

Text: John 18 12-40

Title: "Believe because He is King of His kingdom"

Time: 3/22/2026 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: In Genesis 22 the Lord makes the shocking demand of Abraham that he sacrifice his beloved son Isaac on an altar on Mount Moriah. This faith-test was designed by the Lord to illustrate for all succeeding generations what God the Father would do for them with His Son.

Believing that God had promised to raise up a seed through Isaac, and that God had the power to raise his son up again, Abraham obeyed God, and Isaac submitted willingly to his father's wishes. Abraham built the altar, bound his son, and had him lie down on the altar. He raised his knife and passed the test of faith that the Lord put him through.

The Lord, of course, withheld Abraham from killing his son once Abraham's faith had passed the test. Instead, God provided a lamb to take the place of Isaac on the altar. It is at this point that we no longer see God's Son symbolized by Isaac. Now He is the Lamb.

In our passage Jesus understands that there is nothing that can take His place (v. 37). He is both the offered Son and the substitutionary Lamb. Just like Abraham bound Isaac to place him on the altar, our passage tells us that Jesus was bound to be taken to Calvary (v. 12). Unlike Isaac, Jesus would suffer and die on that altar. The Father's knife would fall on Him.

The setting is the overnight hours of the Passover morning on the 14th of Nissan in A.D. 31. Jesus and His disciples had already eaten the Passover meal earlier that evening, after the day began at 6pm the previous day (Tuesday). Jesus has gone out to His enemies at the Garden of Gethsemane to ensure His arrest. John wants us to know that the death of Jesus was

not an unfortunate misunderstanding or merely one of the many martyrdoms of good men in the Ancient Near East.

John sees in these events the promise made to Abraham and symbolized in that father's love for his son. He reminds us in verse 14 that Caiaphas is the high priest who had unwittingly prophesied that Jesus would be the Lamb to take the place of sinful people. He had mentioned this fact before (11:47-52).

A second century source tells us that just one year earlier (AD 30), the Jewish authorities had been stripped of their ability to execute capital punishment. Since then, that authority resided only with the Romans, and so the high priests refuse to take the lead in this judgment because they are not allowed to execute Jesus as they wish.

John sees this providence as part of God's plan too. All this happened because God's plan was for Jesus to be crucified on a Roman cross, not stoned to death (vv. 31-32). Jesus had told Nicodemus that He would be lifted up, like Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, "that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:14-15). We preach Christ crucified as He did Himself.

Jesus promised in John 12:32, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me," and in the next verse John explained, "This he said, signifying what death he should die." Amazingly, our verses show that those words of Jesus are fulfilled by an argument between Pilate and the Jews.

Perhaps more than any other detail of our passage, one stands out to say that Jesus is God's Son and God's Lamb who willingly obeyed God's plan to save sinners. It is the truth that Jesus is God's King, the King of His kingdom. That is the climax that John reaches in his presentation of these events. He wants us to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and believing have life in His name, because Jesus is the King

of His Kingdom. He presents the kingly glory of Christ by contrasting His glory against three inglorious opposites in this passage: the designs of the Jewish leaders, the denials of Peter, and the disrespect of Pilate.

I. The glorious King and the inglorious designs of the Jews (vv. 12-14, 19-24).

Illustration: The mastermind of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ was Annas. He was appointed high priest in AD 6 and held the office until AD 15. In that year, Pilate's predecessor, the Roman governor Valerius Gratus, deposed Annas from office. Although left little choice about finding a new high priest, the Jews never accepted Annas's fate in principle, because the high priest was to serve for life, and because it was insulting that a Roman governor had deposed their priest.

For this reason, Annas's five sons were those chosen next to be high priest, each of whom followed the will of their powerful father. Caiphas is a son-in-law, and on paper he is the high priest as far as Rome is concerned, but it is Annas who is in charge in the background.

Annas's underhanded influence was matched by his underhanded methodology on this evening. After having Jesus arrested, he had Him taken to his residence under the cover of night for questioning. The purpose of that questioning was likely to gather content that would work for a formal charge later in the day before Pilate. So in this secret place, at this secret time, for this underhanded reason, Annas questions Jesus about His disciples and His doctrine (v. 19).

Application: In the face of this tyranny and hidden agenda, Jesus answers that He always taught openly (vv. 20-21). He implies not only that His ministry had been open and transparent, but also that Annas's was not. That implication was

not lost on one of Annas's temple officials, who slapped Jesus in the face for it (vv. 22-23).

It is because the enemies of open and transparent truth have no prevailing argument against truth that they must resort to physical violence. This is the approach of governments all over the world, who are killing and persecuting our brothers and sisters in Christ as they proclaim the truth. It is why tens of thousands of Iranian citizens have been shot by their own tyrannical Muslim government.

But Jesus does not back down. What He says is either right or wrong, good or evil, true or false, beautiful or ugly, and so He challenges others to choose the truth (v. 23). He asks us the same piercing question. For this question, no unbeliever has a good answer. Dear Neighbor, if Jesus spoke evil, testify of the evil. If He spoke good, why do you reject Him?

Notice that Jesus says to ask those who heard Him what He said. We are some of those who have heard and may be asked. Are we ready to be asked what Jesus has said? He was open, transparent, and public about His teaching, and He wants us to be too: "What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops. And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:27-28). It was this responsibility that gave Peter trouble that night.

II. The glorious King and the inglorious denials of Peter (vv. 15-18, 25-27).

Illustration: Back in chapter 13, at the beginning of this fateful evening, Peter had declared that he would lay down his life to follow Jesus to the end (13:37). Jesus warned His overconfident disciple, "Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, the cock shall not crow, till thou

hast denied me thrice” (v. 38). Earlier in our chapter, Peter drew his sword and sliced off the ear of Malchus, the servant of the high priest. He was trying to make good on his promise to the Lord. But this was not the Lord’s plan. He told Peter to put his sword away, and then He healed the ear of Malchus.

