

Satisfied in a life-giving God

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[0 : 00] Hi there, welcome to our Wednesday lunchtime service. Please do take a seat. This afternoon we're going to be studying John chapter 18 verses 28 through to chapter 19 verse 16.

But as we're taking our seats, let me pray for us. Father God, we thank you for another opportunity this week to come and sit underneath your word. Father, we pray that you would quieten our hearts, help us to focus, that we might see you clearly. Father, we thank you that you are a God who's revealed yourself, that you've revealed the truth to us in your son, and we pray that we'd see him very clearly this afternoon. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

So if you have your Bible open, we're going to start reading from chapter 18 verse 28. Then they, the Jewish council, 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 they would not be defiled, but could eat the Passover. So Pilate went outside to them and said, what accusation do you bring against this man? They answered him, if this man were not doing evil, we would not have delivered him over to you. Pilate said to them, take him yourselves and judge him by our own law.

The Jews said to him, it is not lawful for us to put anyone to death. This was to fulfill the word that Jesus had spoken to show what kind of death he was going to die. So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, are you the king of the Jews? Jesus answered, do you say this on your own accord or did others say to you this about me? Pilate answered, am I a Jew?

Your own nation and chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done? 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. Then Pilate said to him, so you're 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. Pilate said to him, what is truth? And he had said this, after he had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, I find no guilt in this, 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? They cried out again, not this man, but Barabbas, Barabbas. Now Barabbas was a robber. Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged him. And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head and arrayed him in a purple robe. They came up to him saying, hail, king of the

[3 : 39] Jews, and struck him with their hands. 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. So Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, behold the man. When 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. The 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. When Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid. He entered his headquarters again and said to Jesus, where are you from?

But Jesus gave him no answer. So 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? Jesus answered him, you would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore, he who has delivered me over to you has the greatest sin. 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. 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. That was the day of preparation of the Passover.

It was about the sixth hour. He said to the Jews, behold, your king. 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.

So he delivered him over to them to be crucified. We live in a world where things aren't always as they seem. You never really know who you can trust.

Even people who we would naturally trust implicitly can end up letting us down. And those we have written off completely can sometimes surprise us. Jeremy Saville turns out to be far from the champion that he was hyped up to be. And the most unsuspecting of people can become heroes. People aren't always as they appear.

[6 : 36] So it's not surprising then that people aren't always as they appear in John's gospel too. This afternoon we're going to try and blow away the smoke screen and see both Jesus and the religious establishment as they truly are and not as what they appear at first glance. For we must decide to stand with one or the other. We can't sit on the fence. Will we stand with Jesus or will we stand with the religious establishment? But to do that we must set the scene first. In the last few hours Jesus has been arrested in the dead of the night, dragged before the Jewish council, interrogated, beaten and betrayed by his closest friends. We now pick up the story as the Jews bring Jesus to Pilate to have him killed under the charge of blasphemy. Jesus had claimed back in chapter 10 of John's gospel to be equal with God when he said, I and the Father are one. And blasphemy was a crime punishable by death.

The problem was that the Jews could no longer perform capital punishment themselves because Israel was now occupied by Rome. Everything now had to go through the Romans. So the Jews would have to convince Pilate the sentence Jesus to death for them. Well, let's look at our first point for today. Looking at verses 33 of chapter 18 to 19 verse 4. Jesus looks weak, but he's actually the king. The Jews have just approached Pilate with their accusation against Jesus. And thus Pilate takes him into his headquarters to question him. And Pilate starts off his interrogation with a question. Are you the king of the Jews?

Now, this question seems to come out of nowhere from the narrative. There's been no mention of Jesus being a king up until now. But presumably this is the accusation that the Jews had brought before Pilate.

And it's a very clever accusation to make. The Jewish council had felt threatened by Jesus's claims to be the son of God, but knew that that accusation wouldn't stick with Pilate. So knowing that the son of God is also referred to as the king of Israel in the Old Testament, they brought that accusation to Pilate instead. Pilate might not be interested in their accusation of blasphemy. What would he care about Jesus claiming to be equal to the God he doesn't even believe in? But he would have to be interested in someone who claimed to be a king. Because nobody but Caesar was king. The Jews were charging Jesus with insurrection. So here Jesus is pinned against the wall, accused of stirring up rebellion, and abandoned by his friends. He looks pretty weak and helpless, doesn't he? And when we get to the first few verses of chapter 19, it gets even worse. He's flogged in verse 1. He has a crown of thorns thrust onto his brow, and he's struck by the soldiers in verse 3 who continue to mock him and jokingly herald him, the king of the Jews. It's a gruesome and pitiable sight. You wouldn't want to throw in your lot with him, would you? But although Jesus looks weak, the reality is very, very different. There is irony in how these soldiers are treating him. Although to their eyes he just looks like a failed rebel, someone who's tried to establish himself as a king but failed. He is actually that king.

The accusations that have been brought against him, though malicious and manipulative, were actually true. And Jesus' kingship is the focus of these verses in verses 33 to 38, as Jesus is questioned by Pilate. Jesus says, my kingdom, yes I am a king, my kingdom is not of this world though. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. In other words, you might worry about me setting up an earthly kingdom, getting a rabble of followers together and causing an uprising, but that is not what I am about. In fact, back when the Jews arrested me in the middle of the night, I was one who told my disciples not to draw their swords. I told them not to fight back. No, my kingdom is not of this world. I'm not trying to orchestrate an earthly political coup. I'm interested in bringing people into another kingdom, the kingdom of heaven.

[11 : 41] So you're a king, asks Pilate. You say that I am king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I've come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth

listens to my voice. Jesus affirms Pilate's question here. You say that I am king is in reality a lot more affirmative than it is translated in our English version of the Bible. Jesus is really saying, what you say is true.

I am the king. But King Jesus hasn't come into the world to spark a mutiny. No, this king has come into the world to reveal truth to us and to show us how we can enter his heavenly kingdom. So how is he going to do that? Well, by what ensues in the next few chapters? Being beaten, flogged, and nailed to a cross.

That is the greatest revelation of the truth. It shows us that God is not finished with mankind, but has sent Jesus, the king, to our world to rescue us. And it is only through trusting in his death that we can enter his kingdom. And surely there is no greater display of strength and courage than this, dying for the sake of others. He who had the utmost authority and strength, the king of the universe, became weak to rescue his people. He may look frail on the surface here, but he's a king like no other, a king with our interests at heart and not his own. So although we'd be more tempted to have a king who looks more like Barabbas as our leader, someone who looks strong, someone who can overcome our earthly enemies, that is not what we need. We need a leader who will reveal the truth to us and make a way for us to enter into his heavenly kingdom. Barabbas could perhaps incite rebellion and attempt to establish an earthly kingdom by might and power now. But Jesus guarantees our entrance into a heavenly kingdom. But the way he does this is through weakness and through death.

Well, let's look at our second point. Jesus looks powerless, but is actually in control. Looking at verses 38 to chapter 19, verse 12. The narrative moves on. After this interrogation, Pilate admits that he can find no guilt in Jesus. In fact, he says this three times in verse 38, verse 4 and verse 6. But for every time Pilate voices Jesus' innocence, the Jews shall crucify him nonetheless. Three times again, verse 6, 7 and 12. It feels like things are getting more and more out of hand as the trial progresses. It's turning into a kangaroo court that is governed by the masses.

Justice is nowhere to be seen. Jesus looks powerless in the face of such ardent opposition and injustice. But things aren't always as they seem. Jesus looks like a victim of gross injustice, beaten and mocked for a crime that he did not commit. But then the tables turn in verses 7 and 8. Pilate has asserted Jesus' innocence three times and is about to blow a gasket in verse 6. Yell him back at the Jews and tell him to do their own dirty work. He has had enough with his trial. But the Jews reply back to him by shouting, We have a law, and according to that law, this man ought to die because he has made himself the son of God.

[15 : 49] What? What? What, says Pilate? The son of God? You led me to believe that this man was just some powerless pretender, some charlatan king. Nobody mentioned to me that he claimed to be the son of God.

And Pilate, seized by superstition, is absolutely terrified, verse 8, more afraid than he was before. It already felt like things were getting a bit out of hand, were getting away from him.

But now things were desperately worse. And in a haze of fear, he frantically drags Jesus back inside his headquarters to question him again. He wants to make sure that this man he has just flogged and mocked is just a man and no more. The smug bureaucrat becomes a quivering wreck and the powerless man on trial takes control. Pilate asks, Where are you from? But Jesus gives no answer.

And in frustration and terror, he says, You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have the authority to release you and the authority to crucify you? In other words, I am the man in power here. I am the one in power here. I am the man in power here. I am the man in power here. You have the man in power here.

Well, Jesus' response must have blown the socks off him. Pilate, you would have no authority over me unless it had been given from above.

