

Behold the Man!
John 19:1-16
Pastor Jason Van Bommel

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- John 19:1-16, ESV

Behold Your King – The Cross at Christmas

It's December 2nd. The Christmas decorations have been up in the stores for about a month. We've had our first snowfall of the year. Christmas is just over three weeks away. So, why are we in John 19, with Jesus on trial before Pontius Pilate? Shouldn't we be doing an Advent series from Isaiah or something from Matthew or Luke's early chapters on the birth of Jesus? Patience. Patience. All in due time.

But seriously, I realized several weeks ago that we would be beginning John 19 at the beginning of December, and I decided that John 19 was actually the perfect frame in which to set our Christmas celebration this year. After all, why did Jesus come? He came as a baby on that first Christmas so He could grow into a perfect, sinless man who would suffer under Pontius Pilate, be crucified, dead and buried for us and for our salvation. I especially love today's passage and the emphasis in John 19 on this theme of "Behold!" – "Behold the Man!" and "Behold Your King!" What is it we really need to do at Christmas? We need to behold Jesus our Savior, and we need to remember that the baby in the manger grew to be the man who is our King. We need to behold Him! – "Come and behold Him!"

So, our theme this month is “Behold Your King!” We’ll be here in John 19 this week and next, as Jesus is on trial and then led to the cross. We will leave Jesus on the cross, talking with His mother, Mary, and we will then go, on December 16th and 23rd and on Christmas Eve, to Luke 1 and 2, where we will behold the promised birth of our King and the things that were promised, fulfilled, and said about Him at His birth. Then, after Christmas, we will come back to the cross to hear Jesus proclaim, “It is finished!” as the work He was born to do is completed for us, for our salvation. This promises to be a different but very compelling month. I hope you’ll plan to be here for all of it.

So, we begin today with Jesus on trial before Pontius Pilate, or is Pilate on trial before Jesus?

A. Behold the Man! vv. 1-8

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!” ⁶ 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.” ⁷ 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.” ⁸ When Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid.

Why would Pilate take Jesus and flog Him? It seems to be the next stage in his plan to try to convince the Jewish leadership to back off of their charges against Jesus and drop their expressed desire to see Him put to death. Pilate knew Jesus was an innocent man, but he also suspected He was more. He was clearly impacted by the time he spent talking with Jesus. Also, Matthew 27 tells us that Pilate’s wife sent word to him, warning him, “*Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much because of him today in a dream.*”

So Pilate reasoned, cynically, that giving Jesus a beating and publicly humiliating Him might satisfy the blood-thirsty anger of the Jewish leadership and save him from having to actually crucify this “righteous man.”

So, Pilate has Jesus flogged. If we line up what we find here in John’s Gospel with what is recorded in the other Gospels, we can see that Jesus is actually beaten twice by the Roman soldiers. Not all Roman beatings were equivalent. The Romans had a way of beating someone as a warning, as a deterrent against future bad behavior, that was less severe than the scourging of a criminal headed to crucifixion. The ESV tries to capture the difference in its translation. Here in John 19:1, we’re told Pilate had Jesus flogged. Yet, right before the crucifixion, in Matthew 27:26, Pilate has Jesus scourged, which refers to the much more severe beating, involving the use of the dreaded Cat of Nine Tails, the long whip with nine ends, each of which was embedded with rock, shells and bits of bone, designed to tear flesh from bone.

So, the first beating here, a flogging, is still severe enough. It is incredibly painful and, for Jesus, was accompanied by being mocked, having a crown of thorns placed on His head, and being struck in the face by

soldiers repeatedly. This beating would have left Jesus bloodied and bruised, his face swollen and covered in blood from the crown of thorns.

After this shameful beating, Pilate comes out and tells the crowd he is going to bring out Jesus so they can see Him and see for themselves that Pilate finds no guilt in this man. So, Pilate parades Jesus out before them and proclaims, “Behold the man!” Pilate means this proclamation to be words of mockery, mocking both Jesus but more importantly the Jewish leaders who feared Him. “Behold the man!” – Look! This is the man these leaders are so afraid of. This is the man these leaders think needs to be killed for being such a grave danger to the nation. He is beaten, swollen, bloody, pathetic. He looks weak, harmless, quiet, meek, innocent. Pilate is hoping that seeing Jesus so beaten and humiliated will both placate the anger of the leadership and will arouse the sympathy of the people, many of whom admired Jesus and earlier in the week praised Him during His Triumphal Entry.

But Pilate’s simple statement has much more meaning in it than Pilate himself realizes. As John does again and again in his Gospel, he shows us how God is at work, even through the selfish and sinful actions of wicked people, revealing the truth about His Son. “Behold the Man!” is indeed correct. Here, Jesus is the Man:

1. Fully Man: He is shown to be fully human, as He suffers and bleeds as a real man, suffering humiliation as a real man.
2. The Second Adam: Yet He is also here as the representative Man, as the Second Adam, as the head of a new humanity. He is here suffering, not so much for Himself as for His people.
3. The Man of Sorrows: He is there as the Man of Sorrows, acquainted with grief, as the man rejected and despised by men, as prophesied in Isaiah 53.
4. The Son of Man: He is there as the Son of Man, crowned with thorns and streaked with blood, but still entering into His kingdom and the hour of His glory! As Jesus Himself had said, “Now is the hour for the Son of Man to be glorified.” (John 12:23 & 17:1)

“Behold the Man!”

Pilate’s cynical calculation collapses and the Jewish leadership won’t fall for his trickery. Instead of being satisfied when they see Jesus crowned and bloody, they are enraged and begin to cry out loudly, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” Perhaps they see Pilate’s attempt to mock them and that’s what enrages them, or perhaps the sight of Jesus still unbroken through beaten and bloody arouses their anger, but it’s clear that Pilate’s calculations are even more inaccurate than mine were in Algebra 2, and his plan unravels.

Pilate’s plan may have failed, but he still has no desire to crucify Jesus. So he says, “*Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no guilt in him.*”

The Jewish leadership is not going to take the bait. They’re not going to let Pilate get off so easily. They respond, “*We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has made himself the Son of God.*”

As the Roman governor of Judea, Pilate had two responsibilities, which were often difficult to manage: He had to enforce Roman rule, but under the nature of the Roman empire, he was also expected to respect

and uphold local traditions and laws, as much as possible. So, if Pilate is not buying the charge of insurrection against Jesus, if Pilate doesn't see Jesus as a threat to Roman rule, He is a threat to local laws and traditions. Jesus has "*made Himself the Son of God.*" This means He must die, and Pilate should be as ready to uphold local laws as he is to uphold Roman rule.

But far from persuading Pilate to crucify Jesus, this new accusation makes Pilate even more afraid of Jesus. He had already seen Jesus as an innocent man, and probably even as a righteous man, but now here was an innocent, righteous man who had "*made himself the Son of God.*" Was this what Jesus had meant when He said His kingdom was not from this world? This accusation was actually a cynical calculation from the Jewish leadership. In Jewish tradition, the title "son of God" was not actually as blasphemous as it sounds. It was a title that could be used of the king of Israel, the son of David, or more specifically for the Messiah. Of course, the Jewish leadership knew Jesus had implied more than this, that He was, in fact, equal to God as His Son. But even this higher claim would only be blasphemy if it were not true. It was blasphemy when Sun Myung Moon and David Koresh each claimed this for themselves, but Jesus had demonstrated the truth of His claim by His mighty works, the verifiable works of God which everyone had seen Him do.

In the Roman mindset, "Son of God" was a title that applied to a variety of demi-gods, offspring of the gods, like Hercules or Percy Jackson. This may have been what the Roman centurion initially meant when he exclaimed at the death of Jesus, "Surely this man was a son of the gods!" or "Surely this man was a son of God." Whatever the title meant to Pilate, it filled him with great fear to think that he was on the verge of crucifying an innocent, righteous man who had claimed to be the Son of God.

B. Behold Your King! vv. 9-16

As afraid as Pilate was, though, things were moving ahead despite his efforts to derail them. And he was as fearful of the Jewish leadership and their mob as he was of Jesus. What would he do?

⁹ He entered his headquarters again and said to Jesus, "Where are you from?" But Jesus gave him no answer. ¹⁰ 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?" ¹¹ Jesus 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."

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Pilate asks Jesus a real question for the first time in this series of interviews: Where are you from? Perhaps he should have started with that question. Nonetheless, Pilate is not prepared to understand the truth, and

Jesus chooses not to answer this question. As with Pilate's earlier question about whether Jesus was the King of the Jews or not, the answer was just not simple and was beyond the scope of Pilate's worldview, and so he would be unable to receive the answer.

