

The Reason Why Jesus Came

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[0 : 00] We're going to turn now, though, to our Bibles, and our reading this morning is in John's Gospel, chapter 18. You will find that if you have one of the Church Visitor's Bibles on page 904, I think.

And we're reading together from John 19, verse 28, to the end of the chapter. Edward's been dealing with this little section of John's Gospel in these few weeks, and we come to Jesus being brought before Pontius Pilate.

John 18, verse 28. Then they led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the governor's headquarters. It was early morning.

They themselves didn't enter the governor's headquarters so that 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 your own law. The Jews said to him, It's not lawful for us to put anyone to death.

[1 : 14] This was to fulfill the word that Jesus had spoken to show, but by 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 of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me? Pilate answered, Am I a Jew? Your own nation, the 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 may not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world. Then Pilate said to him, So you are a king. Jesus answered, Do 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.

[2 : 27] 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. 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. Now Barabbas was a robber.

Amen. And may God bless to us, his word. Let's turn to John chapter 18.

And you'll find this on page 904, in the big church Bibles. John chapter 18. And we're continuing with our studies in these two chapters, 18 and 19.

And this morning, as we look at this encounter between Jesus and Pontius Pilate, the title I've taken is, The Reason Why Jesus Came.

[3 : 32] The Reason Why Jesus Came. When a person begins to be interested in Christianity, this question, why did Jesus come, begins to press in on their understanding, their thinking.

Why did God send his son into this world? What drove him to it? And what motivated Jesus to submit to his father's will and come? Now, the New Testament gives us a full answer to that great question.

In fact, a number of answers which complement each other. It's not as though there is one single, simple answer. There are several answers, which when you put them together, give us a rich and beautiful view of the reasons for his coming.

Let me give you a little selection of these answers. First, he came to preach the gospel. As he puts it in Mark's gospel, chapter one, verse 38, he says, let us go on to the next towns that I may preach

there also, for that is what I came for.

Secondly, he came to seek and to save the lost. He says to Zacchaeus in Luke chapter 19, the son of man came to seek and to save what was lost.

[4 : 48] Third, he came to bring life. As he puts it in John's gospel, chapter 10, verse 10, the thief, by which he really means religious charlatans, the thief comes only to kill and steal and destroy.

I came that people might have life and have it abundantly. Or in the next verse, he came to offer his life as a sacrifice. John chapter 10, verse 11, the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. Next, he came to save sinners. As the apostle Paul put it, and Paul was deeply aware that he was a deeply died sinner, if I can put it that way. He writes this in one Timothy chapter one, the saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Or again, he came to destroy the devil's wicked purposes. The apostle John writes this in his first letter, chapter three, verse eight, the reason the son of God appeared.

Isn't that a great way to start a verse? We know we're going to get something now, don't we? The reason the son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. And then let's look finally at John chapter 18, our chapter for this morning in verse 37.

[6 : 10] He says to Pilate, for this purpose, I was born. And for this purpose, I have come into the world to bear witness to the truth.

Now it's this saying of Jesus that I want us to think carefully about this morning. Jesus came into the world to bear witness to the truth. Now there's an odd feature to this saying.

Imagine you've got a young son who's very keen on football and you've given your son a football and he likes to practice in the garden. And in your garden, you have a greenhouse. And one day you go out into the garden and your son's been practicing and there's a great hole in the greenhouse.

There's a shattered pane of glass. So you say to your son, Michael, now tell me the truth. Did you break that glass with your football? And he hangs his head and he confesses his crime.

Now what you said to him was, Michael, tell me the truth. You wouldn't say to him, Michael, bear witness to the truth, would you?

[7 : 13] You would just ask him to tell you the truth. But Jesus says to pilot, I have come to bear witness to the truth. Why does he put it like that?

Well, the reason is that the whole of John's gospel is an exercise in bearing witness. John is setting out his account of the life and words of Jesus as if he were presenting a case to a great court.

