**“BEHOLD YOUR KING!”**

John 19:1-16

The Jewish religious leaders hate Jesus and they’ve determined that He must die. During Jesus’ trial they bring a total of 7 charges against Him, all without merit, but they finally settle on one - blasphemy. The OT Law demands a blasphemer be put to death. Lev 24:16: “Whoever blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall stone him.” And why do they charge Jesus with blasphemy? It goes all the way back to John Ch 5. Jesus making Himself equal with God by calling God His own Father. The irony here is that what they interpret to be blasphemy is actually TRUE. Jesus IS, in fact, the Son of God.

The Apostle John’s whole purpose for writing his gospel is to prove THAT point, that Jesus IS the Son of God. From the opening words of John Ch 1 thru right on thru to the end of the book John makes his case proving from Jesus’ own words, His own claims about Himself, the testimony of others as well as by the various signs and wonders that Jesus performed that He is in fact the Son of God – HE IS GOD. Listen to John’s purpose statement in John 20:31: “These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.” So what a person believes about Jesus is important and it has eternal ramifications. What we will see in our lesson this morning is that the real blasphemy doesn’t come from the mouth of Jesus. No, the real blasphemy is voiced by Jesus’ accusers.

Before I read our passage this morning, let me remind you of the setting. Jesus is on trial. We will be looking at the last phase of Jesus’ trial after which He will be delivered over for crucifixion. The various gospel accounts describe 6 phases of Jesus’ trial – the first three Jewish, the last three Roman. Jesus is first brought before Annas the high priest right after His arrest. This is what John focuses on in Ch 18. Jesus is interrogated, beaten, and treated with contempt. No witnesses are heard nor are there any charges brought. Next, they bring Jesus to Caiaphas, son-in-law of Annas, who is also called the high priest. Jesus stands trial before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin (Matt 26). The Jewish leaders bring in false witnesses against Jesus. They ask Him, “Are You the Christ, the Son of God?” Jesus’ answer is clearly understood by the high priest as an affirmation of that. In response the high priest tears his robe and says, “He has uttered blasphemy. What further witnesses do we need? You have heard His blasphemy.” And they decide that Jesus deserves death for this. However, these first two phases of Jesus’ trial are illegal because they were held in secret in the middle of the night. So, in order to make their findings official they reconvened at dawn in the council chambers of the Sanhedrin (Luke 22). This is the third phase of Jesus’ trial. Again they ask Jesus if He’s the Son of God. Again Jesus affirms that He is. And then again they sentence Jesus to death on the charge of blasphemy. It’s all settled.

But the Jews have a problem. They don’t have the authority to put Jesus to death. *[Reminder that what happens to Stephen in Acts 7 is an illegal act of mob violence]*. Only the Romans have the power to put someone to death and the Jews even acknowledge this in John 18:31. Besides, the Jewish leaders are aware of Jesus’ popularity with the people and don’t dare try doing something like that to Jesus. So they bring Jesus bound to the Roman authority, to the governor of Judea, who at this time is Pontius Pilate. This is the fourth phase of Jesus’ trial (last part of John Ch 18 that we looked at last week). Summarize – what accusation do you bring? Nothing presented, handle it yourself, Pilate questions Jesus, after questioning Jesus at length he determines that Jesus has done nothing deserving death. He is no threat to Rome. Pilate tells the Jews “I find no guilt in Him.” Pilate is going to repeat this statement several times.

Pilate is in a very difficult position. On the one hand he wants to keep the peace with the Jews (he is in danger of losing his job, past history). On the other hand he can’t in good conscience execute a man he knows is innocent. Pilate is trying to figure out a way that he can get out of this bad situation, a way that he can save face and not kill Jesus. So he tries several tactics. In last week’s lesson we saw where he tried passing Jesus off to the Jews. “Take Him yourselves and judge Him by your own law – you handle it.” But that didn’t work. Then he tried passing Jesus off to King Herod. This is the fifth phase of Jesus’ trial (Luke 23). It’s all a big joke to King Herod. He treats Jesus with contempt and mocks Him. He dresses Jesus in royal clothes and then sends Him back to Pilate for what will be the sixth and final phase of Jesus’ trial. Pilate attempts to get Jesus released in his good will gesture, a Jewish prisoner release. But Pilate misjudges the situation. Mark’s gospel tells us that the chief priests stir up the crowd to release Barabbas instead – a big-time criminal, a bandit, a notorious prisoner, a murderer, an insurrectionist. Pilate asks the crowd, “Which of the two do you want me to release for you?” And they said, “Barabbas.” And that’s where we left off last week. So let’s continue with the narrative now in Ch 19…

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!” I 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. 9 He entered his headquarters again and said to Jesus, “Where are you from?” But Jesus gave him no answer. I 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.” 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. I 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.

