

# A Baffled Ruler

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Preacher: Alistair Chalmers

[ 0 : 00 ] Hi, my name is Rebecca and I'm one of the members here at Bruntsfield. This morning's reading is from John chapter 18, verses 28 through 40. Jesus before Pilate.

Then the Jewish leaders took Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor. 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 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?

[ 1 : 03 ] 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.

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. But it is your custom for me to release to you one prisoner at the time of 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.

[ 2 : 03 ] Hi, my name is Jonathan. I'm a member here at Bruntsfield. I'm going to pray as Alistair comes to preach to us.

Father, we bring before you our time together, whether it is where we can't be here physically.

Together, we are together spiritually. I'm meeting in your name. We pray for Alistair as he comes to speak to us, that you would grant him wisdom and grant us the clarity to hear what he has to say and that we listen and hear clearly in your name.

Amen. Well, good morning, everyone. My name is Alistair. I have the privilege of being the assistant pastor here at Bruntsfield and the privilege of leading us through this wonderful chapter of John's Gospel as Jesus interacts with a Roman ruler.

But before we dive into this chapter, let's pray together. Father, we come before you this morning and ask that the words of my mouth and that the meditations of all of our hearts would be pleasing to you.

[ 3 : 18 ] In the name of Jesus Christ, our rock and our redeemer. Amen. One of the big questions that people are asking in the world is, what is truth?

So truth can be seen by some as relative, meaning that there's no such thing as one definite truth. Everything is up for grabs. You choose to believe what you want, even if there's no evidence for it, or even if the evidence runs contrary to what you think.

You can almost pick and choose what truth is. A common phrase you might hear today is, your truth. It's become a strapline, a phrase that seems to be inclusive and loving, but in reality, it denies facts and hard evidence for feelings and wishful thinking.

It's become a phrase that characterizes self-help sections in bookstores. A phrase that's used to encourage those deemed different by the rest of society.

And a phrase to encourage those who feel discouraged. You live your truth, people say. But it isn't that easy.

[ 4 : 40 ] Because the big question that that phrase never actually addresses is, well, what is truth? If truth is something that we can be flexible with, if it is something that we can choose, something that we decide for ourselves, then it's not truth at all.

It's speculation. It's a theory. Truth becomes nothing more than an idea to be discarded. Well, this morning in John chapter 18, we're going to meet a Roman ruler who asks that question, what is truth?

And he asks the question because Jesus is brought into his courtroom and the Jewish leaders are calling him a criminal. And Pilate sees a difference.

Some people call Jesus a criminal, while some call him king of the Jews. So what is the truth? Well, we're going to walk through this passage this morning, almost verse by verse, and just let the narrative guide us to the main point we're going to see this morning, which is this, that Jesus is the true king, the innocent, who takes the place of the guilty.

So let's dive in together and read with me at verse 28. Then the Jewish leaders took Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor.

[ 6 : 13 ] By now it was early morning. The night before the events in our verses for this morning, Jesus was praying in the garden of Gethsemane.

And one of his disciples, one of his followers, one of his friends, came in and betrayed him with a kiss and handed him over to the Jewish leaders, a group of people who'd wanted Jesus dead from the very beginning.

And now they have their chance. And what follows is a botched trial. Jesus is taken to the high priest's house and questioned by an illegitimate court who meet in secret in the middle of the night because they know that they have no case against Jesus.

He has done no wrong. But that's not what they care about. They don't care about justice. They don't care about truth. They want him dead.

And so in verse 28, as morning breaks, they take him to Pilate, to the Roman governor. But look at the detail in verse 28. It says, to avoid ceremonial uncleanness.

[ 7 : 33 ] They did not enter the palace because they wanted to be able to eat the Passover. So the religious leaders won't enter the palace because they want to avoid ceremonial uncleanness.

They want to be able to continue to celebrate the festival of unleavened bread that was happening in Jerusalem that very week and which concluded with the Passover meal.

A meal to remember how God had saved the Israelites in the past by delivering them from slavery in Egypt. The irony is that they are rejecting the final Passover lamb and scheming for the death, for his death in such a hurry so that they can sit and celebrate how God saved them years ago.

They are rejecting God's ultimate means of salvation even though he is standing right before them. They are killing the sacrificial lamb, the Passover lamb.

According to their own oral law, Jews were not allowed to enter into the house of a Gentile, someone who was not a Jew. And if they did, they were deemed unclean and needed to undergo a cleaning ritual that would take a number of days.

[ 8 : 59 ] And so they stayed outside of the palace. But do you see the hypocrisy in this whole episode? They want to be clean even though hours before this very event they had beaten Jesus.

And even now as they are trying to have the appearance of being clean, they are manipulating the judicial system to get their own way. You see the reason they take Jesus to be tried before a Roman ruler is they don't have the authority to execute anyone.

Only the Roman authorities could command that. These men know the law of God and they are keen to obey it. In fact, they are so keen that they keep adding their laws on top of God's law to prevent disobedience.

But the problem was that they thought their knowledge of the law equaled obedience. You could say that the religious leaders were over-educated but untransformed by the word of God.

Rebecca Pippitt, an author from the US sums this up well. It is of no use to say we believe in something when our actions betray our beliefs.

[ 10 : 24 ] To know is not only to verbalize and intellectualize. It is to submit in obedience with our lives as well. Now I think that there's a challenge in there for us this morning.

It is not the main point of our passage but it should make us reflect on the consistency of our lives. As Christians, are we being transformed by the knowledge that we have of God and of the Bible or are we trying to keep up an outward appearance of holy lives without really being transformed? You see, these men knew their Bibles but they didn't understand that the law was there to show them their inability to be righteous. Their need for forgiveness from God.

Their hypocrisy led to self-righteousness. Beating a man one hour and then claiming holiness and cleanliness the next.

But that isn't too unfamiliar today, is it? It's so easy to have a Barney with the family just as you are on your way to church but then you walk through the doors and you put on a fake smile and you pretend everything's okay until you sit back in the car seat again.

[11:56] Or maybe, like the religious leaders, we're tempted to think that evil, that sin is only something external to ourselves rather than something that comes from within.

Reflect on how you are behaving when no one's watching. How are you engaging with God's Word and your worship of Him every day but maybe even now on a Sunday morning when the service is online and no one is around you?

Have you been transformed by the Word of God? We need to know the Word of God but we also need to be transformed by it and live in submission to it and to God's will.

So the religious leaders in an act of absolute hypocrisy bring Jesus before Pilate because he has a reputation of being a harsh leader.

He doesn't really like the Jews. He's presiding over Judea, one of the regions in the Roman Empire known for its trouble, for its religious riots and uprisings.

[13:18] And Pilate is known for his brutality. And so the religious leaders think that this execution is a done deal. But Pilate does the unexpected in verse 29 because he opens the court with the proper proceedings by asking the question, what charges are you bringing against this man?

Now at this point, you can almost feel the blood drain from the faces of the Pharisees and religious leaders, can't you? You can almost hear the whispering in the crowd as they're wondering how to respond to this question because they know they have no case against Jesus.

They know that he has done no wrong. In fact, the only thing that he has done is preach the truth about God to them. And he has called them out on their religious acts which glorify man, not God.

And so they snap back at Pilate in verse 30. We wouldn't have brought him here if he wasn't a criminal. But they don't answer the question because they have no leg to stand on.

And so Pilate dismisses them and tells them to judge Jesus by their own law. But we see their real motives for this perversion of justice in verse 31 where it says, but we have no right to execute anyone.

[14:48] They want Jesus dead and they will stop at nothing until it is done. Now at this point in the story we might be tempted to think that Jesus is a lost cause.

