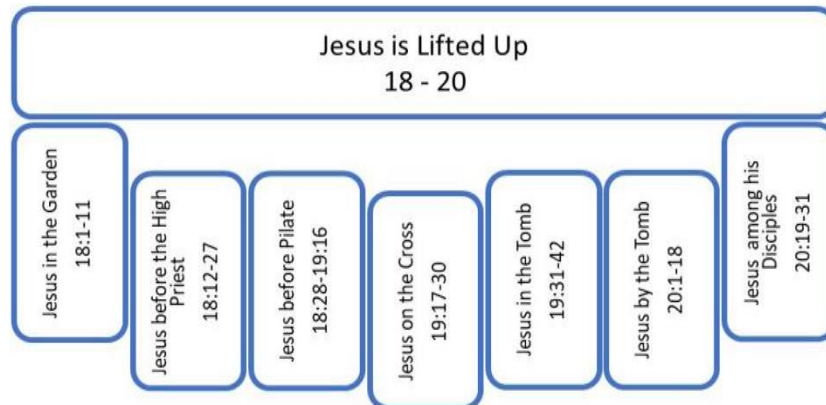


Lesson 33: John 18:28-19:16 The Trial of Jesus

Introduction



Peter has denied him. All the rest have scattered. Jesus continues the road to the cross alone. He goes meekly as a lamb to the slaughter. But meekness is not the same thing as weakness. Moving from the Jewish arrest and interrogation to a Roman trial, John continues to bring out the theme of Jesus' sovereign control over events as they unfold. Jesus' meekness comes only by the veiling of great power and authority.

I am in a debt to my colleague Nolan Sharp for helping me see the honor/shame dynamic in this trial before Pilate. In the sociological sense honor and shame are bestowed by culture. You receive honor through societal affirmation of your achievements and shame through failure in the eyes of the community. Jesus encounters numerous honor/shame tests during his ministry. In our lesson on the woman caught in adultery, we recognized the motive of those who brought the woman to Jesus had nothing to do with justice or morality. They did not care about the woman or what she had done. Their objective was to trap Jesus by presenting him publicly with a no-win situation. To advise her release would be to go against the law of Moses. To call for her death would be to go against the law of Rome. Either way, Jesus would lose honor as a rabbi. Jesus seemed trapped, until he turned the tables on those who came to trap him by challenging them to pick up stones and execute her.

The question of who should pay taxes is another well-known example of an honor/shame duel. To encourage payment of taxes is to sympathize with Rome. To go against paying is to oppose Rome. Failing to detect and avoid the trap would result in the loss of public honor. Refusing to answer or answering wrongly would shame Jesus. Even if his opponents did not succeed in getting Jesus in trouble with the authorities, they could still win the honor/shame duel by causing Jesus to lose prestige among the people and among his followers. But they never won. Jesus always came out on top. In this case he said, "Bring me a coin. Whose picture is on the coin? Caesar. Well then, give to Caesar what is Caesar's. Give to God what is God's." Jesus always comes out with his honor intact.

Honor and shame are at play in this story of Jesus' trial before Pilate. But it is not a duel between two parties. The honor/shame struggle is primarily between the Jewish leaders and Pilate. Jesus, the third party, is the assumed loser already. He's the one on trial. He's lost. He has no power in this situation. Quickly in the dialogue, we recognize tension between the Jews and the Roman governor. The Jews stand outside in spiritual superiority while the Roman continually bullies them with reminders of his superior political authority. From the honor/shame perspective, we are to ask ourselves: who comes out on top when the trial is over? Who will be judged as having accrued honor? Who will be shamed? These questions are going to drive our observation of the passage.

Also driving our observation is the recognition that this whole passage is organized chiasmally. There are nine parts to the chiasm. The beginning of the section has the Jewish leaders handing Jesus over to Pilate. The ending of the section is going to have Pilate handing Jesus back to the Jewish leaders. In the inner frames, Pilate goes out to the Jews, then Pilate goes back into the Praetorium, then

Pilate goes out to the Jews again. That sequence is repeated. Pilate goes out, Pilate goes in, Pilate goes out. In the central section, Pilate enters the Praetorium and has Jesus beaten.

Let's read the whole passage to establish our context. Then we'll come back and go through the chiasmic pattern part by part. This is John 18:28-19:16.