Pilate is still trying to figure out a way to deal with Jesus, a way to appease this mob of angry Jews without actually killing Jesus. Listen to Luke 23:13-16: “Pilate then called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, and said to them, ‘You brought me this man as one who was misleading the people. And after examining him before you, behold, I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him. Neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Look, nothing deserving death has been done by him. I will therefore punish and release him." And so it is that in v 1 of our text, Pilate has Jesus flogged. Some translations say “scourged.” They tie Jesus to a post, strip Him and whip Him. The whip or the scourge has a short wooden handle to which several leather thongs are attached. Each leather thong has pieces of bones or metal on the end. You can just imagine how torn and lacerated Jesus’ body would have been after this beating. One commentary I read said that the beatings the Romans gave prisoners were so savage that sometimes the victims died. In v 2-3 the Roman soldiers make fun of Jesus. They form a crown made out of thorns, probably with the long spikes from a date palm. They push this down into Jesus’ scalp causing the blood to stream down His face and into His hair. They put a purple robe on Jesus and mock Him saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” Then they strike him with their hands. By doing all of this to Jesus Pilate hopes that the Jews will be satisfied and that they will have some kind of pity sympathy for Jesus’ suffering and let Pilate release Him.

In v 4 Pilate declares, “I find no guilt in Him.” Jesus stands there in front of this frenzied mob wearing a crown of thorns and a purple robe. Blood is streaming down His face. He’s weak. He is a battered and bloody mess. And that’s when Pilate says in v 5, “Behold the man! Here’s the man that you all think is so dangerous. Just look at Him!” That’s Pilate’s point. He doesn’t want to execute Jesus.

But again Pilate misjudges the situation. The Jews show no sympathy toward Jesus. They give Him no mercy at all. In v 6 they cry out, “Crucify Him, crucify Him!” Pilate is completely frustrated at this point. For a second time he tells the Jews “Take Him yourselves and crucify Him for I find no guilt in Him.” Back in Ch 18 when they first brought Jesus to him Pilate had said that. Pilate wants nothing to do with Jesus. In essence he tells the Jews a second time, “Go kill Him yourselves!”

Well in v 7 there is an interesting twist. Pilate hears something he hasn’t heard before. READ John 19:7-8. Why would Pilate be so terrified by this statement? If you’ve ever studied Greek and Roman mythology you know they had multiple gods. And all these gods were wrathful, vengeful. Their gods didn’t show mercy and grace. Romans were very superstitious and really believed all these gods existed. Some even at times took human form. The Romans feared what they might do to them. We see a couple of examples of this in the life of Paul. In Acts 14 when Paul and Barnabas are in Lystra they healed a crippled man. And the crowds reacted thinking they were gods. They called Barnabas “Zeus” and Paul “Hermes.” They began to offer sacrifices to them. But Paul quickly stopped them saying, “What are you guys doing? We’re just men like you. We’re not gods.” Then in Acts 28 when Paul is on the island of Malta after the shipwreck he is bitten by a deadly viper. Paul merely shakes the snake off into the fire and suffers no harm. The pagan island natives jumped to the conclusion that Paul must be a god. So the Romans were extremely superstitious and believed in a pantheon of gods who interacted with men on a regular basis. This is what Pilate is thinking when he hears Jesus referred to as “the Son of God.”

Pilate’s initial reaction when the Jews say this about Jesus being the Son of God is, “Uh oh, what have I done? What if this Jesus really is a god? I’ve just tortured someone who might bring down a curse on me!” So the remark made by the Jews strikes terror in the heart of Pilate. He brings Jesus back in his headquarters to question Him some more.

V 9, Pilate asks Jesus “Where are You from?” Jesus doesn’t answer him. Why not? Because He knows Pilate will not believe Him any more than the Jews did. He had told the Jewish leaders who now are demanding that He be crucified where He had come from. Back in John 6 Jesus had said – “For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” Jesus of course was speaking about Himself. Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to Me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in Me shall never thirst.” Then a bit later He says, “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will but the will of Him who sent Me.” The reaction of the Jews was predictable. They grumbled because He said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” They said, “Is not this Jesus, Joseph’s son… How does He now say, “I have come down from heaven?” So if the Jews don’t believe that Jesus is from heaven, why would Pilate?

Jesus refuses to answer Pilate. He remains silent. This fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah 53:7: “He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so He opened not his mouth.”