That he has no more control. That his life will be taken away and that he will just be another victim of injustice. But friends, we need to remember that before these men stands Jesus Christ, the Son of God, God in the flesh, the one who healed the sick, the one who taught people about God, the one who stilled the waves with his words, the one who raised people from the dead, and the one who knows exactly what is happening.

Verse 32, this took place to fulfill what Jesus had said about the kind of death he was going to die. Jesus is in absolute control of what is going on here.

In fact, this has all been part of God's plan from the very beginning of time. Jesus even told his disciples in John chapter 12 verses 32 to 33 that he would be lifted up, meaning that he would die on a cross.

And so in this chapter and the next, it is all about power. Pilate and the religious leaders, they think they're the ones in control. That they're the ones who have power and who are controlling the events leading up to Jesus' death.

[16:34] But the reality is that these people have not realized the truth. That the one true king stands before them and he is in control.

He is fulfilling the father's plan and willingly going to the cross to die. The innocent for the guilty. unsatisfied with the religious leaders, Pilate summons Jesus into the palace in verse 33 and asks a question that's been on his mind this whole time.

Are you the king of the Jews? Now this indicated that the charge the religious leaders had brought against Jesus were framed in political terms rather than the theological grievance that they had with his works and his words.

But Pilate is basically asking Jesus are you a threat to the power of Rome? See Pilate knows that any mention of another king any mention or rumour of an uprising must be dealt with immediately. And so when he hears about Jesus being a king he feels this need to defend his power. But Jesus doesn't answer Pilate's question plainly with a yes or with a no because he needs to know the kind of kingship Pilate is asking about.

[18:10] See Pilate could have been asking if Jesus was a rebel king who would lead a rebellion against the Roman Empire try to overthrow them and kick them out of Jerusalem.

Or Pilate's asking he could be asking are you the Messiah king? The Old Testament king that all of the Jews are waiting for the one who would come and save the Lord's people.

Pilate isn't satisfied with his findings and so he asked Jesus in verse 35 what have you done? and in verse 36 we get a very important response that teaches us about who Jesus is and about the nature of his kingdom.

Jesus said my kingdom is not of this world if it were my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the religious leaders but now my kingdom is from another place.

Jesus tells Pilate that he is a king but not in the way that Pilate thinks. Jesus' kingdom is not of this world meaning that it is of no threat to Pilate or to Rome in the way that Pilate thinks because the kingdom of Jesus did not come about through violence or force like all the other kingdoms of the world.

[19:41] the kingdom of God is not bound to a physical location or region the kingdom of God is not political and to prove his point Jesus basically says to Pilate if my kingdom were like those of this world do you really think that the religious leaders would have so easily arrested me?

See Jesus is making it clear that he is a king but not a king who sits on a throne in a luxurious palace not a king who surrounds himself with armies and bodyguards and not a king whose focus is his own personal gain but instead Jesus is the servant king he is the perfect king the true king the sinless king who rules and who reigns over a heavenly kingdom that no man that no army that no Roman ruler that no religious leader can defeat the kingdom of God is like no other kingdom that Pilate can imagine but Jesus isn't saying that his kingdom won't affect the world we live approximately 2000 years on from the life death and resurrection of Jesus and we can look over history and we can know for certain and we can see how God's kingdom has changed the world but the point that

Jesus is making is that his kingdom will not affect the Roman Empire like another earthly kingdom would because Jesus is king of the heavenly kingdom so you are a king Pilate says and Jesus answers in verse 37 but it doesn't quite come across so well in our NIVs a better translation would be you're right I am a king in fact the reason I was born and came into this world is to testify to the truth everyone on the side of truth listens to me now here comes that pivotal question what is truth Pilate asks the answer is Jesus in John 14 verses 4 to 6 Jesus said I am the way the truth and the life no one comes to the father except through me if you really know me you will know my father as well from now on you do know him and have seen him friends the truth is that Jesus Christ is God in the flesh that Jesus humbled himself and took the form of human flesh to reveal God to us to reveal the glory of God to a sinful world what's the truth well it's that the religious leaders that Pilate that you and me need our eyes to be opened we need to see the glory of God we need to understand our sinfulness and our inability to be made right with God without a sacrifice without a Passover lamb Jesus opened the eyes of the blind he taught the truth about God and he brought the kingdom of God into this world the truth is that the kingdom of God is here and the only way to enter into that glorious kingdom is because of the events that unfold that very day in Jerusalem as Jesus the perfect the true king is nailed to a cruel cross bearing all the weight and punishment and punishment for our sin or the just and righteous wrath of

