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JOHN 18:28-19:22

John Series: Get a Life in Jesus

[PRAYER] Lord, these are your people and this is your word. So I pray now that your word would touch people's hearts and you'd give me wisdom as I try to share some of the things you taught me this week from your word. I pray, Lord, that you'd speak to people today. In Jesus' name, amen.

We're in a verse-by-verse study of the gospel of John. That means we're going verse by verse through the Bible and we happen to be at John 18. So if you brought your Bible, you can open it up to John 18. We're going to look at that passage today. The passage is about the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, a passage that I'm sure you read before and that you're familiar with that Jesus Christ died on the cross for us. The main character obviously in this story is Jesus who gave His life for us, His demonstration of His love and a statement of our ability to have forgiveness in our hearts and to begin this Christian life and walk in this way that He wants for us. It's just an amazing act of God's grace that we have Jesus Christ.

As I read to you this story out of the gospel of John today, I want to look at one particular person throughout this part of the story. He's the governor of that area, the Roman governor. His name is Pilate. And Pilate is having a hard time with this. Pilate does not want to crucify Jesus. You're going to see that in the passage. He's a Roman official and the Jewish people must come to him in order to get permission to execute Jesus, but he doesn't want to be a part of this. He doesn't agree with it, he doesn't like it. Something inside of him tells him this isn't right.

I want to talk to you today about the conscience and I want to show you some passages of scripture in the Bible about the conscience. So this is kind of an advanced discipleship lesson for you today. But Pilate lacked something. I want you to see what he lacked. His conscience was working. We're going to see that. But he lacked something else and it's the something else that we all need. We all have a conscience. That conscience is present inside of the human heart. And the question has to do with what that conscience is, what does it have to do, how does it affect us, how does it work.

So Paul in his writing...and I'm going to share with you three verses of scripture and three passages. These are the ones I want to read publicly with you. We read the scriptures publicly because that's what Paul told Timothy. Don't disregard the public reading of scripture. And we stand in a sense of honor and awe of God and His word because His word is that standard that we need for our lives. So would you stand with me please as I read these verses all about the conscience.

Paul is writing in the first passage to Timothy. Timothy is a young pastor and he's telling Timothy, here's what you've got to think of as a young pastor, here's what you've got to do in your life (something we all need) and he says – *Finish the battle well*. Life is a battlefield, not a playground. *Fight the battle well, holding on to (two things) faith and a good conscience* (Pilate had the good conscience or any conscience, but he lacked the faith), *which some have rejected and so have suffered shipwreck with regard to the faith*. These are two lights, two beacons in the harbor that we must have in line, the scriptures are saying, in order to avoid a shipwreck. Today we're going to look at those two ideas – faith and a good conscience.

Paul writes in Acts 24:16 – *So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man*. Unless we think that a conscience is our authority, it is not our authority and Paul makes that clear in 1 Corinthians 4:4 by saying these words: *My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me*. We can do things in our conscience that can try to clear it, but having a clear conscience isn't the ultimate standard of what is right and wrong. *It is God who judges me*, Paul said. It's these verses about the conscience that I want to lay as a backdrop as we start entering into the story of Jesus being crucified.

You may be seated.

We read about the story in all four gospels. We happen to be going through the gospel of John and so we're going to look at John 18. Let me read through the story to you so you understand what's going on. We're picking up the story in the middle, so if you missed last week then you saw us talking about Annas, the father-in-law of the high priest at that time. Now we left that and it says in verse 28 – *Then the Jewish leaders took Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor* (that's Pilate is his name). *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*.

The Romans had a way of ruling the people that allowed every community to observe their own customs and practices and even to govern themselves under certain regulations. They had limits. If they wanted to execute someone, they couldn't do it on their own authority. They had to appeal to the Roman government. That's what's taking place here.