The words testimony and testify and bear witness appear on almost every page of John's gospel. Let's turn over a couple of pages to the very final, the end of the chapter, end of chapter 21 and verse 24, the penultimate verse there.

And you'll see this testimony theme as John winds up his gospel. He says in verse 24, this is the disciple, that's he himself, this is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things and who has written these things.

And we know that his testimony is true. Now, when he says we know, it's as though he's turning to a group of his friends and asking them to put their stamp of approval on his document.

[8 : 27] He is bearing witness to the truthfulness of his account and his friends are testifying to John's truthfulness. It's rather like a legal document, which is being signed by its author and then countersigned by trustworthy witnesses.

John is presenting to the world his case for Jesus as if he were presenting it to a court, to a jury.

And we readers in effect are the jury. So John is saying to us, here is my evidence.

Here is my testimony. Weigh it. And if you find it to be truthful, you must be persuaded by it. And if you're persuaded by it, you must do the only honorable thing.

And that is, you must believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God. And when you believe in him, you will find that you have life in his name, eternal life. Now, the very essence of a court case is that it is adversarial.

You have witnesses for the prosecution and you have witnesses for the defense. There are some voices which accuse the defendant and other voices that seek to exonerate him.

[9 : 37] And this is just what we find in John's gospel. The witness for the prosecution all comes from the mouth of the Jewish leaders who want to kill Jesus. They regard Jesus as an imposter and a deceiver.

So, for example, on one occasion, in John chapter 7, the Pharisees send out the temple police, the security guards, to arrest Jesus. And when the police return a little bit later without Jesus with them, the Pharisees are very cross.

And they say to the police, have you also been deceived? Have any of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him? In other words, nobody of good standing has believed in Jesus. You security men, you're ignoramuses, to be taken in by him like this. A little later, in chapter 8, the Jewish leaders say to Jesus, are we not right in saying that you're a Samaritan and that you have a demon?

Or at the very end of chapter 11, I quote, the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew where Jesus was, he should let them know so that they might arrest him.

[10:52] It's the Jewish leaders who are so fiercely opposed to Jesus. Pontius Pilate is just a kind of bit player. He's not the real enemy. In fact, if you look at our chapter 18 again, at the end of verse 38, 1838, you'll see that Pilate goes outside to the Jews and he says to them, I find no guilt in him.

So for a moment, Pilate is speaking for the defense, not for the prosecution. He's a weak man who's concerned for the security of the Roman rule in Palestine.

He's no real enemy of Jesus. He can see that Jesus is innocent and he says so, but it's the Jews who hate Jesus. As John puts it so painfully, right at the beginning in his first chapter, he came to his own people, but his own people did not receive him.

And remember, John was a Jew himself. He loved his own people. There's not an anti-Semitic bone in John's body, but he wants his readers to understand that in this great court scene, it's the Jewish leaders who act as the prosecution.

It's they who are determined to put Jesus to death. How then does John present the testimony for the defense of Jesus? Let me pick out a few key moments in the gospel.

[12:15] There's a great deal of testimony for Jesus, so I can only just share the tip of the iceberg. John the Evangelist begins with John the Baptist. We've always got to hold the two Johns distinct in our minds.

And John the Evangelist says in chapter one, verse six, there was a man sent from God whose name was John, John the Baptist. He came as a witness to bear witness about the light.

He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. Then a bit later in chapter one, the Evangelist writes, this is the testimony of John, John the Baptist, when the Jews sent priests and Levites to ask him, who are you?

He confessed. He did not deny it, but confessed, I am not the Christ. Then a bit later, the Baptist says, still in chapter one, I baptize with water, but among you stands one who comes after me, the strap of whose sandals I'm not worthy to untie.

And then the very next day, John the Baptist sees Jesus coming towards him, and he says, behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Now, it's not rocket science to see what the Evangelist is doing.

[13:31] He's calling John the Baptist forward as the first witness who testifies that Jesus is the light and is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Now, I'll move a little bit more quickly. In chapter one, verse 49, Nathanael says to Jesus, Rabbi, you are the son of God. You are the king of Israel. That's his testimony.

In chapter three, John the Baptist reappears, and he describes himself as the best man at a wedding, and Jesus is the bridegroom. In chapter four, we have the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well.

And once they've had their discussion, and she's drawn water for him and so on, she then goes back to her own townspeople, and she says to them, I've met a man who's told me everything that I ever did.

Could this be the Christ? So they come out and meet him, and he then stays with them for two days. And at the end of the two days, they say, we know that this is indeed the savior of the world.

[14:37] So that is their testimony to his identity. In chapter six, Simon Peter says to Jesus, now this is the less well-known of the two great confessions of Peter.

Remember his well-known great confession, you are the Christ, the son of the living God, in Mark chapter eight. Well, this one is slightly less well-known, but equally important. He says to Jesus, to whom can we turn if not to you?

You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed and have come to know that you are the holy one of God. That's Peter's testimony. Then Martha, the sister of Lazarus, who's died, she says to Jesus in chapter 11, I believe that you are the Christ, the son of God, who is coming into the world.

Then in chapter 20, now that's the chapter that tells the story of the resurrection of Jesus. And one of the high points there is John's presentation of Thomas. We meet Thomas.

I know he's known as Doubting Thomas, but that's not the way John presents him. He's unbelieving Thomas. The other disciples who've seen the risen Jesus when Thomas did not see him, they've been telling Thomas that Jesus has been raised.

[15:52] But Thomas says to them, unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails and place my finger into the mark of the nails and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.

Notice that. I will never believe. So stubborn. He wants the proof not only of sight, but of touch. Well, Jesus comes to him a few days later and says, Thomas, put your finger here and see my hands.

Now put out your hand and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe. And Thomas does. And he says, my Lord and my God.

It's a great confession. It's a great testimony. And the evangelist, in presenting us with the persuadability of the most stubborn unbeliever, is saying to us, if the example of Thomas won't persuade you, you are an award-winningly stubborn person.

And in the end, you're on the side of the chief priests and the Pharisees. So John's gospel brings to us the testimony of all these people. And on almost every page, we have the testimony of Jesus himself to his own identity.

[17:09] The scriptures testify to me, he says in chapter five. God the Father testifies about me. The works of power that I perform, they testify to me.

There is so much for the jury, us if you like, to weigh and consider. John the evangelist is saying to the jury, Jesus is all these things. He's the Lamb of God, the Son of God, the King of Israel, the Christ, the Holy One of God, my Lord and God, the Savior of the world, the bread of life, the light of the world, the resurrection and the life, the good shepherd, the gateway into the sheepfold, the way, the truth and the life, and the true vine, and therefore the embodiment of the people of Israel.

And throughout all of this testimony, Jesus is saying, I am, I am, I am, I am, I am. He is not only Israel, he is the God of Israel, and he's come to save Israel.

But Israel will not receive him, will not even recognize him. But, as John says in his first chapter, to all who did receive him, to all who did believe in his name, to them he gave the right to become children of God.

John the evangelist is presenting his case, his testimony, to the courtroom of the world, not just to the Jews, but to all of us, so that we, like Thomas, should quit our unbelief and bow before our king and say to him, my Lord and my God.

[18:47] Well, now, with all that in mind, let's turn back to our chapter, chapter 18, and to this dramatic exchange that Jesus has with Pontius Pilate. Look with me again at verse 37.

For this purpose, I was born, and for this purpose, I have come into the world to testify, to bear witness to the truth. So here, the final witness in the world's court of law proves to be the king himself, and he bears witness to the truth.

So let's look at the details of the story because they're full of interest, and they help us to see the setting in which Jesus makes this great statement in verse 37. In verse 24, look back there, 24, Annas, who's the ex-high priest, sends Jesus, now bound, to Caiaphas, the reigning high priest. And then, verse 28, Jesus is taken from Caiaphas' house to the headquarters of the Roman governor, to Pontius Pilate. And the Jewish high priest do this because they have a problem. Their problem is that the Romans, the occupying power, have kept to themselves the power of judicial execution. The Jewish high council, the Sanhedrin, was permitted to try cases in which Jews were accused of various crimes under Jewish law.

[20:13] But the Jews were not allowed to impose the death penalty. And this explains the odd exchange between the Jews and Pilate at verse 31. You'll see that Pilate says to them, you take him yourselves and judge him by your own law, your Jewish law.

But quick as a flash, they say to him, it's not lawful for us to put anyone to death, which means we think he ought to be executed. But we're bringing him to you, Mr. Governor, because only you have

the power to carry out executions.

And then John adds in verse 32, this was to fulfill the word that Jesus had spoken to show by what kind of death he was going to die.

And John is referring there to something that Jesus had said back in chapter 12, which was, and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.

What he means is lifted up on a cross. In other words, Jesus himself had predicted that he would not be stoned to death. That was the Jewish method of execution, but rather lifted up on a cross, which was the Roman way of executing common criminals.

[21 : 26] So this is why the Jewish leaders had to take Jesus from Caiaphas to the house of Pilate, the Roman governor. They would gladly have put Jesus to death themselves by stoning him, but they knew they would be in serious trouble if they took the law of capital punishment into their own hands.

So they marched him round to Pilate's house. Now, verse 28 tells us that it was early morning, but Pilate was already up and about.

He'd probably had wind of a tricky situation that was brewing up. There's no suggestion that he had to be woken up and given a chance to have his breakfast before he faced this particular problem.

In fact, I've discovered that Roman officials at this period in history often started their day's work very early in the morning and they had their work finished by about 10 or 11 o'clock in the morning. Can you imagine that? Putting your pen down at 11 o'clock and going onto the golf course and saying, that's me for the day. So Jesus is brought into Pilate in verse 28 and the Jews don't go into the governor's house because, now how rich is this?

[22 : 36] Because they were about to eat the Passover and to go into a Gentile's house would have made them ceremonially unclean. And if you were unclean, you couldn't participate in the Passover meal.

Isn't that an extraordinary irony? They're just about to put to death the Son of God, their own Messiah. They're just about to commit the most defiling deed in the history of the world and yet they want to keep themselves squeaky clean by not stepping over a Gentile threshold.

John means us to see the irony there. Anyway, Pilate in verse 29 honors the Jews on this point of scruple and that's why he's prepared to go outside to speak to them.

And he says, what accusation do you bring against this man? And in asking that question, Pilate in effect is opening the trial.

Lay your accusation before the court and we shall proceed. That's what he means. Well, we then have a brief exchange between the Jews and Pilate and Pilate then leaves them and goes back inside the house to where Jesus is standing tied up.

[23 : 48] He calls Jesus to him in verse 33 and he says to him, are you the king of the Jews? And it's that word king that introduces the real subject of everything that follows.

Is Jesus a king? And if he is, then what kind of a king is he? I don't know whether you saw that rather moving fine film called *The King's Speech* some years ago which describes George VI, the father of our present queen who had to step up to the throne very unexpectedly in 1936 because his elder brother had abdicated and he had to play the monarch's role during the dark years of the Second World War.

And the film, as you may remember, is all about his profound stammer. And the question is acutely raised, what kind of a king is this if he can't speak to the nation as the nation enters a very difficult time of war?

And the film movingly shows that the king did overcome his stammer and he was able to address the nation over the radio and to bring comfort to his people at a very dark time. But in a sense the question was what kind of a king do we have?

Now at a much more important level that is the question that Pontius Pilate is facing here. He has heard that Jesus is being called the king of the Jews and that's why he says in verse 33 are you the king of the Jews?

[25 : 17] his underlying question is if you are the king of the Jews what kind of a king of the Jews are you? And you can understand why Pilate is so concerned with that question.