²⁸ Then **they led Jesus from Caiaphas into the Praetorium**, and it was early; and they themselves did not enter into the Praetorium so that they would not be defiled, but might eat the Passover.

²⁹ Therefore **Pilate went out to them** and said, "What accusation do you bring against this Man?" ³⁰ They answered and said to him, "If this Man were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him to you." ³¹ So Pilate said to them, "Take Him yourselves, and judge Him according to your law." The Jews said to him, "We are not permitted to put anyone to death," ³² to fulfill the word of Jesus which had spoke, signifying by what kind of death He was about to die.

³³ Therefore **Pilate entered again into the Praetorium**, and summoned Jesus and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" ³⁴ Jesus answered, "Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about Me?" ³⁵ Pilate answered, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You to me; what have You done?" ³⁶ Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm." ³⁷ Therefore Pilate said to Him, "So You are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say *correctly* that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." ³⁸ Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?"

And when he had said this, **he went out again to the Jews** and said to them, "I find no guilt in Him. ³⁹ But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover; do you wish then that I release for you the King of the Jews?" ⁴⁰ So they cried out again, saying, "Not this Man, but Barabbas." Now Barabbas was a robber.

¹ **Pilate then took Jesus and scourged Him.** ² And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and put a purple robe on Him; ³ and they *began* to come up to Him and say, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and to give Him slaps *in the face*.

⁴ **Pilate came out again** and said to them, "Behold, I am bringing Him out to you so that you may know that I find no guilt in Him." ⁵ Jesus then came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. *Pilate* said to them, "Behold, the Man!" ⁶ So when the chief priests and the officers saw Him, they cried out saying, "Crucify, crucify!" Pilate said to them, "Take Him yourselves and crucify Him, for I find no guilt in Him." ⁷ The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and by that law He ought to die because He made Himself out *to be* the Son of God."

⁸ Therefore when Pilate heard this statement, he was *even* more afraid; ⁹ and **he entered into the Praetorium again** and said to Jesus, "Where are You from?" But Jesus gave him no answer. ¹⁰ So Pilate said to Him, "You do not speak to me? Do You not know that I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify You?" ¹¹ Jesus answered, "You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above; for this reason he who delivered Me to you has *the* greater sin." ¹² As a result of this Pilate made efforts to release Him, but the Jews cried out saying, "If you release this Man, you are no friend of Caesar; everyone who makes himself out *to be* a king opposes Caesar."

¹³ Therefore when Pilate heard these words, **he brought Jesus out**, and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Pavement, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha. ¹⁴ Now it was the day of preparation for the Passover; it was about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, "Behold, your King!" ¹⁵ So they cried out, "Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar."

¹⁶ So **he then handed Him over to them** to be crucified.

Let's go through each element of the structure focusing on the interactions between the three parties involved: the Jewish leaders, Jesus and Pilate. The introduction to the section is verse 28.

A 18:28 Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas into the Praetorium

²⁸ Then **they led Jesus from Caiaphas into the Praetorium**, and it was early; and they themselves did not enter into the Praetorium so that they would not be defiled, but might eat the Passover.

John mentions Jesus being taken from Annas to the current high priest Caiaphas, but he does not give us details of the Jewish trial. Matthew tells us Jewish lawyers produced false witnesses against Jesus, the very thing Jesus had challenged Annas to do - produce witnesses. The witnesses did not prove to be credible. Nevertheless, the Jewish officials decide to ask Pilate for permission to execute Jesus. John does not give us any detail of that trial. He begins this section with the Jews bringing Jesus from Caiaphas to the Praetorium, the official residence and office of the Roman governor.

Ceremonial Jewish law prevents the Jewish leaders from entering the governor's residence because to do so would render them unclean. They would not be able to participate in Jewish ceremony for 24 hours. The text tells us they would not be able to eat the Passover. That sounds like an odd comment, since the Passover meal was eaten one night earlier when Jesus was with his disciples, when he washed their feet. The Passover meal was then immediately followed by the Feast of Unleavened Bread. In Jesus' day, the term "Passover" became a way to refer both to the meal and to the week that followed: to the week of Unleavened Bread. The whole period was referred to as "Passover." And during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the priests ate the meat of daily sacrifice. So the comment here about not eating the Passover cannot refer to the Passover meal. That's already passed. So most probably it refers to this ceremonial eating that these priests would participate in that takes place every day during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, generally being called here, Passover.

The important point in this text, for the sake of John's narrative, is that the Jews have a ceremonial reason for not entering the Praetorium. They stop outside to hand Jesus over. That ceremonial requirement sets up almost a comical nature to this trial which forces this respected, powerful Roman governor Pilate to constantly go in and out of his own courthouse. He comes out to speak to the prosecutors, he goes in to speak to the defendant, he comes out again, he goes in again, and it just keeps going. He first comes out to the Jewish leaders in the second element of the chiasm, verses 29-32.

B 18:29-32 Therefore Pilate went out to them

²⁹ Therefore **Pilate went out to them** and said, "What accusation do you bring against this Man?" ³⁰ They answered and said to him, "If this Man were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him to you." ³¹ So Pilate said to them, "Take Him yourselves, and judge Him according to your law." The Jews said to him, "We are not permitted to put anyone to death," ³² to fulfill the word of Jesus which He spoke, signifying by what kind of death He was about to die.

Judaism was a recognized religion in the Roman empire with certain privileges, particularly the right to maintain ceremonial observance. In spite of his pride as the Roman governor and in spite of what he might have thought of Jewish religion, Roman law allowed the Jews to refuse to enter into Pilate's Praetorium. And the historical record suggests that Pilate did not appreciate at all accommodating Jewish sensibilities. He's Roman. They should accommodate to him. Josephus writes that prior to this trial of Jesus Pilate had provoked outrage by setting up the imperial standards in Jerusalem. The imperial standards depict Caesar. And because Romans recognized Caesar as divine, images of him in Jerusalem smack of idolatry to the Jews. Josephus also makes the charge that Pilate used funds from the temple treasury to build a new aqueduct in Jerusalem. There was no love lost between Pilate and the Jewish leadership. Pilate walked this line between his own sense of Roman superiority and potential riot. In this case, Pilate submits to Jewish sensibilities, but he does not submit graciously.

When Pilate asks for the accusation against Jesus, the Jewish officials, they're not gracious, either. They give him a snarky response, "If this Man were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him to you." In essence, they are saying, "We have already tried him. We are just here for you to sign off on his execution. Let's get on with it." They do not want to validate Pilate's judicial role. They don't see any reason for a Roman trial.

Not appreciating the response, Pilate pokes them where it hurts. "Take Him yourselves, and judge Him according to your law." Pilate knows they cannot get what they want without him. Rome holds power. Rome has the honor here. The Jews are the subjected people. They're subservient to the will of Rome and being reminded of that is shameful. The Jews are permitted by Rome to hold court, to judge cases, to assign punishment, but with limits. They are not allowed to carry out a death sentence. They have to come and ask for permission from the governor. Everybody knows this. But Pilate makes them say it. He makes them say, "We are not permitted to put anyone to death." Probably, feeling an affront that these Jewish leaders would not come into his court, and certainly not appreciating their response when he asked about the accusation, Pilate bullies them into admitting their dependence on Rome.

John points out that this historic dynamic leads to the death foretold by Jesus. The Jews would have stoned him for blasphemy if the death penalty were in their power. But three times in this Gospel Jesus has said, "The Son of Man must be lifted up." And since the Jews don't have power to execute a death sentence according to their law, it must be carried out by Rome's permission in the way Rome chooses to carry it out. Jesus will not be stoned by Romans. He will be crucified. He will be lifted up, just as he said. He will be as the serpent lifted on a pole as in Numbers (21:8), cursed by hanging on a tree as in Deuteronomy (21:23), and pierced through for our transgressions. according to Isaiah (53:5). God is the one in control here.

Pilate decides not to just trust the word of these Jewish officials. He's not just going to give them what they want. So, we have Pilate going back into the Praetorium to question Jesus himself in verses 33-38a.

C ^{18:33-38a} **Therefore Pilate entered again into the Praetorium**

³³ Therefore **Pilate entered again into the Praetorium**, and summoned Jesus and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" ³⁴ Jesus answered, "Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about Me?" ³⁵ Pilate answered, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You to me; what have You done?" ³⁶ Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm." ³⁷ Therefore Pilate said to Him, "So You are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say *correctly* that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." ³⁸ Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?"

At some point, it was told to Pilate that Jesus claimed to be the Jewish Messiah, the King of the Jews. He heard that accusation. When Jesus asks Pilate whether this was his own idea or whether it comes from others, Pilate responds as though the designation, "King of the Jews," is an accusation. "I did not accuse you, your own people delivered you over. What have you done?" It is a practical question. Pilate wants to know whether Jesus has started to arm followers, or he's attacked Roman sympathizers, or done any politically or militarily suspect act.

