



Believe

JOHN

MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

Examining the text & our hearts:

Bible Reading: John 18:28-40

28 Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas to the governor's headquarters. It was early morning. They did not enter the headquarters themselves; otherwise they would be defiled and unable to eat the Passover.

29 So Pilate came out to them and said, "What charge do you bring against this man?"

30 They answered him, "If this man weren't a criminal, we wouldn't have handed him over to you."

31 Pilate told them, "You take him and judge him according to your law."

"It's not legal for us to put anyone to death," the Jews declared. 32 They said this so that Jesus's words might be fulfilled indicating what kind of death he was going to die.

33 Then Pilate went back into the headquarters, summoned Jesus, and said to him, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

34 Jesus answered, "Are you asking this on your own, or have others told you about me?"

35 "I'm not a Jew, am I?" Pilate replied. "Your own nation and the chief priests handed you over to me. What have you done?"

36 "My kingdom is not of this world," said Jesus. "If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would fight, so that I wouldn't be handed over to the Jews. But as it is,^[b] my kingdom is not from here."

37 "You are a king then?" Pilate asked.

"You say that I'm a king," Jesus replied. "I was born for this, and I have come into the world for this: to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice."

38 "What is truth?" said Pilate.

After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, "I find no grounds for charging him. 39 You have a custom that I release one prisoner to you at the Passover. So, do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?"

40 They shouted back, "Not this man, but Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a revolutionary.

I. Historical Pilate & Historical Process

A. Historical Pilate

1. Under emperor Tiberius, governor/prefect of Judea (26-36 CE)

- a. His role: military leader (more like military police) maintaining order, head of the judicial system, able to sentence people to death, collect taxes.
- b. Might have appointed the high priest, Caiaphas who may have been an ally of Pilate.

2. How is he viewed

a. Philo of Alexandria (c. 20-50 CE) a Jewish philosopher described Pilate as “a man of inflexible, stubborn, and cruel disposition”

b. Other scholars consider him to be weak and compromising

- “The majority of scholars regard the Pilate of Mark’s Gospel as a weakling, convinced of Jesus’ innocence, vainly engaged in successive attempts to release him but forced to go along with the wishes of the chief priests & the crowd...” [Helen K. Bond, Pontius Pilate, p. 103]
- “Many... view the Pilate of Jn. 18:28-19:16 as a weak, indecisive ruler earnestly seeking to give Jesus a fair hearing ...[But,] the Jews persuade Pilate to crucify Jesus despite his misgivings ...Pilate [is] caught between the truth of Jesus and the relentless pressure of his Jewish adversaries... Forced to decide between Jesus & his own associations with the imperial powers of the world, Pilate chooses the world.” [GA Ruiz, “Why is Pilate So Afraid...?” in LR. Huber (ed.) Narrative Mode...in Johannine Literature, pp. 42-3]
- “Pilate... is often regarded as somewhat sympathetic: he... wants to be fair & would acquit Jesus, but through political & moral vulnerability he falls to the pressure of Jesus’ accusers & becomes the tool by which they achieve their malevolent ends.” [Sherri Brown, Gift Upon Gift, p. 222]

B. Historical Process

1. Jesus is Led by the Jerusalem religious elites to Pilate (18:28)

· Warren Carter writes: “I judge this item plausible in terms of imperial structures & dynamics. Two central imperial dynamics pervade this action:

[1.] “The enormous power of the governor Pilate as the representative of the emperor & the face of the Roman empire in Judea... Roman governors in Judea had the power to exercise capital punishment; hence, the Jerusalem elite brings Jesus for execution. This life-&-death power... serv[es] a governor’s task to maintain the imperial status quo against any threats... The reality of such immense power is foundational for understanding the Gospel scenes.”

