

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Trustworthy

Condemned and Suffering

(John 18:28--19:22)

Study #10

Introduction: On public display...

Every year, lots of Christians around the world mark three major events from Jesus' life: Christmas, Good Friday, and Easter.¹

Joseph and Mary and a few shepherds were there at or around the time of Jesus' birth. A few Roman soldiers were present for the resurrection event.

Only one - the crucifixion - took place in the open for all to see. And that begs the question, "Why?"

- Why did God hide the two glorious events and expose for all to see the one that was gruesome?
- Why veil Jesus' incarnation and victory over the grave and allow large crowds of people to see the crucifixion?
- Why did Jesus refer to the cross as His "*glory*"? (John 12:23)
- Why did the Apostle Paul write, [*Galatians 6:14*] ***But far be it from me to boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ...***

¹ Obviously, not all Christians observe these annual events. And many Christians observe other holy days. But these three make it on to most Christians' calendars.

² John did not record anything from Jesus' "trial" before Caiaphas (see at John 18:24 and 28) but moved straight to His appearance before the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. See Matthew 26, Mark 14, and Luke 22 for Jesus before Caiaphas.

I'm going to ask you to hold those questions for now. We'll return at the end today to consider why God chose to so publicly display His Son's suffering and death.

Last Sunday, we worked our way through Judas' betrayal of Jesus and Peter's denial of Jesus. Today, we watch as Jesus moved toward the cross.²

Jesus, Condemned (18:28--19:16)

The Jews' Case Against Jesus (18:28-32)

Jesus was transferred to Roman custody (v. 28)

[28] Then they brought Jesus from Caiaphas into the Praetorium, and it was early; and they themselves did not enter the Praetorium, so that they would not be defiled, but might eat the Passover.³

Historical records tell us that Roman courts opened before dawn, meaning that it may well have been really early when these proceedings began.

The head of the tribunal was the Roman governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate.

The Jews spoke with Pilate (vv. 29-31)

As Roman governor, Pilate held sway over all of the particulars of Jewish social and economic and religious life.⁴

Pilate had authority to make decisions about daily life up to and including capital punishment. All of his decisions were backed by the power of the Roman military. Pilate was a very powerful man.

³ We note that the Jewish leaders were concerned with ceremonial defilement, but not with the injustice of putting an innocent Man to death.

⁴ Pilate had authority to reverse Sanhedrin decisions and to appoint the high priest.

Pilate had a question for this group of Jews who were dragging Jesus to him.

[29] Therefore, Pilate came out to them and said, "What accusation are you bringing against this Man?"⁵

The Jewish leaders who were accusing Jesus were offended that Pilate had even asked that question.

[30] They answered and said to him, "If this Man were not a criminal, we would not have handed Him over to you."

To which we say, *"How perfectly logical. Of course He's guilty. That's why we've hauled Him here to stand trial before you!"*

Pilate's first instinct - and it was a good instinct - was to throw them out of his court.

[31a] So Pilate said to them, "Take Him yourselves, and judge Him according to your law."

The Jews pushed back.

[31b] The Jews said to him, "We are not permitted to put anyone to death."

There, they showed their hand.

They wanted Jesus to die, and to die publicly and gruesomely.

They wanted to do away with Jesus the Influencer, Jesus the Troublemaker, Jesus the Threat to their power. And only Rome had the power of capital punishment.

The Jews convinced Pilate to meet with Jesus. And so, for the first time, Jesus and Pilate met and spoke, face to face.

Pilate and Jesus (18:33-38a)

Jesus claimed to be the Jewish King (vv. 33-36)

[33] Therefore Pilate entered again the Praetorium again, and summoned Jesus and said to Him, "You are the King of the Jews?"

The sense of Pilate's question was *"Really? You - royalty?"*

Jesus had just endured a sleepless night, physical abuse, rejection by His people, betrayal by a former disciple, and denial by a trusted friend. We can imagine that He didn't appear very regal.

But following Pilate's opening line, Jesus took over.

[34] Jesus answered, "Are you saying this on your own, or did others tell you about Me?"

