



One Page Sermon

By Pastor Robb McCoy

March 27, 2022

Worship Every Sunday at 9:30 AM

Fourth Sunday of Lent: Jesus before Pilate (part 1), John 18:28-40

Jesus stands before Pilate and Pilate asks, “What is truth?” As the readers, we know that Pilate has the truth standing in front of him. Jesus has already told us that he is “the way, the truth, and the life.” Yet Pilate cannot see it.

The real question is, does he care? There are many ways to understand Pilate in this moment. What we know about Pilate from history is that he was a ruthless, violent, and sometimes cruel governor of Judea. Appointed by the Emperor, he was the living emblem of Roman power. He was removed from his position a few years after Christ. Some speculate it was over his harsh dealing with a Samaritan uprising. Both the High Priest Caiphas (mentioned earlier in John) and Pilate were removed at the same time by Roman authorities, lending credence to the belief that their cooperation was part of the problem.

Many call this scene the trial of Jesus, but to call it a trial is a mistake. Jesus’ fate is already sealed. Remember, Jesus was arrested by a cohort of soldiers, which is 600. If it that is an exaggeration, it shows that Pilate was taking this seriously. You don’t send a cohort of soldiers to arrest someone you do not believe is a threat. Second, they only arrested Jesus. They didn’t round up all of his followers. They focused that kind of effort on one man, and in this passage he stood before Pilate knowing that the cross was his only possible outcome.

Notice also that the High Priests—the ones that want Jesus did since he raised Lazarus—never give Pilate a charge. Yet, in verse 33 Pilate asks Jesus, “Are you King of the Jews?” Where did Pilate get this idea that Jesus was a usurper? The High Priests never said it. Jesus never said it. Jesus even asks, “Is that your idea or did others say it?” The moment Pilate understood that Jesus was claiming Kingship of any kind, his fate was sealed.

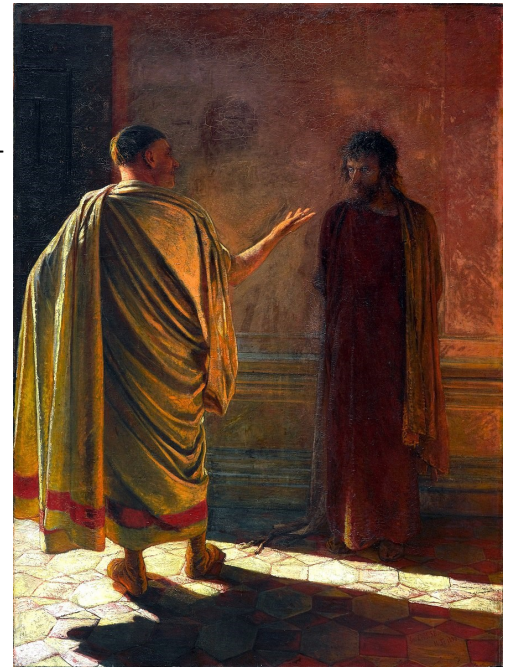
Roman law wasn’t about justice. Despite Pilate’s question, it wasn’t about finding the truth. Roman law was interested in one thing: what is in the best interest of Rome? Roman law applied to citizens differently than non-citizens. Roman law was about enforcing “peace,” keeping trade routes open, and keeping the ruled at bay.

As we read about Jesus’ “trial” we must look critically at our own system and wonder how much has changed. Is our system set up to find justice? Is our system concerned with truth? Or is it set up to protect consumption, profit, and prop up a “peace” that is based on keeping the ruled at bay?

In the end, Pilate makes a show of compassion by freeing a prisoner and the truth is shown to elude everyone involved. Pilate offers to release one prisoner (although the story never says if Pilate follows through on this promise). They want to free Barabbas.

Barabbas literally means Son of the Father (Bar = Son, Abba = Father). Jesus has called himself the Son of Man. This is a messianic title that goes back to the book of Daniel. The Son of Man (also translated as “Human Being,” or “Homan One”) is the name for the one who would come to restore God’s kingdom. Jesus is the Son of Man. He is also the Son of God. Yet the people ask for the Son of the Father.

In this moment everyone involved has missed the truth. They have the Son of Man in front of them. They choose the Son of the Father. Pilate has the Way, the Truth, and the Light in front of him, but he cannot see it. They have the Peace of Christ in front of them, but they choose the Pax Romana (Peace of Rome) instead. Before rushing to judgment, we would do well to consider when we make the same mistake.



“What is Truth?” Christ and Pilate, artist: Nikolai Ge, 1890 (Wikimedia commons)