

Sermon – 15/10/2006 am

Behold the Son of God

Study Text: John 19:7-11

In the city where we lived in India the main market was closed on Sundays. There were very few Christians in that city yet the people observed the Sabbath day of rest. It is after all a creation ordinance. Yet when we came back home to this city we found the shopping malls bustling each Sunday. People give no thought to their creator; they have no fear of God. Non-Christians often fear God more than so-called Christians.

As the trial of Jesus proceeded Pilate continued with his judgment *I find no fault in him* (Jesus). The Jews were getting frustrated. Their initial accusation that Jesus claimed to be king of the Jews had failed to impress Pilate. So the Jews came up with another reason, the real reason, why they wanted Jesus executed. He not only claimed to be king of the Jews, but the Son of God.

Afraid

The Jews stated this claim of Jesus without any fear. Out of envy and a perceived threat, they hated Jesus intensely. They refused to even consider this amazing claim. Pilate on the other hand was shocked to hear this claim – Jesus the Son of God! He had already heard Jesus speak about his kingdom and the truth. Pilate had then had Jesus flogged to please the Jews. Now he was hearing that this man, *Behold the man*, was a god. He was filled with fear.

Pilate the pagan would have been a superstitious man. Some Roman emperors claimed to be divine or god-men. They were to be feared. Sorcerers and magicians could hold men like Pilate under their spell, as was the case with Sergius Paulus on Cyprus (Acts 13). Pilate's own wife was in a state of fear because of a dream about Jesus. So when Pilate heard these words 'Son of God' he was *more afraid* or greatly afraid.

Who was this man he was dealing with, thought Pilate. Was he more than a man? Actually Jesus had already acted and spoken quite differently to a normal prisoner. He made no plea for mercy and offered no bribe. He spoke about a 'kingdom not of this world' and of 'coming into this world to bear witness to the truth' (18:36, 37). Pilate hurried back into the Praetorium to question Jesus further.

In their own court, the Sanhedrin, the Jews had found Jesus guilty of blasphemy, of calling himself the Son of God, and indeed of making himself equal with God (Luke 22:70). Jesus did not deny this charge so they sentenced him to death according to their law. *We have a law* they told Pilate *and according to our law he ought to die* (19:7).

Presumably they based the charge on Leviticus 24:16 – *whoever blasphemes the name of the Lord shall surely be put to death – all the congregation shall stone him*. But under Roman rule, they were not allowed to enforce the death penalty. Would Pilate honour their law or not? Were they making a correct judgment according to their law? Pilate was not convinced, and was now afraid of just who this Jesus was.

The Jews were making a tragic mistake and were pressuring Pilate to do the same. They did not stop to consider the possibility that Jesus' claim could be true. They had in fact seen and heard his own witness to this effect, but closed their eyes and ears to this witness and condemned him.

These were the very people God had chosen and prepared to receive the promised Messiah. These were the people who were expecting a mighty deliverer from God. But Satan so filled their hearts with jealousy and bitterness that they were blinded to the truth. They rejected the Son of God, and God rejected them.

Many around us today are like these Jews. They have heard the gospel. They were taught the Bible in their youth, but have rejected it. They have turned their backs on God and gone their own ways, following the desires of their own hearts. Their hearts are hardened to the gospel of Jesus Christ just like these Jews. Any mention of Jesus and they close their ears. They have no fear of God.

People of other religions are horrified by this. They see Christians claiming to have the truth, but having no fear God. They see Christians undermining their own holy book. They see Christians living irreverent and immoral lives. Pilate was perplexed at these Jews who claimed they were the people of God yet were standing before him calling for their king to be crucified. They wanted the very Son of God to be put to death.

Pilate himself was asking questions. But was he listening? He felt no hatred towards Jesus – apart from the fact he was a Jew. He knew Jesus was innocent and sought to release him, especially after hearing he was the Son of God. But Pilate was no saint. He was too full of himself and too concerned about his power, position and possessions to really listen to Jesus.

Many seemingly religious people are much the same in their hearts. Many of the younger generation growing up without the gospel are like Pilate. They know more about horoscopes and the occult than they do about Jesus. They are superstitious and ruled by fear. They turn to money, drugs, alcohol or sex to overcome these fears. They need to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ, but who will tell them?

Answer

Where are you from Pilate asked Jesus? What a profound question! His first question to Jesus was 'are you the King of the Jews?' (18:33). After establishing the background of the question, Jesus answered Pilate with grace and truth. He spoke of his kingdom that is not of this world and invited Pilate to hear him – *everyone* (including Pilate) *who is of the truth hears my voice*.

Pilate asked his second question 'what is truth?' But he did not wait for an answer. He went out to get on with his business. He turned his back on Jesus and proceeded to have him flogged as a matter of expediency. How tragic this was for Pilate. What a tragedy it is today that so many do not pause to consider the claims of Jesus. 'Tomorrow' they say, 'I will hear you another time'. Tomorrow never comes as they say, but death and destruction surely do!

Pilate's third question was again a profound question. Throughout his brief ministry Jesus openly told everyone that he was sent by his heavenly Father into this world (7:28, 29). He even told Pilate in answer to his first question why he had come into this world (18:37). Where

he had come from was a central proposition in the witness of Jesus. He would have answered Pilate if he was ready to listen.

Pilate could ask profound questions but he was not willing to listen to the truth for which he asked. So *Jesus gave him no answer* (19:9). How many educated men and women today love to ask questions but fail to listen when told the answer is in the Bible. ‘Oh no, I am not interested in that old stuff; my question is more profound than anything in the Bible’ they say in disgust and even anger.

Pilate became angry when Jesus did not answer. His pride was hurt. How dare a prisoner ignore him! ‘I have power to release you or to crucify you’ he told Jesus. Jesus was not impressed by his assertion of worldly power. He solemnly reminded Pilate that God is sovereign and in full control over all things and all men. He could only do what God permitted.

The pathway of truth, the pathway of Jesus Christ, is littered with men who have come to him with questions but who refuse to accept his answer. A rich young ruler came to Jesus asking about eternal life. Jesus told him what to do but he went away sad, refusing to accept the answer. Pilate did not wait for Jesus to answer his question.

Felix sent for Paul to hear what he had to say concerning faith in Jesus Christ. As Paul *reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix became afraid and answered, ‘go away for now’* (Acts 24:25). Is this not the way many respond to the word of God today? ‘Go away, I am too busy now’. How many have been in this church and heard the gospel but we see them no longer. ‘After this or that happens then I will come’ they say – ‘I am too tied up at the moment’.

Accountability

Jesus, the Son of God, to whom the Father had committed all judgment (5:22), was on trial before judges appointed by men. Jesus reminded Pilate that he was not the ultimate judge. He may currently have power in Jerusalem but his time would come to an end. One day he would be standing before Jesus as the judge of all men, along with the Jews. Even now Jesus made the judgment that *the one who delivered me to you has the greater sin* (19:11). He was most likely referring to Caiaphas, though Judas also stood condemned.

Was Jesus exonerating Pilate? By no means! He was largely ignorant of who Jesus was and why he came into this world – although Jesus had told him just now. Pilate had not plotted to get rid of Jesus like the Jews, but he was capitulating to them. He knew that Jesus was innocent but would not release him. He was talking with the very Son of God, ‘the way, the truth and the life’, but he was more concerned for his power in the present than his soul in eternity.

Caiaphas was guilty of the greater sin. He was the one who had Jesus arrested and brought before Pilate. He claimed to be upholding the law of God; he claimed to be a child of God, but rejected the Son of God. ‘That the possession of superior knowledge increases the sinfulness of the sinner’s sin seems to be taught by implication in this verse’. To him who has been given much, much is required. All are sinners and will have to give account before the Judge, but remember there are those who have greater sin.

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