

The King and Kingdom Not of This World – *John 18:28-38*

Introduction – It seems odd that the oldest Christian creed, the Apostles’ Creed, contains the name of the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, a name that stands in infamy. But he is there because of his role in the story of redemption, the deep ironies of the gospel, and the sovereignty of God over and through the free will of man. In these verses, across from this governor of the City of Man stands the ruler of the City of God. He never stood a chance, and he could never see it coming. Standing before the bound Incarnate Truth he would dare to spout, “*What is truth?*” The apostle Paul would later write, “*...the foolishness of God is wiser than men and the weakness of God is stronger than men*” (1 Cor 1:25).

The Man, Pilate – We know more about Pilate than simply what the Gospels tell us. The Jewish historians, Josephus and Philo, give us more details that help us understand his relationship with the Jewish leaders in Judea, where he was appointed governor in AD26, and Jerusalem in particular. This was not a desirable appointment because the Jews were known as being quite a problem for the Romans. And for Pilate, this became very true. Once, he tried to set up an image of Caesar in the city of Jerusalem which led to a multi-day protest. Pilate called in his troops and threatened to kill the Jewish protestors who then laid themselves down and bared their necks. Pilate eventually backed down and removed the image. There were multiple other power struggles, many of them violent, including a time where Pilate mixed the blood of Galilean rebels with their sacrifices (Luke 13:1). But repeatedly the Jews put Pilate in a place of compromise and weakness where he had to give in to their demands; it went both ways. Pilate and Herod were not friends (Luke 23:12) until they conspired together to kill Jesus. Overall, Pilate was known as a morally weak and cruelly brutal governor.

Overview – The Jewish authorities led Jesus to Pilate. It was “*early morning*” a word that also was used as the 3AM-6AM watch. They would not enter the Praetorium (the headquarters of the Roman governor) because they did not want to become ceremonially unclean (v28). So, Pilate came out to them and asked for the charges (v29). Their answer assumed Jesus had already been tried and found guilty by the Jewish authorities, and wasn’t that enough? (v30). Pilate pushed back, “well then you judge Him,” whereby the Jews made clear they wanted this to be a capital crime and sentence. Rome had taken away Judea’s rights to capital punishment (v31). John comments that this signified the death by which Jesus would die – for crucifixion was only performed by the Romans and never by the Jews (v32). Pilate returned to the Praetorium and his question to Jesus indicated that the Jews had brought forth the accusation. The Greek text puts an emphasis on “you” as though Pilate, looking at this bound man asked, “You? Are you the King of the Jews?” (v33). Jesus understood the rules of evidence, looked at Pilate and challenged the hearsay, in essence putting Pilate on trial (v34). Clearly irritated, Pilate responded that the chief priests of Jesus’ nation are making the claims and asks Him, “*What have You done?*” (v35). Jesus had brought no insurrection, no protests, no rebellions but He had made clear that His kingdom was at hand (Matt 4:17, 10:7). But Pilate did not know about this kingdom and Jesus explained why (v36). If not of this world, Pilate asked again if He was a king then and Jesus gave Pilate the opportunity to lean into that question as a confession, to submit to the Truth if he would “*hear His voice*” (v37). Pilate dismissed the invitation with his cynical, ironic, and most famous question, “*What is truth?*” He quickly left Jesus, returned to the chief priests, and in a moment of high irony pronounced the Lamb of God spotless (v38).

Whitewashed Tombs – While they are not the center of this passage, it is important to note the wicked irony of the chief priests, the Sanhedrin, and other Jewish authorities who went through the motions, maintained the outward rituals, and kept themselves ceremonially clean while bringing false witnesses who lied about Jesus (see the other gospel accounts) and then turned Him over to the Romans for crucifixion. This is why earlier Jesus had called them “*whitewashed tombs*” (Matt 23:25-28). God knows our hearts. He knows when we are covering for our wickedness with outward religious practices. And He tells us He hates it (i.e. Amos 5:21-24), and especially hypocrites in places of authority.

The Cancel Culture Mob Rule – There’s nothing new under the sun. When Pilate asks “*what accusation do you bring against this man?*” it’s as if they reply, “*Look at all of us, how many of us up in high places who know He has done wrong.*” No evidence, just numbers, and how dare you doubt us. And they bring Him to Pilate because they want a public and humiliating crucifixion, shaming Him and any who would follow Him. This is the lynch mob routine while trying to make it look legal and all legitimate. This is the work of cancel culture. If you have different evidence, another opinion, shut up. The authorities know better. Later, the chief priests stirred up the crowd to join with them in shouting “*Crucify Him*” (Mark 15:11). Cancel culture in 30AD.

My Kingdom is Not of This World – This phrase is often misinterpreted to mean that Jesus’ kingdom had and has no dominion and authority in this world but is an ethereal or spiritual-only Neverland. It is “up there,” separated from the things of this earth. But that would contradict all of scriptures teachings and all of Jesus’ teachings on the kingdom. In Psalm 2 the Father tells the Son to “*ask of Me and I will give you the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession*” (Psalm 2:8, see also Psalm 72:8). Jesus did and so He declares that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Him (Matt 28:18-20), and Paul tells us that Jesus will reign at the right hand of the Father (in heaven) until all His enemies (on earth) have been put under His feet (1 Cor 15:24-26).

The kingdom of heaven, Christ’s kingdom, is not of this world in origin and it is not of this world in the nature of it. His kingdom originates in heaven where His rule as God has existed eternally and was brought to the earth in His incarnation. We share in that heavenly origin now as regenerate sons of God and so we are called “*pilgrims*” because “*our citizenship is in heaven*” (1 Pet 1:1, Phil 3:20-21). We are the beachhead of the New Humanity which will be fully revealed at the Resurrection and Second Coming of Jesus our King.

The kingdom of heaven is also not like the kingdoms of the earth in that our weapons are not carnal (2 Cor 10:3-5). It is not built on violence, blood, and war. It is built on conversions, and the weapons of our warfare are the Word, Water, Bread, and Wine. The kingdom of heaven is not *of* this world, but it is certainly *for* this world.

The King and Kingdom of Truth – Just as the sheep hear the voice of the Good Shepherd, so those who are “*of the truth*” hear the voice of Truth. Nietzsche said, “*There are no eternal facts as there are no absolute truths.*” Except, apparently, for that statement. And this is the world of the relativist, the pragmatist, the utilitarian self-seeking opportunist. But only until his flavor of his relativistic world is challenged, and then might makes right. Pilate, like so many, tried to rid himself of the Jesus-problem by handing Him back to the Jews. “*I find no fault in Him.*” But his troubles with Jesus, like so many, had just begun. The problem with Truth is that it is so stubbornly real.

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