

“My Kingdom Is Not from the World”

The Fifty-Seventh in a Series of Sermons on the Gospel of John

Texts: John 18:28-40; Daniel 7:9-14

The Jews have found Jesus guilty of a capital crime—blasphemy. The sentence for such a crime is death. The high priest, Caiaphas, and those who were present for Jesus’ trial in the high priest’s courtyard, then brought Jesus before the full Sanhedrin where the verdict was ratified. Unwilling to take the next step of executing Jesus by stoning, the Jews deliver Jesus over to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor. Jesus’ appearance before Pilate is not only dramatic—a Jewish Messiah being questioned by a pagan Gentile governor—it reveals two remarkable things. The first is that Pilate was not about to let the man standing before him create trouble for Rome—a man who despite his reputation as a miracle worker, now stood before Pilate bound, beaten, and bloodied. Jesus was hardly an impressive figure, a man much smaller than his reputation. The second revelation is that the moment it was clear that Jesus was not interested in leading an insurrection against Rome, many of the people in Israel turned against him, and chanted for the release of a notorious criminal (Barabbas), while demanding that Jesus be put to death. On the previous Sunday, Jesus was a conquering king. On Friday morning, Jesus is a condemned man. Such is the mysterious nature of God’s redemptive purposes.

As we work our way through the Gospel of John, we have come to the Passion Narrative which brings John’s Gospel to a close. The last four chapters of John (18-21) describe Jesus’ betrayal and arrest, his trial before Annas (the high priest) and then Pilate (the Roman governor). Jesus will be crucified by the Romans on the afternoon of the Passover, and then buried before Sundown on Friday. Jesus will remain in the tomb for three days before his bodily resurrection on Sunday (Easter). John has emphasized that throughout this astonishing turn of events, Jesus does all of this in obedience to the Father’s will so as to accomplish the salvation of all those given him by the Father, and for whom he is about to die.

As we saw last time, Judas betrayed Jesus by leaving the Passover meal early and then meeting with members of the Sanhedrin (probably including the former high priest, Annas, and the current high priest, Annas’ son-in-law, Caiaphas). Judas, no doubt, informed them that after the Passover meal Jesus and his disciples would gather for prayer in Gethsemane, a walled garden on the slopes of the Mount of Olives. Leading an arrest mob which included Roman soldiers, members of the temple guard and certain members of the Sanhedrin, Judas directed them to Jesus’ location. Bent on arresting Jesus and then trying him for capital crimes (death penalty) the mob approached the garden late at night with lanterns, torches, and weapons. These men were afraid that Jesus would resist them, perhaps to the point of exercising his miraculous powers. But Jesus does not resist them. Jesus is not taken by force, nor is he taken against his will. Jesus must willingly undergo this shame and humiliation so as to be obedient unto death, so as to secure for us our salvation from sin. And so Jesus voluntarily surrenders.

One of the things most difficult about preaching through John’s Passion narrative is that John includes a number of details which are not found in the synoptic gospels, while at the same time omitting certain details found in the other three gospels. John’s account of Jesus’ arrest and trial (John was very likely an eyewitness to many of the events unique to his gospel) includes Jesus’ appearance before Annas, *before* Jesus was turned over to Caiaphas (the current high priest) for trial. Annas was the high priest emeritus and was well respected by the Jews, but had been deposed from office of high priest by the Romans in AD 15. He questions Jesus about his disciples and his teaching, before the trial conducted by Caiaphas in the presence of the Sanhedrin begins in the same location—the courtyard of the high priest.

Although regarded as a wise man by his people as well as a distinguished jurist, Annas completely ignores Jewish rules of legal procedure by interrogating Jesus without first establishing the evidence against him, followed by the testimony of at least two eyewitnesses. Annas allows Jesus to be hit in the face by one of Annas' servants when Jesus answers one of Annas' questions in such a way as to expose the presumption of Jesus' guilt before the formal hearing even begins. The old man is obviously trying to discern Jesus' intentions, as well as determine the number of disciples following Jesus' direction.

After a huge multitude of people singing messianic anthems cheered Jesus on when he entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, the Sanhedrin is very worried about the large number of Israelites now following Jesus as a Messiah figure. Does Jesus plan to lead a revolt? And if so, against Rome or against the Sanhedrin? How many disciples does Jesus really have? What does he intend to do with them? John tells us that both he and Peter were admitted to this hearing by the high priest himself into the high priest's courtyard, where Peter was quickly recognized by people who had seen him with Jesus, and then in Gethsemane. To his own shame, Peter denied three times that he even knew Jesus, before a rooster crowed (the sign it was now daybreak on Friday morning) in direct fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy that Peter would deny him. Mark tells us that Peter even swore a solemn oath that he never knew Jesus, but then wept bitterly when the rooster crowed and Peter remembered Jesus' words that he would betray his Lord.

After Jesus exposed Annas' act of ignoring proper legal procedure, in John 18:24, John informs us that "*Annas then sent [Jesus] bound to Caiaphas the high priest.*" Here's where John's account departs from the synoptic gospels, which collectively give us a very thorough account of Jesus' appearance before Caiaphas in same courtyard where Annas had interrogated Jesus. We know this to be the case, because the synoptic gospels place Peter's denial of Jesus in the same location (the high priest's courtyard). So, when John says that Annas sent Jesus bound, to Caiaphas, he probably means something like Jesus was officially turned over to Caiaphas for trial after Annas had finished questioning Jesus personally. Caiaphas, the current high priest, then presided over the formal trial of Jesus before members of the Sanhedrin. The appearance of Jesus before this court is recounted in some detail by Matthew (26:57-68), by Mark (14:53-65), and to a lesser degree by Luke (23:54-65).

According to the account of Jesus' trial before Caiaphas found in the synoptic gospels, we are told that many of the chief priests and members of the Sanhedrin were present along with many scribes (Bible scholars) and elders. We are also told that since Jesus had done absolutely nothing wrong, much false testimony about Jesus was introduced, as was the testimony of various "witnesses," who were obviously lying, and whose testimony contradicted each other, and which ended up refuting much of the Sanhedrin's case against Jesus. It is very hard to convict an innocent man without evidence against him—unless you manufacture it and then distort the facts you do have to prejudice the jury. But the Sanhedrin pulled it off. After all, they had been planning for this moment for some time.

The synoptics also tell us Jesus remained silent throughout, until the end of the trial when Caiaphas finally demand that Jesus answer the question, "*are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?*" Mark tells us that "*Jesus said, 'I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.'*" When Jesus said this, "*the high priest tore his garments [a sign of disgust] and said, 'What further witnesses do we need? You have heard his blasphemy. What is your decision?' And they all condemned him as deserving death. And some began to spit on him and to cover his face and to strike him, saying to him, 'Prophecy!' And the guards received him with blows.*" Jesus told the truth, and in doing so sealed his fate. The Son of Man has come bringing light and salvation into the world, but since sinful people love darkness rather than light, they plot and scheme to find a way to put Jesus to death for claiming to be one with YHWH, when everything Jesus has done proves his claim.

Since Jesus was found guilty by a Jewish court (in a unanimous verdict) despite the fact that there was no evidence against him and that he was completely innocent, Jesus was now mocked by those in attendance and then beaten by the guards. The sun was now coming up and although John does not mention this, the synoptic gospels recount how the entire Sanhedrin assembled early that morning to ratify the verdict issued by Caiaphas' court. As a result of the ruling of this body (a formal meeting which took place once the trial was over), Jesus was then turned over to Pilate, before whom Jesus would appear as a condemned criminal. The assumption is that Pilate would act quickly and put Jesus to death.

According to Luke's account, even Herod made an appearance while Jesus was before Pilate. In verses 8-12 of the 23rd chapter of his gospel, Luke recounts that Herod, the Jewish king who was nothing but a Roman lackey, could not resist coming to see Jesus for himself. Luke tells us that "*when Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had long desired to see him, because he had heard about him, and he was hoping to see some sign done by him.*" Herod wanted Jesus to perform on command, like a magician making an appearance on stage. "*So [Herod] questioned him at some length, but [Jesus] made no answer. The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him. And Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him. Then, arraying him in splendid clothing, he sent him back to Pilate. And Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day, for before this they had been at enmity with each other.*" Nothing brings people together like a common enemy.

When John mentions that Annas turned Jesus over to Caiaphas, he says nothing more about Jesus' formal trial before the Sanhedrin. Rather, he skips ahead to Jesus' subsequent appearance before Pilate after Jesus had been formally condemned by Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin. In fact, John's account presupposes that his readers are familiar with the sequence of events, an indication that John wrote his gospel after Matthew, Mark, and Luke had written theirs, and that John adds information not mentioned by the others. But the sequence of events is pretty clear. Jesus is arrested, taken before Annas (John) and is then turned over to Caiaphas (the synoptics). During this time (while Jesus is in the courtyard before Annas and then Caiaphas), Peter denies knowing Jesus three times. Jesus is then formally condemned by the full Sanhedrin, and then turned over to Pilate who, the Sanhedrin, expects, will then carry out the sentence. During the time Pilate is questioning Jesus, Herod shows up, and he too questions Jesus.

Keeping all of this in mind, John's account resumes with the statement found in verse 28 that upon conclusion of Jesus' trial before Caiaphas (the details of which John skips over), "*then they led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the governor's headquarters.*" Pilate's official headquarters was in Caesarea, as far away from Jerusalem as he could get, but he was currently in Jerusalem for the Passover (to keep the peace). John does not indicate if Pilate used the Antonia Fortress, or Herod's old palace as his temporary headquarters, but Jesus was taken to one or the other to be condemned. John does tell us that "*it was early morning*" probably after 6:00 a.m., and after the break of day (when the rooster crowed), and after Jesus' appearance before the Sanhedrin as recounted in Matthew 27:1, "*when morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death.*"

The Jews who had Jesus physically in their custody (i.e., the temple police) hated Pilate, who offended the Jews greatly, when, upon first taking office, brought into Jerusalem and the temple area, the Roman legion standards which depicted Caesar as a god. The Jews holding Jesus, "*themselves did not enter the governor's headquarters, so that they would not be defiled, but could eat the Passover.*" Under most circumstances like this one, the Jews would enter the palace, conduct their business with this godless Gentile, and then undergo the ritual washings to regain ceremonial cleanliness (after seven days). But in this case—during the Passover feast—there was not be time to complete such washings until after the feast was over. Again, John uses irony to make the point that the Jews have just ordered the death of their own

Messiah during the Passover, yet think nothing of how this affects whether or not they are guilty before God. Yet they worry fastidiously about entering Pilate's headquarters because this will render them unclean during the feast.¹

Issues of chronology arise again between John and the synoptic gospels because this was early Friday morning, and a pious Jew would have already eaten the Passover at the same time Jesus did, after sundown the previous evening. The best solution to the problem (as we discussed way back when in our introductory sermon, and as we will see when we get to John 19:31), is that when John speaks of the Passover, he's not referring to just the events of Thursday night and Friday until sundown (the day of the Passover), but to the entire feast of the Passover, which included the Feast of Unleavened Bread as well.² If a Jew wanted to participate in the entire Passover Festival (including Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread), then they could not enter Pilate's headquarters, because they would become ceremonially unclean, and would then be unable to become clean again before the feast days ended.

In verse 29, Pontius Pilate makes his first appearance in John's Gospel. "*So Pilate went outside to them and said, 'What accusation do you bring against this man?'*" Since the Jews would not enter his headquarters, Pilate steps outside to speak with them. Pilate had been appointed "prefect" (or governor) by the emperor Tiberius in AD 26, and served for 10 years. Both Tacitus and Josephus mention Pilate and confirm the details in the gospel accounts. For decades, critical scholars contended that Pilate was a fictional character because the gospels were thought to be untrustworthy as historical documents. To their chagrin, the famous "Pilate" stone was found in Caesarea which confirmed his title as "Prefect of Judea." Pilate was a company man who believed in using force to keep the peace in Judea. Since being posted to Judea was one of the least desired places for Roman prefects to serve, it is assumed that Pilate had offended someone in Rome and was sent to Judea as punishment, or that Pilate was someone whom the emperor knew would keep the Jews in line. The church historian Eusebius reports that Pilate committed suicide during the reign of the emperor Caligula somewhere between 37–41 A.D., but nothing certain is known of Pilate's fate.

The governor wants to know what charges had been brought against Jesus. And what was so urgent that they would bring Jesus before him during such an important feast? The Romans were as scrupulous in observing the law and following proper legal procedure as were the Jews—except in the case of Jesus. Since Roman soldiers had been involved in Jesus' arrest, Pilate knew that something big was up, which led the Jews to bring Jesus to stand trial before an official whom they hated (Pilate) during their most holy feast day. Pilate's question is a formal one—it opens the legal proceedings against Jesus.

The Jews "*answered him, 'If this man were not doing evil, we would not have delivered him over to you.'*" The Jews were probably upset by Pilate's question and answer tersely. Why would Pilate not take their word and acknowledge that they had already sentenced Jesus to death? Why would Pilate wish to retry him? Pilate had been in Judea and in Jerusalem long enough to know that political intrigue was everywhere when it came to Herod and the Sanhedrin, and that the Jews had their own long-standing ways to resolve disputes about religious matters. The Jews say nothing about the specific charge on which they have already sentenced Jesus to death—blasphemy. Rather, they tell the godless Gentile whose headquarters they will not enter, that Jesus has done evil. The implication is that Jesus is a threat

¹ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 588.

² Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 589-90.

to the peace. Pilate knows that there is much, much more here than meets the eye, so he curtly dismisses them in verse 31. *“Pilate said to them, ‘Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law.’”*

Pilate does not want to get into the middle of a religious dispute over matters he knows nothing about, and about which he cares little. All he wants is to keep the peace. Pilate knows that the Jews have their own courts. Let them settle the matter. Angered that Pilate will not go along with their scheme to let the Romans be the ones to put Jesus to death, they answer Pilate, *“It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death.”* At first hearing this sounds like a bald-faced lie. But there is some evidence to support the Jewish claim. It may have been the case that the Jews turned authority to punish those who committed capital crimes over to the prefect in AD 6, when the Romans took away the right from local officials to put criminals to death, so as to make Judea conform with Roman practice in other occupied regions.

There is also compelling evidence that the Jews retained the right that under their own law to execute people under certain conditions, such as desecrating the temple—which is one of the accusations made against Jesus, that he said he would destroy the temple (Matthew 26:61; Mark 14:58). After all, the Sanhedrin ordered the death of Stephen (Acts 6-7), not many years after this, and they then executed James (the half-brother of Jesus) some years after that. In light of the collective evidence, it seems as though the Jews could have executed Jesus themselves—if they wanted to. But it was much better for them if Pilate put Jesus to death, since this would shift the blame from the Sanhedrin to the Romans, whom the Jewish people hated even more than they hated the Sanhedrin, if that were possible.

But the reason given by John (in verse 32) for the Jews turning Jesus over to the Romans is even more important for the readers of his gospel to consider. It is God’s will. *“This was to fulfill the word that Jesus had spoken to show by what kind of death he was going to die.”* Jesus must suffer and die to save all those given him by the Father. He must drink the cup of wrath down to the last drop. He must also fulfill prophecy. In Deuteronomy 21:22-23, it is written, *“if a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God. You shall not defile your land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance.”*

If the Jews had put Jesus to death, no doubt, they would have stoned him. But the Romans used crucifixion—one of the cruelest forms of capital punishment known to man. Since, the Scriptures foretold that Jesus must be lifted up, i.e., that he would die by crucifixion, then Jesus must be put to death by the Romans and not by the Jews. In John 12:32-33, Jesus had prophesied that *“‘And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.’ He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.”* Jesus must hang on a tree (a cross) to be cursed by God, bearing the guilt of our sins.

With the matter of the charges against Jesus now known to Pilate, we are told in verse 33 that *“Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, ‘Are you the King of the Jews?’”* The question itself is an indication that Pilate knows full-well about what had happened on Palm Sunday when Jesus entered Jerusalem to such great fanfare. Jesus’ entrance into the city was tied to messianic expectations. Pilate did not care a whit if Jesus blasphemed against the Hebrew God. But Pilate certainly cared about the fact that Jesus was claiming to be Israel’s Messiah and heir to the throne of David. That would be a threat to Pilate and Herod. *“Jesus answered, ‘Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?’”* Jesus asks Pilate whether if he is aware of the verdict of the Sanhedrin and the grounds for the sentence of death—blasphemy for claiming to be one with YHWH.

