**JESUS, PETER AND PILATE ON TRIAL**

March 18, 2018

John 18:1-19:16a

Key Verse 18:37 “‘You are a king, then!’ said Pilate. Jesus answered, ‘You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.’”

The gospel of John was written so that we may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing we may have life in his name (20:31). The gospel of John also shows us that Jesus is King. According to the key verse, this was the reason he was born. Jesus was born king to come and rule our hearts with the peace of God and with the hope of God. He came to be our king to give us the truth of God and to ultimately give us the kingdom of God. The worldly kingdoms are established by killing people but the kingdom of Jesus is established by the king being sacrificed for his people. King Jesus had to be arrested, tried and crucified in our place. He had to suffer like a condemned criminal for our sins and stand in judgment in order for us to inherit his kingdom. He had to shed his innocent blood on the cross and die for us. In this passage, we want to examine the behavior of Simon Peter, Pilate and Jesus and how they reacted in this time of crisis. We can especially find ourselves in Simon Peter and in Pilate. Even though Jesus was on trial, Peter and Pilate were also on trial, and they failed miserably. Through this passage, I pray that we may each examine our hearts and find out if we are committed to Jesus and are willing to know the truth from Jesus. Are we willing to pay the cost to be identified with Jesus by making a daily commitment to him? Are we willing to stay at his side no matter what the cost; no matter what the consequences? May God help us to come to Jesus and identify with him as our king. May God bless us especially to know that his arrest, trial, suffering and death were for our sins and that he was sentenced to die in our place.

**First**, Jesus made a clear decision to accept God’s will through prayer. Look at verse 1. Jesus went across the Kidron Valley with his disciples, to an olive grove. This place was also called the Garden of Gethsemane. The author did not describe Jesus’ prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane in detail. However, Matthew 26:38,39 say, “Then he said to them, ‘My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me…My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.’” According to the Old Testament, the “cup” refers to the cup of suffering. He did not want to suffer for the sins he did not commit. In his manhood, before the cup of suffering Jesus was sorrowful to the point of death. But he was not a slave of his feelings. Jesus prayed as a matter of life and death to obey God’s will. When Jesus prayed, God gave him power and wisdom to confront being arrested, tried and sentenced to death by his enemies.

**Second**, Peter did not make a clear decision of faith through prayer. When the soldiers came to arrest Jesus, they were powerless before the Son of God. Jesus was in control of the situation. When Peter saw that Jesus was in command, he became bold. He drew his sword and cut off the right ear of a servant of the high priest. (He wanted to cut off his head but he ducked.) But Jesus willingly gave in to his enemies and arrested. Then Peter became helpless and did not know what to do. While the other disciples all scattered, Peter followed Jesus to find out what was happening to Jesus. He loved Jesus. Once he said in Mark 14:29, “Peter declared, ‘Even if all fall away, I will not.’” But he did not pray. While Jesus was praying as a matter of life and death to obey God’s will, Peter was overcome by sorrow and slept. Because he did not pray, he had no strength or decision of faith to suffer. He had to either participate in Jesus’ suffering positively or escape the place. He just looked for a small comfort by warming himself in front of fire with others. As a result he could not but deny Jesus three times even though he never meant to do so. It is significant that Peter denied Jesus not in front of a powerful, terrifying soldier, but before a servant girl. If someone pointed a gun in his head and demand that he deny Jesus, we would understand. But denying Jesus before a servant girl is hard to understand. Here we learn how important it is to have a clear identity as a servant of God through prayer. Otherwise we mingle with godless people and deny our Lord Jesus Christ even though we don’t mean to do so.

Professional conferences are usually held on weekends to save money. They have no regard for worshipping God on Sunday. So I have to struggle. I have pressure to attend the conference through Sunday. But the Bible says that we have to worship God. One time I wanted to leave right after Saturday meeting. But I didn't want to appear strange and also I wanted to enjoy free steak dinner after the meeting and so I went to dinner. I thought that I could come back early Sunday morning. But I realized that I was at the wrong place because I didn’t have clear identity.

Peter’s three denials of Jesus was no doubt the low point of his life. According to Luke’s gospel, when he denied Jesus the third time and the rooster crowed, he wept bitterly. He then remembered Jesus’ words, “Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times.” (Lk.22:61-62) But Peter’s denial of Jesus was also the turning point in his life of faith. It was at that time that he was broken, completely broken of his human pride and self-reliance. His human strength and human zeal and human faithfulness had run out of gas. His breaking down and weeping was his sign of repentance. Because Peter remembered Jesus’ words (Lk.22:61) even in times of failure, God could restore his failure. They say that many people made fun of Peter by imitating the rooster’s sound. But Peter was not embarrassed or got angry because he was sure of Jesus’ forgiveness. When we compare him to Judas Iscariot, we see a great difference. After Judas betrayed Jesus and sold him for thirty silver coins, he realized what he did was wrong. However, he did not repent, but was instead filled with remorse and self-pity. Then he went out and committed suicide.

But Peter repented. This was the difference and this was his turning point that made him stronger. 2 Corinthians 7:10 says, “Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.” After Peter repented, he could newly accept Jesus’ love for him and be restored. His spiritual eyes were opened up and he became a new man who was fully committed to Jesus. He was not afraid or ashamed to identify with Jesus and even to suffer for the name of Jesus. He said in 1 Peter 4:13, “But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.” We see here that our failures are not really failures if we remember Jesus’ words and come back to him with repentance. Our failures are the opportunity for us to come back to Jesus and receive his wonderful grace and love even more deeply. It is really the opportune time to grow up in Jesus and become more mature in our faith.

