

Gospel of John - episode 39

Chapter 18 part 3

Welcome to our sharing on chapter 18 of John's Gospel. I want to pick up in 18:28. Here we begin the trial of Jesus before Pilate. In John's Gospel, this is the real trial of Jesus of Nazareth. He has already been tried before the people of Israel during his mission. Now he is to be tried before the cosmos, the unbelieving world. The drama that takes place here is incredible. I want to read it, "They then led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the Praetorium. It was now morning. They did not go into the Praetorium themselves, or they would have been defiled and unable to eat the Passover. So, Pilate came outside to them and they said, 'what charge do you bring against this man'? They replied, If he were not a criminal, we would not be handing him over to you. Pilate said, 'take him yourselves and try him by your own law'. The Jews answered, 'we are not allowed to put a man to death'.

So, it's obvious that they brought Jesus to have him put to death. "This was to fulfil the words of Jesus, when he indicated the way that he was going to die". So now we come before the world power. Pilate is a pagan; his Roman soldiers are pagans. They worship false gods. They cannot recognise **The Light of the world** even in his presence. Before we begin I want to remind you of Luke 2:35. When Jesus was an infant, the Prophet Simeon said that this child would bring about the fall and the rising of many in Israel, and in the process the secret thoughts of many hearts would be revealed. During the trial and sufferings of Jesus the secret thoughts of everyone involved will be revealed. Jesus stands there in silence like an X-ray which shows up everything.

Without participating in their arguments, while saying almost nothing, Jesus' presence brings out the hidden evil. The evil in everyone around him comes to the surface. It's really extraordinary. As I said in the last episode, the reason why John doesn't give the trial before the Sanhedrin is because he has dealt with it already in the first half of the gospel. So, in this trial before the world power, we see that unbelieving world also must decide for or against the light. God has become man. He came to the whole earth, not just Israel, so, the whole world must decide. Jesus is put on trial before the superpower at the time, the Roman Empire, so, the decision that will be made by Pilate is made in the name of the whole cosmos. That alone would make you nervous.

There are three stages presented here, like a drama in three parts playing out at the same time. In the front stage you have Pilate dealing with the Sanhedrin and the crowd which joins them. Jesus is in the background, silent most of the time, and in the centre we will have Jesus being

tortured by the Roman soldiers. Pilate goes from one to the other. Out front stage he meets raucous noise, shouts, accusations, hatred, revenge and the frenzy of those who are affected by the enemy of God and man. When he goes to question Jesus backstage he meets a very calm, silent, non-violent, non-political person whom everyone is shouting about! In going from one to the other Pilate realises that these are two different worlds. Unfortunately, he is a pagan and an unbeliever, living a shallow life, so he is out of his depth. The more he slips in and out of Jesus' presence the more confused he becomes. His own weaknesses come to the surface and the Jewish leaders on the outside see this, and his inability to make a decision shows that he doesn't understand the issues. They discover how to manipulate him.

Jesus never changes. He remains totally himself. It is sad to see Pilate disintegrating in a situation he should never have been involved in, because there was no way he could understand the issues at stake. Pilate makes a drastic mistake. He thinks he can barter with the Jewish elders, but the Sanhedrin and all Israel are painfully aware that Pilate hates the Jews. He hates everything about them, and continues to be very cruel towards them. So, they won't barter with him. They will use him to get what they want - which is to kill Jesus, and in doing so, they will bring Pilate down because they will force him to kill a man whom **he declares three times is innocent!** Now, three times is very solemn. If they succeed, they only have to send a whisper to Rome, and Pilate will be relieved of his job.

So, the Jewish leaders see that they have two victims. They can get rid of Pilate and Jesus in the same event! Therefore, what ensues is a very dangerous, ugly, destructive, political game in which no one benefits. If we observe the game that plays out, instead of just simply looking at the surface of events you will see what John points out clearly. He wants you to see that Pilate is lost in the unbelieving world, but **the Jewish priesthood is also lost in the unbelieving world with regard to Jesus** because they operate on the level of below. The crowd is operating out of revenge, jealousy and hatred for Jesus - also revenge and hatred for Pilate.

Those are three major doors for the evil spirit to enter into them. Sin is the door. Jesus said, 'Satan has no power over me because nobody can convict me of sin'. Sin is the door that allows the evil spirit in. So, when they are operating out of these evil motivations it means the door is wide open for Satan to take over. Satan, of course, is the real opponent of Jesus. Pilate and the chief priests are only puppets, even though they are responsible as adults for what they do. **The real enemy is Satan.** What he does is that he instigates the drama that will destroy Pilate, the Jewish priests **and kill Jesus** one after the other! None of them will benefit from this struggle.

Here is an idea of what happens: it is so incredible that it is difficult to grasp it. Since Pilate is forced by the chief priests to kill an innocent man, he exacts a high price from them. He forces

them to deny their Messianic hopes and to choose the secular world instead of the Kingdom of God and His covenant. Once the high priests, the chief authority in Israel do that, they no longer have any right to be a nation. It's important that you understand this. The country that we call Palestine or Israel was originally called the land of Canaan. That territory, was given to the chosen people on condition they kept the Mosaic covenant. They were in the land on leasehold. When they broke the covenant severely over a period of time they were sent out into exile in Assyria, and later to Babylon. After the death of Jesus, they will be sent out into exile to the rest of the world (which they chose!). They have no right to stay in the land if they break the covenant.

So, it will be a very dramatic moment when the chief priests declare publicly before the authority of Rome, "we have no king except Caesar". It's so terrifying because they understood what they were doing. Pilate forced that payment out of them because they forced him to kill an innocent man. Afterwards, they will have no right to exist as a chosen people in that land. 40 years later, they will be destroyed. The other side of the coin is that when the Jewish leaders force Pilate to kill an innocent man he will be in trouble with Rome. Caesar was intolerant of his governors committing a political crime. He would simply send a message to that person to either commit suicide or go into exile. So, as a result of this very dramatic event, Pilate will lose his job and be sent into exile. So, you can see that Satan wants everyone destroyed.

In the middle of it all there is the innocent victim, the Lamb of God, the beautiful Son of the Eternal Father, **will also lose his life**. Everybody will lose out. Remember that in John 11:48-50, Caiaphas held a meeting of the Sanhedrin where they were worried that everybody was believing in Jesus. They said, "look, if we let him go on like is everybody will believe in him". Caiaphas said: "the Romans will come and destroy the Holy place and the nation. It is better for one man to die instead of the whole nation being destroyed." The incredible thing is that they engineer the death of Jesus, and force the Roman authorities to do it, and then 40 years later the Romans still came and destroyed the temple and the city in AD 70!

The Jewish Sanhedrin also lost everything. They lost their temple, their city, and their nation. They lost their institutions, the very things they were clinging to and trying to preserve. So, looking at the Trial of Jesus before Pilate, we must seek the underlying issues and struggles that are occurring in the background. Jesus is very conscious of the unseen presence of the prince of this world who is orchestrating everything. John also wrote the book of Revelation. There in chapter 9:11 the prince of this world is called the Destroyer (English), Abaddon (Hebrew), Apollyon (Greek). In this drama the Destroyer destroys them all in the human sense!

Later we will see how **Jesus uses Satan's plan to overcome him!** Being a follower of the prince of this world does not guarantee safety because he does not love his followers. When you compare this with the way Jesus loves and protects his followers; the way Jesus cares, you can see the two realms clearly; this helps us to make a better decision. Amazingly, in the midst of all of this chaos and terror John proclaims Jesus the King of the Jews! He shows this very clearly. It is the representatives of Caesar that actually crown Jesus, even though they crown him with thorns. They dress him in a royal robe, even though it is a robe of mockery. They put a mace manifesting his kingly authority into his hand, even though it's done in mockery. So, Jesus is crowned, acknowledged and they adore him even though they do it in mockery! Jesus is enthroned on the cross, and proclaimed in the three main languages of the world of that day, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews". John wants you to appreciate what is truly going on.

For example, it appears as if Pilate is the judge, but that is not so. When he says to Jesus, 'I have the authority to either kill you or leave you alive', Jesus says, 'No, you haven't! You wouldn't be able to do anything unless power was given to you from on high'. Then he turns and actually judges Pilate! He says, "you are not the most guilty". The most guilty ones handed me over to you - that begins with Judas, then the high priests, then Pilate. Jesus apportions judgement to each one. The same happened in Genesis chapter 3 where guilt was apportioned to Adam, Eve, and the serpent in the order of their guilt. Everyone involved in the tragedy of the Passion had to take responsibility for their own actions and decisions. That illustrates the importance of Jesus telling the man who slapped his face not to get involved. Don't have on your soul that you signed your name to the death of the Son of God

Let's begin to read this. John gives us the trial and death of Jesus like a drama on a stage. He gives you scene 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5, one after the other. Each one is a complete piece in itself. What John wants is for us to contemplate the mystery and come to understand something of the wonder and beauty of what God is doing through this disaster. 18:28 is scene one. The first thing we see is that it is daybreak, so the chief priests take Jesus to the Praetorium. Now, the Praetorium was part of the Antonia Fortress built close to the temple in Jerusalem, where the Roman authorities kept a close watch on everything that happened in the temple. They observed everything that occurred because at the time of the Jewish feasts, religious feelings ran very high, and trouble could break out. The Praetorium was a place where Pilate met those who needed to solve problems. The chief priests refused to go into the courtroom because they might incur defilement. I find that utterly amazing. These men bring Jesus, an innocent victim, before an unjust judge to have him executed at any cost, and they refuse to enter the Praetorium for fear that they would be defiled and wouldn't be able to participate in the Passover! Do they not know that premeditated murder is defilement? Or that hatred, jealousy and the destruction of human life is defilement? What do they know?

I'll continue this in the next episode. Thank you for listening. God bless you.

interval

Welcome to our sharing on chapter 18:28 of John's Gospel. This is the last day of Jesus's life showing the extraordinary drama which took place. John does this scene by scene. Each scene seems separate from the last one because he wants you to contemplate it. In the first scene, 18:28-32 Jesus is accused. "They then led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the Praetorium. It was now morning. They did not go into the Praetorium themselves, or they would have been defiled and unable to eat the Passover. So, Pilate came outside to them and said, 'what charge do you bring against this man?' They replied, 'if he were not a criminal we would not be handing him over to you'. Pilate said, 'take him yourselves and try him by your own law. The Jews answered, 'we are not allowed to put a man to death'. This was to fulfil the words that Jesus had spoken, indicating the way he was going to die".

Now, it is daybreak; people begin their day very early in hot countries. Nobody except Jesus and his blessed mother understand that **this is the day of Redemption**. This is **Yom Yahweh, the Lord's Day**. All generations in the future will acknowledge this as the Lord's Day. This is the day when Jesus will break the fetters of sin to redeem the human race. The agents of darkness think it's their day, and they work hard to engineer the most terrible death for Jesus. Unknown to them Psalm 118 - which is celebrated at the time of the Passover - says, **"this is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad"**.

So, they take Jesus to the Praetorium, where the court case will take place. Before we deal with the court case, I want to look just for a moment at what the four Gospels say about **'the handing over'** of the Son of Man. They don't use the word 'betrayal'. The two words used mean **'betrayal'** **Jesus was handed over**. First, Jesus was handed over to the Jewish authorities and the temple police by Judas. He was betrayed by his friend first. Second, the Sanhedrin hand him over to the Roman authorities represented by Pilate. St. Luke shows that Pilate didn't want to deal with Jesus. It was too much for him, so, he handed him over to King Herod, who couldn't handle him at all. Herod then handed him over to the Roman authority again. Then Pilate handed him over to the torturers for no reason whatsoever. Finally, Pilate handed Jesus over to death. This is one betrayal after another. **Jesus was betrayed by both friend and foe**, by religious and secular powers, **that is by everyone!**

If any of them realised who Jesus was, they could not have done it. It would be impossible. It is clear from the text that nobody wants to deal with Jesus. They talk about him behind his back, but when he is present, they are afraid of him. I will show you this with regard to Pilate also. But they do want somebody to deal with him, and this is why they keep handing him over. As we saw in John 15:25 they hated him without cause. Now, one of the big issues is the charge against Jesus. The Sanhedrin's reply to Pilate was, 'if he wasn't a criminal, we wouldn't be handing him over to you'. For Pilate, a criminal is one who has broken the civil law; he is a revolutionary fighting against the authority of Caesar. That he can understand, but what is wrong with this mild human being standing in front of him, he will never be able to work out.

We know that Jesus is being killed because he claim to be the Son of God, but that is a religious matter which won't hold up in a civil court. Because of that we will see the first sin of the Sanhedrin. They have committed many sins up to now, but this particular one on this particular day is that they change the charge. They make the charge fit the civil court. Pilate can see through that but finds it very difficult to handle this group who are cleverer than he is. So, they accused Jesus of being a revolutionary, and we will see what Pilate does with that soon. In other words, they accuse Jesus of claiming to be a king in opposition to Caesar. The truth is that that is exactly what the Sanhedrin and the Jewish nation wanted their Jewish Messiah to do! They wanted him to stand up against Rome and liberate Israel. They wanted political salvation. Jesus refused to go down the political route, and they will take terrible revenge on him for that.

The Jewish punishment for blasphemy was stoning. We saw several attempts in the Gospel to stone Jesus, in chapters 7, 8, 10, and 11. That is frequent enough for us to realise that the real charge is blasphemy, nothing to do with politics. Pilate, though, has to investigate if there is some reality behind the religious charge, if there is there any hidden politics involved. Why wouldn't they stone Jesus? In Acts chapter 7 they stoned Steven without hesitation. They won't stone Jesus because it is not just his death they want. They want to disgrace him in the eyes of the people because too many believe in Jesus. This is what we heard the Sanhedrin saying in chapter 11, 'everybody is believing in him, and if this continues we will lose our authority. So, we have to get rid of him. They have to disgrace Jesus in the eyes of the people. The way to do that is to bring on him the curse of Deuteronomy 21:23 which says, "Cursed be any man who hangs on a tree". That means that the hanged man is cursed before God. So, if the nation sees Jesus hanging on a tree, they cannot accept him as Messiah or Son of God, because we have proved that he is a curse!

In Galatians 3:13 Paul - who was a Pharisee initially to the point of persecuting the church - when he came to understand the mystery of Jesus said, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, as it is written in Deuteronomy, cursed is everyone who is

hung upon a tree. But Jesus redeemed us so that the blessing that was given to Abraham would be passed on to the Gentiles". Even someone like Paul, who had been an enemy of Christ and Christianity initially, came to understand that by accepting to be crucified Jesus would redeem the whole law, and that the curse of the law would be removed. At the time of Jesus's death Rome had removed

The right to execute anyone from the Jewish authorities. The stoning of Steven was unlawful. They admit openly to Pilate that they were not allowed to kill a man, as we've just read, so, the Roman authorities have to do the dirty work for the Sanhedrin. Because the Sanhedrin engineered the whole thing, in Jesus's eyes, they are much more responsible for his death than Pilate who doesn't understand what is happening.

The next scene in this incredible drama is 18:33-38. The first issue was the accusation. The second issue is whether Jesus is a king or not. "Pilate went back into the Praetorium and called Jesus to him. 'Are you the king of the Jews?' Jesus replied, 'do you ask this of your own accord, or have others spoken to you about me?' Pilate answered, 'am I a Jew? It's your own people and the chief priests who have handed you over to me. What have you done?' Jesus replied, 'mine is not a kingdom of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my men would have fought to prevent me from being surrendered to the Jews, but my kingdom is not of this world'. 'So, you are a king then?' Pilate said. 'It is you who say it', Jesus replied. 'Yes, I am a king. I was born for this. I came into the world for this to bear witness to the truth, and all who are on the side of truth will listen to my voice'.

Jesus has gone way beyond anything Pilate can deal with. He doesn't have a clue what Jesus is saying. Out there in the front stage where Pilate went out to meet the Jewish leaders, he heard the raucous noise and accusations against Jesus. Now, going backstage he meets the accused who is a very silent, humble and gentle human being. It is two different worlds! Pilate has his jails full of revolutionaries and agitators. One look at Jesus makes him see a truly regal person. From a worldly point of view, this is as far distant from reality as Pilate could imagine, because it's obvious he is looking at a non-political person, someone who couldn't be an agitator. **Pilate knew that the charge against Jesus was false.** That is stated very clearly in Mark 15:11 where Mark says that Pilate knew it was **out of jealousy** that they arrested Jesus. Please don't think Pilate didn't know Jesus. His wife was one of Jesus's disciples! Everybody in Israel knew Jesus. When Jesus told the Sanhedrin, that "everybody here has heard me" it was true. Everybody in Israel had heard him.

Israel was dominated by Rome and Roman soldiers were all over Israel. There was no way that the Jewish people could have a meeting in a synagogue or in any town without the Roman soldiers being around. This is clear in the Synoptic Gospels where Jesus talks to the Roman

soldiers and heals some of them, and some of them even believe in him. There is no way Pilate doesn't know who this man is. He knows that the Sanhedrin want to kill him and that he has no ability to deal with it. So, he said, 'so you are a king'; this may be politics after all.

The moment Jesus speaks he turns the whole thing on its head because **he is the saviour of the world**, and he is Pilate's saviour! He is the saviour of the Sanhedrin; of the people of Israel, and of all the world, so his approach to humanity is different to everybody else's. Jesus said to Pilate, 'do you want to know the truth yourself? Or is this just a job that was given to you? If you really want to know the truth, yes, I'll show you'. What you have here is that Pilate stands **Facing The Light** but he is utterly blind in his paganism; utterly dark in his sinful life. He cannot see the light. All he knows is that whatever is in front of him is extraordinary. He doesn't know anything else. But as far as John is concerned, this is the moment when Pilate must accept or reject **The Light** in front of him. Every person who has ever lived must stand before Jesus of Nazareth because he will be **their final judge**. This is Pilate's moment of grace. He must give a response but unfortunately, his response is cynical. 'Am I a Jew?' Pilate was famous for one thing - his hatred of the Jews. He was very unjust to them and he interfered with their sacred laws. He did so many things that even Rome disapproved of Pilate's reaction to the Jews. So, 'Am I a Jew?' brings out this hatred. Jesus hears that this man hates his chosen people, the very people that he has decided to give his life for. So, you see how complicated the whole thing is.

Pilate will it demand to know what Jesus has done in political terms. Now, he does know because the Roman soldiers were stationed everywhere. If Jesus had done anything political, they would have picked him up before now. Jesus's response to Pilate is a truly Johannine response - for he says, 'Yes, I am a King, but you would have no way of understanding what my kingdom is, where it is, how it operates. It neither gets its power, authority, nor influence from the world you live in'. It belongs to a completely different dimension. If I belonged to a kingdom in your dimension - that is in the Cosmos - where human politics goes on, he said, If I had a kingdom there, my men would have fought to defend me. But In the Kingdom that I belong to, **it would be legions of angels** that would defend me. That's what the Synoptics tell us.

Now, as far as Pilate is concerned, Jesus is speaking a foreign language. He is not one of Jesus's disciples, so will not listen to the voice of the shepherd. He is not going to take this message. He doesn't want to live a life of love and self-giving. This man is totally selfish, living an immoral life, a true pagan. The realm of the spirit and the realm of the cosmos meet head-on in this encounter between Pilate and Jesus. There is no language in common, no understanding, nothing. Pilate is completely lost. All he knows is that **there is no political case against Jesus**. He walks out from this moment alone with Jesus and the first thing he declares

to the raucous, noisy crowd outside that there is no case against him. **The world powers cannot find sin in Jesus.** None of them will do that. When I look at this dialogue I say, 'poor Pilate', he has no language, understanding, philosophy, theology, religion, to deal with this very simple, utterly profound person that is in front of him. But I want to remind you of something that Jesus himself said in John 7:7. **"the world cannot hate you but it does hate me** because I give evidence that its ways are evil.

Now, we will see from the dialogue between Jesus and Pilate and the consequences of it that Pilate represents the sinful world. He has no idea what wholeness, beauty or love is like, and it's really sad. But Jesus will not give up on him because Pilate is not one of his sheep. He is one of those 'other sheep' that must be saved. Cf chapter 10. He wants everyone saved.

Thank you for listening. God bless you.