

Bearing Witness to the Truth

Thomas Robinson, June 27, 2010

John 18:28-40

²⁸ Then the Jewish leaders took **Jesus** from **Caiaphas** to the **palace of the Roman governor** (Praetorium). By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness they did not enter the palace, because they wanted to be able to eat the **Passover**.

²⁹ So **Pilate came out to them** and asked, "**What charges** are you bringing against this man?"

³⁰ "If he were not **a criminal**," they replied, "we would not have handed him over to you."

³¹ Pilate said, "Take him yourselves and **judge him by your own law**."

"But we have no right to **execute anyone**," they objected. ³² This took place to fulfill what Jesus had said about **the kind of death he was going to die**.

³³ Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, "**Are you the king of the Jews?**"

³⁴ "Is that your own idea," Jesus asked, "or did others talk to you about me?"

³⁵ "Am I a Jew?" Pilate replied. "Your own nation and chief priests handed you over to me. **What is it you have done?**"

³⁶ Jesus said, "**My kingdom is not of (from) this world**. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent me being handed over to the Jewish leaders. But now **my kingdom** is from another place (not from here)."

³⁷ "**You are a king, then!**" said Pilate.

Jesus answered, "**You say that I am a king**. In fact, the reason **I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth**. Everyone on the side of truth hears my voice."

³⁸ "**What is truth?**" retorted Pilate.

With this he went out again to the Jews gathered there and said, "**I find no basis for a charge against him**. ³⁹ But it is your custom for me to release to you one prisoner at the time of the Passover. Do you want me to release **'the king of the Jews?'**"

⁴⁰ They shouted back, "**No, not him! Give us Barabbas!**" Now Barabbas had taken part in an uprising.

John 1:14, 17; 8:32; 14:6; 16:13; 17:16-19

^{1:14} The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. ... **full of grace and truth**.

^{1:17} For the law was given through Moses; **grace and truth came through Jesus Christ**.

^{8:32} "**You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.**"

^{14:6} "**I am the way, and the truth, and the life**. No one comes to the Father except through me."

^{16:13} "**When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.**"

^{17:16} "**They are not from the world, just as I am not from the world.** ¹⁷ Sanctify them in the **truth**; your word is **truth**. ¹⁸ As you sent me **into the world**, so I have sent them **into the world**. ¹⁹ And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be **sanctified in truth**."

John 1:49; 3:5; 12:13

^{1:49} Then Nathanael declared, "**Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel.**"

^{3:5} "**Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.**"

^{12:13} They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, "**Hosanna!**" "**Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!**" "**Blessed is the king of Israel!**"

Jesus Before Pilate – the Game of Power

John takes us inside the strange, dramatic Roman trial that swirls around Jesus.

The high-priestly aristocracy, in charge of Passover, their big day, appointed by Romans but fearing/hating them and especially the Prefect, Pontius Pilate.

Pilate was described by Agrippa as a brutal, cruel man who despised the Jews. He worked with Caiaphas as high priest, but did as little as possible that he wanted.

The high priests' power is in temple & religious rites: They won't go into the Praetorium.

The governor's power is in political force, the greatness of Rome: Don't bother me.

They share mutual contempt, trying to use each other. Jesus is a tool they use.

Jesus doesn't make sense to either. Pilate can tell he's a nobody. But the high priests want him executed in Rome's way – crucified – and right at Passover. Strange!

Pilate has no compunction about swatting Jesus. But should he help the high priests? Pilate goes back and forth between the religious leaders and Jesus.

They are just being themselves, but God is also accomplishing his purpose in them.

A “King” Who Doesn't Fit

Pilate tries to fix a charge: treason, insurrection, a claim to be king. But Jesus is not intimidated. He answers by interrogating Pilate. Who is on trial here?

Jesus says the loaded words “My kingdom...” – probably enough for Pilate. But Jesus says more: it is not “from this world” – not originating here with the values of a typical kingdom fighting for control. It is in the world to transform it but not from this world.

The priests and Pilate will struggle over power, but neither will change the basic structure of things. “My kingdom” is the only one truly in the world to change things.

Pilate thinks he has a charge: “*You are a king, then!*” You're like me. You want power.

Telling About Reality

For Jesus, the word “king” is inadequate. He was born – the incarnation – in order to reveal the Truth, to help people see the reality in which we actually live.

We live by made-up rules not intended by the creator of the world.

We destroy each other. We often turn God's purposes into mortal combat.

Jesus says, You think you're acting with reality. You're not! Jesus brings a “Copernican revolution.” They think the structure of the world and its struggles for power, money, control, pleasure, religious rituals, are fixed, unmoving.

Jesus says, It all revolves around God and his love, his astonishing self-giving, healing, challenging love, and I'm the embodiment of that truth. I testify to that reality. I live it. I lay down my life for it.

Jesus calls even Pilate to see this Truth, hear it's voice in Jesus. Pilate on trial. Me too!

Jesus is the Truth. He marks his followers by that truth, sends them into the world.

Back to the Game

“What is Truth?”. Pilate doesn't hear. No charge against Jesus. “I know your game,” he says. You're playing me for some purpose of your own. I'll play you right back. The Passover amnesty is coming up. Pilate doesn't want to release an insurrectionist.

Maybe he can substitute this nobody, this “King of the Jews.” But his plan backfires.

Who writes the rules for your life? Are they from this world? Do you need a Copernican revolution to see truth/reality? Look at Jesus, full of Grace and Truth. Look at God.