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JOHN 18:28-40, 19:1-24

John Series

Please open your Bibles to John 18. We're going to look at the crucifixion of Jesus Christ today in John 18. It's interesting that although in the course of this as Jesus is being crucified, there's an emphasis by John himself, as he's writing these books under the influence of the Holy Spirit, about a man in the story whose name is Pilate.

I want you to see the wrestling that's going on in Pilate's heart. He's an interesting guy, just like us. He has the same kind of fears. Fears of losing his job, fears of shame, fears for his life, fears of humiliation. The test is going to be will he have an allegiance to his fears or will he have an allegiance to the truth. Waiting for him to make his decision is the Son of God in royal calmness, watching what's going on in the midst of that situation graciously.

I think you'll find it an interesting story as you open to John 18. Let's pray as we look at this passage.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, now we ask that you would teach us what this means, what's going on in this story in ways that reach our hearts, not just our heads. Help us to understand what it looks like in practical terms for us to follow Jesus Christ as our example. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

Five times Pilate is going to try to get out of this problem. What we see here when he's trying to get out of this problem is that he's going to ask to get out. He's going to ask the disciples if he can get out of this whole problem. The challenge that he's going to face as he's going through is that he's wrestling inside. It's a conscience issue.

Remember last week as we talked about this idea of conscience I shared a verse with you. I want to show that verse to you now. This is from 1 Timothy 1:18-19. Just talking about the conscience of Peter. Remember he denied Christ three times? Well now in 1 Timothy Paul tells us about the importance of the conscience. Pilate's going to wrestle with it. I want you to see how important it is.

1 Timothy 1:18-19 says, *Fight the battle well, holding on to faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and so have suffered shipwreck with regard to the faith.*

That's just telling you the conscience is really important. Pilate's going to blow it in regards to his conscience. God has given each one of us a conscience. It's a very important part of who we

are and it's not just to bring us to Christ, although that's part of it, so we recognize we need a Savior.

Paul himself, referring to himself in Acts 24, says these words: *I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.* This is important to Paul.

We see examples in the scriptures of people who were able to deal with their conscience well and some who weren't. Pilate is an example of a guy who was wrestling on the inside with some very important issues and he fails the test. We can learn from that as we're going through.

Look at John 18:28. *Then the Jewish leaders took Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor (that's going to be Pilate). By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness they did not enter the palace, because they wanted to be able to eat the Passover.*

So they don't even go into the palace. They require that the governor come outside because they don't want to be defiled because this is the preparation day for the Passover. It's ironic because they're getting ready to sacrifice the Passover Lamb, Jesus Christ Himself. So it's a fascinating dynamic that's going on here.

Verse 29: *So Pilate came out to them and asked, "What charges are you bringing against this man?"*

"If he were not a criminal," they replied, "we would not have handed him over to you." Pilate said, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law." That's number one of five times that Pilate's going to say, "You guys deal with this. I don't want to be a part of this." He's reluctant.

But see, the Jewish leaders need something he has. Pilate has authority to kill Jesus, enact this capital punishment because the Jews couldn't do it themselves. They had to appeal to the Roman governor in order to make that happen. So they've got to hijack his authority.

They're doing it on the basis of two lies. One is that Jesus is saying don't pay taxes and the other is they're saying He's a king and He wants to subvert the Roman authorities or the Roman government. So those two lies are implicating Pilate because the problem is if Pilate doesn't respond to their request then he's no friend of Rome, he's violating his role as the leader, and he's abdicating his responsibility as that Roman governor. They're going to challenge him and they're actually going to win in the end here because Pilate is going to give permission and actually decide that the capital punishment offense is the appropriate thing for Jesus.

Now there's an interesting twist in the story. I want to bring a passage in from Matthew here just in the middle of this. It's not in John, but I think it's fascinating to see what is going on at the same time because in Matthew 27:19 it says, *While Pilate was sitting on the judge's seat, his wife sent him this message: "Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him."*

Just imagine, here's this guy at work trying to make hard decisions at work and his wife calls and says, "Hey. I've got advice for you about how you handle your business practices. This is what you need to do." So Pilate's got this additional thing. He should have listened to his wife.

Just a good warning for us men: Listen to our wives. Because God often speaks through the wife to the husband in order to communicate a message. God was doing that in this passage.

