

# Gospel of John - episode 40

## Chapter 18 part 4 - chapter 19 part 1

Welcome to our sharing on John's Gospel. We are at the end of chapter 18, about to go into chapter 19. We are looking at the dialogue between Pilate and Jesus. Pilate's reaction to Jesus is: "truth, what is that?" In his world there were multiple gods and philosophies. The Roman Empire had many different civilisations trying to gel together. They all claimed that their gods and their religion was right, so this is just another one. Do you know what is truth? The sad thing is that he is standing before **The One Who Is Truth. I am the way, I am the truth, and I am the life:** John 14:6. My reaction to Pilate at this moment is very sad because he is just a poor little rich man walking away; walking away from the truth will bring dreadful consequences.

If Pilate had opened up to the truth, then his reactions during the rest of this drama would have been very different. Just as he's able to hold out at the very end when he proclaims Jesus King he could have held out at the beginning also. I am reminded of Mark 10:25: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven". I'm also reminded of our Blessed Mother's Magnificat in Luke 1:53, where she says, "he has filled the hungry with good things, but the rich he has sent empty away". Poor Pilate is full of his own importance, authority and position in society. He is not ready to meet the Lord.

Scene three: 18:38-40: "After this Pilate went back out again and declared "I find no case against him. (This is one of three judgements that he will give). But according to a custom of yours, I should release a prisoner at the Passover. Would you like me then to release the King of the Jews?" (Now, if he wasn't speaking cynically, the reaction might not have been so bad). At this, they shouted, 'Not this man, but Barabbas'. Barabbas was a brigand".

So, let's look at this. We're now going to ask the question, who is the greatest? This question was asked at the last supper, when the Apostles discussed this among themselves, not in John's Gospel, but in the Synoptics. The consequences of Pilate's decision will come back on him sooner than he thinks. First of all, he goes out front stage to meet the accusers, and he says, No case. Forget about it. You handed me 'a revolutionary'. I am going to show you what a revolutionary actually looks like. His jails were full of them, so he pulls a man out of jail and puts him standing beside Jesus. The Sanhedrin suddenly realises that the political accusation won't stick in a civil court. They must change tactics, but in this company, at this hour, at this Passover, in this time of darkness, which has come upon Jerusalem, they are all going to stumble. They will do the wrong thing. We were warned about that in chapter 8, 9, 11, and 12. So, at this moment, the darkness in Pilate meets the darkness in the Sanhedrin with awful consequences.

This allows Satan to enter into the situation, take over and bring about the destruction of everyone involved. Pilate's darkness was a life of paganism and immorality. The darkness in the Sanhedrin was also immorality, hatred and rejection of the truth, and in their case, the specific rejection of the beloved Son of Man. So, Pilate decides in his warped way of thinking to show them what a real revolutionary looks like. He puts two men side by side, both of them having the same name, Jesus Bar Abba, Jesus, Son of the Father, and Barabbas (son of his father!). Barabbas represents the world of darkness and sin, the unbelieving world; he was a true revolutionary against Caesar. Beside him is the incarnate Son of God, who is love, grace, life, beauty, glory, truth, and light. They must choose. We would think that anyone would know who to choose, but they chose Barabbas! The fact that they chose Barabbas shows they are determined to kill Jesus, so it didn't matter what Pilate said. They are determined to force Pilate to kill Jesus.

Pilate has won a small victory over the Sanhedrin insofar as he has forced their real motivation for killing Jesus out of them. They handed Jesus over initially as a revolutionary, but have now chosen to release a revolutionary instead of Jesus! If they thought a revolutionary should be handed over to death, why are they choosing a real revolutionary and murderer to be set free? Pilate has forced them out into the open, but it will be a short-lived victory. The chief priests have made a choice, **one which means life or death for humanity**. The choice was between the beloved Son of God or the destroyer. The destroyer, that is, Barabbas, was an agent of Satan. If they choose him, that's what they get. If they choose the Christ, then they are choosing the Kingdom of God. But **in one single voice, they shouted for Barabbas**. It will be a future revolution against Rome that will bring destruction to Israel.