[2.] The second imperial dynamic ...is that of the elite alliance between Rome (... the Roman governor) & the local Jerusalem leaders. Such alliances ... were a crucial strategy for imposing & negotiating Roman power ...One of the fundamental ways Rome exercised its rule throughout the empire was through alliances with local elites who benefitted from maintaining the hierarchical societal structure. The Jerusalem leaders ... are the leaders of Judea. As the local elite, they are not concerned only with ‘religious’ matters, but also exercise social, political, religious, & economic power in the interests of maintaining the status quo. And they do so in alliance with Rome, an alliance marked by partnership, contest, & submission. Roman control is exercised, for instance, through the appointment of chief priests... Yet this subjugating & allying power was also contested as Roman representatives & local elites struggled with one another for domination or to restrict the other. Yet both Rome’s representative & the local Jerusalem elite, while contesting the immense rewards of power, wealth, & status, are allied by the common desire to secure the status quo against any threat to their position & interests... This elite alliance... is assumed ... in Jesus’ transfer from the Jerusalem leaders to Pilate... The transfer signifies elite allies working together to maintain the status quo & remove the threat posed by Jesus.” [Warren Carter, “Jesus & Pilate,” in PA. 2. Anderson (ed.) John, Jesus, & History, Vol. 3 pp. 66-68]

2. Question from Pilate about Jesus as “King of the Jews”

• Both Mark & John record “Pilate’s question & accusation to Jesus that he is ‘king of the Jews’ (Mk. 15:2; Jn. 18:33) ... Several factors support the historical plausibility of the charge. One is that the term ‘king of the Jews’ does not pervade the tradition as an early confession (contrast ‘Lord’). Nor is it one of John’s frequently used... affirmations... Further, legitimate kingship required Rome’s sanction. To claim kingship without Rome’s sanction was considered subversive... Claiming kingship without Rome’s legitimation provoked retaliation. [e.g. Rome crucified many kingly claimants] ... It would be impossible to think of many of these kingly claimants as posing any serious or nationalist threat to Roman power, but what matters is that they challenged imperial authority & order at all. The charge against Jesus suggests that his actions (e.g. the entry to Jerusalem & incident in the Temple) were seen as disruptive & challenging of imperial authority. Jesus was clearly not regarded as harmless.” [Warren Carter, “Jesus & Pilate,” in PA. Anderson (ed.) John, Jesus, & History, Vol. 3, p. 70]

II. The hypocrisy of the Jewish Leaders

A. Not wanting to be defiled by being inside the Governors house while scheming to kill the Son of God 18:28

B. Not truthful about the legality of them putting Jesus to death

1. Saying they have no authority to put someone to death. 18:31
2. Yet all along they have been trying to find a way to kill Jesus (5:18; 7:1,19,20,25; 8:37,40,59; 11:53)
3. Later they do put Stephen to death by stoning without a proper trial. Acts 7:58
4. Possibly trying to get on the good side of Pilate

C. Using political means to achieve their goal

1. Using politics to do their dirty work and to avoid the people’s condemnation

• “For some reason, it is important to the Jewish authorities that the Romans carry out the execution of Jesus. Quite possibly they may have feared that they did not have broad enough popular support, and that if they were to stone Jesus to death there would be repercussions among “the crowds,” who have all along been ambivalent about Jesus....It would e far better if the Roman governor himself came to perceive Jesus as a threat, and if possible be persuaded to carry out the execution on his authority, in the process giving them due credit for their loyalty to Rome.” J. Ramsey Michaels, The Gospel of John, p. 919

2. When Pilate suggests releasing Jesus, they ask for the release of Barabas – an insurrectionist

- a. Barabas means “Son of a Father”
- b. Close to Jesus title: Son of the Father
- c. Barabas was a revolutionary
- d. They chose the way of revolt which later was suppressed in 70 AD and 130 AD

3. Eventually denying their faith in God – 19:15

• “The [Roman] trial narrative opens with ‘the Jews’ insistence on ritual purity & their meticulous attention to the demands of their faith, & it will end with their complete denial of the claims of their faith (19:15) ... By the end of the Roman proceedings the Jewish authorities essentially renounce their faith in God by declaring, ‘We have no king but the emperor [Caesar]’ (19:15).” [Gail O’Day, John: Introduction, p. 815]

