

November 24, 2024

John 18:33-37

One of the most remarkable people recorded for us in God's Word is Pontius Pilate. We don't know much about him. He was likely a wealthy, politically connected Roman citizen who possibly served in the military, and he was serving the position that no Roman would ever want: Governor of Judea. The Romans conquered this part of the world, but really, really did not care for the people that were there. They saw the Jews as odd religious fanatics, obsessive about their holy book which they considered to be the true, unadulterated word from their God, whom they declared to be the only God in existence. They had these odd rules and restrictions. They would never work on Saturday, they never ate pork, and they were convinced this special ruler would come and deliver them from their enemies. A lot of people claimed to be that ruler- the "Messiah," the "Christ." One day, the Jewish religious leaders- the chief priests came to him to ask him to put one of these so-called kings of Israel to death. Odd. Pilate had a strenuous relationship with the high priests. He represented the Roman law- only he could enact capital punishment, his soldiers patrolled the streets, and his people made sure the people paid their taxes. The religious leaders were in charge of the souls of the nation, and normally weren't the ones trying to put these so-called kings to death. Deep down, they probably were rooting for the uprisers hoping that they would succeed and kick the Romans out of their country. So you could imagine Pilate's surprise when the religious leaders of Jerusalem demand that Jesus of Nazareth be put to death! Why? Because he claimed to be the King of the Jews! Because he told the people not to pay taxes to Rome! That wasn't true- they were trying to pin something on him that would make Pilate execute him like he would execute the many other men who gained followers and tried to rebel against the Roman government.

But Jesus was different. Pilate knew that the Jewish leaders were secretly jealous that Jesus was a better teacher of the Scriptures than they were, and that people listened to him. Pilate knew that his wife had a terrible dream and warned him not to have anything to do with this Jesus of Nazareth. But he couldn't figure out why! Why did the Jewish leaders want him dead so badly? What was it about him? He had a job to do. If this man was accused of being an insurrectionist, claiming to be the true ruler and king of Israel, he as governor had to investigate. So he brought Jesus into the palace and asked him "Are you a King," expecting him to say, "No, I'm not- let me go!" But Jesus doesn't say that. He instead responds to Pilate's question with a question, something Pilate would not have been used to- "Do you really mean that? Do you really want to know if I'm a king, or are you just asking me because the Jewish leaders told you this and you just have to do your job and ask?" Jesus doesn't say yes, because Pilate is thinking about a king in a political sense, and Jesus isn't that. But Jesus also doesn't say no, because he is in reality, a king- the king. Pilate retorts, "Do I look like a Jew to you? You think I care about all your silly religious debates? Your people want to kill you and I don't get it- you don't strike me as dangerous at all! You're covered in your own blood. You're in chains, and yet they claim that you are trying to be a king! Clearly you're not. What have you done that makes them want to kill

you?” Jesus says, “The Kingdom, which is mine, isn’t like yours or one that you’ve ever seen. You are a governor because you have people to govern. Most kings are kings because they have people call them, ‘king.’ I’m different. My kingship doesn’t come from here. I don’t need people to fight for me- otherwise my followers would fight against my arrest. But I don’t need them to. Even if I die, I rule as king not simply over Judea, but the entire universe.” Now Pilate begins to understand- “You are a king!” But Pilate is a Roman. Romans view the world through the lens of power, ambition, dominance, and control. Kings are powerful. Kings dominate. Kings demand allegiance from their subjects- kings don’t let themselves get arrested and brutalized. The way Jesus is speaking, his king-ship is from outside this world, that he is in control of all things whether people like it or not- he almost sounds more like a god! Jesus affirms this. “You are correct. This is why I was born, but I’ve always existed and I came into the world for this purpose. And Jesus kingdom isn’t about territory or dominance or power for its own sake. His kingdom isn’t measured in miles, but in souls. And anyone can be in his kingdom- just listen and believe his voice.

You see, Jesus is saying something incredibly profound- the problem with people is that they are under the impression of lies. The alcoholic is under the dominance of a lie when he believes that this next drink will solve his problems. The thief is under the dominance of a lie when he believes that he needs to take from others and that he’ll get away with it. And all people are under the dominance of lies- “God doesn’t really care about my bad habits.” “God is angry with me, so I need to do some good works to make it up.” AND Jesus has come to set people free with the truth- we are all desperately sinful and disgusting before God, but Jesus the king has come not to dominate or crush his enemies, but to let his enemies crush and kill him so that his enemies could be forgiven and welcomed into his kingdom- not by being the right race or living the right way, but believing and trusting his truth. There are two major takeaways I’d like to share with you from this: **1. Don’t be deceived by appearances. 2. Don’t look for a Heavenly Kingdom on Earth.**

1. Don’t be deceived by appearances. Do you notice how shocked Pilate is? Well, he’s not the only one. In fact, Jesus’ own people were deeply shocked at him. He was not the king they expected. Most heroes, most kings that would truly look like a king would be powerfully built, strong, charismatic, big, surrounded by people praising their name and plenty of wealth. Jesus was none of that. Isaiah predicted that Jesus would have no majesty to attract us. Jesus was from Nazareth, a hillbilly town. He was impoverished, depending on the generosity of those who believed that he was who he said he was. He didn’t gather an army of soldiers to fight against the Romans, but rather a group of every-day men and women who preached the truth. The Pharisees and religious leaders hated him because he spoke God’s Word and exposed their hypocrisy- they wanted a Messiah who would agree with all their sentiments! The people mostly rejected him because he told them that if they were to be his followers, they would have to suffer with him. Pilate was confused by him- a suffering king? But this is the whole point of Christianity- Jesus

himself holds together every molecule and atom of the universe with the sound of his voice, he controls all things, and yet the way he defeated death and Satan was by allowing himself to be killed- because only then would those who deserved to die forever be able to live forever with him. Don't be fooled by appearances! Think about this- you as a Christian are an heir to the glory and throne of Jesus himself. Because Jesus died in your place and rose from the grave- you are going to live forever in perfect glory. That's your future. Yet, would anyone guess that by looking at us? Probably not. Yet, the poorest, most looked down on Christian is in reality wealthier than Elon Musk! But you wouldn't be able to tell by looking at us. Think about this church! It's not as big or new as some others, but in this building the riches of the Gospel, the truth that every human desires in the deepest part of their soul is preached and sung here! And here at this table Christ himself is going to be here! Would anyone guess that as they drive by on Main Street? Probably not. And as you look at the world today, would you guess that Jesus is winning? Probably not. But he is. Would you guess that Jesus is in control of all things? Maybe not. But he is- and as the world crumbles do not be tricked by appearances: Jesus is king, you are saved, and he is powerfully at work.

2. Don't look for a Heavenly Kingdom on Earth. "This nation used to be God's nation, and we need to bring it back to God." Anyone hear that from Christians in the last few years? Well, it was also the battle cry of many of the Jews of Jesus' day. They looked back with nostalgia at the days of David and Solomon, when Israel was ruled by god-fearing (mostly) kings and their were punishments for people from the government if they worshiped false gods. But during Jesus' time, the pagan Romans were in charge. Many people wanted to reestablish Israel as God's nation! But Jesus didn't do that. His kingdom isn't of this world. His Kingdom is the Church- all Christians who trust and believe in him, in his truth. The same mistake was made by many European nations for the past 2000 years. The Holy Roman Empire legally required that all people be Christian or die! The same happened in England, Spain, France, and other countries! They wanted to bring their nations to God and make people Christian by forcing them by the law of the land! Lutherans did this too- Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Finland are still officially Lutheran nations- one must be a member of Lutheran church- by law! The government enforced Christianity on people, they had to be Christian and go to church or else they'd go to jail. How'd that work out? Well, now in Europe most people are not Christian and want nothing to do with Jesus at all. Some people in our nation want to enforce Christian truth on people- they want public schools to have the Ten Commandments on their classroom walls and enforce prayers to be said at the beginning of each day. They insist that Christians should be the ones in control of the government, and that Christian values be the norm of our culture- so that this nation can be a Christian nation- this can be Jesus' kingdom! But that's not how Jesus' kingdom works! He doesn't work through governmental law. He doesn't change hearts by forcing people to go to Church.

And I know how frustrating it is to see a world completely reject and scorn the truth about gender and marriage and life and twist and redefine good and evil. But changing governmental laws won't bring people to Jesus, and it probably won't change their hearts. Jesus changes people through the truth- through his Gospel- when he creates faith in their hearts and brings them into his kingdom and over time believe and trust him and his ways. If you want to advance God's kingdom, it won't be through voting for the right person or protesting for a cause or lobbying for a policy change. It will be through sharing the Gospel message- Jesus is a king who died for you, his enemy, so you could friend. Through that truth, miracles happen and God's kingdom grows- one soul at a time. Amen.