Pilate is a bit put out at Jesus refusal to answer Him and responds in v 10: “You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?” This isn’t true, though, is it? If Pilate really had the authority to release Jesus then by now he would have. But he isn’t really the one in control here. He is not the one driving this train. Who is? Be careful how you answer that. It’s not the Jews. You might think that based on what happens next. The real power and authority here is God Himself. And that’s exactly what Jesus says in v 11.

Jesus answered him, “You would have no authority over Me at all unless it had been given you from above.” No governing person has their authority apart from God. God is the One who gives rulers their authority. Paul echoes this in Romans 13:1 – “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.” Jesus goes on to say, “He who delivered me over to you has the greater sin.” There are degrees of sin. Certainly both the Romans and the Jews are guilty of killing Jesus. Both are culpable. So why does Jesus say that the Jews (the ones who delivered Jesus over to Pilate) have the greater sin? Because they had the greater knowledge of Jesus – they were aware of all the OT prophecies concerning the Messiah, which Jesus has been fulfilling. They knew of His own claims about who Himself. They had witnessed and heard about all the miracles and signs Jesus performed almost daily which proved His deity. The Jews had the greater degree of revelation. Pilate and the Romans were mostly ignorant of all this. The Jews were not.

So after meeting with Jesus, v 12, Pilate desires more than ever to release Jesus. He knows Jesus is innocent. He doesn’t want Jesus’ blood on his hands. But the Jews are insistent that Pilate not release Jesus. They cry out, “If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar.” The Jews have just raised the stakes. Before this Pilate had only been afraid of losing his job if there had been a riot among the Jews. Now he’s afraid of losing his life. If Pilate lets Jesus go then the Jews will go to Caesar and accuse him of being a traitor to Rome. Jesus, by making Himself out to be a king, they say, opposes Caesar. He’s an enemy of Rome. So the Jews have gone from accusing Jesus of blasphemy (this had not worked with Pilate) to now saying that Jesus claims to be a king. They know that this accusation will have a better chance of getting the Romans to crucify Jesus than their initial charge of blasphemy. So in the pretense of being loyal to Caesar they manipulate Pilate to ultimately get what they want.

This prompts Pilate to act quickly. In v 13, Pilate sits down in the judgment seat. As governor of Judea one of his duties is to act as judge in matters relating to Rome. He’s Caesar’s representative in Judea. He brings Jesus before the judgment seat. This is a significant moment in history. John gives us both the day and the time, v 14. It is high noon (6th hour) on the day of the Preparation of the Passover. It’s Friday Nissan 14 on the Judean calendar. It is April 3, 33 AD in our calendar. We can pinpoint this day in history based on historical documentation. Pilate says to the Jews, “Behold your king!” Jesus, the King of the Jews, the Jew’s very own Messiah, the Son of God is rightfully identified even if it is intended in a rather sarcastic way.

What the Jews say next is the perhaps the greatest blasphemy ever uttered. They cry out, v 15, “Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him!” Pilate says, “Shall I crucify your King?” The chief priests answer, “We have no king but Caesar.” This is outright blasphemy if you are a Jew, a follower of Yahweh. There are a lot of passages I could go to in the OT but listen to this one – Isaiah 33:22: “For the LORD is our judge; the LORD is our law giver; the LORD is our king; He will save us.” God always intended to be the King of His people Israel. That’s why He was so upset when they insisted on a human king. He allowed them to have Saul but He knew they would regret it. God is the true King of Israel. But here the Jewish leaders profess another king. In their zeal to kill Jesus they utter incredible blasphemy against the living God.

Well they get what they asked for. In v 16, Pilate delivers Jesus over to them to be crucified. When we come back in a couple of weeks we’ll look at Jesus’ crucifixion. Jesus’ death and resurrection are the focal point of the whole Bible and of great significance. I plan to spend a couple of weeks looking at all aspects of the cross in detail.

In closing (I brought this up last week) who killed Jesus? Why did Jesus have to die? We can say the Romans killed Jesus and we’d be right. Or we can say the Jews were responsible for killing Jesus and again we’d be right. Ultimately, however, we’re all responsible for killing Jesus, aren’t we? After all, it was our sin that put Jesus on the cross. But we can’t ignore that this was all a part of the predetermined plan of God. Listen to Peter’s prayer in Acts 4:27-28: “For truly in this city [Jerusalem] there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your plan had predestined to take place.” It was God’s plan. God may have used human instruments to carry out the plan, but it was His plan.

Why would God do this? John 3:16. Because God loves us. He didn’t want to leave us in our lost condition. He provided a way for us to be saved and that was by Jesus’ death on the cross. He did all THIS for YOU, for ME. That’s a life changing thought, isn’t it? Sing, “Lead Me to Calvary”