

## “John: Clash of Kingdoms”

Psalm 2 • John 18:28-40

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX  
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Who killed Jesus? Think about that for a moment. Who killed Jesus? One of the themes that appears over and over again in the Bible is that things are not always as they seem. The things that are important in God’s Kingdom are usually the opposite of what the world values – the least are considered the greatest, the poor are rich, the weak are strong. We find this principle especially clear in today’s passage. Jesus has been arrested and beaten by the Jewish religious leaders, the leaders of God’s people. In one sense you could say that the religious leaders killed Jesus. Now they have brought him to the Roman governor asking that he be executed. So you could also say that the Romans killed Jesus.

Within hours he will be nailed to a cross and executed in a brutal way. From a worldly perspective, Jesus is powerless. But nothing could be farther from the truth. Things are not as they seem. Everything that happens was planned by Jesus from the beginning. He is in complete control. Even in this darkest hour he is still the King of Kings.

John doesn’t give us any details about the Jewish trial in front of the Sanhedrin. As we talked about before, it’s probably because the other gospels go into detail about the trial and John is trying to fill in some of the things not included in the other three. John simply says, “Then they led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the governor’s headquarters. Pontius Pilate was the governor of Judea, appointed by Caesar Tiberius. Pilate’s wife was the granddaughter of Caesar August so he was well connected. But Judea was the least desirable place to serve in the Roman government. Pilate didn’t like the Jewish people and they couldn’t stand him. He had repeatedly done things that violated the Jewish religion and the people had protested or even rioted. Because of those events, Pilate was kind of on thin ice with Rome. He couldn’t afford another screw-up.

Caiaphas and the other religious leaders brought Jesus to Pilate’s headquarters demanding that he be crucified. Pilate came out to them and asked the most important question in any criminal trial – what are the charges? What is he accused of doing? They never do say what the charges are against Jesus. Jewish law required that any charge had to have at least two witnesses. The other gospels tell us that in the trial before the Sanhedrin they couldn’t get any witnesses to agree. When Pilate asks the charges the Jewish leaders still won’t say. Instead, they say, “If this man were not doing evil, we would not have delivered him over to you.” That would be like the prosecutor in a trial today telling the jury that the defendant has to be guilty, otherwise he wouldn’t be on trial.

Pilate sees that this is not legal so he tells them to handle it by Jewish law. They responded by saying, “It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death.” Of course the Old Testament law did permit them to put people to death but the Romans had cracked down on that. Not only that, we find in Acts that they do in fact put people to death, such as when they stoned Stephen. What they really wanted, though, was for Jesus to be crucified very publicly. Deuteronomy 21 says that anyone hanged on a tree is cursed by God. The Jewish leaders wanted everyone to see that Jesus couldn’t be the Messiah because he was cursed. But remember that Jesus is in control and, as verse 32 says, he had told his followers ahead of time that he would be crucified.

Pilate comes back inside and questions Jesus. He asks, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Actually, we kind of lose the emphasis in translation. Pilate looks at Jesus, still bound hands and feet, dirty, beaten, accused by the Jewish leaders, and asks rather sarcastically, “Really? *You’re* the King of the Jews?” Remember, things are not always as they seem. Jesus answers the question with a question. He

says to Pilate, “Do you say this yourself or did others say it to you about me?” All of a sudden, the Roman governor is on trial before the King of the Universe. Pilate’s response is, “Am I a Jew? Your people are the ones who brought you here? What in the world have you done?” In other words, Pilate is saying, “You’re clearly not the king of these people. Why did they bring you here?”

Jesus then says, “My kingdom is not of this world.” Earthly kingdoms use force and coercion to gain power. Rick Phillips adds, “Modern governments have expanded this list to include manipulation of the press and propaganda, along with technological, scientific, and economic prowess.” Jesus says, “that’s not how my kingdom works.” Jesus was clearly telling Pilate that he is not a threat to the Roman Empire. Jesus is not planning a revolt. Pilate says, “So you *are* a king?” Some people hear what they want to hear, not what you’re trying to tell them. Jesus then answers, “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.”

Notice, first of all, that Jesus is saying there is such a thing as truth. Pilate asks, “What is truth?” Our society today asks the same question. Many would argue, sometimes forcefully, that there is no such thing as objective truth, that what we call truth is merely the power structures of oppressor and oppressed, that truth is only your perception and it’s based on your position in the power structures. You will often times hear people say, especially if we’re talking about faith, that you have your truth and I have mine. Even if the “truths” are completely opposite.

Jesus clearly says that objective truth exists and that he came to “bear witness” to that truth. So the second thing we see about truth is that it is revealed to us by God. Jesus came to reveal the truth of God to us. Truth is not something we make up for ourselves, and it’s

not something that we experience, so that each person experiences it differently. The truth of God is revealed.

That brings us to the third thing we need to see about truth. Jesus reveals the truth of God by being born. He says, “For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth.” As Jesus said in chapter 14, “I am the truth.” Jesus is God. Things are not always as they seem. Many people see Jesus as kind of like Mister Rogers. A kind man, a good teacher, but certainly not a king, not God. But Jesus came into the world as a human, yet fully divine, so that we could know the truth about God firsthand. When Jesus speaks it’s God speaking. When he heals the sick and feeds the hungry, it’s God doing those things. Jesus reveals God to us. Do you want to know what God is like? He’s like Jesus. As a result, Jesus says, “Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.” Everyone who puts their trust in Jesus as their Lord and Savior will know the truth, and as Jesus said, “the truth will set you free.” You will be free from the punishment that each of us deserves because of sin, the punishment that Jesus takes on himself on the cross.

After examining Jesus, Pilate goes back outside and pronounces him not-guilty. But he knows that religious leaders brought Jesus out of jealousy. He doesn’t want to make them angry and risk his own position so he tries to give the people an opportunity to express their will and get him out of this difficult situation. He reminds them of the custom of releasing a prisoner during Passover. He says, “So do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?” They cry out, “Not this man, but Barabbas!” The irony here is that the early church Father Origin tells us that Barabbas’ full name was Jesus Barabbas. The name Barabbas means “son of a father.” Barabbas had been arrested and convicted of murder during an insurrection, the very thing the Jewish leaders were trying to get Jesus

convicted of. Now they stir up the people to ask for Barabbas. The people have a choice between Jesus, son of a father, and Jesus, Son of *the* Father. They choose Barabbas.

So do we. Apart from the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, we will always choose Barabbas over Jesus. We will choose the trappings of the worldly kingdom – money, fame, power, rebellion, anger. Jesus came to set us free from those things. He said, “Seek first the Kingdom of God and you will receive all the other things you need.”

Finally, in verse 28 we see that the Jewish leaders wouldn't enter the governor's palace so that they would not be defiled. That way they could continue to celebrate the Passover. They were careful to keep all the rules of religion while at the same time condemning the Son of God. We need to be careful about that, too. The Christian faith is not about rules—do this, don't do that. The Christian faith is about you having a personal, growing relationship with Christ. Who killed Jesus? Jesus killed Jesus because you were worth dying for. Which means he is worth living for.

*Amen.*