I want to remind you of something that you probably don't associate with this situation. In Deuteronomy 30 there is a section on the Two Ways. I will pick out two verses; you can read the rest for yourself. "Today, I set before your life and prosperity (Jesus), death and disaster (Barabbas). Then it goes on to explain the consequences of your choice. "Choose life then so that you and your descendants may live in the love of the Lord your God". We have talked about that throughout the whole of the final discourse - obeying the Lord's voice and clinging to him is the way of life of beloved disciples. "For in this your life consists. In this way, you will have a long life in the land that the Lord your God has given to you". Now, if we had time to go into this, you would understand the rest of this drama, because if they If they choose life, if they choose Jesus, they can continue to live in what we call the promised land.

Their only right to live in the promised land as a people chosen by God, was to live in his covenant, obeying his will. Their decision at this moment will result in them being exiled in the

world, so, while they think that they are choosing **life or death for Jesus** they are, **in fact choosing life or death for their nation!** Just as Pilate had an opportunity to choose when he was standing privately in front of Jesus, so the Sanhedrin and the whole nation are now given the choice to choose or not. In the infancy of Jesus in Luke's gospel, you find that the prophet Simeon told Jesus's mother that this child was going to bring about the rise and the fall of many in Israel, and as a result, the secret thoughts of many hearts would be revealed. We are already in that process where the secret thoughts of everyone involved in the Passion of Christ is revealed. Chapter 10:8-10 shows the good shepherd was compared to robbers and bandits, and he is the one who gives his life for his sheep, the bandits are the ones who break in and destroy.

I told you that the way John presents the Passion of Jesus is a revision of his whole Gospel. So, when they reject Jesus in favour of the realm of below, the realm of darkness and destruction will come to this nation 40 years later and bring about terrible destruction. The war broke out against Rome in 65 AD and continued until the Romans came and obliterated this people. We're told that 1 million people died defending Jerusalem stone by stone; that the Romans sacrificed priests on the altar, **which was an abomination of desolation** and that the survivors were all exiled to the nations of the world. So, there are terrible consequences to the decisions made now. I remind you again that in John 11:49-50 Caiaphas said, 'if we don't kill this man, the Romans will come and destroy our nation'. They killed Jesus, and the Romans did come and destroy their nation. Caiaphas was not a wise man.

The chief priests at this moment gain an advantage over Pilate in this desperate political struggle, because they now force Pilate to release a man who is known publicly to be a revolutionary. Once Caesar hears that Pilate is in real trouble. When they force him to kill an innocent man, it's even more clear that Pilate will lose his job, so Pilate's fall from power begins at this moment. He should have declared 'this cannot be done', but he doesn't do that. He refused to listen to the voice of Jesus, and then, almost immediately, he is compelled to listen to the voice of the Sanhedrin. Pilate himself now becomes a pawn in this dreadful political game, and since he lacks wisdom he will continue to make decisions which will have long term consequences for all concerned.

So, let's come to scene 4 in Chapter 19. "Pilate then had Jesus taken away and scourged, after which the soldiers twisted some thorns into a crown and put it on his head and dressed him in a purple robe. Then they kept coming up to him and saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews, ' and they slapped his face". The topic of Chapter 19 is that **the Son of Man is lifted up on the cross**. Here at the very beginning we have scene 4 - **the coronation of the King**. In scene 3, it was **the proclamation that Jesus was the King**, and here we have the coronation. So, the political

accusation against Jesus fades into the background, and now the real accusation against him surfaces. Pilate realises that he can't win the struggle with the Sanhedrin because they resort to political blackmail which is really horrible because they will force Pilate to kill Jesus against his better judgement.

Now that Pilate has discovered that the Jewish Sanhedrin have found a way to destroy him, he will be as cruel as he can possibly be towards them. Of course, when Rome hears about these events Pilate himself will fall from power. Suddenly Pilate realises that someone is going to die today. That person will be either himself - because the Sanhedrin will go for him - or Jesus. That's when he moves towards killing Jesus, but he still doesn't want them to see that he has lost power.