Very defensively, **[35] Pilate answered, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests handed You over to me; what have You done?"**

Jesus left Pilate in no doubt about His claim to be a king.

[36] Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm."

In other words, *"Like any king, I compete for the hearts of men and women and boys and girls. But unlike any other king, My kingdom has nothing to do with military might, land, or earthly treasure. It's an altogether different kind of kingdom."*

And here, Pilate missed the "gist" of what Jesus was saying about His kingdom being an other-worldly kingdom. And he zeroed in on Jesus' one unmissable point.

⁵ Pilate ruled as governor from A.D. 26 until his suicide in A.D. 37.

Jesus claimed to be TRUTH'S witness (vv. 37-38a)

[37a] Therefore Pilate said to Him, "So You are a king?"

I take this to be a sincere question. But it was a question Pilate would have asked with raised eyebrows. To claim to be a king while living in Roman territory was to ask for the death penalty.

But Jesus didn't waver. He doubled down.

[37b] Jesus answered, "You say correctly that I am a king. For this purpose I have been born, and for this I have come into the world: to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to My voice."

To which, the unconvinced Pilate replied, **[38a] Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?"**

I take this question to be less than sincere and more cynical. Pilate was more concerned with expediency than veracity.

His life and his government ran on the fuel of might makes right. Pilate had Truth, in the Person of Jesus, standing right in front of Him, and he rejected Him.

He went back to the Jews and made a half-hearted attempt to win Jesus' freedom.

The Jews Wanted Jesus Dead (18:38b-40)

Pilate cleared Jesus (v. 38b)

[38b] And after saying this, he came out again to the Jews, and said to them, "I find no grounds at all for charges in His case."

I think that Pilate saw Jesus as nothing more than a harmless pretender to the Jewish throne.

Here's the bone he threw to the Jews to try to get them to drop their case against Jesus.

Pilate offers to release Jesus for them (v. 39)

[39] "However, you have a custom, that I release one prisoner for you at the Passover; therefore do you wish that I release for you the King of the Jews?"

The Jewish leadership didn't bite.

The Jews demanded the release of Barabbas (v. 40)

[40] So they shouted again, saying, "Not this Man, but Barabbas.' Now Barabbas was a rebel.

These Jewish leaders asked for - and got - the release of a man who was actually guilty of the crimes of which they were accusing the innocent Jesus.

And with the release of Barabbas, Pilate sealed Jesus' fate. That brings us to Jesus' final sufferings at the hands of the Romans.

What we read is not rich in details. But John does record the most physically violent attack on Jesus before the crucifixion itself.

Jesus, Scourged and re-Presented (19:1-7)

Abused by soldiers (vv. 1-3)

[19:1] So Pilate then took Jesus and had Him flogged.⁶

⁶ Note that John didn't focus on the physical suffering here except to name it. This is because (1) the first readers of his account understood flogging; (2) John stressed the relational and emotional and spiritual aspects of Jesus' suffering.

This “flogging” was so severe that Roman citizens were exempt from flogging.

In this torturous punishment, the prisoner was beaten with a leather whip. Sharp shards of metal were embedded into the ends of that whip. The beating lasted as long as the soldier had the strength or the will to continue.⁷

Flogging was normally used as a pre-crucifixion punishment to weaken a prisoner so that he would die more quickly on the cross.

In that respect, it was a merciful precursor to crucifixion.⁸

After the flogging, a badly wounded Jesus would have been greatly weakened. Still in the custody of the Roman soldiers, they took it upon themselves to add insult and injury to injury.

[2] And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and placed it on His head, and put a purple cloak on Him; [3] and they repeatedly came up to Him, and said, “Hail, King of the Jews!” and slapped Him in the face again and again.

Everything possible - from the painful wreath to the purple robe to the mock praise to the slaps in the face - was done to mock Jesus’ claim to be a King.⁹

When the soldiers finished their barbaric treatment of Jesus, the focus shifted back to Pilate.¹⁰

Presented to the Jews (vv. 4-5)

[4] And then Pilate came out again, and said to them, “See, I am bringing Him out to you so that you will know that I find no grounds at all for charges in His case.”

[5] Jesus then came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. And Pilate said to them, “Behold, the Man!”

It is clear at this point that Pilate didn't want anything bad to happen to Jesus.

That was partly because he knew that Jesus was innocent. (To which we ask, “*Then why have an innocent man flogged?*”)

It was also because Pilate considered Jesus to be a pathetic figure. There was no need to put Him to death.

So, as he presented Jesus to the Jewish leaders, and with Jesus still bloody from the scourging and the soldiers' abuse, Pilate announced, “*Look at the poor Guy. You can't believe that He is a threat.*”

But only one outcome would satisfy them.

Jews demand His crucifixion (vv. 6-7)

[6a] So when the chief priests and the officers saw Him, they cried out, saying, “Crucify, Crucify!”

To which Pilate replied, ***[6b]...“Take Him yourselves, and crucify Him, for I find no grounds for charges against Him.”***

I hear disgust and impatience from Pilate here. By now, he probably wanted to release Jesus just to spite the Jews.

But he also wanted to remind the Jews of who was in control.

He knew that they knew that they couldn't put anyone to death. It was against Roman law. The Jewish nation-state didn't have the prerogative of capital punishment.

⁷ The Old Testament limited to forty lashes what a Jew could lay on a fellow Jew, lest the criminal “*become contemptible in your eyes.*” (Deuteronomy 25:3) There was no limit to a beating when the Romans flogged a man prior to crucifixion.

⁸ In those cases, in which a victim was not scourged, a condemned man might live for days while nailed to the cross.

⁹ The purple robe was the symbol of royalty. A reed was given to Him to symbolize His scepter (Matthew 27:29).

¹⁰ Trace through chapters 18 and 19 to see Pilate move in and out of the Praetorium seven times to speak with either Jesus or the Jews who were accusing Him.

He reminded them of that when he mocked them, *"You go ahead and crucify Him!"* - knowing that they couldn't.

The rulers kept on pressing Pilate to do for them what they wanted him to do.

[7] The Jews answered him, 'We have a law, and by that law He ought to die, because He made Himself out to be the Son of God.'

And at that, Pilate got really uncomfortable.

Maybe hearing that their concerns were religious, we see his superstitious side.¹¹

Maybe he remembered a dream that his wife recently had about Jesus. After this dream, she told Pilate, ***"have nothing to do with that righteous Man."*** (Matthew 27:19)

Pilate left the Jews again and went back again to Jesus.

Jesus, Rejected and Condemned (19:8-16)

Pilate and Jesus talk, again (vv. 8-11)

[8] Therefore when Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid; [9a] and he entered the Praetorium again and said to Jesus, "Where are You from?"

That's panic you hear the panic in Pilate's voice. It's right here that we see that it wasn't Jesus who was on trial before Pilate. It was the other way around. Pilate was on trial.

This time, Jesus chose to pass on answering Pilate's question.

Jesus refused to answer Pilate's question (v. 9b)

[9b] But Jesus gave him no answer.

Roman governors weren't used to being ignored or going unanswered. Pilate was offended.

Pilate asserted His authority over Jesus (v. 10)

[10] So Pilate said to Him, "Are You not speaking to me? Do You not know that I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify You?"

Yes, humanly speaking, and as far as Pilate knew, and the way things appeared, he was right. Only the Roman ruler could say ***"release"*** or ***"crucify."***

But Jesus had to speak here. He couldn't let Pilate be so deluded as to think that authority over His life lay in the puny power of the Roman Empire.

Jesus corrected Pilate! (v. 11)

[11] Jesus answered him, "You would have no authority over me at all, if it had not been given you from above; for this reason the one who handed Me over to you has the greater sin."

Even in His beaten, weakened, bloody state, Jesus had and spent the energy to correct Pilate. And I think that Pilate was saying two things here.

One, *"Pilate, your authority is not intrinsic. It is derived from God. If He hadn't delegated authority to you, you would have none."*

Jesus wanted to ensure that Pilate knew - and He wants us to know as well - that the cross was not God's mistake, or an act of the power of man over the power of God, or a surprise attack God hadn't seen coming.

