

Sunday, April 10, 2022 | The Road to Easter

John 18:28-19:16 | “The Way of Sorrow”

The story of Jesus's path to the cross is vital for all people to consider—especially followers of Christ. This series is framed around roads Jesus took en route to Calvary. Each road points to the essential purpose of Jesus's journey and what we must learn from it to fully appreciate the significance of the cross and the resurrection.

In week 1, we began our series with Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem, often referred to as “The Triumphal Entry.” And unlike the Roman version, Jesus' entry into Jerusalem was marked by controversy and sadness. Instead of it being one of overwhelming joy for everyone, we found Jesus weeping for his city because they would instead choose war over peace. Thus, we learned that while joy is assured for those who hail Christ as King, sorrow is just as guaranteed for those who dismiss the Lord altogether.

Last week, we looked at the path Jesus took through the Garden of Gethsemane. In that scene, we found the Son of God in great distress because he was coming to grips with God's will for his life. God's will might be something we have to grapple with. And that's okay. **Confronting God's will in prayer prepares us to face into trials when our hour comes.** But God's will should never be something we actively avoid. Eventually, with whatever God has told us to do, may we say, as Jesus said while leaving Gethsemane, “Rise, let us go.”

Today we'll move forward to the crucifixion and the Way of Grief, known traditionally as the Via Delarosa. And in this story, there are two great ironies at work in the narrative.

READ: John 18:28-40 (ESV)

²⁸ Then, they led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the governor's headquarters. It was early morning. They themselves did not enter the governor's headquarters, so that they would not be defiled, but could eat the Passover. ²⁹ So Pilate went outside to them and said, “What accusation do you bring against this man?” ³⁰ They answered him, “If this man were not doing evil, we would not have delivered him over to you.” ³¹ Pilate said to them, “Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law.” The Jews said to him, “It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death.” ³² This was to fulfill the word that Jesus had spoken to show by what kind of death he was going to die.

The Jews thought to humiliate Jesus by crucifixion. Little did they know crucifixion was the plan all along (cf. Jn. 12:32-33).

³³ So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" ³⁴ Jesus answered, "Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?" ³⁵ Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?" ³⁶ Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world." ³⁷ Then Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "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." ³⁸ Pilate said to him, "What is truth?"

After he had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, "I find no guilt in him. ³⁹ But you have a custom that I should release one man for you at the Passover. So do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?" ⁴⁰ They cried out again, "Not this man, but Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a robber.

The word "king" had more than just regal implications. When Pilate asked Jesus if he was the "King of the Jews," Jesus didn't outright affirm the title. Jesus had to first probe to ask what Pilate meant when he used the word. To be called a "king" when there was already a king (i.e., Caesar) would've been interpreted as traitorous. To borrow a modern-day term, when Pilate asked if Jesus was the "King of the Jews," he was asking if Jesus was the leader of some Jewish rebellion (i.e., a revolutionary). And in that sense of the word, Jesus was most definitely not that sort of king. Jesus had no political aspirations to sit on some earthly throne (cf. Jn. 6:15).

Jesus says to Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world." Jesus was, indeed, a King. Pilate picks up on the implied admission himself. This is why he says, "So you are a king?" But Jesus' kingdom was not of this world; instead, his kingdom was otherworldly. To Pilate, this admission would've sounded like nonsense. And, at worse, he would've thought of Jesus as some crackpot that believes he was from another planet. But since, in Pilate's estimations, Jesus was nothing more than a crazed lunatic, that also meant that he was of no threat to Roman rule. And he was most certainly not the traitorous rebel that the Jews were trying to make him out to be. What sort of Jewish rebel would be a threat to Roman rule when the Jews themselves had delivered him over to be executed by the Romans?

Imagine how it must've sounded when Jesus said, "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." These words sounded like the ravings of a madman. Pilate's sarcastic cynicism shines through when he replies, "What is truth?" He not only fails to stay around to hear Jesus' answer, but he asks the question without really expecting an answer. Doubtless, if he had stayed to hear the answer to his question, he would've been alienated even more from Jesus. After all, in another place in this same gospel account, John records Jesus saying, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (cf. Jn. 14:6). If speaking about being the king of another world distanced Pilate from Jesus, unquestionably, this would've fully solidified Jesus as a madman in Pilate's mind. Regardless, how ironic for Pilate to ask "what is truth" when the embodiment of Truth stood before him. A better question might've been, "Who is truth?" At least then, Jesus might've responded with, "I am."