**Third**, the religious leaders’ hypocrisy. The detachment of soldiers arrested Jesus. They bound him like a dangerous criminal and brought him first to Annas. He had been the official high priest once. Now Caiaphas, his son-in-law, was the high priest. However, Annas was in control in an unofficial capacity behind his son-in-law. This shows the corruption of the religious leaders. The trial before the Sanhedrin lasted all night. During the whole night, Jesus was mocked and beaten by them (Mt 26:57,67; 27:1). According to the law, a criminal should be tried in broad daylight. They secretly tried Jesus in Kangaroo court. They brought up many false testimonies. They determined to sentence Jesus to death and then began to search for evidence. This is clearly in reverse order. When they said that they had no right to execute anyone, they were disingenuous. They stoned Stephen later. They could stone Jesus if they wanted. But they were not satisfied with just killing Jesus. They wanted to humiliate him and destroy his reputation. They wanted to make Jesus cursed by God. So they decided to crucify him according to the Roman law. It would cause a great confusion among his disciples and dissolves a Jesus’ movement. Why believe in someone who is cursed by God. But God used their evil scheme to accomplish his purpose. Galatians 3:13 says, “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole.” Jesus was cursed on the cross in order to take God’s curse from us so that we may be free. This fulfilled what Jesus had said. Look at verse 32. “This had happened so that the words Jesus had spoken indicating the kind of death he was going to die would be fulfilled.” In order to destroy Jesus, they denied every principle they had, even their pride of being a chosen people. They said, “We have no king but Caesar.” (19:15)

**Fourth**, Pilate, a man of compromise. Look at verse 28a. “Then the Jews led Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor.” They wanted to deal with Jesus quickly so that they could enjoy the holiday weekend. Pilate was unhappy that the Jews brought Jesus to him because he did not want to involve in their politics. So he asked them, “What charges are you bringing against this man?” When they could make no clear charge, he said, “Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law.” But he could not bear the pressure of the Jews and went back inside the palace to question Jesus. Through questioning Jesus, Pilate realized that Jesus is innocent. So he should set Jesus free at any cost. But he wanted to please the Jews. So he began to make a political compromise with the Jews. Look at verses 38b-39. “I find no basis for a charge against him. But it is your custom for me to release to you one prisoner at the time of the Passover. Do you want me to release ‘the king of the Jews’?”

Jesus tried to help this poor governor to understand who he is. Look at verse 36. “Jesus said, ‘My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.’” Jesus’ kingship is not what Pilate is thinking of. This king does not need to establish his Kingdom like the Romans did, with a display of physical power. His kingdom is spiritual, that is in the hearts of his followers; Therefore he does not depend on military might to establish it. Jesus will not win people to his kingdom by force, but through conviction and persuasion, by the truth! Look at verse 37. “‘You are a king, then!' said Pilate. Jesus answered, ‘You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.’” Jesus was not intimidated by the Roman governor; rather, he wanted Pilate to listen to the truth and repent his sins and come back to God. Jesus was not concerned about how to be free, but how to help Pilate accept his invitation to the kingdom of God. So he urged Pilate to accept his promises and stand on the side of truth. When Pilate heard Jesus’ words, he sarcastically retorted, “What is truth?” To him, truth did not matter. What matters was how to get out of the situation without getting hurt politically. He asked, “What is truth?” not to know the truth, because he did not care for truth. Pilate was a politician who had to play tricks to survive and advance in the world. Here Pilate appeared to be very weak. But actually he was a very ruthless man. According to Luke chapter 13, there were some Galilean Jews worshiping at the temple, and Pilate went in and killed them all in the middle of their worship and mixed their blood with the sacrifices. Then how did he become so weak here? He was already in trouble with Tiberius Caesar who was his boss because he had so many times needlessly and stupidly provoked the Jews and fomented rebellion and riot, and Caesar didn’t want to hear any more about his incompetence as a governor. Pilate knew that one more riot from the Jews and he would lose his position and maybe his life. So he is trying to maintain his job as a judge and a governor. He is trying to appease the Jews to keep them from rioting again, and thus losing his job. So he became a slave of fear at the shout of the crowd. They say that after this Pilate could not endure his guilty feelings and committed suicide. We are just guilty as Pilate. Many times we do not do what is right because of compromise.

The Son of God had to be arrested and tried and sentenced to death because of our sins. Because of our sins, we are the ones who must be tried and condemned (2 Co 5:10). But our Messiah Jesus took upon himself all our iniquities and transgressions and was tried in our place (Isa 53:6). Later Peter said, “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed” (1Pe 2:24).

In this passage we can see sharp contrast between Jesus and others. Because Jesus prayed and made a decision of faith to obey God, he was very calm before the suffering. But others, Peter, religious leaders and Pilate lived before men. They basically sought for their glory and honor and social position. As a result, they could not but live against the truth. I pray that God may help each of us to stand on the truth by making a commitment to Jesus and being willing to pay the price regardless of rejections, misunderstandings and persecutions. May God help us to commit to Jesus who suffered for us as our king.