God knew exactly what He was doing when He sovereignly allowed all that was happening to Jesus, happen.

¹¹ Pilate knew that the Jews wanted Jesus dead not because He broke civil law (His claim to be a King), but because of religious law (claiming to be the Son of God).

Two, *“Pilate, you do bear some culpability here for My coming crucifixion. You are playing a part. But it’s the Jews - and Judas - who delivered Me to you who bear the greater guilt.”*

By this time, Pilate is a mess and he’s in a mess.

For all kinds of reasons, now he really wanted to release Jesus - but he had already released Barabbas. He was running out of options.

So, he made one, final attempt to negotiate with the Jewish leaders for Jesus’ freedom.

Pilate and the Jews talk (v. 12)

[12]...but the Jews shouted, saying, “If you release this Man, you are not a friend of Caesar; everyone who makes himself out to be a king opposes Caesar!”

That was a very carefully worded, but very clear, threat. The Jews accused Pilate of being a traitor to Caesar and guilty of treason if he let Jesus go free.¹²

He now sees how much it will cost him to do what is right and to release Jesus. What will Pilate do?

The Jews rejected and Pilate condemned Jesus (vv. 13-16)

Pilate presented Jesus the King to the Jews (vv. 13-14)

[13] Therefore when Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out, and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Pavement - but in Hebrew, Gabbatha. [14] Now it was the day of preparation for the Passover; it was about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, “Look, your King!”

¹² We know from extra-biblical sources that Pilate was not on solid footing with Caesar Tiberius. The threat the Jews hurled at Pilate would have sobered Pilate.

¹³ Due to a discrepancy in calendars, Judean Jews observed Passover on Friday on that year; Galilean Jews observed it on Thursday, the day on which Jesus ate the Passover meal with His disciples.

We can’t miss the irony of this scene. The governor of the Roman province of Judea is at his judgment seat, ready to pass judgment on the King of kings and Lord of lords.

It was around 6am on what we have come to call Good Friday.¹³

Pilate brought Jesus out to the Jewish crowd and presented Jesus as their King. They would have none of it.

The Jews’ only King was Caesar (v. 15)

[15] So they shouted, “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 except Caesar.”¹⁴

And, by that statement they rejected their Messianic hope, the hope that had sustained the Jewish people for hundreds of years.

Pilate saw no other course to follow but the course they demanded.

Pilate delivered Jesus to be crucified (v. 16)

[16] So he then handed Him over to them to be crucified.

Notice that there is universal culpability for the death of Jesus. Both segments of humanity - Jewish and non-Jewish - were party to the killing of God’s Son.

The Jews were committed to putting their Messiah to death on the cross to retain power.

¹⁴ By this, they contradicted their long resistance to Roman subjugation. As well, they sealed their fate, as a nation. The Old Testament refused God’s Kingship, instead swearing allegiance to Rome.

Pilate and the Romans were willing to have a Man whom they knew to be innocent put to death to appease the crowds.¹⁵

And now we come to the pivotal event of human history. Now, we come to the cross.

Jesus, Crucified (19:17-22)

Jesus Carried His Own Cross (19:17)

[17] They took Jesus, therefore, and He went out, carrying His own cross, to the place called the Place of a Skull, which in Hebrew is called, Golgotha.

Remember the suffering Jesus had already endured over the previous twelve or so hours.

Betrayed by a former disciple, denied by a trusted friend, He had gone sleepless and without food. He was scourged, beaten with rods, and mocked, condemned by Jews and Gentiles through a sick series of sham trials - and all the while was completely innocent.

Golgotha, the place of crucifixion, was just north of Jerusalem. Condemned criminals had to walk a long way on winding roads to get there. And John lets us know that Jesus carried part of His own cross, at least part of the way to Golgotha.¹⁶

They Nailed Jesus to the Cross (19:18)

[18] There they crucified Him, and with Him two other men, one on either side, and Jesus in between.

If we wonder why so little is said about the actual crucifixion, it was probably because crucifixion was so well known in John's day, there would have been no need to explain.

