

John 18:28 – 19:15 “The Irony of the Cross”

Read John 18:28 - 19:15

1. As an overview of this story how do you see both Pilate and the Jewish officials following the pattern of the kingdom of this world?

The ends justify the means – The world would be better off if X happened (in this case if Jesus were dead) – therefore by any means necessary I will bring that about.

Holding onto power for my own sake – even though Pilate sees that Jesus is innocent it will serve his own power and position to capitulate to the wishes of the Jewish authorities.

Power is truth – The question ‘What is truth?’ just lingers in the air – the only truth either of them are willing to acknowledge is that of power.

The desire to humiliate the enemy – the chief priests are wanting not just death but a crucifixion which was about humiliation, shame, and disgrace – as the person was publically displayed naked often exposing themselves. Pilate seeks to release Jesus by satisfying their desire for this by having him beaten and mocked – to no avail.

2. In the interaction between Jesus and Pilate in vs. 33 – 37 what do we learn about the nature of his kingdom (33-37)?

Jesus seems unwilling to use Pilate’s categories – what I am wanting you to see is so different from what you envision that to use your term of King would be to misrepresent what I am all about. Jesus turns away from the self-identifier of King to speak of Kingdom, and how his kingdom is different from the kingdom of the world.

My followers won’t follow the kingdom of this world – they will not bear the sword in my name – they will not wield political power in my name and by way of taxation, laws, and force get people to live as followers of Jesus. Some reflection of why we did that in our history may be profitable here - Some reflection on where in the world we did that and still do that would be profitable here – as where is it that Christianity is in decline? and where is it that Jesus is rejected? – and where is it that the gospel is skewed out of recognition? – it is not where power has been wielded in the name of Jesus following that pattern of the kingdom of this world? The pattern revealed in Pilate and the chief priests.

I have come to bear witness to this new kingdom. He will bear witness to the pattern of this kingdom at the cross, laying down his life for the sake of others. His followers will then also bear witness to this.

(Note that when Jesus’ says his kingdom is not of this world, he is not being dualistic as if to say we have an earthly kingdom and a heavenly kingdom, but rather the pattern of my kingdom is different from the pattern of your kingdom)

3. (40) Barabbas means "son of the father". The earliest texts of Matthew give his first name as Jesus. Mark tells (15:7) that he was arrested in the insurrection (terrorist activity against Rome). The word robber was used of a freedom fighter who would rob, pillage, and rape to further their cause. The officials are saying don't give us this Jesus son of the father, give us that Jesus son of the father – give us Jesus the terrorist. What does the irony here tell us about how they view kingdom and power?

Nationalistic in nature – it would be primarily about the Jews, ridding the land of the Romans.

The way to bring about this change is through violence – again we see that the powers of darkness have perpetuated the myth of redemptive violence – violence will bring about redemption, the good we desire.

There are very clear lines between good and evil – Jew good – Gentile evil – whereas the line between good and evil runs through all of us. You can see this belief in the chief priest's actions – they won't go into an unclean Gentile home for fear of defiling themselves – while they manipulate truth and subvert justice to bring an innocent man to death. The height of irony is that they want to remain pure to eat the Passover while they bring about the death of the true Passover lamb (Jesus) who has gone into the gentile home and is thus in their minds defiled.

4. (19:15) The officials charge Jesus with blasphemy – saying that he is the son of God – at the end they say – "we have no King but Caesar". They are accusing Jesus then of the exact same things that they are guilty of – for which he is condemned to death. John Stott says that the heart of the human problem is that we "claim prerogatives that belong to God alone" and the nature of the divine solution is that "he accepts penalties that belong to us alone". How is this scene an expression of both the heart of the human problem and the nature of the divine solution?

In Jesus we see the sinless condemned so that the sinful might be forgiven.

In Jesus we see the pure defiled that the defiled might be made pure.

In Jesus we see the source of life brought to death that the dead might be made alive.

5. (19:14) John interrupts the dialogue to locate the moment of condemnation at the "day of preparation for Passover, the sixth hour". At that very moment across town, in the temple, the Passover lambs were being slaughtered for the Passover meal. John is saying if you want to understand the meaning of the cross look no further than the Passover story. That first Passover the forces of darkness bearing the face of an Egyptian Pharaoh were defeated, the people set free to worship their God and be formed into a new people, a new kingdom. This Passover the forces of darkness bearing the face of high priests and Rome were defeated, the people set free to worship their God and be formed into a new people, a new kingdom. From the witness of the cross, and Jesus' conversation with Pilate, what does it look like practically to be formed into a new people, a new kingdom?

This will take a reflection on many of the answers that were given in previous sections. The clearer your group has been on examining the patterns of the kingdom of this world the easier it will be to see Jesus' kingdom pattern by comparison. To help your group navigate this question bring them back to what they spoke of earlier.

The general principle here is to lay down ourselves for the sake of the other – what are some practical examples of that?

We can lay down our right to justice when someone wrongs us – and instead take the path of forgiveness.

We can lay down any one of our resources – time, money, talent – to serve another.

We can as N.T. Wright put it – prayerfully bear witness that there is a new way to be human – a true way – to be prepared to confront the world as Jesus did with Pilate with a new vision of Kingdom, of truth, of power.