Now it says it was *early morning*. It was early morning on Friday, the Friday of not just a normal Sabbath so they could participate in the Sabbath. This was *the Passover*, the big celebration once a year that would take place when they would bring sacrifices and they would put their hands on the sacrifice and that sacrifice would represent for them the atonement of their sin. It's just so beautiful that the crucifixion of Jesus Christ took place on that day.

But the Jewish leaders didn't want to be ceremonially unclean and there were laws that governed if they went into this public place into the palace they were considered unclean for a period of time and they wouldn't then be able to celebrate the Passover with their family or the Sabbath with their family as well. So they didn't want to go into the palace because they wanted to be able to eat the Passover.

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.”

“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.

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.” This one statement brings into clarity much of our role in our world today because the world that we’re in needs a message and that message is about the kingdom of God. It’s not necessarily a political message, although we take God’s word and it changes how judges operate or how legislators produce laws or how leaders govern or schoolboards make decisions. So we want the scriptures and the kingdom of God to permeate the world in real places and real ways. But Jesus is talking about the kingdom of God that is in our hearts.

In many of the parables Jesus said, “Let me tell you a story about the kingdom of God,” and then He would tell a story about that because He was trying to illustrate some principle about this kingdom. We live in the kingdom of God. This is so freeing for us because, yes, we live in the world and we have to adjust to the challenges that we face, but we serve a higher master. That our peace is not determined by politics in the Middle East. Our internal peace is determined by the rule of the king inside of our hearts. So Jesus is saying to Pilate, there’s a kingdom that’s not about this world. There’s a kingdom that’s from a different place. It’s a very important message that we need to grasp for our daily lives to recognize who God is and how He wants to live in our lives and reign in our hearts each day.

“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.”

“What is truth?” retorted Pilate.

Those are famous words. Those words, *what is truth*, are used in a university campus in an ethics class or philosophy class. When you’re asking the question *what is truth*, that’s really what you’re asking in those kinds of classes. So let me take a moment and take a tangent and help you understand what is truth. Because Pilate is obviously wrestling with something very important here. I think it’s a demonstration of what he’s lacking when it comes to the conscience. He had a conscience and we’re going to see he doesn’t want to do this thing of sentencing Jesus to death, but his truth is relative.

I want to suggest that we all experience suggestive truth. We all decide what that truth is going to be for ourselves in a number of different ways. And here's the principle about truth we need to understand: Truth rests on authority. You're going to choose whatever authority is going to determine truth for you.

Let me give you a practical example. This week I wrote a blog article and in that blog article I wrote about children sometimes having demandingness in their heart and parents have a job to do as they're working on the demandingness. One of the first comments that came onto the blog was, "This was a great article, except you made up a word, demandingness, and that's distracting. You shouldn't make up a word" (demandingness). I've been using that word for a long time, so I went to merriam-webster.com and I looked up 'demandingness' where it says it's a noun of being demanding. So I replied in the blog article. In a nice way I answered and agreed with some of the things she was saying (because she was making some good comments too), but I said, "And by the way, demandingness is a noun and you can find it at merriam-webster.com." Do you see what I'm doing? What is truth? In this case truth rests upon authority. I chose merriam-webster.com.

I know a lot of you want to know what truth is, so you just google it. Okay. That for many people is what truth is. Some people reply on the political atmosphere and that becomes truth for them or the laws of the land. Sometimes it's what the law says that represents truth (sometimes it does, but many times it doesn't represent truth). Sometimes popular opinion becomes the authority that people rely on to determine truth, which is of course very dangerous as we saw during Hitler's time. We all have to make a decision about what authority we're going to choose for our truth.

Now along comes Christianity. Christianity makes a claim that there is absolute truth. That it's not just relevant truth that we choose a different authority for our lives, but we recognize that God's word is our authority, that God created this world. He defined our world in a particular way and He created the instruction manual for it, so there is absolute truth.