Pilate is put off by the question and, in verse 35 responds, *“Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief*

priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?'" While Pilate knows there is more behind Jesus' condemnation than the Sanhedrin has told him, neither does he understand the reasons behind it. A Gentile simply could not comprehend why the Sanhedrin was so worried and outraged by Jesus' appearance in the city. A seasoned politician like Pilate knows political intrigue when he sees it. He may not understand Jewish theology, but he knows what is at stake if Jesus is claiming to be king of the Jews. If Jesus were saying this, he would be challenging the authority of Herod, and if he is a king, he might even be claiming to have authority over Pilate himself. The one thing which concerns Pilate is that there is no genuine power in Israel, except that of Rome.

Jesus' answer (in verse 36) is profound and certainly unexpected. *"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."* Jesus quickly removes any doubt as to his ultimate intentions. Jesus has no intention of leading an insurrection or leading a revolt—the Jews never accused him of this. Jesus' kingdom is *"not of this world."* His is a spiritual kingdom (tied to the redemption of sinners), not a political kingdom the likes of which would compete with Rome and then seek to undermine Pilate's legitimate civil authority. Pilate does not know of Daniel 7:9-14 (our Old Testament lesson) in which Jesus' kingdom is foretold to be an eternal kingdom which will be manifest in all its power and glory on a day far future when the same Jesus—whom Pilate is about to order to be executed, only to be raised from the dead three days later—will return in great power and glory. Pilate has no idea with whom he is dealing or the nature of Jesus' kingdom. Jesus' followers will not take up arms. Rather, they will trust that Jesus will save them from their sins and seek his righteousness by faith.

Pilate is confused by Jesus' answer. *"Then Pilate said to him, 'So you are a king?'"* But Jesus quickly answered him. *"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 is worried about a potential insurrection. Jesus is worried about obeying the Father's will. Jesus came to bring light into the world. But Pilate demonstrates that he prefers the darkness. In verse 38, the governor cynically asks, *"what is truth?"* Pilate is a soldier. He is not a theologian, nor a philosopher. He scoffs at such things. Jesus says he came to save sinners and to obey the will of God. Pilate does not have time for debate. It is now apparent that Jesus is no threat to him, or to Rome. John tells us that *"after [Pilate] had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, 'I find no guilt in him.'"*

Yet Pilate knows that this is a matter of grave importance to the Sanhedrin, Herod, and those Jews loyal to them. Jesus has created a controversy which Pilate does not understand, and of which he wants no part. But to keep the peace and appear concerned about his Jewish subjects, Pilate tells the crowd waiting to hear his verdict, *"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?"* The depth of Jesus' humiliation becomes evident in verse 40, when John tells us that the crowd who had assembled outside Pilate's headquarters chanted loudly, *"Not this man, but Barabbas! Now Barabbas was a robber."* Robber is too soft a term to use here, as the word actually refers to a rebel and an insurrectionist. Barabbas is everything Jesus is not.

Pilate sought to release Jesus because he could see that Jesus was not a threat to Rome, nor to the peace of the city. Now Pilate must release a man (Barabbas) who is. Many of those Jews who cheered when Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday are now outside Pilate's headquarters loudly chanting for Jesus' death. Matthew adds that *"when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, 'I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves.' And all the people answered, 'His blood be on us and on our children!'"* The horrible irony is that those who want to be held guilty for Jesus' death will get their wish.

Again, the irony is powerful and surely intentional. The Sanhedrin now finds themselves rejecting the Prince of Peace, whose “*kingdom is not of this world*” and whose followers do not take up arms, only to embrace a man (Barabbas) bent on plotting against Rome, and who is a genuine threat to Rome, to the peace of Jerusalem, and to the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin has chosen a terrorist over the Messiah.

More importantly for us, Jesus has been betrayed by Judas, denied by Peter, found guilty by the high priest and the Sanhedrin, rejected by those whom he came to save, and then appeared before a pagan Gentile prefect who acknowledges Jesus’ innocence, who, in order to please the Jews, directs that Jesus be crucified, which fulfills biblical prophecy. Jesus must drink the entire cup of wrath because he will obey the Father’s will and accomplish our salvation. For those who invoke God’s covenant curse—Jesus’ blood will indeed be upon them. Likewise, for those who are his, his blood is also upon us—only it washes away our sins and saves us and our children from the wrath of God.