The Herods the house of Herod they were the royal house of the Jews the puppet kings under the Roman overlordship. Pilate knew the current king Herod. So might this man Jesus be claiming to belong to Herod's position?

Might he be threatening to mobilize an army who could rise up against the Romans and try to throw them out of Judea? From Pilate's point of view he had to know if Jesus was a threat to the power of Rome.

And what Jesus says in verse 36 would have brought comfort and relief to Pilate because he says 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 is wanting Pilate to see that his activities are no threat to the power of Rome. He's saying to Pilate I don't wield worldly power as you understand it.

[26 : 35] I don't have soldiers, or weapons or money. If that were my game my servants would be armed and fighting to keep me out of the clutches of the Jewish leaders. But the kingly power that I have is not that kind of power at all.

And those words would have been a real relief to the governor. He would have realized that he wasn't going to have to muster troops and put down a nasty insurrection. He realized he wasn't going to have the threat of blood in the streets of Jerusalem.

And yet Jesus had not denied that he was a king. In fact on the contrary he was clearly claiming to be a king.

My kingdom is not of this world. My kingdom is not from the world. Suddenly Pilate is being presented with categories that he's not familiar with.

All he knows is the power of military muscle. Might is right and the Roman Empire is the world's superpower. So what kind of king is this who speaks of an otherworldly kingdom?

[27 : 43] Now that's why Pilate has to put his second question at the beginning of verse 37. He's relieved that Jesus is not a worldly king but he's intrigued with the strange idea that someone could be a king without an army.

So he now asks so you are a king meaning if you are a king don't keep me in suspense man. Tell me what kind of a king you are. So Jesus answers you say that I'm a king which really means yes it is as you say.

But now and let me paraphrase here now I'm going to tell you what kind of a king I truly am. I was born for the purpose of being king and though I'm not a worldly king I've come into the world to establish a different kind of kingdom and I exercise my kingly power by bearing witness to the truth and my subjects are all those who listen to my voice and believe the truth to which I bear witness. Now we'll return to Pilate in just a moment but let's first think about these words of Jesus in verse 37. He is a king more than that he's the king let's not be deceived by some of the rather soft pictures of Jesus that we may have been brought up on as we read our Sunday school Bibles years ago.

You know those pictures of a brown haired rather delicate looking young man with soft large eyes perhaps holding a lamb or holding a child by the hand. Now of course Jesus loves his people very tenderly.

[29 : 21] He knows each one of his people by name but he is the king of heaven and earth and one day every power in the universe will be subjected to his rule and those that resist him will be shattered dashed to pieces like a potter's vessel as Psalm 2 puts it.

He's an awesome king he's wonderful to those who belong to him but in the end he will be terrifying to those who resist him. Apparently Queen Victoria who ruled over at least a quarter of the world's inhabitants she was once asked what she would do when she met Jesus and she replied it will be my delight to lay my crown at his feet.

He's the king but let's notice from verse 37 just how he exercises his kingly rule. It's not by calling people to arms it's not by establishing his reign over some geographical area his kingdom is not physical like the United Kingdom.

According to verse 37 he establishes his kingdom by bearing witness to the truth and consequently still in verse 37 those who are of the truth those who belong to the truth and want to hear the truth will listen to his voice which means that they will recognize that he is the king that he's the supreme authority and that what he has to say is the truth in the most important sense of that word.

what he's really saying is that there are two kinds of people in the world. There are those who are of the truth who listen to his voice and then there are those who have no real interest in the truth and who shut their ears to his voice.

[31 : 09] So what is the truth that he bears witness to? Well first and foremost it is he himself. he says I am the way the truth and the life.

I am the truth. Now it's odd to people like us to think of the truth as being primarily a person. We tend to think of truth in terms of mathematics or physics or biology or philosophy words and sentences and propositions which are self-evidently accurate and correct.

For example oak trees from acorns do grow. That's true isn't it? How about this? Wolves are more dangerous than chihuahuas.

Isn't that right? So if you want a pet dog don't take the wolf. But to think of truth as a person that's something that opens up altogether new avenues for our minds.

I am the truth he says and he means not only that truth resides in him but also that who he is and what he came to do is the most important thing in the world.

[32 : 21] So as we get to know the truth about this king we become subjects of this king. So for example we learn about his identity that he is both God and man fully God and fully man.

The son of God and the son of man. We learn about his mission how he came into the world at the bidding of his father. How he came as the representative human being.

The man. The second man. The proper man as Luther called him. How he then went to the cross as our representative so that he could bear representatively the penalty that our sins fully deserve so that we should not have to bear it ourselves.

How he was then raised from death as the prototype man of the new world. The guarantee that all who belong to him will be raised in just the same way with death not able to hold us.

We learn about his destiny how even now he's seated at the right hand of God and how he will return to the earth and gather to himself all who belong to him and how he will take all his people to be with him forever to live with him in the new creation able to worship him and God the father in a realm where frustration and sickness and pain and tears and death are no more.

[33 : 42] For this purpose Jesus has come into the world to bear witness to the truth to speak about it to persuade people that the truth about him is the most important truth in the universe.

But he then adds this telling final sentence in verse 37 which surely is addressed personally to Pilate. He says everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice he's implying that's true of you too Pontius Pilate yes you may be the Roman governor you may be a high ranking official in the Roman Empire but you too could come to listen to my voice and thus become a subject of the true king. Well time is nearly up but let me in closing say a word first to any here who are not Christians and secondly to those who are Christians. if you're not yet a Christian let verse 37 show you that to become a Christian is in a sense a process of training your ear in a new direction.

You haven't been listening to the voice of Jesus so far in your life. You may have lived by human standards an upright and decent life but you're not yet a citizen of the most important kingdom. your ear may have been tuned to many different voices and those voices may be honorable and true in their own way. The voices of reason and art and culture.

[35 : 18] You may genuinely desire to be a useful citizen and a good neighbor but the truth in the most important sense is something that you don't yet know.

So friend if that's your position let me encourage you to open your ear and to listen to the king. Listen to the truth as he teaches it as the Bible teaches it and you'll soon realize that it's a different kind of truth from any that you've discovered before.

It's a truth that nourishes and satisfies us as no truth ever can which comes from the life of the world. And for those of us who are Christians let's rejoice again that we have a king like this and that we are able to listen to him again and again every day and that his truth is true truth it's real truth.

Because of him we're no longer at the mercy of the spirit of the age. We're not blown around by all the trends of thought and all the fashionable isms that come and go.

We're not made anxious by all the things that the world is so fearful about. Our security comes from our citizenship of the unseen kingdom. the kingdom that is not of this world.

[36 : 33] Our joy comes from the king himself. We know that he bears witness to the truth. And as we listen to his voice day after day he establishes his kingly rule of truth ever more deeply in our hearts and lives.

The unseen kingdom is the only kingdom worth belonging to in the end because it is the only kingdom that will last. Jesus gave Pilate this little window of opportunity.

Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice. That could be you, Pilate. But all Pilate could say was, what is truth? And having said that, he turned on his heel, walked away, and didn't even wait

for an answer.

Well, let's end with the words of our great king. And let each of us be honest and ask ourselves where we stand with him. 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.

[37 : 48] Well, let's bow our heads and we'll pray. Let's thank God the Father. Amen. dear God, our gracious Father, you were under no pressure to send a savior to rescue us, to send your son, the king, to rule over us.

You could have consigned us to the pit, to destruction because of our rebellion against you, but you've loved us. You've loved the world so deeply that you were prepared to give your only son up to a cruel and dreadful death, so that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

So we pray that you'll help us to listen with joy, with humility, to the words of Jesus and the words of the Bible. And we ask that you will establish your kingdom, your true kingdom, in our hearts ever more and more.

And we pray it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.