God against a rebellious sinful humanity the truth is that the true king was nailed to a cruel cross the innocent died so that the guilty can live and that is why Jesus says in verse 37 everyone on the side of truth listens to me this is a call for Pilate and this is a call for you this morning if you are not a Christian to open your eyes and see the majesty of this king who willingly died so that you can live it's a call for you to put your trust in Jesus to come into his kingdom to see the truth it's an invitation to see Jesus for who he is the true king the innocent one who takes the place of the guilty and for

the Christian the challenge is do we really listen to and submit to Jesus we can't treat our salvation like a get into heaven free card we are called to follow Jesus to submit to him to hold heartedly live our lives out of service and devotion to him are we listening to and acting on the words of [ 25 : 39 ] Jesus Christ Pilate says in verse 38 that he finds no basis for a charge against Jesus and he says it twice more in chapter 19 and yet the religious leaders still cry out crucify him why because they don't want to see the truth they don't want to recognize that Jesus is the king of kings and lord of lords they don't want to recognize that Jesus is innocent because they are content to think that they have all the power that they have all the control the truth is that Jesus was in control this whole time that he is the true king who willingly willingly was nailed to a cross to make forgiveness possible and rose three days later triumphant from the grave defeating sin defeating death and calling people to repent to believe in him and to enter into his kingdom

Christian look at these wonderful truths before us in this passage and make them move you to whole hearted worship of who Jesus is marvel at the wonderful grace that this perfect innocent king died in your place meaning that you can have the privilege of being in the kingdom of God and that truth should blow our minds every single time we think about it and we should give all the honor and all the glory to God and it should lead us to praise him with everything we are and everything we have we should sing endless praises of our great God never cease giving thanks for our wonderful savior and for the true gospel but don't stop there because our world is searching for truth and we have it we can open our bibles and see Jesus truth personified

God in the flesh who calls people to enter into his kingdom kingdom and we are to be ambassadors of that kingdom we are to proclaim it to the ends of the earth to proclaim it to the distant shores to go to the distant shores but also to go to the neighbor next door because everybody needs to hear about Jesus in Jesus we find the hope the satisfaction that this world is longing for and we have a future that is secured through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ so go take the gospel to the world and plead for people to enter into the kingdom of God we know the truth and the world needs to know him too and if you're not a Christian

I would ask you please investigate the life of Jesus Christ the evidence is overwhelming look and see that his claims are true he is the true king the only innocent one who took the place of the guilty he died so that sinners like you and like me can live will you put your trust in Jesus this morning and find truth one of the biggest questions that people need to ask in our world is that question what is truth and the answer that we can boldly and with confidence proclaimed to the world is that Jesus is the way the truth and the life let's pray together heavenly father we thank you so much that from the very beginning of time you had your plan of salvation in place whereby you would take on flesh you would become one of us step into our sinful broken sin stained world and die on a cross so that people can be forgiven and enter into a relationship with you father thank you that you have revealed the truth to us by your spirit through the person of Jesus

Christ would you help us live out that truth would you help us live in obedience and submission to your word and would you help us glorify you with everything that we do and say we ask this for the upbuilding of your kingdom and in the name of our precious saviour Jesus Christ amen as how to know as Actually at reminded the of the people and they have escaped and they were here and they could they join us and they use that