

John 18.39-19.16a Sermon / COB / 04.26.15

Introduction

- † **[Slide 1: P52]** Last week, I had the opportunity to sit where you sit, out in the pews for a worship service in Oak Lawn, Illinois. I sat right in the center on the aisle, where I would be sure to attract the eye of the Senior Pastor, and when it came time for his sermon, I steadfastly refused to smile or offer any other encouragement! You see, I want to understand you all, your mindset.
- What I found remarkable was how often people laughed during the sermon, though the pastor was not that funny! They must love him and he must understand well how to effectively communicate with his congregation. I hope you and I relationally grow in that regard.
 - I was happy to see my friends worship and serve in that good church. But I did miss y'all! I missed you during the week, and it was an odd feeling to realize, as the sermon began out there, that you were already done here, and I was absent. I didn't like it! I wanted to be with you! Enough mushy stuff. Let us pray and then we will return to our narrative about Jesus...
- † I was remiss two weeks ago, when we were talking about John 18, for I forgot to tell you that the oldest New Testament fragment we have found contains this passage! It is called P52. It contains John 18.31-33 on the front and 18.37-38 on the back. It was found in Egypt and has been dated by experts to about AD125. It now is housed in the John Rylands Library in Manchester, England.
- † Today we will start in John 18.39. You should recall that, after holding their own trial to condemn Jesus, the Jewish religious leaders brought Jesus to face the Roman governor, Pilate, because they wanted Jesus to be legally executed.
- There was no love lost between Pilate and these religious leaders, so Pilate held his own inquiry. After talking with Jesus and sparring with the religious leaders, Pilate proclaimed that he found no basis for an accusation against Jesus. Now we pick up the scene in progress in John 18.39...

[Slide 2: 18.39-40] **John 18.39-40 NET:** [Pilate speaking to the Jewish religious leaders] **“But it is your custom that I release one prisoner for you at the Passover. So do you want me to release for you the king of the Jews?” Then they shouted back, “Not this man, but Barabbas [Βαραββᾱς]!”** [Try saying this with me, Βαραββᾱς! when you read, do you say Βαραββᾱς or Ba-RAB-bas? Which do you prefer?] **(Now Barabbas was a revolutionary.)**

- † Having found no basis for an accusation against Jesus, Pilate should have set him free, but instead he engaged in this banter with the Jewish religious leaders. Why? We don't know.
- I told you before that we would see political posturing between Pilate and the religious leaders, as each tried to manipulate and intimidate the other, so perhaps Pilate wanted them to ask for Jesus to be set free, even after he mockingly referred to Jesus as their “king.”
- † **[Slide 3: Mark]** Instead of asking for Jesus, the religious leaders yelled for the release of Barabbas. The Greek word ληστής can mean “robber” or “revolutionary guerilla.” So which was he?
- Let's take a look at the information in **Mark 15.7 NET: A man named Barabbas was imprisoned with rebels who had committed murder during an insurrection.**

- So there are two ironies regarding this choice to free Barabbas or Jesus . First, the name Barabbas means “son of the father,” while Jesus actually is the divine Son of God the Father.
- The second irony is that the religious leaders were calling for the execution of Jesus, based on their accusation that he was a revolutionary, while they called for release of Barabbas who really was a revolutionary. Surely even Pilate perceived this irony.

[Slide 4: 19.1-3] John 19.1-3: Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged severely. The soldiers braided a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they clothed him in a purple robe. They came up to him again and again and said, “Hail, king of the Jews!” And they struck him repeatedly in the face.

- † I confess that until this month, I thought “hail” was a verbal form of worship, I guess because of the German version which Nazis used to shout at Hitler; but all “hail” really means is “greetings.”
 - The soldiers were acting with typical pagan cruelty. They dressed Jesus up in a crown and robe to mock his supposed royalty. More harshly, they were taking turns pretending to greet him as a king and then slapping him in the face. The Greek verb form suggests they were doing this repeatedly. But that was not the worst Jesus suffered.
- † The Romans had three kinds of whippings: the worst kind, for those sentenced to death, was so fierce that it often left the accused dead before he could be executed; there was a less brutal version for those convicted of serious crimes which did not carry the death penalty, and there was a still less brutal – but still brutal – version for those convicted of lesser crimes.
 - Before Jesus went to the cross, he suffered the worst kind, the kind that could leave your muscles in shreds and your bones exposed. How many of you saw Mel Gibson’s movie *The Passion of the Christ*? That movie is so graphically violent for so long that it leaves you in shock just to watch; so you can imagine what it was like to experience the actual beating.
 - Jesus suffered that kind of flogging before going to the cross; but I don’t think that is what John describes here. If we harmonize the four gospel accounts, it seems the most brutal flogging was still to come. So in this instance, the Romans gave Jesus a “light” whipping; brutal enough by our standards, certainly extremely painful, but not to the point of leaving him for dead; not yet.