Interestingly, this Gospel was written by John, and John's purpose is to show us the signs that Jesus did so that we might believe that he truly is the Messiah, the Son of God. That's what Jesus has done. He's done miracles. But Pilate is asking - he's assuming there must be some criminal activity here somewhere. That's what he needs to judge. Jesus distinguishes his actions from the actions of a typical political ruler. He does not deny that he is a king. He says, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm." Even though Jesus uses the

terminology of kingdom, there is something fundamentally different about his kingdom and the kingdoms of the world. His one example is that his followers would fight if he were a worldly king, but they do not fight. He stopped Peter from fighting in the garden, "Put away your sword." Jesus is not attempting to establish a nation with an army and a political system.

This is one of the ways the New Covenant is very different from the Old Covenant. The Old Covenant included civil law for the organization of a political society on earth. Israel was intended to be a geo-political reality organized according to Mosaic law. God granted land to Israel. Their first major act after receiving the Mosaic Covenant was to go in militarily and secure the land God had given them.

The New Covenant does not include any criminal or civil law that we find in the Old Covenant. The church is not intended to be a political government. The reign of Christ is to spread in the hearts of men and women through the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The commandments of the New Covenant focus on our moral behavior, our relationships with each other, our worship. We are to have an effect on government and society. It's not supposed to just be our individual, private behavior. It's our behavior in society. But we are not to be a political body. We influence the political bodies in our culture, but the church is not a political body.

Jesus does not - we can't go on much more here - Jesus doesn't develop that idea, but his words establish a principle that we have to consider as we move forward in the New Covenant. This is a new wine wineskin. And it's distinct from the Old. When we say "kingdom", we don't mean what we meant when we said, "kingdom of Israel." This is a spiritual kingdom.

In his conversation with Pilate, his words deny a claim of sedition against Rome. He is the king of a spiritual kingdom. His kingdom will spread but he is not raising an army to overthrow Rome. And much to the chagrin of so many of his followers who were hoping that was what he's about, it's not what he's about.

Jesus has acknowledged obliquely that he is a king. Still, consistent with his practice through his ministry, we notice that he does not take for himself the title of king. Pilate asked to press the question, "So You are a king?" Jesus affirms that he is a king, but still without directly saying it. He doesn't say, "I am a king, yes. I am a king." Instead, he puts the declaration back into Pilate's mouth, "You say *correctly* that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." This does not sound like seditious politics to Pilate. It sounds very much like religion.

He is not able to hear the voice of Jesus. As a pragmatic politician he responds to Jesus' claim about truth and he just says, "What is truth?" It sounds like a conversation-ender for Pilate. He does not want to go there with a Jew.

Jesus has taught about himself, as we see through the Gospel of John. He is the truth. And it's one of the audacious claims that Jesus makes that we've been encountering in John. It's a claim of divinity. To understand reality as it truly is, we have to begin with Jesus. If you don't have Jesus at the center of your worldview, your worldview is fundamentally flawed from the very beginning. And Jesus is not speaking in the abstract. He is speaking of concrete, objective truth. His words are spiritual, but they are not theoretical. The spiritual truth Jesus speaks about profoundly affects both our hope for a real eternal future, and also every area of our life that we live in here and now: our personal life, and our communal life. It's all affected by recognizing that Jesus is the source of truth. It changes how we speak and how we think and how we behave, but this would be way too much for Pilate at this moment. He's concerned with just figuring out, "Are you some kind of rebel I need to be concerned with?", and when it goes towards the spiritual and the religious, Pilate ends it.

His response - "What is truth?" - could be coming from a philosophical turn of mind. Pilate is familiar with the religious disagreements between Roman and Jew. He is also aware of the different Greek philosophical schools. And he can have some kind of conversation on truth if he wanted to. I imagine, for him, "What is truth?" is less philosophical but more pragmatic. He is a politician ruling an

unwieldy Roman possession. Truth is what it needs to be to get the job done. He is not interested in pursuing this line of thought with Jesus. So, he ends the conversation, "What is truth?" Ironically, at the moment he asks the question, truth is standing on trial right in front of him. Pilate doesn't see it. He can't hear it.