The chief priests demand blood so Pilate decides in his own warped thinking that he will give them blood, **but he won't give them the life!** So, under intense pressure, he orders Jesus to be scourged. The only thing he achieved in this dreadful decision was to increase Jesus' pain and suffering beyond measure. This punishment was given to a man Pilate knew he had 'no case against', one who was completely innocent. Isaiah 52:14 described what Jesus looked like afterwards: "the crowds were appalled on seeing him so disfigured did he look that he seemed no longer human". Now, We have to look at this. This appalling punishment was given to an innocent man whom Pilate still wants to release!

Look at this event in terms of the Passover lamb. In the process of offering this lamb - out of compassion for the animal – the priests killed it humanely and then **flogged it afterwards**. That flogging was the punishment for the sins of the people. Here we have **the living Lamb of God**, literally fleeced alive! He is scourged from head to foot, front and back, so that no part of that sensitive body was left without wounds. It is so appalling that many a man died raving mad under the scourge; or died of heart attacks and shock. Yet this is **just the beginning for Jesus!** The most incredible part of it all is that Jesus took this punishment **in silence in peace, even in majesty**. His whole Person is so majestic, peaceful, so wonderful, that I don't know how the soldiers continued.

While they were literally taking the flesh off his body, he was in complete silence. This is the punishment that Jesus had to take to cure all our sexual immorality and everything that degrades human beings making them unworthy of God's presence. It was part of the Passover to have the Lambs flogged to make reparation for the sins of the people. But if Pilate thinks that this will elicit pity from the Sanhedrin, he is wrong. When they see Jesus coming from this scourging and crowning, they will move-in for the kill. It is frightening to see priests of God degrade themselves so completely.

Thank you for watching. God bless you.

## **INTERVAL**

Welcome to our sharing on chapter 19 of John's Gospel. We now deal with the scourging and crowning of Jesus on the final day of his life. We looked at the fact that Pilate, in his warped way of thinking, thought that he could scourge Jesus and somehow get away with not killing him. One wonders how a person could come to such a conclusion in that situation. He thinks he can bargain for Jesus's release, but as soon as he tries to bargain using Barabbas the Sanhedrin know that they have power over Pilate. The hatred of the Sanhedrin for Pilate was so great they decided to move-in for the kill and get two victims, not just one. They know they can bring Pilate down now because they will make sure Caesar hears what Pilate has done. Pilate then becomes a pawn in their game. It seems the Roman soldiers were not given any instruction with regard to the scourging of Jesus! They were apparently free to do what they liked with him - to vent their hatred of the Jews on him. John doesn't give the details. He just says that it was done. What he is interested in is that when they have scourged Jesus, they dress him up as a pretend king, and make a human effigy of him.

The Sanhedrin know what the Roman soldiers are doing. They know that to dress Jesus up as an effigy of the king of the Jews, means that the soldiers take the opportunity to insult the Jewish nation with regard to their claim to have a King Messiah. The chief priests take the insult because they want to kill Jesus. So, you see this dreadful death-dealing movement carries on between these two groups all the time with Jesus is caught in the center of this ferocious battle. So, they crowned Jesus with thorns. John doesn't want to go into any details about it, but is important for us to remember that when Jesus is crowned with thorns, he becomes **the living burning bush**. In Exodus, Chapter 3, **God** appeared to Moses as **the living burning bush**, as the fire in the center of the bush; the bush was not destroyed because **this Presence** was there. **Here is Jesus, the living presence of God** in our midst.

He was crowned with his entire head covered with the thornbush. Why did they crown him with thorns? I would imagine the Roman soldiers had no idea why they did it. They merely wanted to crown him in mockery. But John understands, that in the Old Testament the thornbush was a symbol of the curse of sin. This humble king accepts the thorn bush. You want to get an insight into the meaning of the thornbush in the Book of Judges in Chapter 9; it is called Jotham's

Fable. It is given at the time when Abimelech killed all the sons of the previous king, wanting to have himself proclaimed king. One of the survivors of the massacre announced to the people that a disaster was occurring. He gave a parable in which the vine was asked to be king but it refused. Then the olive tree, and the fig tree both refused. Now, the vine, olive, and fig were symbols of the people of God. Finally, the thornbush was asked, 'would you serve?' Since the thornbush was useless, but dangerous, what Jotham is saying was that Abimelech, the one they had chosen, was the worst possible king they could have, that they had chosen a sinner and a murderer for their king. That is the meaning of the thornbush. Here, in the crowning, we see that Jesus redeemed our wrong way of thinking, our intellect, memory and will. He wants us to become kings in our personal lives; that we can rule the territory God has given to us, and truly reign with Christ, as Saint Paul says. We can only reign with Christ if the self has been conquered, as we've already said in the final discourse. The thornbush is therefore important. Jesus pays the price for our sins of the intellect, our pride, arrogance and rebellion against God.

