

## Before Pilate – John 18:33-38

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### A. Read Vs. 33-38

#### B. High Drama

1. This is high drama!
  - a. It's the confrontation of 2 kings & their kingdoms.
  - b. The kings are Caesar & Christ.
  - c. The kingdoms are the Roman Empire & the Kingdom of God.
2. Pilate was the Roman governor of Israel; a strategic part of Rome's domination in the East.
  - a. A major reason why the Roman Empire lasted so long & controlled so vast an area was because of the administrative skill of the officials who governed the various regions.
  - b. Pilate was one of those; Rome's representative, the Emperor's agent, the very voice & face of Caesar in Israel.
  - c. His decisions carried the weight of the entire might of Rome.
3. Opposite him was Jesus; God incarnate, Creator come as man.
  - a. As the Messiah, He was King of a realm *far greater* than Rome.
  - b. As powerful & vast as the Roman Empire was, arguably the *greatest* empire of all time, it was just one of several kingdoms to rise & fall throughout history –
    - c. A history that will find its consummation in the Kingdom of God. [\[1\]](#)
4. These two men face off with one another.
  - a. Pilate is arrayed in the regalia of his office as the military governor.
    - 1) The meeting takes place in his HQ.
    - 2) He's backed by troops equipped with the latest in military hardware.
    - 3) Rome knew how to use the demonstration of power to intimidate & weaken an opponent. So we can be sure Pilate was using every tool at his disposal to quickly end this challenge.
  - b. In contrast to Pilate, Jesus was *alone* & dressed in a simple garment, now soiled by a long, sleepless night & His rough handling by the temple police.
5. The topic of discussion between them is "kingship."

### II. TEXT

#### A. V. 33

**33 Then Pilate entered the Praetorium again, called Jesus, and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?"**

1. The Praetorium was the governor's palace & HQ.
  - a. When the priests had first come to present their case to Pilate, he'd had to come out of the palace to meet them.
  - b. It was against their rules to enter the home of a Gentile for fear of being contaminated!
  - c. But they had no qualms about murdering an innocent man.

- d. Interesting how man-made religious rules will always *bend* to allow us to do what we *want* to do.
2. Now that Pilate has heard the priest's charges against Jesus, he returns to HQ's & begins the interrogation.
3. His main concern lies in the accusation of the priests that Jesus is claiming to be the King of Israel.

#### **B. V. 34**

#### **34 Jesus answered him, "Are you speaking for yourself about this, or did others tell you this concerning Me?"**

1. Jesus *will* answer Pilate's question, but He wants the governor to *understand* the answer.
2. So He asks a question of Pilate meant to clarify what *he means* by "King."
  - a. Is this Pilate's idea of a king or the Jewish concept of the Messiah?
  - b. When Pilate asks, "Are You the King of the Jews?" does he mean someone who will *challenge* the Roman rule of Israel.
  - b. Or does he refer to the Messianic mission?
3. You see, Jesus *is* in fact a King; but His rule is very different from what Pilate understands & Jesus wants to help him grasp this so his decision can be a just one.
4. But Pilate doesn't want to get dragged into another of the many Jewish religious controversies.
  - a. He'd been governor long enough to know the Jews *delighted* in religious debate.
  - b. Religion & politics were all one big mish-mash in Jerusalem,
  - c. And he'd been dragged into the debates in the past.
  - d. He didn't want to get sucked into another, so he said . . .

#### **C. V. 35**

#### **35 Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me. What have You done?"**

1. The priests had accused Jesus of claiming to be the King of the Jews.
2. Pilate knew, the priests knew this charge would be hot enough to require his attention & that he'd be *inclined* to execute anyone even *accused* of it.
3. But Pilate was no dummy. His relationship with the priests wasn't at all chummy – they despised each other.
  - a. So when the priests came that morning dragging one of *their own* & accusing Him of something worthy of death, he got suspicious.
  - b. It's not *like* these guys to turn over one of their own to the Romans.
  - c. He rightly concludes Jesus must have done something to torque these guys off.
  - d. Since the enemy of my enemy is my friend, Pilate puts the brakes on the rush to execute Jesus & tries to find out what Jesus has done that has the priests so eager to get rid of Him.

#### **D. V. 36-37**

#### **36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom**

**were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.”**

1. Jesus gets to the heart of the problem & tells Pilate what He needs to know so he can render a just decision.
2. Yes, Jesus *is* a King, but His kingdom is no rival to Rome because His rule is neither political nor military in nature.
  - a. If it was, then He would have gone about raising & arming recruits.
  - b. He would have proposed a new political system & called for the *overthrow* of the current order.

**37 Pilate therefore said to Him, “Are You a king then?” Jesus answered, “You say *rightly* that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.”**

3. At Jesus’ admission that He is indeed a King, Pilate’s alarm was instantaneous.
  - a. Rome’s Empire was so vast, keeping it under control was the main concern.
  - b. Troops were stretched thin. In fact, at this point there were far more foreign mercenaries in Rome’s army than native Romans.
  - c. All over the Empire, would-be rulers popped up trying & throw off the Roman yoke.
  - d. *Any* claim to kingship was seen as a threat.
4. So Jesus tells Pilate he needs to understand that His kingdom *is no threat* to Rome.
5. His kingdom isn’t a political, economic, or military challenge.
6. Caesar has nothing to fear from Christ in terms of Earthly dominion.

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7. At this point, we need to stop & take a good hard look at *how* these words impact our understanding of the Christian life & the *Mission* of the Church.
8. As we’ve seen so clearly over the last few weeks in chs. 13-17, When Jesus returned to the Father, He turned His mission over to the disciples.
  - a. They in turn passed it on to those who came after them.
  - b. That process has continued until here we are today.
9. In His *first coming* as the Messiah, Jesus conquered sin & death & made it possible for men & women to be restored to relationship with God.
10. That relationship results in a change that starts in the heart & works out to all of life.
11. That’s the mission that’s been passed to us – to share the good news that people can be born again & transformed from sinner to saint by the inner work of the Holy Spirit.
12. When Jesus *comes again*, He’ll come to *apply* His victory over Satan & will set up new governing structures that reflect His righteous rule.
  - a. But that’s something *He alone* can do when He comes again as Conquering King.
  - b. It is *NOT* part of our mission now to *make* the kingdoms of this world *bend* to Christ’s rule.
  - c. Jesus made it clear to Pilate – **“My kingdom is not of this world.”**

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13. A major tragedy occurred in the thinking of the Church in the late 4<sup>th</sup> Century.
  - a. This was not long after the Roman Empire made Christianity the unofficial

- State religion.
- b. The Church emerged from the catacombs where it had fled persecution to find itself the darling of the political world.
  - c. It wasn't long before the leaders of the Church were looking for ways to define their mission in the midst of a system that was lending its support & assistance, instead of trying to eradicate it.
  - d. At this crucial moment, a man named **Augustine** stepped onto the scene.
  - e. He was a brilliant & eloquent philosopher who blended the power of the Roman State, with Greek philosophy, and the Gospel.
  - f. He proposed a system in which through the influence of the Church, the institutions of the world could be redeemed & bring about a Utopia that would invite Jesus to come back with a hearty slap on the back & an "atta' boy" to the victorious Church.
  - g. He declared that it was the **duty & destiny** of the Church to bring about the Kingdom of God on Earth through a combination of spiritual & political power.
  - h. In Augustine's vision, Jesus doesn't return to set up the Kingdom on Earth, He returns because the Church has done it **for** Him.
14. The Church embraced Augustine's vision & made it their template for mission.
- a. This is why the **Roman Church** figures so centrally in the kingdoms & nations of Europe until the Modern Era.
  - b. But the **Reformers** also looked to Augustine. Both Calvin & Luther took their inspiration from him in their attempts establish a **State Church**.
15. History makes it clear that whenever the people of God have sought to use political, economic, or military power to accomplish the aims of the Kingdom of God, the Church has been horribly **corrupted**.
16. And this is why we must exercise great caution as it relates to the current political scene.
- a. God forbid that Christianity or the Church should ever align itself with a political party or candidate.
  - b. Sure we may find that the Biblical position on issues is better represented by one party or another.
  - c. But we're doomed when we make **union** with that party a test of fidelity to Christ.
  - d. When the world equates being a Christian with a political platform, we've just closed the door on our real mission which is evangelism.
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- e. **USA Today** carried an article on Feb. 21<sup>st</sup> of this year about an organization that's trying to convince Evangelical Christians to move to South Carolina & literally take over the State.
17. As a pastor, I'm in a unique position to see how different groups try to **use** the Church for their own ends.
- a. We regularly get calls, emails, & letters from groups who want to mobilize CCO for some cause.
  - b. Movie producers want to get us to rally behind their latest release.
  - c. Political groups send us letters about how if we don't join their cause all of Western civilization is in danger of falling apart.

- d. We're called on to boycott the corporate sponsors of some TV network because they're going to produce a new series deemed offensive.
18. I need to ask you to forgive me. – *The Passion* – Since then.
19. It is **NOT** our mission to redeem the institutions of society & make the governments of this world **look like** the Kingdom of God!
20. Jesus **alone** can & will do that when He comes again.
21. **Our mission** is to carry on His **first coming** – to see a transformation occur in individuals from the inside out.
- We're to **use** the **same means** Jesus did.
  - We're to **operate** the **same way** He did.
  - Far as we know, Jesus never picketed Pilate's or Herod's house.
  - When He visited Caesarea Philippi, a well-known place of pagan worship & demonic activity, He didn't call for a boycott of the local merchants.
  - He looked for the poor, the abused, the hurt, the lonely - & gave them new life.
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22. Jesus **did** say that as we follow Him we'd be the salt & light of the world.
- As He lives through us, a righteous **influence** will flow out to effect those around us.
  - But that's to be the **extent** of our power – INFLUENCE!
  - Not force, not control or domination. Not threat, or fear, or intimidation.
  - Our power is a spiritual enabling to influence others through an excellent lifestyle.
23. As disciples, we're to be **just like our Rabbi**-- Jesus.
24. The **only time** we see Him set aside gentleness is when He was dealing with **religious hypocrisy**.
- He cleared the temple of the marketplace set up by the priests.
  - And used harsh words on the Pharisees.
  - He wasn't dealing with the **world** at those points. –
  - He was dealing with the very things that was **supposed to be an earthly manifestation** of the Kingdom of God!
25. If we're faithfully following Christ, then we ought to focus our attempts at institutional reform **on the Church** rather than the world.
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26. Jesus made it clear to Pilate that His kingdom was not an earthly rival to Rome.
27. It was a realm defined by **spiritual** rather than **geographic borders**.
28. And the main issue of this spiritual kingdom was **Truth**.
- The citizens of Christ's Kingdom aren't defined by what ethnic group they're a part of.
  - They're not defined by where they're born or what language they speak.
  - They are those who recognize Jesus IS Truth & that faith in Him brings them into **right relationship with God**.
  - It is **that** relationship that **makes them true**, straight, right.
  - That rightness then flows out from them, influencing those around them.
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#### **E. V. 38 – Truth**

1. In what may be the most ironic statement in all of History . . .

**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 fault in Him at all.”

2. What’s ironic about this is that *the very embodiment of truth* was standing right in front of Him.
    - a. And He’d just said that all those who are *of the truth* recognize Him.
    - b. That Pilate diverts the conversation *away* from Jesus with this dismissive reply proves he’s not really interested in an answer.
  3. When he said, “What is truth?” he was being cynical.
  4. As a politician who’s called to the art of compromise, his concern was “*what worked*,” what made the most people happy for the longest time.
  5. Pilate didn’t believe in some over-arching, absolute, unchanging truth.
  6. And if it *did* exist, as far as he was concerned, it was beyond the reach of puny man.
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### III. CONCLUSION

#### A. Post Moderns

1. Though Pilate lived 2,000 years ago, he was quite *contemporary* in his outlook.
2. We live in what’s referred to as the *Post-Modern Era*. <sup>[2]</sup>
3. The *Modern Era* began with the Enlightenment, when human reason was stripped away from the influence of religious faith & made the *only* arbiter of knowledge.
4. God was rejected as the Authority & man was set up in His place.
5. But the Modern Era’s promise of bringing about a perfect world through politics, science, & technology has proven hollow.
6. People have come to realize that man is not the solution, he’s the problem.
  - a. He’s not his own liberator; he’s the oppressor.
  - b. Science didn’t heal us, it gave us the A-bomb.
7. Following the horrors of WWII, people began rejecting Modernity’s emphasis on human reason.
8. Many saw in Hitler’s Third Reich nothing but Modernity writ large.
9. So in the post-modern age, people have not only been trained to distrust faith, they’ve grown weary of reason.
10. The result is well summed up by Pilate’s question: “What is truth?”
  - a. It’s not so much that PM’s *reject* truth.
  - b. They’re just *suspicious* of anyone who claims to have a *corner* on it.
  - c. PM’s are *skeptical* of both science & religion, while at the same time being *open* to both, *if* - & here’s the key – *if* the truth can be convincingly *shown* them; not just *told*, but *shown*.
  - d. They start out in a cynical place, “What is truth?”
  - e. But underlying that question for many is a sincere desire for an answer.
  - f. Because PM’s tend to be unaffected by *talk*, classical apologetics rarely work with them.
  - g. For the PM, truth is not a *position to argue*; it’s a *reality to live*.
  - h. PM’s end up coming to faith, not because of the brilliance of our theology but because of the *beauty of our lives*.
  - i. They visit a church because they like the music, or the fellowship, or the

- way the teaching makes the Christian life relevant.
- j. These things bring the *reality of truth* to light for the PM.
  - k. It's the risen Christ living in & through His own.
  - l. They say to the Church, "Don't *talk* me into being a Christian. *Show* me it works!"

### **B. Our Age, Our Opportunity**

1. The contemporary Church needs to wake up to the fact that *this is* the world we live in.
2. While some Christian philosophers & apologists are fretting & wringing their hands over the danger & threat of PM, I see this as a fantastic time to be alive to share the love & truth of Christ.
3. One of the most explosive periods of growth for the Church was during its first 300 years.
  - a. In that period, the Gospel was considered a *scandal* because Jesus had died a shameful death as a common criminal.
  - b. Yet people were coming to faith *everywhere* across the Empire.
  - c. Here's what even their critics kept saying about them; "See how these Christians *love* one another!"
  - d. It wasn't the brilliance of their arguments that won the lost; it was the beauty of their lives.
4. Jesus didn't say, "By the convincing nature of your arguments, will they know you're my followers."
5. It was, "By *this* will all men know that you are My disciples, by the love you have for one another."
6. Jesus, the Truth, stood before Pilate.
7. Today, He sets *us*, indwelt by the Spirit of Truth, to stand before the world.
8. May they not only *hear*, but **SEE** that Truth in us.

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[1] Daniel 2

[2] Many thanks to Joe Paskewich for the information on Post-modernism that follows.