Anyways, Pilate sets his mind to set Jesus free. I imagine it was more that he didn't want to be used to do the Jew's dirty business than it was out of some honest attempt at setting an innocent man free. Historically, we know beyond a shadow of a doubt that Pilate cared about only one thing: power.¹ To see the Jews' manipulation of him and Roman law irked him. And so, like the politician he was, Pilate thought of a way where he could not only avoid being used to kill someone he didn't want to kill but also, he thought, his plan would appease the Jews.

Pilate comes out and says to the crowd, "I find no guilt in him. But you have a custom that I should release one man for you at the Passover. So do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?" Pilate publicly declares before the crowds Jesus' innocence. Never before in the history of the empire had a Roman wanted to avoid shedding blood. But in saying "release," he was implying that Jesus might still be a criminal. Pilate thought this would mollify the Jews. He was wrong. Rather than accept the path of least resistance, the Jews cried their reply, "Not this man, but Barabbas!" Who, the writer of John says, "was a robber."

Rather than set an innocent man free, the Jews chose a convicted criminal. Most English translations read "robber" or "thief," which isn't technically wrong, but it can be misleading. It may imply that Barabbas was guilty of nothing more heinous than stealing goods. This is bad, to be sure. But the reality is that Barabbas was more than just a burglar; he was an **insurrectionist**. Matthew 27:15 tells us Barabbas was "notorious" for what he had done. Luke 23:17-19 says that Barabbas not only started an "insurrection" in Jerusalem but was, flat out, "a murder." And while Mark 15:7 says much of the same thing that the other passages do, the writer tells us that Barabbas was "among the rebels in prison," implying that he had worked alongside others in his failed attempt at rebellion. Considering that Jesus is later crucified

¹ Carson, D.A., *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, (Leicester, England; Apollos Publishing, 1991), p. 590.

alongside two others, it is more than likely that the two criminals who hung next to Jesus on his left and right were Barabbas' fellow compatriots.

So, think about this for a moment. Jesus was accused by the Jews of being a revolutionary. After a brief discussion with Jesus, Pilate quickly dismisses the charges of insurrection. Jesus might be mad, but he is anything but the mastermind behind some plot to defy Caesar. So, in his attempt to throw this trial out the window, Pilate brings out Barabbas, a man no one questioned who was indeed a radical insurrectionist (cf. Mat. 27:17). Under any normal circumstances, Jesus would've been set free at that moment. But the Jews did not care about justice or innocence or upholding the law; they wanted blood. They wanted to murder Jesus, plain and simple. **Thus, herein lies one of two great ironies in Jesus' trial: the Jews chose a failed revolutionary over their faithful Redeemer.**

READ: John 19:1-5 (ESV)

¹ Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged him. ² And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head and arrayed him in a purple robe. ³ They came up to him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and struck him with their hands. ⁴ Pilate went out again and said to them, "See, I am bringing him out to you that you may know that I find no guilt in him." ⁵ So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Behold the man!"

Many do not know this, but Jesus was beaten ***twice*** before being crucified. John's use of the Greek term **μαστιγώω** (mas-tee-gah-oh), translated as "flogged" in our text, referred to the ***lesser*** of three such punishments under Roman law.² This type of beating, while harsh, was meant to punish offenses where death was ***not*** the intended result. But it is worth noting that Jesus' flogging was especially brutal as they not only "struck him" on the face over and over again (the Greek verb implies a repeated action.³) but they also pressed a crown of thorns down on his head. And while there are other possibilities, commentators think the plant used was that of the date palm, whose thorns could be as long as twelve inches.⁴

Ironically, Pilate's treatment of Jesus was meant to garner sympathy from the crowds. He thought he would bring Jesus out before the Jews, wearing a crown of thorns and clothed in a purple robe, and everyone would see how ridiculous it was to view Jesus as a threat.

² Köstenberger, Andreas J., *John*, The Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI; Baker Academic, 2004), p. 531.

³ Beasley-Murray, George R., *John, Revised Edition*, The Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 36, (Grand Rapids, MI; Zondervan, 1999), p. 315.

⁴ Carson (1991), p. 598; Köstenberger (2004), p. 532.

But, sadly, the chief priests would not be satisfied with anything less than death by crucifixion.

READ: John 19:6-11 (ESV)

⁶When the chief priests and the officers saw him, they cried out, "Crucify him, crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no guilt in him." ⁷The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has made himself the Son of God." ⁸When Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid. ⁹He entered his headquarters again and said to Jesus, "Where are you from?" But Jesus gave him no answer. ¹⁰So Pilate said to him, "You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?" ¹¹Jesus answered him, "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin."

Still, we find this wicked Roman governor going to great lengths to avoid having to crucify Jesus. He even tells the Jews, "Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no guilt in him." He knows they can do no such thing. They had no right, under Roman Law, to exact capital punishment. Thus, he was saying he would not go through it. The Jews' attempt to paint Jesus as a rebel threat had failed. And so, the Jews switch tactics. They tell Pilate that they have "a law" that requires someone put be put to death if they make themselves equal with God. The law in question was likely Lev. 24:16.⁵

Hearing this, John tells us that Pilate became "afraid." But why? In the eyes of a Jew, a man making himself ought to be the son of God was blasphemous. But in the eyes of a Roman, a man saying that he was the offspring of the gods was a genuine possibility. Romans were a superstitious bunch who believed that their gods would have children with humans making them demi-gods (i.e., Romulus/Remus, Hercules, etc.). And from Pilate's perspective, he had just flogged a man who claimed to be the Son of God.

Understandably, Pilates questions Jesus once again and asks him about his origins. But Jesus does not answer. Pilate wouldn't have believed Jesus even if he had responded. Regardless, this infuriates Pilates, and he goes on a tirade saying, "You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?" To which Jesus explains that the power Pilate supposes to have had actually been given to him. Pilates thinks of himself as some important figure in world events, and, to be fair, he wasn't totally irrelevant. But ultimately, he was nothing but a tool. He had been placed in his position by another power,

⁵ Carson (1991), p. 599.

and while not wholly innocent in these trials, Pilate is not the primary one responsible for this joke trial. This is what Jesus meant when he said, "[he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin.](#)" Pilate has sin in this. But nearly as much as Judas, the Jewish leaders, and the Jews themselves.

READ: John 19:12-16 (ESV)

¹² From then on Pilate [sought to release him](#), but the Jews cried out, "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar." ¹³ So when Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Stone Pavement, and in Aramaic Gabbatha. ¹⁴ Now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover. It was about the sixth hour. He said to the Jews, "Behold your King!" ¹⁵ They cried out, "Away with him, away with him, crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar." ¹⁶ So he delivered him over to them to be crucified.

Jesus' words had stirred enough fear in Pilate's heart that John tells us he "sought" all the more "to release him." But the Jews knew the one person Pilate feared more than the gods was Caesar. And so, the Jews said to Pilate, "[If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar.](#)" However much Pilate believed Jesus to be some demi-god, he knew without a doubt that if the Jews got word to Caesar that he had released a man who claimed to be "king," Pilate would not be Governor anymore. In fact, he very likely would've lost his life.

Thus, with some reluctance, John tells us that Pilate pronounced judgment on Jesus. He looks at the crowd and says, Behold your King!" To which they chant all the more to crucify Jesus. Yet, curiously, Pilate asks one last time, "Shall I crucify your King?" To which they reply, "[We have no king but Caesar.](#)" And herein lies the second of the two great ironies in Jesus' trial: Jews chose a Roman king over their royal Christ.

So, what's the takeaway?

Given a choice between a revolutionary and a redeemer, the Jews chose Barabbas. And given the option between a Roman king or the royal Christ, Israel chose Caesar.

Jesus is not some political revolutionary or some earthly leader; his kingdom is not of this world. [Anyone who aligns themselves with the Son of God must walk the Via Dolorosa—the way of sorrow—that Jesus walked.](#)

READ: Matthew 16:24-26 (ESV)

²⁴ Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever would save his life[a] will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. ²⁶ For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?

So, what's the takeaway?

Anyone who aligns themselves with the Son of God must walk the Via Dolorosa—the way of sorrow—that Jesus walked.

While Christ gives us abundant life, the likes of which fill life with joy, the way of Jesus is a sorrowful way. Eventually, if you follow Jesus long enough, you, too, will be wrongly accused. You will suffer. Hopefully, though, you won't suffer as Jesus suffered. But even in the modern world, faithful followers of Jesus will suffer because of their attachment to Jesus.

Video Description

The Road to Easter | Week 3 | “The Way of Sorrow”

TEXT: John 18:28-19:16

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Given a choice between a revolutionary and a redeemer, the Jews chose Barabbas. And given the option between a Roman king or the royal Christ, Israel chose Caesar. Jesus was not some political revolutionary or some earthly leader; his kingdom is not of this world. And, precisely because of this, he suffered. He was forced to walk the Via Dolorosa. And anyone who aligns themselves with the Son of God must also walk the Via Dolorosa—way of sorrow—that Jesus walked (cf. Mat. 16:24-26).

Pastor's manuscript can be found here: <https://docdro.id/M82wYPO>