[Slide 5: 19.4-5] John 19.4-5: Again Pilate went out and said to the Jewish leaders, “Look, I am bringing him out to you, so that you may know that I find no reason for an accusation against him.” So Jesus came outside, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, “Look, here is the man!”

- † I think Pilate figured a whipping would suffice and then he could set Jesus free. No doubt he was perfectly willing to whip an innocent non-Roman citizen if it meant keeping peace during the religious festival. So Pilate had Jesus whipped and then again told the religious leaders that he found no basis for an accusation against Jesus.
- † Then Pilate presented Jesus to the Jewish religious leaders again, saying “Behold, the man!” There Jesus stood, bloody, dirty, swollen and bruised, maybe barely conscious, wearing the mocking purple robe and crown of thorns.
 - Remember from our last sermon, that Pilate thought the accusation against Jesus was ludicrous; he did not think Jesus was a rebel or someone claiming to be a king.

- Now Pilate was saying, “Behold, here he is, the one you said was a threat! See, he is no threat, I have made him harmless and ridiculous. And – for whatever real reason you hate him so – I have made him suffer.”

[Slide 6: 19.6-7] John 19.6-7: When the chief priests and their officers saw him, they shouted out, “Crucify him! Crucify him!” Pilate said, “You take him and crucify him! Certainly I find no reason for an accusation against him!” The Jewish leaders replied, “We have a law, and according to our law he ought to die, because he claimed to be the Son of God!”

- † I think Pilate is showing frustration and sarcasm here. He would not really let them break Roman law to carry out their own death sentence against Jesus; but all along he has been telling them that they should take care of this situation without involving him, that it was ridiculous to bring it to him. Now they repeatedly are rejecting his verdict, which further angers him.
- † From the religious leaders we see here both the cause and the depth of their hatred for Jesus.
 - They hated Jesus *enough* to want him crucified. This was the cruelest form of punishment in the Roman Empire, it provided a very painful suffering before death.
- † **[Slide 7: circles]** They hated Jesus *because* he claimed to be the divine Son of God.
 - A king of Israel, as God’s ultimate representative on Earth, might be called “*a* son of God.” Under the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic covenants which God had made with Israel, the Jews were to be God’s people, representing God and reflecting his character to the other nations, and their king – as he ruled over the people – would reflect God’s character and represent God even more, reflecting the image of God like a loyal son reflects his father.
 - But Jesus went beyond all that: He claimed to be *the* Son of God; he not only claimed to be the promised Messiah-king, he claimed that he was divine along with God the Father.
 - The Jews did not understand God to be triune in nature. They believed in the one true God, but Jesus was revealing that God was Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each distinct in personalities and actions, but completely unified in essence, character, and will.
 - The religious leaders refused that teaching and they refused to believe Jesus was the Messiah or the Son of God; they thought his teaching was blasphemy, speaking falsely about God, and so he should die, as written in their scriptures.

[Slide 8: 19.6-7] John 19.8-11: When Pilate heard what they said, he was more afraid than ever, and he went back into the governor's residence and said to Jesus, “Where do you come from?” But Jesus gave him no answer. So Pilate said, “Do you refuse to speak to me? Don't you know I have the authority to release you, and to crucify you?” Jesus replied, “You would have no authority over me at all, unless it was given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of greater sin.”

- † If Pilate was afraid, he probably reacted with anger and mounting frustration. This is the first we have seen that Pilate has fear, so I am not sure what exactly John was saying. Maybe that Pilate felt more fear than ever before.

- The Romans generally were superstitious people. Most of them believed in many gods who might have malicious intentions toward people. Many also believed in what they called “divine men,” who had magical, seemingly divine, powers.
- When he heard Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, Pilate might have wondered if Jesus was one of these “divine men,” who obviously would not be very pleased about Pilate having him beaten and whipped for no good reason, even after being found innocent of all charges!

† **[Slide 9: sovereignty]** When Jesus finally spoke in this scene, he said two profound things. First he said, **“You would have no authority over me at all, unless it was given to you from above.”** Two weeks ago, in our adult development class, we asked the question: are these events driven by human free will or God’s sovereign plan?

- We know these events could not have been driven entirely by human free will, because in that case God would be merely reacting to human decisions, which would mean he had no plan in this situation, and the crucifixion was just an afterthought, not part of God’s plan at all.
- But we know there must be some human free will involved, for if the religious leaders were not sinning by condemning Jesus and trying to get him killed, then it would have to be the case that Jesus himself really was guilty, that he had sinned when he claimed to be the divine Son of God.
- So as we said two weeks ago, there is both God’s sovereign plan and human free will at play here. Jesus knew that the religious leaders were sinning and thus carrying out Satan’s evil plan to rid the world of Jesus, but he also knew that all their actions were playing into God’s eternal plan to bring Jesus to the cross so as to offer salvation through his sacrifice. God had placed Pilate into this position for this very event. That’s how detailed was God’s plan.
- Jesus could be at peace about it all, even while he suffered, because he knew of God’s foreknowledge and control over events. Though none of us is the Son of God, nor are we divine, nor are we completely perfect and selfless, isn’t there something here for us too? that we also can have peace, by reflecting on God being both omniscient [which means all-knowing] and omnipotent [which means all powerful]?
- So when we are suffering, we can know that God is aware, that he is in control, and we also know from previous passages, that he loves us and will empower us to endure, to come through the trial stronger than before, if we cling to him.
- I asked Celia if she would help me illustrate this. Celia in the past couple of years has been dealing with abandonment and divorce, chronic pain and health problems, and financial struggles which were exacerbated by her mortgage company acting somewhat improperly. Celia, how did these problems make you feel? How were you able to overcome these problems? Were there struggles along the way or did God make it easy for you? In what ways did you cling to God in this time? In what ways did God empower you to endure and overcome?

† **[Slide 10: guilt]** The second profound thing Jesus said was, **“Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of greater sin.”**

- I have always thought of this as referring to Judas Iscariot. But Judas betrayed Jesus into the hands of the Jewish religious leaders, not to Pilate. So after further study, I now think this refers to the High Priest, Caiaphas, who condemned Jesus at the Jewish trial and then sent Jesus to Pilate so they could legally put him to death.

- Pilate would commit sin by having Jesus unjustly crucified. But Caiaphas not only was the driving force behind these events, he compounded his sin with hatred, manipulation of the justice system, failure to recognize God's Messiah-savior, failure to submit to God's chosen king.
- As High Priest at a time without a Jewish king, Caiaphas was responsible for what happened religiously in Israel during his time in office, but rather than leading the people into spiritual renewal and recognition of the Messiah-savior, he plotted against Jesus, arrested Jesus, and judged against Jesus.
- Instead of representing God to the people until the king came, he enjoyed the trappings of his office while failing to reflect God's character or represent God, and then drove people away from recognizing God's chosen king when he did come.
- And Caiaphas made the same mistake as many of his ancestors who were supposed to represent God to the Jewish people. He should have led Israel to seek God's blessing for political security and independence from the pagan nations, and to represent God to those pagan nations; that's how it was supposed to work, God blessing Israel and Israel blessing the nations. Instead we see Caiaphas going to the Roman governor for help in executing Jesus, thus turning to the pagan nations for blessing, and as a result joining in their rebellion against God and his king.
- **[Slide 11: circles/lines]** Though none of us are a king or high priest, we also have been given a responsibility to reflect God's character and represent God to other people. We also sin if we fail to do this, if we instead allow pagan people to influence us or if we instead seek empowerment and comfort in worldly ways instead of from God.
- When you are suffering, it is all the more tempting to seek help and comfort in the world – through drugs or other means to escape, through lust or other means to feel empowered, through over eating or other means to feel a positive sensation – but when you are suffering, the best thing you can do for yourself is throw yourself even more completely into depending on God, into fervent prayer, into immersion in scripture, into the arms and care of loving fellow believers, into more securely walking in God's light and trusting in him to care for you and empower you to endure. Trust in God, represent God; walk by faith and obedience. This not only will help you in the moment, it will prepare you for when God wants to bring the blessings you seek. Celia has been learning how to do this; I am proud of her! We must do it too!

[Slide 12: 19.12-13] John 19.12-13: From this point on, Pilate tried to release him. But the Jewish leaders shouted out, "If you release this man, you are no friend of Caesar! Everyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar!" When Pilate heard these words he brought Jesus outside and sat down on the judgment seat in the place called "The Stone Pavement" (Gabbatha [Γαββαθα] in Aramaic).

- † "Caesar" had become a title for emperors, like we use the term "king." At this time, the Roman emperor was Tiberius Caesar. He was known to be suspicious of his subordinates and quick and ruthless when it came to punishing them. If Pilate were to tick him off, Pilate might find he was the one getting flogged and sent to a cross!
- The Jewish religious leaders had complained to Tiberius Caesar before, about how ruthless and disrespectful Pilate was toward them. So Pilate knew he could not call their bluff.
- And what defense would Pilate have if the suspicious and ruthless emperor heard that Pilate had set free someone who was accused by the Jewish court of being a rebel revolutionary? None, right? Up on the cross he would go, after receiving his flogging. So Pilate knew he was cornered. So he sat down on the judgment seat to sentence Jesus.

[Slide 13: 19.14-16] John 19.14-16: (Now it was the day of preparation [that means it was Friday, the day before the Sabbath] for the Passover, about noon.) Pilate said to the Jewish leaders, “Look, here is your king!” Then they shouted out, “Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!” Pilate asked, “Shall I crucify your king?” The high priests replied, “We have no king except Caesar!” Then Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified.

- † Though Pilate was forced to act contrary to his will, he was still sassing the Jewish religious leaders, calling Jesus “their king,” which mocked their false accusation against Jesus and their status as a conquered nation without its own king.
 - And notice that though the religious leaders manipulated Pilate into crucifying Jesus, Pilate manipulated them into a public declaration of loyalty to the Roman ruler, Tiberius Caesar!
 - Since the Jewish scriptures proclaim that Israel is to be the kingdom of God, that God ultimately is their king, and even in human terms they must obey a Jewish king from the line of David who represents God, the religious leaders were sinning greatly by saying this.
- † Jesus was brought before Pilate before dawn, but now it is about noon. All morning, he has been tried, mocked, and severely beaten, but now at noon he will be sentenced to die, along with the second wave of Passover lambs being slaughtered for the religious Feast.
 - Remember the symbolism: the Passover lamb was sacrificed in remembrance of when God provided deliverance from physical death through the blood of a lamb. Through the blood of Jesus, the ultimate sacrificial Passover lamb, God provides deliverance from both physical and spiritual death.
 - Those who accept that Jesus is the divine Son of God who came as the human Messiah-savior and in his death paid the penalty for their sins, will have eternal spiritual life right now, so they can be alive in Christ, free from the power of sin, relationally connected with God at all times, and assured of physical resurrection to life on a renewed Earth at the end of this age.

Conclusion

- † **[Slide 14: blank]** How willing are we to acknowledge that Jesus is our king and head of the church? That would mean that we would obey everything he commanded; that we would commit to submit to him in every area of life; that we would not choose to do things our own way, to seek our own desires, to live for wealth or popularity or power; that in the church and in life, we would base our decisions on scripture and the Holy Spirit’s guidance, not on our preferences or emotions.
- † How well do we feel empowered by God in our times of trouble. I think many of us struggle with this. We don’t feel close to God even when life is good, so how can we feel close to God and empowered by him when life gets hard? We need to work on this relationship every day if we want spiritual health and growth. We need to ask other believers to help us, by encouraging us to do the things that bring us closer to God and to confront us when we are doing things that will tear us away from God.
- † Jesus died so you could be alive, so you could be free, so you could be his. Reflect on that truth and let it build you up. You are a man or woman of God, adopted brother or sister to the King! [Pray]