Let's go back where we were in chapter 18. *Pilate said, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law."*

"But we have no right to execute anyone," they objected. This took place to fulfill what Jesus had said about the kind of death he was going to die. We're going to see prophecies fulfilled all through the crucifixion, the trial of Jesus Christ. This is another example of it.

Verse 33 says, *Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?"*

"Is that your own idea," Jesus asked, "or did others talk to you about me?"

"Am I a Jew?" Pilate replied. "Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What is it you have done?"

Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place."

"You are a king, then!" said Pilate.

Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."

This idea of truth, as you know, is a theme throughout the book of John where he says *the truth will set you free*. He talks about *I am the way, the truth, and the life*. We are truth-seekers first as Christians as we're moving forward. Now He's challenging Pilate with the truth – *"Everyone who is on the side of the truth listens to me."*

Notice Pilate's response. *"What is truth?" retorted Pilate.* There's almost a disgust in his voice. He's given up on the truth.

When someone gives up on the truth and they start meandering around and making decisions based on other things – what's the decision I can make that will give me the least amount of heartache? Or what's a decision I can make to please certain people? That's where Pilate is stuck because he's unwilling to address the truth in his life.

We come to the second time he tries to get out of this in verse 38. *With this he went out again to the Jews gathered there and said, "I find no basis for a charge against him. But it is your custom for me to release to you one prisoner at the time of the Passover. Do you want me to release 'the king of the Jews'?"*

They shouted back, "No, not him! Give us Barabbas!" Now Barabbas had taken part in an uprising.

Again, Pilate's trying to get out of this situation. He's a divided man. He wants to release an innocent guy, but at the same time he wants to release Him he doesn't want to pay the price required in order for that release to take place. He's wrestling in his heart, trying to figure out a way, an escape path that he can take. He's going to use a few of them, escape tactics, to try to get out of this. One is "Hey, I'll give you somebody else. Choose somebody else to be released or choose Jesus. I'll release Him." And they say, "No, we'll take Barabbas." So he willingly (or unwillingly) gives away this authority to the Jews to crucify Jesus.

Let's go into chapter 19 as we continue the story. The first thing Pilate does is he offers this alternative – take somebody I'm going to give away at the Passover. They don't want that; they want Barabbas instead.

Now in John 19 he's going to beat Jesus up and give Him up as if maybe that will be enough. *Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They clothed him in a purple robe and went up to him again and again, saying, "Hail, king of the Jews!" And they slapped him in the face.*

The crucifixion of Jesus Christ is an R-rated story. I don't like R-rated movies with violence in them. They do something to me and so I avoid them. I don't like the story of the crucifixion. It does a lot of things in my own emotions. Obviously I'm grateful for Jesus Christ and the sacrifice He paid. I think that's where I end up with a sense of gratefulness. But it's hard for me to read these verses because I love this guy. And they're beating up my Lord and my friend.

One of the emotions I feel is this anger at the injustice of what's happening in the story. It's painful to see what's going on here. The more you study crucifixion and these things like being flogged and the crown of thorns and what crucifixion is, the more painful it seems it gets to imagine what happened to Jesus Christ in those moments. Not counting the emotional turmoil that He experienced by being separated from the Father by carrying our sins. Just a very painful, painful thing.

Back to Pilate in verse 4. He beats up Jesus like this in verses 1-3. Verse 4: *Once more Pilate came out and said to the Jews gathered there, "Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against him."* This is number three; his third attempt to get out of this.

When Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, "Here is the man!" As soon as the chief priests and their officials saw him, they shouted, "Crucify! Crucify!" But Pilate answered, "You take him and crucify him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against him."

He wants to get out of this so he doesn't have to take responsibility for this problem. His conscience is bothering him, but he doesn't have enough character to deal with it. There are two things – conscience and character.

When I'm working with a ten-year-old, for example, in counseling, we decide to start by helping him be internally motivated to deal with his bedroom. So I say to him, "Okay, what are the things you want to work on your bedroom?"

He says, "Pick up the clothes of the floor, make my bed, and clean off my desk. Those are the things my mom wants me to do."

I said, "Well, you're now ten years old, you can start managing this yourself. So here's an idea. When you cross the threshold of your door I want you to turn around and see if those three things are done. You don't have to rely on mom now. You're ten. You can do this yourself. And your conscience will prompt you – do the right thing." So now as he's going through the doorway, the conscience is prompting him – I need to look back and see if those three things are done.

"But," I said, "the conscience won't clean your bedroom; it's the character that cleans your bedroom. Do you have the character?" Once you get a prompting from the Holy Spirit, a prompting from your conscience, when that takes place, do you have the character to turn around and go do the job?

See, Pilate is getting promptings here from his conscience that he knows is the wrong thing to do, but does he have the character to move forward? No, he doesn't. And we end up with this problem.

Verse 7: The Jewish leaders insisted, "We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God."

Now this is what Pilate's hearing now. *He claimed to be the Son of God.*

When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid. So that's what leads me to believe that Pilate's wrestling with fears inside because he was already afraid, now he's more afraid. He's afraid of his job, afraid of his reputation, afraid that there might be an uprising. He's afraid of all kinds of things here. So it says *he was even more afraid* (and verse 9) *and he went back inside the palace.*

It's not just about offending the Jews. It's not about getting in trouble with the Roman bosses that he has because of some uprising. Maybe he's offending God. This is serious business. *When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid and he went back inside the palace.*

"Where do you come from?" he asked Jesus, but Jesus gave him no answer. "Do you refuse to speak to me?" Pilate said. "Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?" This guy's really not interested in being a part of this problem. He wants to get out of it.

Verse 11: Jesus answered, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin."

From then on – verse 12, do you see that? *From then on, Pilate tried to set Jesus free* (this is the fourth time that it says Pilate wants to get out of this, he doesn't want to be involved in this. He's

wrestling with it in his heart), *but the Jewish leaders kept shouting, “If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar.”*

So now they’re really tightening the screws here and saying, “You’re not being a good Roman citizen. You’re not having your allegiance to Caesar if you don’t do this.” So they’re tightening the screws on him. What’s he going to do? He doesn’t want to be here in this whole problem. He wish it would go away.

Verse 13: When Pilate heard this, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge’s seat at a place known as the Stone Pavement (which in Aramaic is Gabbatha). It was the day of Preparation of the Passover; it was about noon.

“Here is your king,” Pilate said to the Jews. This is the fifth time. This is the last time. He’s saying, “I’m giving Him to you. Here is your king.”

But they shouted, “Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!”

“Shall I crucify your king?” Pilate asked.

“We have no king but Caesar,” the chief priests answered.

What a fascinating thing for the Jewish leaders to be saying. That they would be acknowledging Rome and embracing Rome as their leader. It’s fascinating.

Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified. It’s amazing. He’s going to give up an innocent man because he’s unwilling to stand for what’s right. He’s wrestling with this in his heart.

It just reminds me I need to be careful. Who am I trying to please? How am I making decisions? Am I focusing on what God wants me to do? Am I sticking with the truth? Wow.

The passage continues. *Verse 16: So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). There they crucified him, and with him two others—one on each side and Jesus in the middle.*

Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek. The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, “Do not write ‘The King of the Jews,’ but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews.”

Pilate answered, “What I have written, I have written.” He’s just fed up with the whole thing.

Verse 23: When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom.

“Let’s not tear it,” they said to one another. “Let’s decide by lot who will get it.” This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled that said, “They divided my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment.” So this is what the soldiers did. And they crucified our Lord. They crucified Jesus Christ.

In closing I just want to take you to a passage because I want you to see that Peter, as he’s writing later, uses this story of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ to help us deal with a certain area of our lives.

Peter is saying take Jesus home, to your workplace, and to your family. I want you to see it in 1 Peter 2:18-23. He’s going to talk about the conscience here and he’s going to talk about the death of Jesus and how it applies to mistreatment.

When you’ve been abused, when you’ve been mistreated, whether at home or at work, someone’s mistreated you, you have to have a way of thinking about that and processing it. So in 1 Peter 2:18-23 he starts by talking about servants, slaves. We can apply this to business kind of relationships.

Slaves, in reverent fear of God submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. So if you’re in a school situation and the teacher’s being harsh or mean, you might apply these truths to your own life.

For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God. Some of your versions will say something besides *conscious of God*. What they will say literally in the Greek is their conscience is facing toward God. In other words, they’re doing the right thing before God even though they’re being mistreated and that’s commendable in the midst of harsh suffering.

If you are mistreated, you want to have your conscience clear – that you are doing the right thing even though you’re being mistreated. That’s what he’s talking about. Conscience. Very important and mentioned here in this passage.

Verse 20: *But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.* So now you’re not looking for your reward among the people-pleasers of life; you’re looking for your reward from God Himself and there’s this *commendable before God* that gives you this sense of satisfaction, completion in your conscience – I’m doing the right thing even though I am being mistreated.

Verse 21 – here’s where it ties into the crucifixion. *To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you (we just read about the suffering), leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.*

And here’s what He did – *“He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.” When they hurled their insults at him (like they do to you and me when we’re being abused or mistreated), he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats (like we tend to do).*

Instead (here's the key, here's what He did that we need to remember too), *he entrusted himself to him who judges justly*. He gave Himself to the Lord. "Lord, you take care of them. I'm going to give myself to you."

When you are mistreated, you want to go back to the cross, you want to understand what Jesus did. When you recognize that, if you're doing the right thing, the conscience is facing toward God, it gives you this sense of satisfaction that I am pleasing God, not pleasing people. So Peter takes it down into our own lives.

In the next verse it says this, *Wives, in the same way...* And then a few verses later – *Husbands, in the same way...* What Peter is saying is in the same way that Jesus was mistreated, take that into your home because there is sometimes when your wife or your husband don't treat you as well as they should and you better know how to handle that in the same way that Jesus handled the mistreatment that took place.

Taking Jesus home – it's a powerful concept that Peter's teaching them. Take Him home to work, take Him home to your family, and apply this idea of the crucifixion to your own personal life. Follow Jesus Christ as an example.

The conscience is strategic and maybe today you're thinking, "Wow, I don't even want to think about the conscience because my conscience pelts me with all the regrets that I have because I made so many bad mistakes in my life." Whoa, whoa, whoa. I want you to stop right there because I want to show you one more verse about the conscience that I think is strategic. Because something happens to you in salvation in regards to the conscience.

It's Hebrews 10:22 that says this: *Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience.*

One of the privileges we have, because of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, is that our hearts are sprinkled with salvation. And what does it do? It cleanses the conscience. The conscience is inside the heart and God does this work inside of us (our conscience) to free us. So one of the neat things that happens in a person's life when they accept Jesus Christ in their heart is they go, "Ah. I feel like a weight has been lifted off my shoulders." That's the conscience being relieved.

If today you're a believer and you're plagued with guilt because of mistakes you've made in the past, you need to know that Jesus Christ died for those mistakes. You need to forgive yourself for those. God wants you to have a clear conscience and, like Paul said in the beginning, *I strive to keep my conscience clear before God and man*, it's work. Strive is working. You want to work at that. Work in the sense that we want to receive that forgiveness that Jesus Christ gives to us.

So today when we celebrate the Lord's table, it's an opportunity for you to focus on your relationship with God and say, "God, sometimes I feel guilty about this I did in the past or that I did in the past." God says, "I want to free you up. I don't want you to be plagued by those things. I want you to rejoice in the fact that your heart has been sprinkled in order to cleanse that conscience," and God does a beautiful thing in your heart and life.

As we celebrate the Lord's table now, I want you to think in terms of what God is doing in your own heart. Allow God to speak to you. I'm convinced that the whole idea of communion is that we're coming before God on a regular basis. Jesus says, "As often as you do this, do this in remembrance of me." We're doing it often so we don't forget.

At the cross we have so many things happen right there for us. We just talked about one we don't think about very often. The conscience is cleansed. Forgiveness is achieved. We have an example of how we should live in our lives, in our homes, in our workplace. So many things happen there and we want to be thanking God, remembering that. Never forget the cross of Christ. It changes who we are and it powers us to move forward to do what God wants us to do, to be what God wants us to be.

Let's pray together before we pass out the elements.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, right now I ask that you would be working in our hearts and speaking to us and causing us to remember the brutal death of Jesus Christ. But the purpose of that death, to free us of our sins, to provide forgiveness, to cleanse us of all unrighteousness, to purify our consciences, we ask that you would remind us of that today. We want to yield ourselves to the Holy Spirit this morning. We want to give you our hearts today again, afresh, anew. And we do that as we celebrate this communion that you've ordained for us to do regularly. Thank you, Lord, for what you've done for us. We acknowledge you now. In Jesus' name, amen.