He is done with this trial and he goes out to tell the Jews so. This is 18:38b-40.

D 18:38b-40 He went out again to the Jews

And when he had said this, **he went out again to the Jews** and said to them, "I find no guilt in Him. ³⁹ But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover; do you wish then that I release for you the King of the Jews?" ⁴⁰ So they cried out again, saying, "Not this Man, but Barabbas." Now Barabbas was a robber.

Jesus was not tripped up by Pilate's questioning. He didn't incriminate himself. And Pilate affirms what we already know, "There is no guilt in him." But instead of just letting Jesus go, it seems that Pilate cannot resist poking at the Jewish leaders again by asking, "Would you like me to release the King of the Jews?" It is meant to antagonize them. Pilate latches onto this idea that Jesus is King of the Jews and he enjoys that it antagonizes these religious people who think they're superior to him. And he's going to refuse to let go, all the way to the cross. He's going to put a sign on the cross that says, "King of the Jews" because he's just enjoying pushing this in the face of these officials.

The Jews refuse Jesus. They don't want Jesus, and they ask for the release of a thief, a robber. The word means more than it probably sounds to us and we see that in the other Gospels, which indicate that Barabbas was involved in murderous sedition of Rome. His name is highly ironic. Have you thought about what Barabbas means? Bar means "son of." Abba - you know what Abba means. "Father." Barabbas means "son of the father." So, imagine this. Pilate gave the Jews a chance to set free the king of the Jews, who actually truly is the king of the Jews. They reject Jesus, the true king, and instead secure forgiveness for a rebellious murderer. The murderer's name is, ironically, "son of the father." The true Son of the Father is condemned. And in the end, this one that is handed over unjustly is the one who is going to secure forgiveness for the ones who refused to secure it for him.

Now, Pilate has created a problem for himself. He wanted to release Jesus. He could have released Jesus. But he could not resist antagonizing the Jewish leaders once more, by asking, "Would you like me to release your king?" And when they say, "No," their rejection of Jesus prevents Pilate from releasing him. He's put himself in the corner. Now he's got to keep Jesus. He is not ready to execute Jesus, so he has him beaten. This is 19:1-3.

E 19:1-3 Pilate then took Jesus and scourged Him

¹ **Pilate then took Jesus and scourged Him.** ² And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and put a purple robe on Him; ³ and they *began* to come up to Him and say, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and to give Him slaps *in the face*.

The soldiers do not just beat Jesus. They shame Jesus. They are clueless that their mockery is another ironic recognition of Jesus' true identity. The crown of thorns, the purple robe, the cry, "Hail, King of the Jews", they are all befitting the true King of heaven who has given himself over to be executed by men for the sake of men. They violently and cruelly attempt to shame Jesus. But is Jesus shamed? He is only shamed if we accept the attempts of Romans and Jews to do so. When we consider the words and behavior of Jesus to this point - you know, what has he said, what has he done? - we see one who calmly maintains his honor in the face of persecution. He has brought no shame on himself.

With the beating of Jesus, Pilate considers his duty done. He goes back out to inform the Jews. This is 19:4-7,

D' 19:4-7 Pilate came out again

⁴ **Pilate came out again** and said to them, "Behold, I am bringing Him out to you so that you may know that I find no guilt in Him." ⁵ Jesus then came out, wearing the crown of thorns and

the purple robe. *Pilate* said to them, “Behold, the Man!”⁶ So when the chief priests and the officers saw Him, they cried out saying, “Crucify, crucify!” *Pilate* said to them, “Take Him yourselves and crucify Him, for I find no guilt in Him.”⁷ The Jews answered him, “We have a law, and by that law He ought to die because He made Himself out *to be* the Son of God.”

There is an odd juxtaposition here of *Pilate* sustaining Jesus’ honor by declaring, “I find no guilt in him” and then, right beside it, the shame imposed on Jesus by the crown and the robe. You find no guilt in him, but he’s standing here bloody and beaten with a crown of thorns and a torn robe on his body. *Pilate*’s, “Behold the man!” may have been meant to point out the punishment Jesus had undergone, as though *Pilate* is saying, “Here, I have whipped him. Behold! That should be enough. Look at him bruised and bloody before you. We can be done. You brought him to me. I beat him. That’s it.” However, whether it was intentional or unintentional, the crown and the robe may have just antagonized the Jews further. It’s as though *Pilate* is saying as one of Rome, saying, “Behold, this is how we treat the king of the Jews.” And the Jewish leaders respond by sticking to their single-minded objective of eliminating Jesus. It just stirs them, and they cry out all the more for crucifixion.

Pilate wants the matter over. But again, *Pilate* pokes back at the Jews, telling them to crucify Jesus on their own, knowing that they are impotent to do so. And the Jews answer, “We have a law, and by that law He ought to die because He made Himself out *to be* the Son of God.” That comment strikes home with *Pilate*. He’s afraid. So, he goes back into the Praetorium. He needs to think this through. This is 19:8-12.

C’^{19:8-12} he entered into the Praetorium again

⁸ Therefore when *Pilate* heard this statement, he was *even* more afraid;⁹ and **he entered into the Praetorium again** and said to Jesus, “Where are You from?” But Jesus gave him no answer.

¹⁰ So *Pilate* said to Him, “You do not speak to me? Do You not know that I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify You?”¹¹ Jesus answered, “You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above; for this reason he who delivered Me to you has *the* greater sin.”¹² As a result of this *Pilate* made efforts to release Him, but the Jews cried out saying, “If you release this Man, you are no friend of Caesar; everyone who makes himself out *to be* a king opposes Caesar.”

The text says *Pilate* is “more afraid,” not just that he’s afraid. He’s “more afraid.” Apparently, there is underlying unease that John has not reported to us. We know from the other gospels that *Pilate*’s wife had a dream and warned him not to have anything to do with this Jesus. The Jews commented just now that Jesus claimed to be “the Son of God,” and that seems to stir that unease that *Pilate* already feels. It makes him afraid. And by that, *Pilate* loses honor. He is the Roman governor, and he is trying this poor Jewish rabbi, and yet he’s the one who’s afraid. Jesus shows no fear.

And his fear motivates him to question Jesus further. *Pilate* is now not so dismissive of Jesus’ claims to a spiritual kingdom. He asks, “Where are you from that you claim to be Son of God? Where are you from?” When Jesus refuses to speak, *Pilate* makes a claim to authority, “You do not speak to me? Do You not know that I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify You?” Jesus is not afraid. Jesus remains calm and in control, and he tells *Pilate*, “You only have authority because God has allowed you to have authority.” We can remember the garden when a cohort of Roman soldiers came to arrest Jesus and fell to the ground at the declaration of the name, “I am.” Jesus is in control here and he’s submitting to the authority of *Pilate*, but that’s an authority that *Pilate* gets from God.

Interestingly, Jesus indicates that the guilt of the Jewish leaders is greater than *Pilate*’s guilt. *Pilate* will still be held responsible. God uses evil to bring about good. But still, he punishes evil for the evil that was done. An example from the Old Testament that stood out to the prophet Habakkuk was God’s use of wicked Babylon to punish Judah. “That doesn’t seem right!” And it wasn’t right. God used Babylon to bring about justice for Judah, but then Babylon, after carrying out its role in an evil way was punished. And the Bible holds these truths to be compatible. (1) God is sovereign in all things, even able to use evil to bring about good, and (2) people are still accountable for their actions.

Pilate's action is going to lead to salvation for the world. That does not absolve Pilate. He is participating in the condemnation of an innocent man. The Jewish leaders, however, are charged with greater responsibility, greater sin. They are the stewards of Israel. They know the prophecies of the Messiah. They should be able to see that Jesus is fulfilling those very prophecies that they have memorized. But they refuse to see. They are blinded by their desire to hold onto their positions of authority and their view of Jewish religion. They don't want to hear what Jesus has to say. They refuse to give up their stewardship to the rightful King.

The Jewish leaders continue to press their accusation., "If you release this Man, you are no friend of Caesar; everyone who makes himself out *to be* a king opposes Caesar." They know what to say to a Roman governor. They're speaking in his terms.

Pilate comes out one last time bringing Jesus with him.

B' 19:13-15 Therefore when Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out

¹³ Therefore when Pilate heard these words, **he brought Jesus out**, and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Pavement, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha. ¹⁴ Now it was the day of preparation for the Passover; it was about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, "Behold, your King!" ¹⁵ So they cried out, "Away with *Him*, away with *Him*, crucify Him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar."