But crucifixion was so gruesome that there was no desire to elaborate. I will mention only the barest of details.

The Romans had perfected crucifixion as a method of torture-killing through constant refinement. The physical suffering of the crucified was absolute. Rome was known to have crucified thousands of criminals at a time.

Iron spikes were pounded through each wrist. One spike sufficed for the feet which were placed on top of each other.

By these three spikes the crucified man was held on to the cross, where he would linger in agony until thirst and hunger, bleeding, exposure, and exhaustion finally killed him.

Today, we look at the cross as a symbol of love and peace. Fair enough, for on the cross, Jesus brought us peace and showed us love.

But we can't forget that the cross was above all, an instrument of death-torture.

For a first century Jew or Roman to walk into this room and see this cross at the front would be just as startling to him, as if we walked in and saw modern methods of execution on display.

On the cross on which Jesus was crucified were words, authorized by Pilate.

Pilate's Inscription on the Cross (19:19-22)

What Pilate wrote (vv. 19-20)

[19] Now Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It was written, "JESUS THE NAZARENE, THE KING OF THE JEWS."

¹⁵ There is no room for developing an anti-Semite bias from this passage by accusing the Jews of putting Jesus to death. John made it clear that Jesus was condemned by both Jews and Gentiles alike.

¹⁶ John doesn't contradict Mark's (15:2) and Luke's (23:26) report that another man, Simon of Cyrene, carried Jesus' cross for at least part of the way.

[20] Therefore many of the Jew read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek.¹⁷

We aren't surprised that the Jewish leaders didn't like this inscription.

What Pilate wrote, remained (vv. 21-22)

[21] So the chief priests of the Jews were saying to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews'; rather, write that He said, 'I am King of the Jews.'" [22] Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written."

By this time, Pilate had had it up to here with these guys. He answered, **[22]... "What I have written I have written."**

And so the sign stayed up on the cross on which Jesus was crucified. It was visible for all to see, out in the open, completely public.

Let's now consider the question I asked at the beginning, *"Why so public?"*

Conclusion:

On the cross, Jesus didn't have the look of royalty. I say this reverently, but on the cross, Jesus looked weak and foolish. Pilate's placard - identifying Jesus as **"The King of the Jews"** - only enhanced the look of foolishness and weakness.

The scene begs the question, *"Couldn't God have dealt with our sin and the problem of death and our alienation in some other way?"*

Couldn't God have done what kind old grandfathers are famous for doing when the grandkids misbehave? Couldn't He have said about our sin *"No problem!"* and gathered us all into a big hug? Wouldn't that have been the epitome of kindness?

On the other hand, couldn't God have demanded that we perform dangerous feats of strength and daring to deal with our sin? Hard things. Dangerous things. That would have been righteous. Just.

But God couldn't have ignored our sin. That would not have been just. And the price needed to deal with our problems - sin, death, and alienation from God - was a price we couldn't pay by any deeds.

Only a perfect, sinless sacrifice could atone for the damage done by our rebellion. Thus, the cross of Jesus. He took our place and suffered all that He suffered - for us.

And it this, God's plan, that now allows God to offer the one who simply believes in Jesus for eternal life that priceless gift - *gratis* - because Jesus paid it all.¹⁸

It was this that made the public display of Jesus on the cross - complete with a sign proclaiming Him King - necessary. The world needed to know what kind of a God, God is.

The Apostle Paul got it. He wrote, **[1 Corinthians 1:23]...we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness.**

In Jesus' cross, we see true power manifested by divine weakness; we see God's wisdom in apparent foolishness.

The only way to redeem a fallen humanity was by offering a **[John 1:29] "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."**

So God, in Christ, showed His grace by the cross where Jesus - though infinitely rich - for our sakes became desperately poor so that we, through His poverty, might become rich. (2 Corinthians 8:9)

***Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!
[2 Corinthians 9:15]***

[Psalm 85:1] Graciousness and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed each other.

¹⁷ Aramaic, a common language; Latin, a legal language; Greek, a trade language.

¹⁸ On the cross, what the psalmist wrote was fulfilled: