

See the Son. Believe for Life. On Trial for You – John 18:28-40

When I was a kid I remember being at my grandmothers house in June of 1994 and all of us turning the TV on to watch a whole bunch of police cars slowly following a white Ford Bronco down the highways of Los Angeles. Of course, we came to find out that inside that Bronco was OJ Simpson, a former football star and celebrity who was wanted for murder. Simpson was arrested put on trial for the murders. It was a long trial, and everybody was very interested in it. In fact, I remember at our Christian school we actually turned on the TV to watch the verdict read after the 11 month long trial concluded. I read that they estimate over 100 million people watched the verdict read. Of course, he was found “not guilty”.

Although no trial has quite reached that level of interest since then, it does seem that as a society we get very interested in trials and courtroom scenes. I think at least one of the reasons for this is because in a trial you hope to get access to some information that was unknown before. You hope to find out the truth. The stakes are high and direct questions are asked that attempt to get to the heart of things.

In our study of John last week in chapter 18 we saw Jesus get arrested in the garden by a group of Roman and Jewish soldiers with Judas, his betrayer, leading them to him. He was then taken to the Jewish high priest and questioned. The high priest got nowhere and today we are going to see Jesus moved from the Jewish authorities to the group with whom the real power rests, the Romans. The Roman trial of Jesus begins in John 18:28 and this, of course, will carry us through to the death of Jesus by Roman crucifixion.

As we watch this trial unfold we will get some specific insight into who Jesus is and what His death will accomplish. So, here’s what I want to see today in John 18:28-40, **3 Sketches of Jesus in His Trial that Show us Our Salvation.**

1. The Passover Lamb who is Sacrificed for You (vv. 28-32)

Look with me at the first part of verse 28. Remember Caiaphas was the Jewish high priest and now they move Jesus to “the governor’s headquarters”. What does this mean? During that time a man named Pilate was the Roman prefect or governor of Judea. Normally, the Prefect would have had his headquarters at

Caesarea, but during the Passover, he would have moved to Jerusalem in case his authority was needed while the crowds were so great.

Pilate ruled in Judea from 26AD to 37AD and he is the only person mentioned in the Apostles Creed other than Mary, the mother of Jesus. Why? Well, Pilate is mentioned in multiple other ancient sources outside of Scripture and is even mentioned as the one who crucified Jesus of Nazareth. It's not that we need those other sources to verify the truthfulness of Scripture, but the mention of Pilate in the Apostles Creed does help us to remember that our faith is built on historically reliable eye witness accounts. These things happened in real time and in a real place.

Notice what happens as the Jewish authorities bring Jesus to Pilate in the rest of verse 28. Clearly the Passover is taking place that evening and to enter the home of a Gentile would have possibly made the Jewish leaders ceremonially unclean and unable to eat the Passover for another 7 days. It's not that paying attention to cleanness and uncleanness is wrong for them. The problem here is the irony of worrying about ceremonially uncleanness regarding the Passover and missing the entire point of Passover by wrongly putting to death the true Passover lamb.

In the book of Exodus God promised to free the Israelites from slavery in Egypt and He instituted the Passover on the night when this happened. God would send His angel of death and judgment through the land of Egypt and the only way to be protected from death was to have a lamb die for you. The lamb's blood would have to be placed on your doorpost as a sign that atonement had been made. Then you were protected from judgment and for the Israelites this led to freedom and new life as God's people.

In 1 Corinthians 5:7 Paul tells the Corinthians to live holy lives in accord with their new status as God's children because Christ, the Passover lamb, has been sacrificed for them. They can't enter back into slavery because Christ's death has made them free from sin. The Jews clearly miss this and end up bringing about the death of the true Passover lamb. Of course, Pilate is heavily involved in this. Look at verse 29.

This is a request for formal charges to be brought against Jesus. The Jews have delivered him over to the Romans, now tell us why. Look at how they answer in verse 30. It's possible that the Jewish leadership thought that because Pilate sent

troops to help arrest Jesus that he would just quietly agree to their condemnation of Jesus. So, they basically just say, trust us, he's a bad guy. It's shocking and reveals the major problems in their case against Jesus. Pilate isn't taking the bait so quickly and easily though. Look at verse 31.

Pilate is like, well, you try him for his crimes if you think he's a criminal and can't even tell me what I'd be putting him to death for. The Jews respond by bringing to light a key point in this. Now look at verse 32. This is ultimately why Jesus dies as the crucified Son of God and not by stoning. This is why he suffers the shame and humiliation that he does at the hands of the Romans. The Jewish leadership need the Romans to put Jesus to death because they aren't allowed to do it themselves. Jesus had spoken about his death as being a death on a cross and ultimately this goes back to Deuteronomy 21:23. Jesus suffered the judgment and curse of God as the Passover Lamb.

So, after this confrontation with the Jews, Pilate goes to investigate himself.

2. The King who has Come to Rule and Reign (vv. 33-38a)

Look at verse 33. Of course, Israel was full of messianic expectations during this time. The hope was that God would send one to free Israel from the Romans. There was even a scene in John 6 when the people tried to take Jesus by force and make Him king. Pilate has most likely heard these rumors or this may have even been part of what the Jews told him when they brought Jesus to him. Jesus responds by asking for clarification in order to know what he's dealing with in verse 34. Is this a charge from the Jews or something Pilate has picked up elsewhere? Pilate answers in verse 35.

In other words, to Pilate this seems like an intramural squabble or a problem among Jews. So, Jesus clarifies the true nature of His kingship without giving Pilate grounds for putting Him to death. Look at verse 36.

It's clear from all of the Gospels that Jesus comes proclaiming the arrival of the kingdom of God. But what exactly is God's kingdom? Well, it's not like an earthly kingdom. Jesus is not simply looking to push the Romans out and establish a new dynasty in Israel. He's not another worldly and petty ruler. If he had been he would have encouraged Peter's actions in the garden.

But instead, His kingdom comes through His sacrifice on the cross and His drinking of the cup of God's wrath for sin. He defeats the powers of sin and darkness by atoning for sin on the cross. Listen to Colossians 1:13-14 and 2:13-15.

He does come to rule and reign but in a different way and over a different kingdom. His kingdom spreads, not through political victories or military might. His kingdom spreads through the proclamation of the good news and the submission of hearts to the king who died for them. This is what Jesus is affirming in verse 37.

When Jesus says, "You say that I am a king" here it actually means, "You are right in saying I am a king" and he can say this because He has defined his kingdom. And his kingdom is one of truth about God, about Himself, and about the sinful condition of human beings. To enter His kingdom is to accept His teaching and perspective and recognize your need for His atoning death and new life in Him. It's to repent of your sins and turn to the King.

Pilate is in no position to grasp this. Look at the first part of verse 38. And so, he turns around and heads back outside and this brings us to our 3rd sketch.

3. The Innocent One who Suffers Instead of the Guilty (vv. 38b-40)

Look at the rest of verse 38. This is a drum that Pilate will beat over and over again throughout the narrative of Christ's trial and crucifixion. This is not a murderer, insurrectionist, thief, or even a sinner! The Jews can't even come up with an accusation and after questioning Jesus Pilate can't find any fault. So, the logical course of action is to release Him, right? Well, in a rather strange decision Pilate decides to throw the decision back to the Jews. Look at verse 39.

But they immediately turn to another individual. Now, think about what has happened here. Pilate has been questioning Jesus to see if He's some sort of king. He's asking this because he wants to find out if He's a political threat to rebel against Rome.

Now, notice the editorial comment that John makes about Barabbas in verse 40. You probably have in your footnote that Barabbas was an insurrectionist. This is the very definition of a political enemy of Rome! This man is guilty of the very crime Jesus was being accused of committing. The Chief Priests and Jewish leaders would have normally had nothing to do with a man like this. They did not

want to agitate Rome because they enjoyed their privileged position under Rome. But their hatred for Jesus is so violent and so deep that they are even willing to champion the release of a known terrorist to Rome in order to see Jesus put to death.

Now, on a theological level, let's consider what has happened here. The guilty has gone free while the innocent has been condemned. Of course, we have no knowledge of whether the death of Jesus impacted Barabbas personally and whether or not we will meet him in heaven, and yet, this is exactly the sketch of Jesus that we need to see. The guilty goes free and is acquitted on all charges and the innocent is condemned to suffer in the place of the guilty.

I'd like to read 2 Corinthians 5:17-21. Let's notice a couple of things here. The goal is reconciliation with God. How does this happen for us? Not by our own works or ability or effort or goodness. It happens through Christ. How does Christ bring reconciliation between you and God? Verse 21 gives us the theological reason that reconciliation can happen. It's for our sake that Jesus was treated as guilty, even though He wasn't guilty, so that we could receive and know the righteousness of God.

The trial of Jesus opens the realities of His ministry and work up to us. He's the Passover lamb, the sovereign King who has come to rule and reign, and the innocent who suffers in the place of the guilty so the guilty can go free. Each of these sketches gets to a fundamental reality of Jesus's work and our salvation. I hope that these sketches can be a continual encouragement to you this week. Let's pray.

Sermon Reflection Questions

1/29/23

- Why do you think Pilate is the only person mentioned in the Apostles Creed?
- Explain what's going on with the religious leaders in verse 28. Why won't they enter the Governor's House?
- What is the background of Jesus being called the Passover Lamb in 1 Corinthians 5:7?
- Why does it matter that Jesus was put to death by the Romans and not by the Jews?
- Why would Pilate ask Jesus if he is a king?
- What is Jesus getting at in verse 36 when He says, "my kingdom is not from the world"?
- In what ways is Jesus' kingdom different than the kingdoms of this world?
- What difference does the nature of Christ's kingdom make for us as the church?
- How does one enter Jesus's kingdom?

- Why does it matter that Jesus is innocent of any wrongdoing?
- Explain 2 Corinthians 5:21.
- What does it mean to be given the ministry of reconciliation?