

Sermon – 22/10/2006 am

Behold Your King

Study Text: John 19:12-16

In Kenya a large evangelical church decided to call their leader 'president'. He was given a large office in the church headquarters. But when the president of Kenya heard about this he was not pleased. He told the church that they could not call their leader 'president'. 'There can be only one president this nation' he said.

The Jews thought they could get Pilate to condemn Jesus because he called himself the King of the Jews. But Jesus explained to Pilate that his kingdom was not of this world. Pilate was satisfied that Jesus posed no threat to his authority, or the rule of Caesar. But the Jews persisted in their wickedness, eventually making a veiled threat to go over Pilate's head to Caesar.

Things had been spiralling downwards for some time in this trial. Today we come to the end. We hit rock bottom as the accusers and the judge descend into personal threats and ridicule, and with Jesus being caught in the middle, the innocent victim. The man in whom Pilate could find no fault was given over to death. The shouts of the crowd prevailed. Justice of course could not prevail against Jesus, the Son of God if he was to be convicted of doing wrong.

What is truth? Is it what the majority says? What is justice? Is it what is expedient? Man's heart has not changed since the time of Pilate. Crowds still clamour and lobby for their evil ways to be made legitimate. Majority opinion over-rules truth. If you as a believer find yourself in the minority then welcome to the club!

Meet Abraham whom God called to leave his pagan family; meet Joseph who was sold into slavery by his brothers; meet Moses who was rejected by those he was sent to save. 'Who made you ruler and judge over us' they protested. Meet Elijah and Jeremiah – *I am ridiculed all the day long and everyone mocks me* (Jeremiah 20:7). Never think that as a follower of Jesus you will popular among men.

'We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses... so let us run with perseverance the race set before us, looking unto Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith' (Hebrews 12:2). All these men of faith saw Jesus enduring the Cross. What about you? Are you looking to him and pressing on, or you falling back and hearing the roar of the crowd rather than the word of truth?

Enter Caesar

Every person has their weak point and the devil knows it only too well. The Jews knew Pilate's weak point and they were about to exploit it for their own wicked purposes. Pilate became afraid when he heard that Jesus was the Son of God (19:8). But he was also afraid of the name 'Caesar'. Tiberius Caesar was a suspicious, even paranoid, ruler who was ruthless in putting down any sign of opposition. The Son of God or Caesar, who would Pilate fear most?

The Jews accused Jesus of sedition – he claimed to be King of the Jews – and then blasphemy – he claimed to be the Son of God. But Pilate, following proper examination found no fault in him. So he sought to release Jesus. Peter told the Jews that *Pilate was determined to let Jesus go* (Acts 3: 13). Pilate claimed he had power to release Jesus, but Jesus reminded him of a greater power. As we come to the end of the trial, Pilate's weakness rather than his power is most evident.

If you let this man go you are no friend of Caesar the Jews cried out as Pilate re-emerged from asking Jesus where he was from (19:12). He had probably told them yet again that he found not fault in Jesus and was going to release him.

The chief priest who was orchestrating this deadly attack upon Jesus was a clever man. 'Is it not expedient that one man die for the people' he had earlier advised. He knew Pilate's weakness. On earlier occasions he had communicated his displeasure with Pilate to the Emperor. Pilate had no reason to think he would not do it again.

Pilate was in a corner. He had sought to keep the Jews happy, but in the end found himself being manipulated by them. They knew his weakness, his fear of man, and attacked. Pilate had no place left to turn – apart from truth and justice. But that way he judged to be dangerous to his own reputation and position.

This threat from the Jews was too much for Pilate. He had run out of options. He could not put off making judgment any longer. When Pilate *heard that saying, he brought Jesus out and sat down in the judgment seat in the place which is called the Pavement* (19:13). This was a raised marble platform with a chair on it, or maybe three chairs for a tribunal. As Pilate came out he took water and symbolically washed his hands saying 'I am innocent of the blood of this man' (Matthew 27:24). Pilate had capitulated under the threats of the Jews; he had crumbled under pressure from the crowd.

Behold your King said Pilate, taunting these despicable people mobbed before him. *Shall I crucify your King? We have no king but Caesar* they replied. While Pilate feared Caesar more than Jesus who he **thought** might be the Son of God, the Jews actually preferred Caesar to Jesus whom they **knew** to be the Son of God. The people God chose to be his own were once again going after other gods. What blatant apostasy!

The Jews had no hesitation in saying *his blood be on us and on our children* (Matthew 27:25). How incredible! They were inviting the curse of God upon themselves and their children. They had learned little from their own history, from the years their forefathers spent in exile for rejecting the Lord their God. Within a generation they would rue this day and these words they shouted to Pilate – their temple was razed in AD 70. Have they yet learned not to fight against God, not to deny him and his Son, and not to bring the curse of God upon themselves?

Exit Jesus

It was the Preparation Day of the Passover about the sixth hour (19:14). The time frame set forth in this verse some claim to be in conflict with the other gospels. The day before the Passover would have been Thursday but Preparation day always refers to the day before the Sabbath in Scripture. John would have meant the day before the Sabbath of the Passover week, that is Friday.

In Mark's gospel we read that Jesus was crucified at the third hour (Mark 15:25). John says he was sentenced at *about the sixth hour*. Various explanations have been put forward to explain this apparent conflict in timing. But we must remember that in New Testament times people did not have clocks as we do. The Jews counted the daylight from 6am and marked it into three hourly intervals – the third hour, the sixth hour and so on. This was sufficiently accurate for their purposes. So the difference between the third hour and *about the sixth hour* may not be as significant as we presume today. Jesus was crucified sometime between 9 and 12noon.

Sitting on his judgment seat, the judgment seat of man, Pilate *delivered Jesus to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus and led him away* (19:16). It would have been the soldiers who lead him away, probably for another brutal flogging, before he was forced to carry his cross to the place outside the city. The Jews had got what they wanted – they welcomed the blood of Jesus. Pilate thought he was free of his blood, but he was still guilty, even if a lesser sin. Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

Although Pilate's weakness was all in the 'determined purpose and foreknowledge of God' we can still learn from such a tragic human failure. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. This is the often repeated, but seldom heeded, message of the Bible. Fear of man is uppermost in the hearts of most people and leads to the downfall and destruction of many. 'Peer pressure' and 'following the crowd' are terms we keep on hearing, especially of the young who are most vulnerable. But it is not only the young. Pilate was not young, but he was ambitious, he was making his own way in this world.

Paul accused the Christians at Philippi of looking out for their own interest and not the interests of others, nor of Christ (Philippians 2:4, 21). Paul himself could not be so accused. He suffered greatly for the gospel of Jesus Christ. He was despised and ridiculed, flogged, imprisoned, and stoned, all for Christ.

Next week (October 31) we remember another man who stood for the truth of the gospel, Martin Luther. He was threatened with death if he did not bow the knee to Rome, to the throne of man. It was the religious leaders of his day who threatened him, but he stood by the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Pilate, Paul, Luther and many others have been threatened by men, by crowds who hate God and his Son Jesus Christ. Many have suffered unto death for refusing to deny Jesus Christ, their Saviour and Lord.

In AD 155 Polycarp was told to deny Christ or die. 'Eighty and six years I have served him and he has done me no wrong – how can I blaspheme my King who saved me' he testified, as the vicious crowd watched the flames consume him.

What is your testimony? Where do you stand when it comes to Jesus Christ of Nazareth? Do you try to be neutral? No one was neutral when Pilate made his judgment. No one will be neutral when Jesus comes again and makes his Judgment.

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