The day here is called the preparation for the Passover. Some have thought this creates a chronology problem, and it does if you interpret the day of preparation as the day before the Passover meal. Because, that meal was celebrated the previous day as reported in John 13. So that would be a conflict. The timing doesn't work out if designated this to be the day before that meal. But that would be a curious use of the term, "day of preparation." We actually don't have that in the Bible, and we don't see it in extrabiblical writings about the Passover. The day before Passover is not called the Day of Preparation anywhere, as far as we know. We have the record of the term being used, though. It's a very common term. And the day of preparation is the day before the Sabbath.

And the perceived problem can be resolved by, as we did the earlier problem about eating the Passover, if we understand Passover to indicate not only the Passover meal, but the whole feast of Unleavened Bread. So, the Passover becomes the meal plus the next week. And since that feast lasts a week, it always includes one Sabbath. The dating of Passover is not like our Easter, that always occurs on Sunday. It is like our Christmas, that occurs on a certain date, you know, December 25th, can be any day of the week. Year to year it changes. So also, the Passover meal was designated by a specific date and a specific month, and so the day of the week changes with every year. Every Passover is on a different day. A Sabbath would occur sometime during that week after Passover, some years it's earlier, closer to the Passover meal, some weeks it's later. But there's always a day of preparation during the Passover time. That's the day of preparation before that Sabbath that occurs during Passover. And it is always Friday. The day of preparation is always Friday, because Sabbath is always Saturday. And this is how we know Jesus was crucified on a Friday, because he was crucified on a day of preparation, and his body needs to be taken down before the beginning of Sabbath.

Pilate pokes again the Jews one last time, "Behold, your King!" Angry at Pilate and fixated on their aim, they respond, "Away with *Him*, away with *Him*, crucify Him!" Pilate asks, "Shall I crucify your King?" And then listen to how the priests answer, "We have no king but Caesar." The leaders of Israel deny their king. They deny Yahweh. They deny the Messiah. "We have no king but Caesar." And though Jesus is on trial, the Jewish prosecutors just incriminated themselves. We have to stand a moment in silence, hardly believing did they just say what I heard them say? "We have no king but Caesar?" Did that just come out of the mouths of these Jewish stewards over God's people? "We have no king but Caesar." Shame. Shame.

By the end of this trial, Pilate is shown to be afraid, unwilling to act justly on his repeated claim to find no guilt in Jesus but he doesn't do anything about it. He's afraid but he's impotent. He is

shamed. And the Jewish leaders are shown to be hypocritical in their single-minded crusade against Jesus. They go so far as to reject the sovereign rulership of Yahweh over their nation, and they claim Caesar just to get what they want: to get Jesus crucified. Only Jesus maintains his honor throughout. Even though there's this attempt to severely shame him in the middle of the section: he's beaten; he's robed; he's slapped, and a crown of thorns is put on his head. So the society is doing all they can do to shame him. But we look at what he says, and we look at how he behaves, and we look at his control throughout. And we see who is in charge. Nevertheless, he does allow the injustice to continue. He is not going to halt the road to the cross. He continues on. And our concluding verse is 19:16.

A' 19:16 So he then handed Him over to them to be crucified.

¹⁶ So **Pilate then handed Him over to them** to be crucified.

Pilate stamps the death order and hands it over, giving Jesus back into the hands of the Jewish leaders. They got what they came for. And Jesus continues on to the cross alone.

Reflection questions

1. Read John 18:28-19:16. What stands out to you as interesting, important, strange or confusing? What are some questions that come to mind?
2. Consider the structure of the text. How often does the text indicate that Pilate went out or that Pilate went in?
3. Consider the interaction between Pilate and the Jews. What language appears to indicate frustration or that indicates tension as either the Jews push Pilate or Pilate pushes the Jews?
4. Why do the Jews refuse to go into the Praetorium? How do you think Pilate feels about their refusal? Why does he allow it?
5. Why are the Jews making this request to Pilate in the first place? How do you think they feel about that?
6. How does the reputation of the Jewish leader's fare by the end of the trial?
7. How does Pilate's reputation fare by the end of the trial?
8. How does Jesus' reputation fare by the end of the trial?
9. What stands out to you about Jesus' conversation with Pilate in 33-38? What light do Jesus' words shed on his program for the church?
10. How does the religious Jew's view of spiritual truth show up in your community or society? How does the pagan Pilate's view of spiritual truth show up in your community or society? What stance does the Gospel of John suggest regarding truth in our modern times?