[17 : 22] In other words, you may look like you are in charge, Pilate, but the reality is very different. All the authority that you have comes from me and my father. You are just a pawn in our plan. I'm the one in control, not you. Jesus may have looked like a powerless victim, but he was actually in utter control. The events being worked out are actually a part of Jesus's master plan. He was in the process of achieving something incredible. So what was Jesus's master plan?

Well, you may have noticed as we were reading through the passage that the word Passover is mentioned three times. There is a reason why the trial and the crucifixion of Jesus and the Passover are taking place exactly the same time. The Passover was a feast to remember God's

great rescue of his people, where God spared his people from death back in Egypt. But it also looked forward to the day when God would rescue his people from death once and for all by giving them eternal life. And that day was today.

Back in Egypt, the people of Israel were rescued from death through a substitute taking their place. An innocent lamb was killed on their behalf. And the prophet Isaiah wrote of a day when a man would come and be their substitute, not a lamb. Someone who was innocent, not guilty, who would give up their life that the eternal life could be offered to all. Enter Jesus. He's not a powerless man being overcome by the injustice of the world, but rather God himself who has entered into our world to overcome our greatest problem.

He has come to deal with death forever by dying in our place. This is his master plan. I said earlier that we don't need a bravest. We don't need someone to batter our political enemies.

But that is not our greatest need. We need someone who would defeat the powers of sin and death for us. For that is our greatest enemy. And that was what Jesus achieved through his death.

[19 : 54] It might have looked like complete defeat, but it was actually the most incredible of victories. Things aren't always as they seem.

And if we hadn't delved beneath the surface, we might have discounted Jesus completely. He looked utterly powerless on the surface, a victim. But in reality, he is the king of heaven, opening up his kingdom to people like us.

Well, let's move on to our final point. We've looked at two things about Jesus that aren't as they seem. Let's look at the religious leaders, but they aren't as they first appear either.

So our final point, the religious look pious, but are actually evil. When we first meet the religious leaders in chapter 18, verse 28, they came across as rather pious, didn't they?

They wouldn't even enter Pilate's headquarters because they didn't want to become ceremonially unclean and miss some of the Passover festivities. They came across as morally serious people.

[21 : 09] But as the narrative unfolds, they are exposed. They're found to be guilty of the very thing that they accused Jesus of. Verses 12 to 16 of chapter 19 is where the irony really hits its climax in this chapter.

Pilate has been stunned by Jesus' words that he is the one who is in control and thus seeks to release him. Pilate then brings Jesus out before them, He says, God was to say,

These pious men were found out to be nothing but evil. They were blasphemers, not Jesus. In fact, they had committed the greatest blasphemy imaginable by orchestrating the killing of God's Son.

Now, this situation is terrible, but it's profoundly ironic. The Jewish leaders were utterly concerned with not defiling themselves and missing out on celebrating the Passover.

But now, through their unbelief, they had cut themselves from the fulfillment of that celebration.

They had cut themselves off from the rescue and the promise of eternal life that that Passover pointed forwards to.

[23 : 39] Things aren't always as they seem. Those who would have been. Those who would have you think themselves squeaky clean often have the dirtiest of hands.

So, as we come to a close, the question looms. Who will we trust? Who will we trust? Jesus? Or the religious establishment?

And we can't sit on the fence. That's what Pilate tried to do, didn't he? But look where that ended.

But look where that ended. Will we trust those who appear pious on the surface, who are rotten underneath?

Or will we trust Jesus, who looks weak at first sight, but is the king of the world that we've been waiting for? Let's not be led astray by first appearances.

We've seen today who Jesus really is. Not just some unsuccessful rebel. Not merely a victim of injustice. But God himself.

[24 : 45] The king over the universe. He has come to give us life by giving up his own. Behold your king. He is not as you would have expected.

But he is far more wonderful than we could ever have imagined. So let's respond rightly to him by bringing our lives fully underneath his rule. And accept the eternal life that he has died to give us.

Let me pray. Father God. We thank you that you are not done with this world.

We thank you that you have shown us the truth. That you have sent Jesus into the world to reveal to us how we can enter your kingdom. And Father, although we'd be tempted to dismiss him at first sight.

For he looks unimpressive when he's beaten, mocked and scorned. We thank you that behind the veil. He's the almighty king of the universe.

[25 : 53] And we pray today, Lord, that we will have seen him clearly. That we would behold our king as he truly is. Not some victim.

Not some pretender. But the almighty king of the universe. Come to give us life. And to give us entry into his kingdom. We pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen.