for us and for His people, and that's the way that it's going to expand. It's not going to grow by force and it's not going to grow by power.

In 2008, Tim Keller preached a sermon on this passage, and he said, the Christian church is growing faster than the population growth in South America, Asia, Latin America, and Africa. In America at that time, it was holding steady. The one area of the world where it was not growing faster than the population was Europe. Why is that? What had they tried to do in Europe for hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of years? They tried to establish a state church. They tried to force people based on power to become Christians, and because they did that, it largely failed. It didn't work, right? Because the kingdom of God is not established by power, it is established by grace. It works on a worldwide level, and it works even in your home. Think about it! How do you rule your home? Is it by power and aggression or is it by grace? How do you talk to your kids? Is it their life for yours, or is it your life for theirs? How do you talk to your spouse? Is it your life for mine, or my life for yours? How do you talk to your neighbor? Is it their life for yours, or your life for theirs? The kingdom of God will not expand, it won't grow, the gospel won't go out through power; it'll go out through grace. It'll go out through suffering and sacrifice. That's the first thing we see.

The second thing we see is that Jesus' kingdom is a kingdom of truth. Look at verses 37 and 38. It says, "<sup>37</sup> Then Pilate said to him, 'So you are a king?' Jesus answered, 'You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.'" <sup>38</sup> Pilate said to him, "What is truth?" Truth is reality. Something that's true is accurate with reality. What Jesus is doing here, is He is getting below the behaviors of the kingdom. He's getting below why we behave the way we do, and He's getting down into our core beliefs, our core desires, our aspirations. He's saying He came to bear witness, not just to what's going on, on the surface, but what is going on in the heart. Jesus talked a lot about truth. He said that He *is* truth. He says that He gives the spirit of truth. He referred to the Bible as truth. He said that true worshippers are going to worship Him in spirit and truth. He said that to be a follower of Him you have to *do* truth. For Jesus, truth wasn't just material, it was spiritual, but it was no less real.

We have this sort of presupposition in our world that for something to be true, it has to be a measurable, concrete, material thing. We think about things like, if I can't measure it then it must not be true. Now, what's the problem with that statement? Can you measure that statement? No. So, is that statement true? No. Then it's not true. So, if that were true that if you can't measure it, it's not true, then that very statement would refute itself. But what Jesus is saying is that there is a real, true spiritual world underneath everything around us that is definitive and objective and tangible that we can believe in, and He, Himself is the very evidence of that. He is truth.

Okay, I'm going to give a two- or three-minute philosophy lesson and it may bore you, okay? But I found it fascinating. Maybe it will help you, okay? So, if you're like, why is he talking about this, then, that's why, because I think it's going to be helpful. So, Jesus' view of truth would have been radically different than Pilate's view of truth, and oh, by the way, I'm getting this from Pastor James Montgomery Boice, just saying, this is not Shane. This is Shane researching it and sharing it with you. But Pilate would have had a Greek view of truth and a Greek view of truth would have come from Plato, and Plato would have said, we can't just talk about truth in the abstract. We have to talk about the particulars, but those particulars have to come from an ideal, so for instance, Plato would say we can't just talk about the details of a chair without saying there's an ideal chair out there someplace and we have to measure this chair up against the ideal chair. And so, for Greeks, the ideal chair came from the gods, but what was the problem with that? Where do the gods get their ideal of the chair? So, Plato tried to go backwards in time to get to the ultimate source of these ideals, to get to the ultimate source of truth, but he could never find it.

So, what happened to the Greeks? They eventually turned into the Stoics, and the Stoics said, well, there is no truth. We can't really know it. So, whatever is going on in life, we've just got to grin and bear it. We can't show any emotions or any feeling about it. Well, that didn't work very well, so what happened then? Then came along the Epicureans and the Epicureans said, well, the Stoic way of truth is unnatural. It's unauthentic. Whatever feels good, that's what's true. So, the Epicureans did whatever felt good. But that wasn't enough either, and soon enough you had the Mystics come along. The Mystics said, no, there's this world outside of the world that we can see, and we can't know it, but we've just got to believe it, and so, they sort of believed in blind faith.

All of that sort of synthesizes and you got to this guy named Hegel and Hegel came along in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and a lot of the views that we actually have about truth actually came from Hegel, however you say it. I'm country. I can't say anything right. It's German. Somebody who knows German could probably tell us how to say it better, but anyways, Hegel basically said that truth is evolutionary, that one person has a thesis, and so, one person takes the opposite thesis and over time they come together and they form a truth, and then that becomes the dominant truth, and then somebody takes an opposing view and over time they come together and so, truth just evolves.

Now, what is the problem? Ya'll are probably dizzy thinking about all of that like I am explaining it. What is the problem with all of those different truths that have changed over time? Imagine if your truth changed like that! Would you have anything stable? Would you have

anything concrete? Would you have any anchor for your soul? Would you have any sanity for your mind? No! You'd be depressed and anxious and frustrated and confused and then you would see oppression and depression and then you would tell a mountain's worth of lies to cover it all up. Does that sound like any culture we know? It sounds like our current culture, doesn't it?

What Jesus offers us is a truth that doesn't change. It's a truth that is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable because it comes from an infinite, eternal, and unchangeable God. It offers us a place of security, honesty, and hope. Whenever Colson told his lawyers and his wife that he was going to tell the truth in the Watergate trial, they thought he was crazy, absolutely crazy, but Colson trusted the God of the Bible with the truth. Do we? Do you trust God with the truth about your reputation? Do you trust Him with the truth about how you raise your family? Do you trust Him with the truth about your search browser on your computer? Do you trust Him with the truth about your bank account? Jesus says that you can trust Him with the truth. He says it's the truth that will set you free. The truth set Colson free and the truth will set us free as well. Not only does it set us free, but it gives us an objective way to evaluate our beliefs and our ideas.

I had a couple over for dinner last night, and we were talking about the consequences of beliefs and ideas. Beliefs and ideas matter! What you believe matters. It will shape the way you live and interact with your neighbors and your family and your friends. If we want to see our lives transformed and the gospel go out and people's lives changed, then we have to interact with the truth of Jesus and let it transform us and let people see that. I heard a story about a pastor once, and the pastor was speaking to a large group, and afterwards, a lady came up to him and she said, 'You know, I can't figure you out. You believe in all these conservative traditional views like the inerrancy of the Bible and original sin and the necessity of justification and this traditional view of sexuality. You have all these conservative views, but you also have all these liberal views! You believe in equality and justice and helping the poor and the orphan and the widow and so, I can't figure out, are you a conservative that's becoming a liberal? Are you a liberal that's becoming a conservative?' He said, 'Well, I'm not any of those. I'm something totally different. I'm a Christian,' and began explaining the Bible to her, and he began explaining the gospel to her. That's where people begin to change. They begin to change in relationships. You and I change in relationship to the truth about Jesus Christ and the gospel. Our friends, our families, our neighbors, they are not going to change in the abstract. They are going to change through a person to person encounter with you.

The Kingdom is a kingdom of grace and it's a kingdom of truth, and it's there in this grace and truth that we find the challenge of the kingdom, and that's the last thing we see here. "After he had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, "I find no guilt in him. <sup>39</sup> 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?" <sup>40</sup> They cried out again, "Not this man, but Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a robber." Jesus' answer challenged Pilate. Essentially, Jesus was saying, 'Who are you going to serve? Are you going to serve the people? Are you going to serve Caesar? Are you going to serve your own power, your own pride or are you going to serve me? And how are you going to serve? Are you going to serve through power and prestige or are you going to serve through grace and truth?' Pilate had Jesus right there in front of him and he didn't take it.

Notice that Pilate wants to talk about politics, what does Jesus want to talk about? He wants to get to his soul. He wants to talk to what's going on in his heart. He wants to talk to him about truth, and Pilate totally missed it. Instead of exploring the truth of Jesus and the truth of the kingdom, he tries to look for a political solution. He says, 'You can have Jesus or Barabbas,' and they picked Barabbas. Because Pilate knows Jesus is innocent, he's trying to get himself off the hook and it just doesn't work. One pastor said, "Having failed to acknowledge the truth, Pilate is in the power of the lie." Why didn't he investigate the truth? Was he critical, was he cynical or was he curious? He had a chance, but he didn't take it. This is a challenge for us. If you are not sure what to think about Jesus, He is asking you personal questions. He is coming for your heart. Don't just keep Him away with your politics and all those things. Jesus wants your heart. He is asking you what you believe about Him. He is asking you what you are going to do with your sin. How are you going to find freedom? Listen to Him. Read the Bible. Hear His defense. He is the Lord of the universe and He loves you. So, there's Pilate.

And then you have to look at the Jewish people, right? Pilate's actions challenge the Jewish people. They had to ask: who are we going to serve? Are we going to serve Jesus? Is He going to be our king or are we going to serve Barabbas? They chose Barabbas. Do you know why they chose Barabbas? Because he led an insurrection. He was a political rebel. What they really wanted was not a Savior of their souls, but a political power to save them. That's what they really wanted, and I'm afraid all too often, that's what we want too. We're looking for political solutions to spiritual problems, and it won't work. In a book called "Seculosity," David Zahl, it's really, really insightful, but he says that our politics now are not just a set of political beliefs, they become an identity. They become a way we see ourselves in relation to the world. They become the story we adopt to make sense of everything around us, and that's why more and more people are defining themselves and their relationships based on their political identification, and not based on Jesus. Even Christians! What Jesus offers us is so much more than just a set of political beliefs and political ideas. He offers us an identity that frees us. He offers us a new identity that is based on grace and mercy and truth, and not based on politics.

That's what Colson found. He found an entirely new identity, and that's what Jesus is offering us. It's an identity. The question is, will we submit to Him? Will we serve Him? Will He be our King? Will we operate based on grace and truth, or will we operate based on power and pride? I'm afraid that all too often, I try to rule my house based on power and not on grace and that I adopt the ways of this world and not the ways of the kingdom. The good news of the gospel is that Jesus paid for my sins and He paid for your sins too. And we see that with Barabbas, right? In this passage, if you look at who we are, we are Barabbas. We're the ones who have robbed God of His glory and His power and His prestige. We're the ones who should be convicted and sent to the cross. But instead of us being sent to the cross, Jesus is sent to the cross for us. Do you know what Barabbas' name means? Barabbas' name means 'son of the Father.' Isn't that a great picture of the gospel? You have Jesus, the eternal son of the Father, who comes to earth to live the life that we should have lived, and die the death that we should have died so that guilty sons and daughters of the Father could be saved and could go free.

In the Passover tradition, they would always bring two lambs to the temple. They would take one lamb and the priest would put the sins of the people on the lamb and that lamb would go be sacrificed to pay for the sins of the people, and they would take another lamb, and they would

pray for the sins of the people on that lamb and they would let that lamb go free, and that was called the scapegoat. Jesus fulfills both of those things. He is both the lamb that took our sins to the cross and paid for them, and He was the lamb that took our sins and escaped, so that we could escape and go free. If your power and your pride, or your sin, or your politics, or whatever it is, if it has enslaved you, Jesus has paid for that. He has taken that sin, so that you could go free. If you're trapped in lies like Pilate, Jesus can free you. If you're trapped looking for an earthly king like the Jews, Jesus can free you. If you are sitting in the dungeon of your sin and you have no idea how you can escape, Jesus can free you. The truth will set you free. Let's pray that He would do it. Please pray with me.