So if you're going to try to define marriage, for example, on the political side, who are you going to listen to? You've got all these ideas that are in the political arena about what is marriage. Well I would suggest that God created the world. But there is an absolute truth outside of us and we go to that absolute truth and we see God designed marriage. He created it and we can find that definition in God's word, and that's going to help us understand how we live and how we act in regards to marriage.

One of the challenges I think we find in our world is that many people choose an authority to rely on when it comes to truth and that authority is themselves. So they make themselves the authority over the Bible, over situations. So they end up finding all kinds of things to do and they end up in some significant brokenness and challenges in their lives.

Pilate had a problem. He doesn't want to crucify Jesus. He's got this conscience. Every person has a conscience in their lives, whether they're Christians or not Christians. God has designed that conscience inside of a person for a reason. You can have that conscience seared, the Bible says a seared conscience, and it becomes so deadened. But there's a conscience present in each of

our lives, whether we're saved or not saved. The thing that makes the conscience work so well is truth. And Pilate here is asking that question.

As Paul said earlier in the verses that I read, you need to hold onto these two things, faith and conscience. So when conscience prompts you, you're asking the question, what is truth? What do I need to do here? What does God say is important? The problem with Pilate is he didn't have enough internal integrity, character, strength to take the messages he was getting in this idea of conscience and put them together with truth. He didn't have faith, so that's why he ends up in this very difficult and damaging place.

Well while we're in a parenthesis, we'll come back to this slide in just a moment, but I want to take you to the gospel of Matthew just to show you another piece of the story that seems to be happening at the same time.

While Pilate was sitting on the judge's seat, his wife sent him this message. We always have to be careful, husbands. When your wife sends you a message, you better be sure to listen. "Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him." Here's another resource of information that Pilate is receiving. Maybe he didn't want his wife involved in his business practices, I'm not exactly sure, but he's getting a message from several different sources, at least from his conscience and from his wife.

"What is truth?" retorted Pilate. With this he went out again to the Jews gathered there and said, "I find no basis for a charge against him." So Pilate is saying I really don't want to do this. I don't see that this is an issue that I need to get involved in. Now he's going to try to get out of this by changing the situation a bit. So here is his first attempt to try to get out of this executing of Jesus. He says – *"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. So that didn't work. That idea of giving them an alternative, they didn't want that. They wanted to kill Jesus.

So then (this is verse 1 of chapter 19) – *Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged, had him beat up. 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.*

Jesus endured a lot of suffering, pain, representing His love for us and just went through all of this suffering because He loved us, so that we could have a personal relationship with Him and enjoy Him. Pilate is used, obviously, in the midst of all of this plan that God has, but it doesn't excuse Pilate for his own actions.

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."* How many times is he going to say these same words? *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."*

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.” You have to imagine being Pilate in this moment and he’s gathering this information. He doesn’t like what’s going on, he doesn’t like this decision that’s coming down, and he doesn’t like the pressure that’s being placed on him. And now they come back and say He’s the Son of God.

Notice verse 8. *When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid, and he went back inside the palace.* He’s going to talk to Jesus again. He’s afraid. *“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 (or we’re going to put the word authority, that’s the same word there) either to free you or to crucify you?”* See Pilate’s understanding of authority is in the Roman government or in himself and that’s why he’s failing in this whole situation.

So Jesus wants to clarify this for him so he understands. And Jesus says this very clear statement. *Jesus answered, “You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above.”* There is a higher power, a higher authority that reigns in all of our lives. We can’t put ourselves above that authority. We must be subject to it. Jesus is making that clear. *“Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.”*

From then on, Pilate tried to set Jesus free, 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.” Now Pilate is suffering, I think, of the fear of losing his job. That if the word gets back to Caesar that Pilate has not fulfilled his duty, that he allowed this King of the Jews to live instead of killing Him, that he might lose his job. How far are we willing to go to the right thing? When the conscience prompts us under the standard of God’s word to do something that’s right, it may cost us in various ways. For Pilate that was very difficult.

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.
At this they shouted, “Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!”
“Shall I crucify your king?” Pilate asked.*

And a fascinating statement by religious leaders, these Jews who served God only – *“We have no king but Caesar,” replied the chief priests. Then Pilate handed Jesus over to be crucified and the soldiers took him away.*

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.

The story isn’t over for Pilate, so I’m going to read the last part here. *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." In other words, I'm not dealing with this anymore. I'm out of here.

Well let's pause for a moment and ask this question: So what? How does this apply to us? Because we too have a conscience. We too have a responsibility to go to that standard. In fact there are these two things mentioned in the first verse that I showed you earlier. Two things that we hold onto, faith and a good conscience. Both of them are very significant. The conscience is only as valuable as the standard upon which it relies. The conscience isn't an ultimate authority, but it prompts us to do something that's right or to correct something that's wrong or to care for somebody that's hurt. So this conscience becomes this very valuable tool for us in our own hearts.

The conscience needs training. The conscience needs discipleship. That's why we're a discipleship church. What we're trying to do is help us all, we're all trying to grow in this understanding of what the faith means in practical terms. What does it mean to take Jesus home into our lives every day? What does that look like? Because when this thing that's inside of us, this heart that we have, conscience, prompts our heart to do something, we have to know what to do with that feeling that we have and it must be met with faith principles in order to direct it in the right kind of way.

We say of somebody, "Oh that person has a good heart." Often what that means is they have a conscience that's soft. But the reality is, is their heart good just because they have a soft heart or is it because they're tied into the faith? It's the faith, it's the truth that Pilate didn't have that we all need in our lives.

If we do a study of the word 'conscience' in the Bible, we come to a fascinating first step, I think, for the conscience. Here's why God created the conscience in the first place and that is so we will be able to deal with our own sin. That when we come to our own lives, we see sin in our lives and we say, "I need something outside of myself. I need a Savior to help me deal with my problem of sin. I have a guilty conscience."

Now what some people will try to do to absolve themselves of a guilty conscience is they'll try to do good things to try to balance them out. "I'm going to do a lot of good things to try to outweigh the bad things that I've done so I can feel better about them." But the conscience doesn't work that way. There's always those regrets, those thoughts, feelings about the things that we've done that are wrong that prevent us from having a clear conscience. There's some people who say, "Well I'm going to go to church. That will make me feel better." And I hope going to church does make you feel better, but it can't absolve your conscience.

Here's a fascinating verse in Hebrews 9. The book of Hebrews was written so we'd understand that Jesus is supreme and fulfills everything in the Old Testament, all the laws and all of those things. A great book to study. In Hebrews 9:9 he's talking about all the sacrifices and offerings that were offered and he says these words about the conscience: *This is an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the*

conscience of the worshiper. Well that's a fascinating thought. All of the sacrifices coming in, (bringing your lamb as an offering, as a sacrifice to God, putting your hand on the lamb as they kill the lamb, identifying yourself with the lamb, the blood being shed), that was not enough to clear the conscience of the worshiper.

He goes on. (I'm skipping a few verses.) Notice down here in verse 14 he says – *How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!*

It is God's desire that we have a clear conscience and He's designed a plan for that – that's the blood of Christ. That's why on this special Passover day Jesus Christ was sacrificed on a cross. His blood was shed so that we could have a clear conscience. I think that's the first and maybe most important part of the conscience that we must grasp is that it paves the way for us to recognize our sin and desire a Savior.

But it doesn't stop there, as we see in Paul's writing. When he writes Acts 24:16 he says this – *I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.* Paul is already a believer. There's a purpose for the conscience after he got saved. The same thing is true for us. We want to have a conscience that's clear before God and man.

