

John 18:33-37

³³Pilate went back into the Praetorium and summoned Jesus. He asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?”

³⁴Jesus answered, “Are you saying this on your own, or did others tell you about me?”

³⁵Pilate answered, “Am I a Jew? Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What have you done?”

³⁶Jesus replied, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would fight so that I would not be handed over to the Jews. But now my kingdom is not from here.”

³⁷“You are a king then?” Pilate asked.

Jesus answered, “I am, as you say, a king. For this reason I was born, and for this reason I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.”

King

I.

He knew they were watching the trial. *Everyone* was watching the trial. Lots of information had to be taken into account, and more than just the evidence at hand.

Fortunately, there would be no cameras present at this interview of the defendant. No artist was on hand to do a sketch of the event, either. There weren't even any reporters who would dash right out to spread their stories far and wide.

The news, however, would leak. It was inevitable.

Since what was said in these proceedings would leak, it was essential that he consider his every move very carefully. The matter was politically charged. What effect would this proceeding have in the community or in the surrounding area? There was no jury seated in the hall, so there was no place to deflect the anger of those who might disagree with his actions.

He would have to be pragmatic. Pragmatic and shrewd. Every word should be weighed thoughtfully. Careless words could come back to haunt him in the future. It was entirely possible that just a small band of individuals could find strategic positions among the throngs of people gathered outside. Using carefully crafted words, a few people could easily stir the crowd up to a frenzy. Things could very quickly get out of hand. It wouldn't take much.

He had asked them: “What charge do you bring against this man?” (John 18:29, EHV). Before ever bringing Jesus before Pilate, the Jews had thought about what they would say very carefully. They had their trumped-up charges all prepared. Luke gives the most thorough report of the charges: “We found this fellow misleading our nation, forbidding the payment of taxes to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king” (Luke 23:2, EHV). Really, their charge of Jesus claiming to be a king was a bit thin, so they had to preface the charge with subversion, which was a complete fabrication. It would help, they thought, make Jesus look like a radical who wanted to overthrow the Roman government.

“Pilate went back into the Praetorium and summoned Jesus” (John 18:33, EHV).

Imagine how Pilate must have prepared himself before Jesus was led in. This matter was going to be a tricky one. The primary goal of any politician is to maintain power. Whether

he could manage to emerge completely unscathed was unclear at the moment, but it was necessary to proceed very, very carefully.

Justice should be upheld, of course. But what justice, exactly? And at what cost? If the carefully planted dissenters didn't like his verdict, riots would break out. Any thought for the defendant and his well-being was secondary, at best. Riots wouldn't serve *Pilate* well.

Before Jesus was led in there had already been two trials. Annas and Caiaphas already had determined the justice *they* wanted to see done. Caiaphas had once said: "It is better for us that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish" (John 11:50, EHV). Caiaphas, like Pilate, was only thinking of his own power when he said that.

"Pilate ... summoned Jesus" (John 18:33, EHV). How does one "summon" a king? Centuries earlier Isaiah had captured the scene that was to come: "He had no attractiveness and no majesty. When we saw him, nothing about his appearance made us desire him. ³He was despised and rejected by men, a man who knew grief, who was well acquainted with suffering. Like someone whom people cannot bear to look at, he was despised, and we thought nothing of him" (Isaiah 53:2-3, EHV). Bloodied and bruised from the beatings at his previous trials, Jesus didn't look much like a king.

II.

Who wants that kind of king, a king who is bloodied and beaten? Who wants that kind of king, a king who has been abandoned by all his so-called loyal followers and left to his own devices? Who wants that kind of king, a king who cannot seem to overcome adversity and use his power to rise above?

Nobody. That's who.

Pilate's focus was on himself—his own power, his own prestige, maintaining his position of authority in this outpost of the Roman government. Annas and Caiaphas and their cronies were focused on themselves—their own power, their own prestige, maintaining their position of authority in the religion of Judaism that was left alone by the Roman government.

Focus on self. Focus on the immediate. What impact can this king have on my existence right now? How can *I* benefit? How can I use the situation to my own advantage? Even close followers did it—and do it. There is pressure. Pressure from the outside. Pressure from society. Pressure from the mob. The next thing you know, you find yourself around the fire, warming yourself and swearing up and down you never knew the man. Just save your own skin; save your own reputation. Deny when the going gets tough.

III.

Now the pathetic figure stood at his third trial, hands bound together, bruised and bloodied face looking at Pilate calmly. "[Pilate] asked him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?'" (John 18:33, EHV).

How long was the interval before Jesus answered? Did Pilate start to squirm in his seat as he waited for the answer? Perhaps he was already running scenarios through his mind to try to anticipate what he might say next to deal with the situation.

"Jesus answered, 'Are you saying this on your own, or did others tell you about me?'" (John 18:34, EHV). An answer in the form of a question, designed to give Pilate an opportunity to confess faith in Jesus, even while Jesus stood on trial for his life.

"Pilate answered, 'Am I a Jew? Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What have you done?'" (John 18:35, EHV). Not only do you not *look* very kingly, Jesus, the people who should be your subjects are the very ones who dumped you off at my

courtroom for trial. Far from confessing faith, Pilate wondered what Jesus had done to so anger his own countrymen.

“Jesus replied, ‘My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would fight so that I would not be handed over to the Jews. But now my kingdom is not from here’” (John 18:36, EHV).

Amazingly, those who are “servants” of Jesus and followers of Jesus seem to forget that his kingdom is not of this world. His servants and followers seem to expect him to rule in such a way that this present kingdom would be more pleasant for us. That’s not what he came for.

“‘You are a king then?’ Pilate asked” (John 18:37, EHV). Pilate has no interest in anything else Jesus has to say. He has admitted to the charge of being a king. Somehow, some way, Pilate will be able to use this to his own advantage. No matter what his decision would be, he could pass the buck on to the confession of the defendant, if need be.

IV.

“Jesus answered, ‘I am, as you say, a king. For this reason I was born, and for this reason I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice’” (John 18:37, EHV).

The very next words out of Pilate’s mouth would question the very existence of truth. At the very least, he would wonder how anyone can determine where truth might lie.

Jesus already said it: his kingdom is not of this world. His kingdom would be firmly established and entrenched over the next few hours. Already Jesus was fighting a battle that no human being can possibly comprehend. Jesus was fighting against more than the chief priests and Sanhedrin who accused him and beat him and brought charges against him before Pilate.

Satan knew the battle was hitting a fevered pitch. So far he had been unable to tempt Jesus into sin, no matter how hard he had tried. The battle was for souls—for the souls of all. The slaps in the face Jesus had already taken, the blows to the head that had already been administered, the lashes of the whip that were soon to come, even the physical torture of the cross he would soon endure, were not the real battle.

Soon Jesus would be abandoned by God to suffer alone on the cross the sins of the world. *That* was the real battle. No one could take any of the punishment from him. Every single lie, every single doubt, every curse, piece of gossip, every *everything* was on him. God the Father treated Jesus as sin itself and hurled his hatred of sin at him as he hung there, doing battle for you and me.

That’s the truth. The truth is, Jesus *is* King. The truth is, Jesus took it all. The truth is, Jesus won! The truth is, Jesus would soon say from the cross: “It is finished.” Every sin was paid in full by the King who won the battle for us.

That’s why we exist as a Christian congregation. Everything else is secondary, at best. Every problem of this world has to be put into context. Jesus’ kingdom is not from here. *We* don’t really belong here. He has won a victory for us; Jesus won forgiveness. The truth is, we listen to his voice, therefore we belong to the truth—we belong to Jesus, we belong to the King—we belong in that place he is preparing for us even now. Amen.