D. According to Jesus’ word he would be “lifted up” that is death by crucifixion – 3:14; 18:32

1. Jesus would not die by stoning but by being lifted up
2. According by God’s sovereignty

III. Pilate’s involvement

A. Not a neutral judge /administrator

1. Siding with the Jews
2. Collaborating with the Jews by sending soldiers to help arrest Jesus in the garden – 18:3

- “Pilate’s instruction (‘You take him and judge him according to your law.’ 18:31) is often misinterpreted as Pilate’s disinterest or affirmation of Jesus’ innocence. It is neither. Pilate’s committal of troops to Jesus’ arrest (18:3, 12) establishes his awareness of Jesus’ threat.” [Warren Carter, “Jesus as Prototype & Pontius Pilate (John...)” in JB. Tucker (ed.) T&T Clark Handbook to Social Identity in the NT, p. 242]

B. No charge is given against Jesus

- Pilate’s initial question was the normal opening inquiry for a trial under Roman law: “What charges are you bringing against this man?” He would not automatically pronounce a sentence without knowing the alleged crime. The answer was elusive. The high priest no doubt knew that Jesus was not guilty of any crime under Roman law. Expositor’s Bible Commentary (Abridged Edition): New Testament

C. Realized eventually that Jesus was not a threat to him or to Rome

- “Pilate’s first question of Jesus is unambiguous: ‘Are you the king of the Jews?’ Is Jesus a threat to Rome? Will he incite a rebellion? According to 20:31, John pens his Gospel to demonstrate that Jesus is in fact Israel’s ‘Messiah’ [/king]. But Jesus doesn’t fit Pilate’s (or the Jewish leaders’) category of messiahship. Jesus argues that his ‘kingdom is not of this world,’ but is ‘from another place’ (18:36). The idea is that Jesus’ kingship & territory are not confined to a plot of land or territory [Israel/Palestine]. His kingdom is derived from an entirely different order & origin. He is not simply the king of Israel but the king of the universe.” [Benjamin L. Gladd, Handbook on the Gospels, p. ci]

D. Not finding anything wrong with Jesus but forced by Jews to sentence Jesus to death

1. Pilate tries to find a way to secure Jesus’ release – 18:39

2. ‘Forced’ by the Jews to sanction his death

3. Not caring for justice or righteousness

4. Not wanting to get on the wrong side of the Jewish leaders

5. Pilate was forced to make a decision about Jesus

6. The writer attempts to force the reader to make a decision about Jesus

- “Pilate of the 4th Gospel...is caught between ‘the Jews’ & Jesus... & [shows] ‘the impossibility of compromise, the inevitability of decision & the consequences of each alternative’ (Culpepper) ...Pilate soon realizes that Jesus is innocent, but is nevertheless forced by ‘the Jews’ to sanction the death of Jesus. He...attempt[s] to secure Jesus’ release, but... finds a clear-cut decision in Jesus’ favor too costly & [so] abandons... the truth & instead condemns an innocent man ...This [portrait] of Pilate [is] an attempt by the evangelist to force the reader to make a decision regarding Jesus.” [DF. Tolmie, “Pontius Pilate,” in D. Hunt (ed.) Character Studies in the 4th Gospel, p. 578]

- One “emphasis of John’s passion narrative is the remarkable attention given to Pilate...[He] is the supporting character in the whole drama of the Gospel whose character is explored most fully. It appears that the evangelist did not want us to slip through the Gospel without becoming aware of how dangerous it is to try to remain neutral to this Jesus figure.” [Robert Kysar, John, the Maverick Gospel, p. 63]

III. Jesus’ kingdom is not of or from this world

A. His kingdom is not earthly and hence not related to any earthly nation

1. Jesus’ kingdom is not a political or national entity.

2. It transcends all geographical boundaries and nation states.

3. Jesus has one kingdom. If there is a Christian nation it is worldwide.

4. The idea of the kingdom of God being established or protected through political means is entirely foreign in the NT.

- “[Jesus] entire ministry rested on the commitment to build a kingdom and the caveat that it would not be found here.” Tim Alberta, The Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory)

- “One error is to identify the kingdom [of God/Christ] with a geopolitical entity as theocrats & revolutionaries are inclined to do. ‘My kingdom is not of this world,’ Jesus declared (Jn. 18:36), meaning both that the kingdom does not have its origin in the world & that it is not a political or national entity. The kingdom is ‘of God’ and transcends all geographical boundaries & nation states. No human entity can claim divine correspondence to God’s kingdom... No economic system or political structure can claim God as its source.” [PD. Simmons, LL. McSwain, “Ethical Maturity...,” in BJ. Leonard (ed.) *Becoming Christian*, p. 68]
- My kingdom’ (18:36) “is singular. It will not do to speak of Christian nations [plural], because Jesus is speaking of the one Christian nation that will someday reclaim creation completely. Christians in America for e.g., cannot create a Christian nation which borders reach only from California to New York – the only true Christian nation, the kingdom of God will be worldwide. In addition, the idea of a kingdom of God being established through normal political means is utterly foreign in the NT.” [Cody Cook, *Fight the Powers*, p. 32]

B. Jesus was born to be a king

1. His purpose: to testify or bear witness to the truth – 18:37

a. Truth about God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, man, sin, salvation

- When Pilate asked Him if He was a king, ... Jesus answered, “You say rightly that I am a king.” But His kingdom is concerned with truth, not with swords and shields. It was to bear witness to the truth that He came into the world. The truth here means the truth about God, Christ Himself, the Holy Spirit, man, sin, salvation, and all the other great doctrines of Christianity. Everyone who loves the truth hears His voice, and that is how His empire grows. William MacDonald, *Believer’s Bible Commentary*

- [Jesus] declared that his purpose was to bear testimony to truth, and he intimated that anyone who was devoted to truth would listen to him. The obvious inference from his words was that he came into the world from another realm, that whoever did not listen to him would not be characterized by truth, and that if Pilate really wanted to know what truth was, he would give Jesus his earnest attention. As in Jesus’ other interviews in this gospel, his focus was not on himself but on reaching the heart of the person he addressed. He appealed to Pilate, not for acquittal or mercy, but for recognition of truth. The combined statement, “For this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world,” can be linked with ch. 1 and reinforces Jesus’ statement elsewhere in this gospel that he was fully aware of both his origin and destiny (cf. 8:14). *Expositor’s Bible Commentary (Abridged Edition): New Testament*

2. Those who are of the truth listen/respond to his voice

3. Pilate doesn’t get it, he is not interested in the truth

4. They chose Barabas – an insurrectionist

a. “Son of a Father”

b. Close to Jesus title Son of the Father

c. Their way was of revolt which was suppressed in 70 AD and 130 AD

C. God’s kingdom is outside the realm of politics

- America, like every other nation on the planet, is part of the world system (or, in New Testament terms, part of “the world”). It is not the kingdom of God, nor is it a special manifestation of the kingdom of God. In fact, God’s kingdom values are often diametrically opposed to the values of our country. Michael Brown,, *The Christian Post*, Dec 16, 2020

D. Does not depend on politics or human manipulation

E. From God not from man

F. Having nothing to do with world of religion or politics

• Jesus models [1.] “an antithetical relationship [of mutual incompatibility] to imperial [Rome’s] society. [2.] exclusive commitment to God’s reign; [3.] non-violence, [4.] commitment to the truth, [5.] listening to God’s voice, & [6.] awareness of God’s superior power. Central to [this pattern] is its uncompromising opposition to imperial [Rome’s] society. There’s an incompatibility between Jesus & Pilate, Rome & God. The two entities are set at odds with each other. There is no compromise, no negotiation of difference, only the assertion of distance & the superiority of God’s reign. The six characteristics ...maximize the distinctiveness of God’s reign [Christ’s kingdom] over against Rome’s rule.” [Warren Carter, “Jesus as Prototype & Pontius Pilate (John ...),” in JB. Tucker (ed.) T&T Clark Handbook to Social Identity in the NT, p. 248]

IV. What kingdom are we in?

A. Our citizenship is elsewhere – in the heavens -Phil. 1:27; 3:20

1:27 Just one thing: As citizens of heaven, live your life worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or am absent, I will hear about you that you are standing firm in one spirit, in one accord, contending together for the faith of the gospel,

3:20 Our citizenship is in heaven, and we eagerly wait for a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.