Jesus accepted this crown of mockery so that one day we could wear a crown of glory. He accepted the mocking 'royal robe' so that one day we could be robed in grace in baptism, the robe of salvation. He accepted the mace of mockery so that one day we could reign with him. At the end of Revelation you find that when Jesus returns to judge the unbelieving world, the saints are with him. They are reigning with Christ. That's important.

When the king has been proclaimed in his dialogue with Pilate and now crowned, what the soldiers do is they pay obeisance to him, just as they would do to Caesar. But of course, they do it in mockery, but unconsciously they do the right thing. They bow before Jesus and say what they would say to Caesar, 'Hail, King of the Jews', but it's done in mockery. The only acknowledgement crowning, and enthroning that Jesus, the King of the Jews will have is what is done here in mockery! Yet they unconsciously acknowledge the truth. These soldiers are Gentiles and it is the Gentile world that will honour Jesus as king, not just the King of the Jews, but King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, who alone has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light: 1 Timothy 6:15-16. This is announced twice in the Book of Revelation in 17:14. Also, the identity of the returning king is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, so, he is not just King of the Jews. But at this particular moment the soldiers are in spiritual darkness.

After the king has been acknowledged and crowned, the next stage is the acclamation of the people. So, we go to the next scene in 19:4-: this is the **Ece Homo** scene. Pilate came outside again and said to the Jewish leaders, "look, I'm going to bring him out to you to let you see that I find no case in him". How could Pilate connect the scourging and crowning of Jesus with 'finding no case against him'? He already knew he had no case against him. But the behaviour of Jesus

during his scourging and crowning certainly told them that **he was a kingly, majestic person**. At least the blind Pilate had to acknowledge he was dealing with a hero, if nothing else.

All of Jesus's responses told them that this was not a civil case. Rome can't deal with this. So, he said, "I find no case against him". It's a second time, and he will say it a third time. So, Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. He emerged from that awful place of scourging and crowning **as the King of the Jews**. "**Here is the man: Ece homo**". That's not the only way you can translate that. It seems as if Pilate couldn't believe the majesty, control and the peace that Jesus has. What he says can also be translated: **What A Man!** You want me to kill this man? This man is a hero. How can you possibly think I could have a case against him? But "when the Sanhedrin, saw him, the chief priests and the guards shouted, **crucify him, crucify him!**" They don't just want blood; they want the life. "Pilate answered, take him yourselves and crucify him. I find no case against him". There you have the third time.

"According to our law, he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God". At long last, the truth is out! Jesus has to die because of who he is. John is a very skilful writer to manage to get the actual issues to come up to the surface. So here we have the newly crowned king presented to his people. He is dressed in his royal purple, and he is crowned. So, it's time for the acclamation. But the only acclamation Jesus gets is a cry for his death! Everything is upside down.

It really is the hour of darkness when everybody stumbles. The Jews would accept this suffering king in front of them, whom they know is the rightful heir to the throne of David, if he would do what they wanted. Jesus knows that. We know that, yet this majestic, wonderful king is completely written off. Not only do they not acknowledge his divinity, they won't even acknowledge the fact that he is one of the greatest men who ever lived. All Pilate hears are the cries for his death. He is used to hearing the cries and curses of the condemned who cannot bear the pain he caused them, so, he is really disturbed by Jesus. Pilate will be even more disturbed with the next stage of this incredible drama. When he hears that according to Jewish law Jesus ought to die, he realises the issue is completely different to what was presented to him earlier. It shouldn't be dealt with in a civil court at all. It is a religious matter!

When you see Jesus standing there scourged and crowned with thorns, remember that just five days previously the crowds shouted, "Hosanna, blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. He is the King of Israel". When you remember that, it is so sad to see how they have changed! At this moment, Jesus is merely the man whom Caiaphas has said must die for the nation. And it just so happens that this is Passover preparation day, and that as soon as 12

o'clock comes, they will begin killing the lambs in the temple, while the Lamb of God will die at 3:00 PM in the afternoon, just as the Passover Lamb should. Of course, it was the duty of the priests to kill the Passover lambs. John's emphasis on the fact that it is the Jewish priests who are forcing the issue is more important on the spiritual level than on the political level, because it's their duty **to kill the Passover Lamb** for the sake of all. In fact, **this was the highest moment of priesthood for them**, when on this day, at three o'clock in the afternoon, they offered the Son of God to God on behalf of humanity. It's just that they themselves don't appreciate it. It's really sad. What happens today, as I've said before, makes sense of all the Passovers up to this moment and the Passover of Moses in Egypt also, but you can only understand this on the level of above. Pilate has now declared Jesus three times to be innocent. Therefore, no matter what the Sanhedrin says or does, he should let Jesus go. It doesn't matter what they say, yet Pilate doesn't do that. He's caught up in a psychological war with the Sanhedrin, and it has the upper hand. Pilate doesn't know that **this is Jesus' Passover**. Pilate doesn't know that **Jesus is the Lamb of God**. Pilate doesn't know that priests kill the Passover Lamb. He is ignorant of that, so he unconsciously tells the truth when he says, "kill him by your own law". Do it yourselves. However, Pilate does know that the Jewish people would never crucify a Jewish man because the Romans kept this horrendous form of death for the people they hated most, who happened to be the Jewish people.

So, it was a frightful thing that the Jewish leaders would demand this type of death for one of their own people, but they want to destroy Jesus in the eyes of the people. They want to destroy the people's faith in him, so they want him to become a curse. Therefore, they swallow the insults Pilate gives them. The moment of truth comes when they admit that the real accusation is blasphemy. Therefore, Jesus cannot be killed by the Romans because he is not a subversive; he is not a revolutionary. He can only be killed by the Jewish law, which is correct, because that's the way the Passover lamb has to die. But as I said, the Sanhedrim now have a psychological hold on Pilate, and they are going to move in for the kill. So, after all the lies, deceit, subterfuge and shouting, Jesus will die simply because **he is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world**. He will die for the simple reason that he is what he said he was, **the beloved son of the Father**.

But of course, when Pilate hears that he claimed to be the Son of God he is really disturbed because this is beyond him. In the next scene we will deal with the subject of Jesus' identity. Notice the way John is presenting this so that each truth about Jesus is brought out. So, when Pilate hears that Jesus claims to be the Son of God, I'll read it for you in 19:8: "When Pilate heard them say this, his fear has increased. So, re-entering the Praetorium, he said to Jesus, 'where do you come from?' But Jesus made no answer. Pilate then said to him, 'Are you refusing to speak to me? Surely you know that I have the power to release you, and I have the



power to crucify you'. Jesus spoke, 'You would have no power over me if it had not been given to you from above. That is why the one who handed me over to you has the greater guilt'.

Now, this is way beyond what Pilate can deal with. He is very troubled because one of the titles given to Caesar was that he was 'a son of god'. So, he looks fearfully at this very silent man; he stands before Jesus, utterly and completely disturbed. The Sanhedrin were also afraid of Jesus, of his person, authority and power that they wanted to kill him. Here Pilate, representing the superpower of the earth, the whole unbelieving world stood before this very simple person, utterly afraid of him. Sinners always fear meeting God.

Don't you think that we are being given a real revelation here? Don't you think that John is saying to us, 'how do you feel' before the presence of Jesus? Do you experience fear? Or do you know that you are a child in the presence of your Father? Or that you are a lamb in the presence of your good shepherd?' It depends on your relationship with him as to whether your response to Jesus will be love or fear. It's these people who represent the unbelieving world that have all of this fear and all of this disturbance, and to get rid of the fear and the disturbance, **they get rid of him**. They do all the wrong things. They do not know that if a child runs into the arms of its father, it loses all fear. There's no fear in somebody who loves God.

Thank you for listening. God bless you.