Jesus' silence infuriates Pilate. Refusing to answer a direct question from a Roman governor could be seen as an act of supreme insubordination, of severe contempt of court, So Pilate asks: *"You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?"*

Since Pilate wants to speak of his authority, Jesus is now prepared to set the record straight: *"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."*

Jesus wants Pilate to understand two things:

1. If Pilate thinks he is in control of this situation, he is sadly mistaken. All authority is given by God, and Pilate's authority operated under God's supervisory authority. This view does not deny the moral responsibility Pilate bears for his choices, but it humbles his position to its rightful place, below the authority of God, who rules over all.
2. Jesus also highlights the fact that the conspirators, Judas and the Jewish leadership, are more guilty than Pilate in this situation. Again, it's not that Pilate is innocent. He isn't. He is acting like a coward and is failing to uphold true justice, which should be his highest concern. Yet still, under God's overarching rule, the Jewish religious leaders who knew the Scriptures, and Judas, who knew Jesus, bore the greater guilt, for they were conspiring together to kill the One who was promised in their Scriptures, sent to them by the One they claimed was their God.

Pilate then goes from being afraid of Jesus to trying to release him. He has determined that he won't convict Jesus either for the sake of upholding Roman rule, for Jesus is not a threat to Roman rule, or to uphold local Jewish laws, for Jesus is probably exactly who He says He is. So, he determines to release Him.

So, why doesn't Pilate release Him? How can we go in one verse, from verse 12 where Pilate wants to release Jesus to verse 13 where Pilate takes his seat at the place of judgment and condemns Him? The situation turns so quickly as to make our heads spin, so what's the cause?

The last words spoken by the Jewish leadership were a threat of political blackmail, essentially - *"If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar."* Pontius Pilate had already gotten in trouble with Caesar once before. Pilate reigned as prefect of Judea from 26 to 36 AD, and he had gotten into trouble with the Emperor before when he allowed his soldiers to bring images and idols into Jerusalem. The crowds demanded their removal. Pilate threatened them with death, and they exposed their necks to him, to say, "Bring it on!" The Emperor chastised Pilate for his behavior in this

episode, and Pilate had to know he was on thin ice as governor. In fact, after he was removed in AD 36, he was sent into exile and reportedly killed himself on direct orders from the emperor.

So the threat of the Jewish leadership was real. They had gotten Pilate into serious trouble just for bringing idols into the city. What would the emperor say of Pilate releasing an insurrectionist, a popular figure who claimed to be the King of the Jews. So, this was it – Checkmate. Game, Set, Match. The Jewish leadership won the showdown.

But Pilate's not quite done yet. He takes his official seat at the place of judgement, the Stone Pavement, Gabbatha. It was now approaching Noon on this Friday, the Day of Preparation for the coming Sabbath. They had been at this all morning, having arrived at Pilate's house at sunrise, six hours earlier.

Pilate presents Jesus to the people again. This time, he says "Behold your King!" Perhaps he intends it as mockery again, but once again he speaks the truth. Jesus is their king. He is the promised incarnation of their covenant Lord, and He is their long-awaited Messiah. He is the King of the Jews, the Son of David.

Their response is the most bold, public blasphemy recorded in the Gospels: *The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar."* So he delivered him over to them to be crucified.

The Scriptures are clear that the LORD is the King of Israel. Isaiah 44:6 is once of the most compelling places: "Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: "I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god." YaHWeH is the King of Israel and his Redeemer, and YaHWeH in the flesh stands before them as their King and they utterly reject Him. They answer, "We have no king by Caesar." Years earlier they had been willing to die rather than let graven images remain in their city, but here they are publicly denying the LORD and claiming that their only true king is Caesar. This is the shocking depths their depravity has brought them to.

And yet, what of us?

Jesus stood there to be condemned in our place. He stood there to be rejected for us.

Conclusion: Who is Your King?

What is your response to Him? Behold the man! Behold your King! What do you say of Him? Will you behold Him? How will you respond to Him?

Who is your king? Is Caesar your king? I don't mean Caesar Tiberius of Rome, of course, but who or what is the king of your heart and of your life. Jesus said, "No one can serve two Masters." You have only one King of your life. Who is your King?

Behold the man! Behold your King! Will you shout, "Away with Him!?" Or will you bow the knee and worship Him?