If you're going to have a conscience that's clear before God, you're going to have to understand this theological idea – it's called confession on the run. You can't just wait till you get to church to pray and ask God to forgive you. You can't just wait till we have communion, which we'll have next week. As we come to the actual death of Christ, we're going to have communion next Sunday. You can't just come to communion and in that ask for forgiveness and have your sins forgiven. That's a good thing to do, but there has to be this sense of clear conscience, which means daily, and hourly, every minute we're sensitive to what God is doing. So confession on the run is basically this: "Lord, I just messed up. Will you forgive me?" as we're continuing on. You might be driving. You might be talking to someone. But you're coming before God and you want a clear conscience so there's nothing between you and God. No sin that's unconfessed. That you're right before God, living before Him, and asking Him to forgive you. Clear conscience before God and man.

I think man might be a little harder. If you want to have a clear conscience before man, I'll just tell you, this is what you want to do. Get out a pencil and paper and a few hours and some quiet time, and "Lord, please help me understand and remember anybody I've offended in my life." That is a pretty big list for most of us. Then you write it all down. Then you look for ways to go and get a clear conscience and ask for forgiveness.

In some cases you can't do that. If you had sex with a woman before she was married and now she's married to someone else, contacting her now would probably not be a good idea. So there's some things you're not going to do. But as much as you're able, you're going to seek forgiveness from people.

So we hear stories about people who stole money or products from Walmart, then they returned them years later or gave money back because they stole something. What are they doing? They're trying to make things right. They're trying to get a clear conscience.

Did you know that our U.S. government has what's called the Conscience Fund? There are three ways you can give gifts to the U.S. government, three funds they go into. The first one is the debt-reduction fund, the second one is just the funds to keep the government going, and the third one is the Conscience Fund. People write letters to the Conscience Fund and a letter to the government and the money is deposited in the Conscience Fund for stealing products from the government in a government job or something. I stole these things and I want to pay them back. Or cheating on my taxes, so I want to give some money back. That's an attempt to get a clear conscience. As you go through that list of people that you've created and you're praying, "God, if there's anyone I've ever offended I want to make things right."

It reminds me of the story of Zacchaeus. At the end of the story Jesus says, "*Salvation has come to this place.*" Do you remember in the story Zacchaeus comes and they go back to his house and Jesus is going to have lunch with him and in the middle of dinner Zacchaeus stands up and says, "I'm going to give half of what I won to the poor (that's my conscience before God) and anyone I've cheated I'm going to give them four times whatever I cheated" (that's before man). Here's a man who wants a clear conscience and he's in the presence of Jesus.

I would suggest this is a very valuable thing. In fact it's so valuable that Paul says you want to have a good conscience in your life tied to good faith, strong faith. Those two things together are going to help you navigate the waters of our life situations. Once you've done that and dealt with your past, you want to make a commitment before God and man that any time you make a mistake, anytime you've sinned, anytime you've done anything that's wrong, you're going to make it right right away. That's a clear conscience before God and man.

Does that mean you'll be able to please people who are upset with you? No. In fact Paul says live at peace. *As far as it depends on you, live at peace with all men. As far as it depends on you* is the important part there. We can't please everybody. We want to do the right thing before God and we want to present ourselves to God in a special way with this clear conscience.

I just think this is a powerful concept that God has given to us. Pilate really lacked something in his life. What did he lack? Well he had the conscience working, but he lacked the faith. It's the truth that could empower him to do what's right. We as Christians need to be able to receive the messages of the conscience, but to be able to check them out with the truth of God's word, check them out with the power that God has for us through His Holy Spirit so we can live the life that God has called us to live and do the right thing.

Would you stand with me and let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Lord, I thank you that you've made a way for us to experience a clear conscience before you. We thank you for the salvation that you've given to us and the cross that's provided for us. Lord, we need that in our lives so much. So we thank you for that gift of salvation. Lord, it's hard, it's painful to read the story of Christ's death and His suffering. But it just draws us to a

gratefulness to you and just a big thank you for what you've done. Lord, help us to align our lives in a way that is right in line with your truth. Teach us what it means to live this life that you've allowed us to live this week. We ask for your grace to do that. In Jesus' name, amen.