Peter must have concluded that Jesus wanted to be arrested, and that must have discouraged and confused Peter. Jesus had told Peter that where He was going, Peter could not come. Peter did not listen. He had an alternative plan.

Application: It is when we fail to listen to the Lord, in order to come up with our own plan, that we put ourselves in position to deny Him. In Peter’s case he had come up with a plan that he sincerely thought was better for the Lord and His work. Failure to listen to the Lord is often accompanied by a sincere desire to do something better for the Lord and His work than the seemingly less effective directive from His Word.

But there is nothing better for the Lord and His work than simple obedience to His Word. Peter learned this lesson the hard way. On the path of his own plan, he lacked the spiritual power to confess his Lord before little girls and humble servants. Far short of the power to die for his Lord, Peter could not even confess Him. Both John and Luke spare us this detail, but Matthew and Mark mention that to disguise the fact that he was a disciple of Christ, Peter used four letter words and took God’s name in vain. There are few things that hide our true identity as Christians as well as swearing the way Peter did, and the way we used to before we were Christians.

Of course, this spiritual nadir for Peter ultimately did not define him, and our failures to speak boldly for Christ need not do so for us either. Jesus restores a repentant Peter, and the rest of the story is that he did die a martyr’s death for the Lord he truly loved. When we fail to speak for Christ, may we humbly repent and be restored to usefulness again as well.

III. The glorious King and the inglorious disrespect of Pilate (vv. 28-40).

Illustration: When a person disrespects another, it often says more about him than the person he is disrespecting. Maureen and I experienced some disrespect while walking up Hooper Hill Rd. last Friday. We were on the steep section just past Bill Moran's house on the right, when a young guy in a speeding SUV appeared over the hill in front of us. He began beeping his horn while coming down the hill expecting us to get out of his way. Everyone else who passed us that day moved their car over, but this guy came right at us honking his horn. At the last minute, he too moved over so we could stay on the road, but as he passed he seemed troubled by more than the fact that he had to move over a bit for a couple of walkers.

Application: The Scriptures present Pilate not only as disrespectful of the glorious King, but also as a troubled man. Luke tells us that he mingled the blood of Jews with the blood of their sacrifices (13:1). Edersheim describes the governance of Pilate this way: "Venality, violence, robbery, persecutions, wanton malicious insults, judicial murders without even the formality of a legal process, and cruelty – such are the charges brought against his administration. If former governors had, to some extent, respected the religious scruples of the Jews, Pilate set them purposely at defiance; and this not only once, but again and again, in Jerusalem, in Galilee, and even in Samaria, until the Emperor himself interposed" (1.1.262). Pilate was just the man Annas and the Jews needed for their treachery against Jesus the Messiah.

When Pilate asks Jesus the question, "Are you the King of the Jews?", he emphasizes the word *you*. Westcott puts the disrespect of the question this way: "Art thou, poor, and bound, and wearied, the King of whom men have spoken?" The disrespect Pilate felt for Jesus came naturally to him, as does the disrespectful unbelief of every unbeliever.

Jesus responds with a question of concern for Pilate, also emphasizing the word *you* but for a different reason (v. 34). Jesus's question queries whether Pilate had any real interest in knowing whether or not He was the King of the Jews. Do we have any real interest? After Pilate made clear that He did not, Jesus explained in what sense He was the glorious King (v. 36), a truth that never depends on our interest in it.

In 1 Timothy 6:13, the Apostle Paul calls this Jesus's *good confession before Pilate*. He writes that believers need to be generous and free from the love of money. Jesus's kingdom is not of this world, and He taught His disciples to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things would be added to them (Matt. 6:33). Are we doing so?

But Jesus's application for Pilate is a different one from the same truth about the royalty of Christ. Jesus explains to Pilate that His kingdom is not of this world *at this present time* (KJV, *but now*). There is coming a day when the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever (Rev. 11:15). That will be the day when His law officers (*servants*, same word is used for the temple police in verses 3 and 12) fight for Him as He rules the earth with a rod of iron. Pilate needed to get ready for that future kingdom by submission to the King now.

Pilate calls Jesus a king, but he does so sarcastically, I believe. For Pilate, only the kings who are kings of this world count as kings. Kings not of this world are not really kings to him. Jesus explains that this conclusion is a tragic mistake (v. 37). He was not only born for this role, but He came into this world for this role. He came to tell the truth about Himself, and everyone who is on the side of truth believes His truth, the truth.

Sadly, although invited by the True One to be on the side of the truth and to hear His voice in faith, Pilate denies that truth even exists (vv. 38-40). For Pilate, there is no truth, only

power. His goal is to hold on to his power, what he sees as his own sovereign independence. His goal is not to find the truth. He tries to use his power to set Jesus free, but the attempt fails, and Barabas is freed instead. Anyone who places their faith in their own power rather than that of the King of the truth shall fail.

Conclusion: The question Jesus asks of Pilate in v. 34 is one I believe He would have us answer ourselves this morning: “Do we ask for ourselves or only heard from another?”

Are we people told about Jesus without much true interest of our own, or are we people who are inquiring after Him that He might need our need? Do we identify Him as merely, even sarcastically, a the king of the Jews, but not our King? Do we echo Pilate’s retort, “What is truth?”, or are we among those on the side of the truth who hear His voice in saving faith? What have we chosen – our personal power over our lives, or His truth for our lives?

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

–David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching