



SCRIPTURE + SHARED

Week 6 – John 18:28-19:30

Day 1 – John 18:28-38a

²⁸Then they took Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate's headquarters. It was early in the morning. They themselves did not enter the headquarters, so as to avoid ritual defilement and to be able to eat the Passover. ²⁹So Pilate went out to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?" ³⁰They answered, "If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you." ³¹Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law." The Jews replied, "We are not permitted to put anyone to death." ³²(This was to fulfill what Jesus had said when he indicated the kind of death he was to die.) ³³Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" ³⁴Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?" ³⁵Pilate replied, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?" ³⁶Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here." ³⁷Pilate asked him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." ³⁸Pilate asked him, "What is truth?"

Understanding the Passage:

We're in the heart of drama of the Passion now. Much could be said of this passage, indeed entire books have been written, but for now a few points must suffice.

1. We must remember that when John refers to "the Jews," he's talking about the corrupt leaders of a failing religious establishment. He's not talking about all Jews everywhere.
2. Nobody wants to claim responsibility for what happens to Jesus — not the Jews, not Pilate, not even his disciples who have abandoned him. Jesus is nobody's problem. Nobody wants him, so everybody is responsible for what happens to him.
3. John adds this note about "ritual defilement" to call attention to the hypocrisy of the Jewish leadership. The Jews who flank Jesus as they take him to Pilate won't enter Pilate's palace (the praetorium) because the law forbids a Jew to enter the home of a Gentile. To do so would make one unclean. The Jews go out of their way to maintain the purity standards of the law, but later they will deny God as their ruler and profess Caesar as king (19:15). Paul will tell Timothy to beware of people who hold to the "form" of religion but reject its power (2 Tim. 3:5). John exposes the Jewish leadership for what they are: spiritually compromised wolves in sheep's clothing who have the form of religion but have given up on its power.

4. John portrays Pontius Pilate as complicit in the capital punishment of Jesus. Pilate doesn't care about Jesus or the Jews or really anybody. He doesn't care about right or wrong, guilt or innocence. His only concern is getting this Jesus stuff done in as little time as possible. He doesn't care about who the legal system fails or if it's morally right; he just wants to take care of business. He is not so different from the Jews: he has the form of leadership as a high-ranking Roman official, but he lacks the power of true moral leadership, which cares more about doing the right thing than doing things right. So, his question, "What is truth?" is less an existential crisis and more a sarcastic criticism of Jesus. He's saying, "What is truth to a guy like me? The truth has no power here. I am the power here." Jesus can have his truth and Pilate can have his power. So we too are left with a choice: which will it be?

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. What is another example of a person or an issue that was nobody's problem, so it became everybody's problem?
2. When have you had the "form" of religion but lacked its true power?
3. When have you seen or been part of a situation where the truth didn't matter, and all that mattered was getting things done?

Day 2 – John 18:38b-19:7

^{38b}After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, "I find no case against him. ³⁹But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover. Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" ⁴⁰They shouted in reply, "Not this man, but Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a bandit.

Chapter 19

¹Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. ²And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe. ³They kept coming up to him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and striking him on the face. ⁴Pilate went out again and said to them, "Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no case against him." ⁵So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Here is the man!" ⁶When the chief priests and the police saw him, they shouted, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and crucify him; I find no case against him." ⁷The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God."

Understanding the Passage:

John doesn't spend as much time as the Synoptics telling us about Barabbas. John simply says that Barabbas is a "bandit." Luke describes Barabbas as a political revolutionary who had attempted a coup to take Jerusalem back from the Romans and failed, making him guilty of treason and murder (23:19). The irony here is staggering: the Jewish leadership wants to release a violent criminal in exchange for the execution of a peaceful prophet.

In the Synoptics, Pilate has Jesus flogged and humiliated after the mock trial is over and directly before Jesus takes up the cross and walks to Golgotha. The flogging is an appetizer to crucifixion. But in John, Pilate has Jesus flogged in the middle of the trial and presents Jesus to the Jews again, this time beaten and bloody and dressed in a purple robe and crown of thorns. He is made to look like a king, and the Jews can see him as their would-be king when they finally shout for his crucifixion. That's the point. In John, the Jews see Jesus dressed as who he really is, as their King, and they condemn him with that visual immediately in front of them. This isn't humiliation. This is Jesus' accidental exaltation as the real King of the Jews.

Pilate tells the Jews, "Here is the man!" John is referring to Jesus' claim to be the Son of Man, whom Israel believed would come one day as a divinely appointed representative for all humanity and save the world. Pilate unintentionally presents Jesus as the long-desired Son of Man he claimed he was.

Verse 7 gives us a glimpse at the struggle for power between Pilate and the Jews. Pilate was obligated as the Roman governor to respect and adhere to the local customs and laws of the Roman subjects. The Jews are essentially saying, "Remember, Pilate. You have no choice but to agree with us on this one. Do your duty." It's a power struggle, and shouts and opinions volley like bullets back and forth. But caught in the crossfire is Jesus, who never says a mumbling word.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. When have you seen "the people in charge" choose to go easy on the guilty person and go after the innocent person instead?
2. When have you lost faith in "the system" – the religious, political, legal, or any organizational system?
3. What has redeemed your faith in "the system"?

Day 3 – John 19:8-16a

⁸Now when Pilate heard this, he was more afraid than ever. ⁹He entered his headquarters again and asked Jesus, "Where are you from?" But Jesus gave him no answer. ¹⁰Pilate therefore said to him, "Do you refuse to speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?" ¹¹Jesus answered him, "You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin." ¹²From then on Pilate tried to release him, but the Jews cried out, "If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor." ¹³When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside and sat on the judge's bench at a place called The Stone Pavement, or in Hebrew Gabbatha. ¹⁴Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about noon. He said to the Jews, "Here is your King!" ¹⁵They cried out, "Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!" Pilate asked them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but the emperor."

¹⁶Then he handed him over to them to be crucified.

Understanding the Passage:

Remember the expression "high noon"? High noon is the exact middle of the day. It's when the sun is highest in the sky. High noon is a measure of time. Something is either before high noon (morning) or after high noon (afternoon). But high noon also means the final confrontation between opposing forces that have been locked in contest, but now the moment of truth has come. In old cowboy movies, the sheriff and the bandit face-off in the street outside the saloon, their hands steady at their holsters. They wait for the clock to strike twelve. A tumbleweed tumbles by. All is quiet. The sun rises to its apex in the sky. It's a showdown. It's the battle to end the battle. It's high noon.

John says in verse 14 of our passage that it was "about noon." It's a fine time for a showdown. Pilate and the Jewish leaders have stalemated each other but it can't last. The Jews want Jesus gone because he threatens the very foundations of the religious institution they built and profit from. Jesus has shown the people the truth about God. God isn't a spiteful warlord who demands a sacrifice and therefore payment to religious professionals who need those resources to maintain their power. That's not God. God is Jesus, and the Jewish leaders have too much to lose to tolerate Jesus. He has to go.

But on the other hand, Pilate doesn't want the Jews to have their way with Jesus because if they come out the winners here, Pilate will look weak, like he doesn't have control over his subjects. He's the governor of a Roman colony, he rules over colonized people, and if he lets the Jews win this one, it will look like the inmates are running the prison.

But the Jews play the trump card. They say Jesus has claimed to be a king, and by definition he has "set himself against the emperor" (v. 12). That simple statement is a line in the sand and a challenge to

Pilate: you're either with the emperor or you're against him, and what you do with Jesus will tell us what side you're on. The Jews have painted themselves as pro-emperor and if Pilate lets Jesus go now, it will look like he's anti-emperor. Jesus is the dividing line. You're either with him or you're with the emperor. They have forced Pilate's hand. He has to side against Jesus.

And so Pilate puts Jesus on the judgment seat where he belongs as the true ruler of the world though no one will admit it. Shots fired. It's high noon.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. What have been the "high noon" moments of your life?
2. When did you realize that Jesus was telling the truth about God: that God is not mean and judgmental but a God of sacrificial love?
3. Where do you need to take a stand today and side with Jesus and against evil?

Day 4 – John 19:16b-25a

^{16b}So they took Jesus; ¹⁷and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. ¹⁸There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them.

¹⁹Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." ²⁰Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. ²¹Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" ²²Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written." ²³When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. ²⁴So they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it." This was to fulfill what the scripture says, "They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots." ²⁵And that is what the soldiers did.

Understanding the Passage:

And so it happens. Jesus is nailed to the cross. We must remember that crucifixion was a mixture of capital punishment, public execution, and terrorism. As capital punishment, crucifixion is the official death penalty of the Roman empire; as public execution, crucifixion is unlike lethal injection, which happens behind closed doors, and more like hanging or lynching because it sends a clear message to everyone who sees it: don't mess with us or this will happen to you, too; and as terrorism, crucifixion is a cruel yet effective way of frightening an entire society into submission.

John's account of the crucifixion has two unique emphases. First, Jesus carries his own cross to Golgotha in John, whereas in the Synoptic gospels, Simon of Cyrene carries the cross because it's too heavy for a beaten and battered Jesus. John wants the reader to see Jesus as more of a willing participant in his crucifixion and less of a victim. Jesus is in control here. He hasn't lost an ounce of his power. Still, though, the image of the condemned carrying the instrument of his death shouldn't be underestimated. In the movie, *The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly*, a Union soldier has been stripped of his uniform and made to march while carrying his own casket, while a sign hangs around his neck saying, "Thief." It's a powerful sight. It's humiliating and horrific. That's crucifixion. It's a walk of shame holding hands with terror.

Second, John adds a backstory to the inscription above the cross, whereas the Synoptic gospels simply report what the inscription says. The Jewish leadership wanted Jesus convicted of treason for claiming he was King of the Jews. But the key word there is *claim*. They wanted the public to see Jesus as someone who claimed to be king and got what he deserved. They don't want anyone to think Jesus is their actual king. But Pilate, in a passive aggressive move against the Jews, simply writes "King of the

Jews,” no “claim” language anywhere. Everyone loses here, except Jesus. Jesus is executed as the King he is, not an alleged King (a blow to the Jews), and the kingship of Jesus is made known to everyone in Jerusalem because the sign is translated into the three common languages of the city (a blow to Pilate). John wants us to see the crucifixion as nothing less than the coronation of Jesus as King of the planet.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. How does the crucifixion of Jesus impact (or not) your personal beliefs about the death penalty?
2. Does it matter to you if Jesus was “in control” of his crucifixion? Why or why not?
3. How is the crucifixion of Jesus also his coronation as King? (Hint: go to John 12:32 and ponder what John means by “lifted up”)

Day 5 – John 19:25b-30

^{25b}Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, “Woman, here is your son.” ²⁷Then he said to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home. ²⁸After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), “I am thirsty.” ²⁹A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. ³⁰When Jesus had received the wine, he said, “It is finished.” Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Understanding the Passage:

Imagine what it’s like to be Mary. The disciples lose a friend, but Mary loses a son. She watches the whole thing, every gruesome detail. The life of Jesus of Nazareth is bookended by Mary of Nazareth. She was the girl who gave him life, and now she is the broken-hearted woman watching him die. Jesus has everything to gain from the cross, but Mary has everything to lose.

Jesus has one item of unfinished business. He hasn’t executed his succession plan yet. Who will lead the Jesus family once Jesus is gone? Who will keep the mission going? In the Synoptic gospels, that person is Peter. Peter will lead the charge in Jesus’ absence. But in John, it’s not Peter. It’s the family. No one single person is designated as the “rock” or the foundation of the church. There’s no leader. There’s only the family, not his biological family of birth but his kinship family of choice.

So when he tells Mary and the “disciple whom Jesus loved” (still unnamed) that they belong to one another, he is forming the church before our very eyes, there at the foot of the cross. In Luke/Acts, the church is born on Pentecost with the gift of the Holy Spirit. But in John, the church is born at the cross while Jesus hangs there. In the Synoptic gospels, Jesus selects Peter as the leader of the Jesus movement because he is the keeper of the faith. It’s Peter who first proclaimed Jesus as the Christ. The church, in the Synoptics, is defined as anyone who puts their faith in Jesus. But it’s not like that in John. In John, the church is defined as anyone who claims Jesus as family, and by claiming Jesus, you claim everyone else who claims Jesus.

Every gospel remembers Jesus’ final moments differently. Here in John, Jesus says, “It is finished.” That could just as well be translated, “It is complete.” What is complete is the mission, the work that Jesus was sent to do. He has revealed the Father to the world. He has demonstrated and modeled the Father’s love to the world. He has been crowned and exalted as King. He has become the sacrificial lamb for the sins of the world. And now he has given birth to a new kind of family, just as Mary gave birth to him, a family who will continue the Father and the Son’s work in the world.

John says that Jesus “gave up his spirit.” A better translation would be “handed over” or “delivered.” It’s the same word for “betray.” Judas “gave up” Jesus. Jesus “gave up” his spirit. The crucial distinction is

that Jesus willingly hands over his spirit. It's not a passive surrender. It's an active gift. Jesus is not the victim. He is the victor. By giving up his life, he wins the world.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. Name three words that would describe how Pontius Pilate feels about the crucifixion. Then name three words that would describe how Mary feels.
2. Jesus forms the church at the cross. Why is that important for John? What does he want us to know about the nature of the church (as opposed to the other gospel authors)?
3. Why is it important for John that Jesus willingly hands over his spirit?

Video Discussion Questions:

1. Why is it important to set the other gospels aside when reading John?
2. How does Dr. Clark-Soles think we should translate "gave up his spirit"? How does that change the meaning?
3. When Jesus says, "It is finished," what is he finishing? What is being completed here?
4. What is Jesus doing when he gives his mother to the "beloved disciple"?
5. How is John's ordering of crucifixion and the giving of the Spirit different from the other gospels?