

John 18.28-38 Sermon / COB / 04.12.15

Introduction

† **[Slide 1: title]** When we are done here today, I am on vacation, so this sermon is going to be short!

- Jack Crans will be with you next week. It will be the first Sunday service I am absent since coming here twenty-two months ago! We were planning to come back on Saturday, but we are visiting friends who are in ministry, and when people visit us we really want them to come experience our church, so we decided to honor our friends the same way.

† In the spirit of starting my vacation before noon, let's jump right into the biblical text. We begin today in John 18.28. As you turn there, let me remind you of what has been happening.

- Jesus and his apostles enjoyed the Passover supper together. After Judas Iscariot left to betray Jesus to the religious leaders, Jesus talked and prayed with the other apostles. Then they left the city and went across the Kidron Valley to the olive grove called Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives, where Jesus prayed some more.
- Judas brought officials from the religious leaders to arrest Jesus, backed by Roman soldiers. Jesus gave himself up peacefully, and was brought, bound, to face Annas, the still influential former High Priest, and then Caiaphas, the official High Priest. All this – which we have been discussing for months! – all this happened Thursday evening and night.

[Slide 2: 18.28] John 18.28a NET: **Then they** [the Jewish religious leaders] **brought Jesus from Caiaphas to the Roman governor's residence. (Now it was very early morning.)**

† Pilate was appointed as the Roman governor, or prefect, about seven years earlier, in AD26. His capital was in the port city of Caesarea, but he came to Jerusalem for the religious festivals, to be on hand in case of trouble. As you can imagine, religious festivals which drew thousands of Jews from all over the empire easily could lead to riots against the foreign oppressor, which was Rome.

- Pilate might have stayed with the troops in the fortress of Antonia, north of the Temple, but I think he probably stayed in the palace former king Herod had built in the upper city.

† The Greek term translated as “early morning” here literally meant 3-6am. It's possible that the Jewish religious leaders brought Jesus to Pilate before dawn, since Roman leaders were known to start the day early and be done with work by noon [just like me today!].

[Slide 3: 18.28b] John 18.28b: **They** [the Jewish religious leaders] **did not go into the governor's residence so they would not be ceremonially defiled, but could eat the Passover meal.**

† The Mosaic Covenant between God and the Jews contained many holiness requirements and rituals which determined whether a person could come close to God during religious festivities. By Jesus' day, the Pharisees had added many of their own rules.

- So the religious leaders thought that if they went into Gentile's [or non-Jew's] residence, they would be defiled, unclean, and that would prevent them from taking part in Passover activities that day.

- † Think about the irony here! The religious leaders were avoiding ritual contamination so they could participate in religious activities during Passover, but meanwhile they were blatantly sinning against God by manipulating the justice system to secure the death of an innocent man. What kind of sense was that? Jesus had told them before that they cleaned the outside but left their insides dirty.
 - **[Slide 4: Passover]** This is all the worse because this innocent man was Jesus, who as the Messiah was the true Passover sacrifice. What do I mean by that?
 - Passover was a festival celebrating God's deliverance during the exodus. God decreed that all the first born sons in Egypt would die in one night, but the Jewish families could be delivered from this death by the blood of a sacrificial lamb, which they would spread over their front doorway as a covering.
 - God told them afterward to celebrate this deliverance every year with a meal of a sacrificial lamb. This is the meal the religious leaders didn't want to miss by becoming defiled in Pilate's residence.
 - But when we first started studying in the gospel of John, we heard John the Baptist proclaim that Jesus was the Lamb of God [1.29, 36] who takes away the sin of the world. You see, God had told the Jews to celebrate Passover because it was symbolic of the deliverance God was going to bring through the blood of Christ, our ultimate sacrificial lamb.
- † Now, those of you who have been paying attention might be wondering how it is that Jesus and his apostles ate the Passover meal for *Thursday* supper while these religious leaders were looking forward to that meal on *Friday*. If you do the devotion this week, you will learn why!

[Slide 5: 18.29-30] John 18.29-30: So Pilate came outside to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?" They replied, "If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you."

- † Pilate was known for fiercely putting down Jewish rebellions, so many Jews hated him. In turn, he had little respect for the Jewish religious authorities, as we will see.
 - But to keep peace among the locals, Pilate accepted certain realities, like the Jewish religious leaders not coming inside. So he went out to confront them.
- † Pilate already knew their accusation. He let the religious leaders take Roman troops to help with Jesus' arrest, so they must have told him their story, that Jesus was a revolutionary who claimed to be king of the Jews.
 - So imagine you are one of the Jewish religious leaders in this moment: You know that Pilate already knows the accusation and that you already had your own trial, plus Pilate did grant your request for troop support, and he is a busy man with pressing concerns, so would you not expect him to rubber stamp your verdict against Jesus without any hassle? Sure...
 - So when Pilate asked what accusation the religious leaders were bringing against Jesus, it was like a slap in the face. He was going to disdainfully ignore their trial and start his own inquiry. They understood the implication that he put little value on their authority and procedures. And so they reacted here a little sullenly. As we read on, we will see political posturing on both sides, as both seek to intimidate and manipulate the other.

- Besides taking the opportunity to poke at the Jewish leaders, Pilate probably wanted to understand what was going on. He was not stupid: he would be asking himself why the Jewish leaders, who hated him and Roman rule, were prosecuting someone for rising up against Rome.

[Slide 6: 18.31-32] John 18.31-32: Pilate told them, “Take him yourselves and pass judgment on him according to your own law!” The Jewish leaders replied, “We cannot legally put anyone to death.” (This happened to fulfill the word Jesus had spoken when he indicated what kind of death he was going to die.)

- † Your translation might literally say “The Jews” in v.31, but remember that is how John sometimes referred to the Jewish religious leaders, and it was they who brought Jesus to Pilate.
- † Under the Roman system, local authorities – in this case, the religious leaders in the Sanhedrin council – dealt with minor offenses and religious matters, while the Romans dealt with major cases.
 - As was their custom throughout the empire, the Romans reserved for themselves the right to execute prisoners. So the Jewish religious leaders were not legally allowed to execute Jesus, because only the Romans could judge in the case of a major crime deserving a death sentence.
 - But the Jewish religious leaders had been plotting a long time to have Jesus put to death, that’s why they arrested him and why they were here in front of Pilate on a very holy day.
 - The fact that Pilate seemed willing to let the Jewish religious leaders handle this situation shows that either he was posturing for some advantage in the discussion or he did not take seriously their accusation that Jesus was a revolutionary with claims to the throne.
- † In v.32, John reminds us that all this played into God the Father’s plan, which Jesus had revealed in prophecy. Multiple times in this gospel, we have heard Jesus imply that he would be crucified.
 - If the Romans were to put Jesus to death, it would be by crucifixion, as they preferred this cruel and public method of execution for non-Romans.
 - If the Jewish leaders had killed Jesus, however, they would have followed the instructions of their scriptures and thus killed Jesus by stoning. Then our symbol would be a stone, not a cross! Not as pretty right? It is ironic that today we consider the cross to be beautiful as a symbol of Christ when it originally symbolized the most gruesome death the Romans had contrived.
 - So to fulfill God’s plan as revealed in prophecy, Jesus must be unjustly condemned not only by the Jewish religious leaders, but also by the Romans.

[Slide 7: 18.33] John 18.33: So Pilate went back into the governor's residence, summoned Jesus, and asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?”

- † All major English translations phrase Pilate’s question this way, and it is a correct translation of the Greek, but it ignores two indications of emphasis in the Greek text [word order and the superfluous pronoun]. It would be better to read Pilate’s question as, “**You are the king of the Jews?**”
 - Since we see throughout this passage that Pilate does not find any reason to condemn Jesus, probably his tone here is incredulous. Jesus is just a normal looking fellow, dressed humbly, not snarling or fighting against the ropes that bind him, having given himself up peacefully.

- Pilate certainly would have doubted Jesus was a king, but more to the point he found it incredible that the religious leaders were making this accusation against the man standing before him, who showed no pretensions of monarchy or rebellion. The accusation seemed so trumped up it offended Pilate to be dragged into the affair.
- This reminds me of something that happened when I was about eleven and my sister was about eight. You know how it is with siblings, we were always teasing and poking each other, even though we loved each other. One day, I made her so angry that she punched me, but we were sitting on the floor and somehow she hit me in the knee and hurt her hand. So she went running to my father, crying, “Daddy, Daddy, Billy just kneed me in the fist!” It was so ridiculous an accusation, that even she started laughing while she continued crying.

[Slide 8: 18.34-35] John 18.34-35: Jesus replied, “Are you saying this on your own initiative, or have others told you about me?” Pilate answered, “I am not a Jew [or I am not *Jewish*], am I? Your own people and your chief priests handed you over to me. What have you done?”

- † Pilate thought all this was some Jewish religious squabble. He was not Jewish, so he had no real interest in the affair, other than to understand what the religious leaders were up to.
 - He also had no knowledge of this affair except what the religious leaders had told him. So Pilate hoped Jesus would shed some light on what he had done to offend his own religious leaders.

[Slide 9: 18.36] John 18.36: Jesus replied, “My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my servants would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jewish authorities. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.”

- † Pilate would have received the report that Jesus turned himself in peacefully and stifled Peter’s aggression before anyone else could get involved. This was evidence that Jesus was not relying on violence and other worldly means to accomplish worldly goals.
 - Jesus said, “**My kingdom is not of this world,**” meaning it is not *sourced* in this world, it is not *of the type characterized* in this world. His words appeased Pilate, but what do they really mean?
 - This world is created, fallen and rebellious, dependent on sinful violence and manipulation, to pursue fleshly goals. You know this is true, right? We have to look out for number one, learn how to get ahead, do what it takes to provide. That’s how the world works and even believers find ourselves corrupted in our thinking, such that we live on the bottom line by the flesh.
 - In contrast, Jesus’ Messianic kingdom, the kingdom of God, is top line all the way; it is eternal and transcendent, righteous and representative of God, dependent on nothing but the will of God, while presently relying on methods such as lovingly sharing the gospel of truth and grace. It is a different kind of kingdom.
 - Even so, we should note what Pilate surely missed: that this kingdom was a far bigger threat to Roman culture and rule than any other. Even after Jesus departed to Heaven, he would, through his followers, without violence or manipulation, change the world and build his own people into the greatest number of any king in history.

[Slide 10: 18.37-38] John 18.37-38: Then Pilate said, “So you are a king!” Jesus replied, “You say that I am a king. For this reason I was born, and for this reason I came into the world— to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” Pilate asked, “What is truth?” When he

had said this he went back outside to the Jewish leaders and announced, “I find no basis for an accusation against him.”

- † Some translations imply Jesus was saying Pilate was correct to say he was a king, but to me it looks more like Jesus said, **“You yourself say that I am a king.”**
 - In any case, his main point follows: **“I have been born for this and for this I have come into the world: [namely] that I might testify to the truth.”** It is true that Jesus is a king, and it is true – though unknown to Pilate – that Jesus will return to rule Israel and through Israel over the whole world. But his purpose for his first visit was to testify to the truth, especially the gospel truth, and part of his testimony was to fulfill that truth through his death and resurrection.
- † Pilate did not realize who Jesus really was, but he did realize Jesus was innocent under Roman law, and that the religious leaders were trying to manipulate him to make Jesus their victim. He would rather spurn them than succumb to their manipulation, so he bluntly told them he found no basis for an accusation against Jesus.
- † Theologically, that is significant. Jesus really was the ultimate unblemished Passover sacrificial lamb, he really was the only sinless human being who therefore was qualified as a sacrifice on our behalf.
 - At the Exodus, the original sacrificial Passover lamb had to be without blemish or fault to provide deliverance from physical death. As the ultimate sacrificial Passover Lamb, Jesus the sinless man provides deliverance from physical death, but also from sin and spiritual death.
 - The religious leaders could not find sin in Jesus, so they trumped up charges against him; Pilate also found no fault in Jesus. He was without sin and thus, in God’s plan, he could die for our sin.
- † **[Slide 11: blank]** In his response to Jesus, Pilate might have been reflective **“What is truth?”** ... or he might have been sarcastic **“What is truth?”** ... but he certainly was dismissive. As an arrogant Roman leader, he was not about to get into a serious philosophical discussion with an accused Jew. And so he revealed he was not a person of the truth.
- † We, however, should engage in this discussion.
 - Are we the people of the truth, is God’s revelation in scripture truth for us, indeed is Jesus himself the very truth of God, as he claimed earlier in this gospel [14.6]?
 - Do we acknowledge Jesus is the Messiah-savior prophesied to come, the one we call Christ who was crucified for our sins?
 - Do we believe Jesus is the divine Son of God not just a man?
 - Do we recognize Jesus as God’s chosen King in the line of David, and therefore that Jesus is the lord over us?
 - If we answer “yes,” then how should we live? what purpose should we have in life? what impact should we seek to make on the world?
- † If Jesus is who he claimed to be, should we not really seek to follow him in all things? Should we not obey him in all aspects of life?

- Sometimes we don't try very hard; sometimes we choose to willfully sin in certain areas of life; sometime we even gleefully post about our sins on Facebook, which probably is not very bright, especially if we are "friends" with a pastor.
 - If Jesus is who he claimed to be, should we not really seek to follow him in all things? Should we not obey him in all aspects of life? Should we not experience transformation of our character and thus our life to become more like him?
- † If Jesus is who he claimed to be, and if we are people of the truth, should we not carry out the purposes God gave his people in scripture?
- Should not our highest goal each day be to glorify God by reflecting God's character and representing God and Christ our king to others?
 - Should we not seek to do what they ask and then trust them with everything else? Should we not accept the gospel mission as our own?
- † If Jesus is who he claimed to be and we are his people, should not we have more impact on the world than the world has on us? We are always struggling against the world's influence on us, but should we not be a greater influence on the world?
- Should we not put away our violent video games and sexy videos? should we not boycott media and politicians promoting ideas offensive to biblical morality? should we not vocally prosecute every political act of corruption and every business who flouts the law?
 - When my grandfather died, he left me something like forty-one shares in some obscure energy company. I had never heard of it, so eventually I sold it off. A few weeks ago, I read that company was indicted for doing business in Iran! If I had not already sold the shares, I certainly would have then. I don't want anything to do with a company that puts profit ahead of morality, safety, law, and national policy. That's not who I am. When I get to Heaven, Jesus isn't going to be concerned about how much money I made, he is going to ask how I lived.
 - I talked with Dan and Jesse about this this week. If we take moral stands like this, we might find that on some issues we are struggling against the tide. I think that is ok. And I am not asking you to boycott every food produced by a company that gives benefits to homosexual couples. That's not our fight.
 - But should it not be our fight to offer hope and love to the needy? to ensure opportunity and fair play in the marketplace? to encourage reforms in our justice system and government? At the Point banquet last night, Duane gave an autobiographical sketch of his life. When he was a teenager and young adult, his life looked hopeless in human terms, but God chose to invest in him, and God chose to invest in him through people of the truth, the body of Christ; and the result was not just the salvation and transformation of one man, but through him the salvation and transformation of many. That is our mission!
- † One more set of questions. If Jesus is who he claimed to be and we are his people, why is this country sinking into a moral and cultural abyss? I think I know the answer: part of it is that there is evil and corruption at work in the world, but part is that we don't live as though we really believe.
- We Christians have become passive and tolerant of sin, sometimes even willingly joining in to enjoy worldly things and ways. We choose to walk in the shadows, not the light, we try to have God and a worldly life too, we think we can straddle the fence between the top line and the

bottom, but that is a deception, so we become tasteless salt, dim light, offering no proof to the skeptical world or our skeptical children that Jesus is real, that he is real in us. If Christians do not experience transformation in character that leads to transformation in life, then we have zero credibility for Christ, and so instead of bringing him glory, we cover his name in shame.

- † Fortunately, it is never too late to turn this around; individually and as a church, we can have an impact for Christ. Today we will take communion. Let us confess our sins, repent of our worldly ways, commit to submit to Christ in all things, and allow our king and savior to empower us and transform us, so that we experientially become what he has declared us to be: his people.