B. Beware of trying to change the world

1. Beware of Christian nationalism

• Historically a problem

• Crusades – the attempt to make Jerusalem a Christian city

• “‘Christian Nationalism’ is the belief that the American nation is defined by Christianity, and that the government should take active steps to keep it that way. Popularly, Christian nationalists assert that America is and must remain a ‘Christian nation’— not merely as an observation about American history, but as a prescriptive program for what America must continue to be in the future... & that we will lose our identity & our freedom if we do not preserve our cultural inheritance.” [Paul D Miller, “What Is Christian Nationalism?” Christianity Today, Feb. 3, 2021]

• The “‘nation whose God is the LORD’ [Psalm 33:12 & the ‘people who are called by my name’ [2 Chron. 7:14] is the gathering of God’s people in Christ across all cultures & in all times. 2 Chron. 7:14 & Psa. 33:12 are about [OT] Israel &, in the new covenant, about the Church; they are not about the United States or any other secular polity. To apply then to the United States is [interpretationally] indefensible, theologically irresponsible, intellectually sloppy, politically dangerous, & borderline heretical. Jesus told Pilate ‘My kingdom is not of this world’ (Jn. 18:36) ... That’s why he spent time ministering to Samaritans & Romans [soldiers], why the Spirit gave the gift of languages... at Pentecost, & why the apostles travelled the world sharing the good news ... Jesus saved people for God ‘from every tribe & language & people & nation’ (Rev. 5:9; 7:9). Jesus refused to be king of one national polity... Seen in this light, the civil religion that equates America with Israel is a prolonged exercise in missing the point. America is not Israel; the church is. Americans are not God’s chosen people; those who trust in Jesus from every tribe, tongue, people, & nation are... America is not a ‘Christian nation’... The Church is the one & only true Christian nation... The belief that America is somehow chosen by God or has inherited the mantle of ancient [OT] Israel is unsupported by biblical evidence, church history, or theological reasoning.” [Paul D Miller, Religion of American Greatness: What’s Wrong with Christian Nationalism, pp.]

2. Beware of trying to change the issues in society over which we have no control

3. Let’s make sure that the kingdom of God has absolute control over our own life

C. We have been called to an eternal kingdom

2 Peter 1:10-11

10 Therefore, brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election, because if you do these things you will never stumble. 11 For in this way, entry into the eternal kingdom of our

Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be richly provided for you.

D. Our worship (our allegiance) must be only toward God, not toward any earthly kingdom – Matt. 4:8-10

8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 9 And he said to him, "I will give you all these things if you will fall down and worship me." 10 Then Jesus told him, "Go away, Satan! For it is written: Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him."

- What or who we worship determines if we are a true worshiper or if we worship an idol.
- Tim Alberta asks Chris Winans: "What's wrong with American evangelicals?" Winans thought a moment. "America," he replied. "Too many of them worship America." (In Tim Alberta, *The Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory*)
- "God has His own kingdom; no nation in this world can compare. God has His own power; no amount of political, cultural, or social influence can compare. God has His own glory; no exaltation of earthly beings can compare.

These are nonnegotiable to the Christian faith. One of the Bible's dominant narrative themes—uniting Old Testament and New Testament, prophets and disciples, prayers and epistles—is the admonition to resist idolatry at all costs. Jesus frames the decision in explicitly binary terms: We can serve and worship God or we can serve and worship the gods of this world. Too many American evangelicals have tried to do both. And the consequences for the Church have been devastating." Tim Alberta, *The Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory*

E. What will you do with Jesus? There is no neutrality.

- ***"Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him."***