

JESUS' INTERROGATION AND CONDEMNATION

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."

We thank our Lord Jesus for allowing us to learn His high priestly prayer this past week. Jesus lived with one purpose, to glorify God. He also prayed for His disciples that they might be sanctified in the truth and for all believers that all of them may be one. With the high priestly prayer of Jesus, let us persistently intercede for the young people and prepare the spiritual environment for the revival of this generation. We also thank the Lord for the blessed Masters course on leadership during this weekend. Thus, we were able to equip ourselves to resist the false teachings of this time and to walk resolutely on the path of following Jesus.

Today we want to reflect on Jesus' suffering, his interrogation by the chief priests and by Pontius Pilate, and his sentence. Who is this Jesus who endured such indescribable suffering, scourging, mockery, and was finally handed over to be crucified? Why is Jesus' suffering and our participation in it so fundamentally important to our path of faith? May God grant us spiritual eyes to accept Jesus as our King of Truth and to choose to participate in His remaining sufferings.

1. Jesus' imprisonment and interrogation (18:1-40)

First, Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (1-11).

Let's look at verses 1-3: "When he had finished praying, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other

side there was an olive grove, and he and his disciples went into it. Now Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples. So Judas came to the grove, guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons." After the high priestly prayer, Jesus, together with the eleven disciples, went out to the Kidron Valley. At the border there was the Garden of Gethsemane at the foot of the Mount of Olives. Judas knew this place, for here Jesus often gathered with his disciples. As we learn in Matthew 26:39, Jesus waged a fierce prayer battle there, choosing to do God's will: "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will!" About midnight his betrayer, Judas, came into the garden with a great crowd of soldiers and servants of the chief priests and Pharisees. They had only one goal: to seize Jesus and take him away.

Let's look at verses 4-5: "Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, "Who is it you want?" "Jesus of Nazareth," they replied." Jesus was spiritually prepared for this situation by his hard prayer struggle. He was not hiding. He also knew all that was to come against Him. And so he boldly approached the soldiers and asked, "Who is it you want?" Let's look at verse 6: "I am he," Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) When Jesus said, "I am he," they

drew back and fell to the ground." Despite his imprisonment, Jesus was the Lord of this situation. And he was also the good shepherd who, in trouble, thought not of himself but of his disciples. Let us read verses 8 and 9: "I told you that I am he," Jesus answered. "If you are looking for me, then let these men go." This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: "I have not lost one of those you gave me." Thanks be to Jesus, who thought not of himself in the hour of captivity, but like a shepherd, of his sheep, that none should be lost.

Let's look at verse 10: "Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.)" Peter was full of fighting spirit. It is estimated that there were 400 to 600 soldiers, yet Peter did not despond. He drew his sword and cut off the right ear of one of the servants of the high priest. Peter had a good motive: he wanted to fight for his Master, Jesus. However, it could have cost him his life in the face of this great multitude of soldiers. Peter's fight was a human fight. While Jesus had struggled in prayer and had made a clear decision for the will of God, Peter and also the other disciples had fallen asleep again and again. While Jesus was determined to give his life, Peter wanted to preserve his life. Therefore Jesus admonished him, saying in verse 11, "...Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?" Jesus was decided for the cup of suffering. Therefore, he struggled spiritually to fulfill the will of God to the end. It is a spiritual struggle to deny ourselves and to fulfill the will of God to the end, that is, to drink the cup of suffering.

We remember Corrie ten-Boom, who during the Third Reich decided to shelter persecuted Jews and help them escape. She was arrested and sent to a concentration camp. But she was willing to share in Jesus' suffering. Later, she was able to forgive even her traitor and the guards by practicing Jesus' unconditional and forgiving love. Last year, the servant of God missionary Peter, who

served the work of God so devotedly for 40 years, experienced fierce slander. Humanly speaking, like Peter, he could have "drawn his sword" and struck back. But instead of reacting humanly, he fought the spiritual battle of prayer. With Philippians 1:21, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain," he chose to fight spiritually and fulfill God's mission in Germany, Europe and all the way to the Muslim world.

Here we learn to fight the spiritual battle and drink the cup of God's mission and calling to the end. Jesus nowhere promised his disciples (and us too) that we could live without opposition and live a comfortable life. Let us remember God's grace in our lives and decide anew to drink the cup of suffering, whatever the cost, to the end. Then we will experience Jesus' help and power from above to fulfill our mission and use our lives and house churches for the fulfillment of Jesus' world salvation work and for the spiritual revival of this generation.

Second, Jesus' interrogation by the chief priests (18:12-24).

Consider verses 12-14: "Then the detachment of soldiers with its commander and the Jewish officials arrested Jesus. They bound him and brought him first to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it would be good if one man died for the people." Annas and Caiaphas were related to each other. They were also both corrupt and interrogated Jesus for hours in the middle of the night. Their only goal was to find a valid charge against Jesus so they could ask the Romans for the death penalty against Jesus. False witnesses came forward against Jesus. Then the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching. This is probably how Annas wanted to get the personal details of Jesus' disciples so that he could seize them as well. Let's look at verses 20 and 21: "I have spoken openly to the world," Jesus replied. "I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in

secret. Why question me? Ask those who heard me. Surely they know what I said." Jesus was not intimidated by the falsehood and brutality of his adversaries. Rather, Jesus told the high priest that he had spoken freely and openly in the synagogue and in the temple, and nothing in secret. Then the servant of the high priest struck him in the face, saying, "Is this the way you answer the high priest?" Let us give thanks to Jesus, who although so despised and even struck in the face, endured all this - out of love for us lost sinners! The fallen sinful world could not and cannot bear such devotion to the redemptive work of God. But all the more, in this Easter season, we want to thank Jesus for His complete divestment and surrender, and renew and deepen our love relationship with Him.

After the interrogation, Jesus was sent to the house of the high priest Caiaphas. Verses 25-27 report, "As Simon Peter stood warming himself, he was asked, "You are not one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it, saying, "I am not." One of the high priest's servants, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, challenged him, "Didn't I see you with him in the olive grove?" Again Peter denied it, and at that moment a rooster began to crow." That night when Jesus was interrogated was a hard time of trial for Peter. He loved Jesus so much. After all, he wanted to follow Jesus to the end. He had even been willing to fight for Jesus. But here in the house of the high priest, Peter's complete helplessness was revealed. He was not even able to confess himself as a disciple of Jesus in front of a bouncer. Peter had to realize what a fearful and deficient person he was. He could not be faithful to Jesus to the end with his good will. But in that hour, despite his failure, Peter was able to remember the word of Jesus that the Lord had given him before (Luke 22:31, 32): "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers." Jesus knew how hard Satan was fighting for Peter's soul. But Jesus prayed for him that his faith would not

cease and that he would be changed into the rock of the church. Peter was not yet ready. But soon he would be converted and appointed by Jesus to be the arch-shepherd of God's church.

Third, Jesus' interrogation by Pilate (28-38).

After the Jews had spent all night frantically trying to mount an accusation against Jesus, Jesus was now brought into the Praetorium early in the morning. Verse 28b says, "By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness the Jews did not enter the palace; they wanted to be able to eat the Passover." Here we see all the hypocrisy of the religious superiors. They did not want to make themselves unclean so that they could eat the Passover meal. Yet they were so spiritually blind because they were condemning the very Jesus, the true and eternal Passover Lamb of God, as a sinner and blasphemer.

Through this incident we learn about Pilate, how much he depended on the religious superiors and became a helpless puppet of circumstances. Pilate, had to go out of the praetorium to ask outside the building about their accusation. Let's look at verse 30: "If he were not a criminal," they replied, "we would not have handed him over to you." But Pilate replies, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law." But the superiors wave him off and tell him, "But we have no right to execute anyone." Now the evil intent and tactics of the superiors became apparent. An ordinary punishment was not enough for them. They wanted Jesus eliminated once and for all and demanded the death penalty.

Again Pilate had to concede to the superiors. He went into the praetorium and called Jesus and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Let's look at verses 34-38: "Is that your own idea," Jesus asked, "or did others talk to you about me?" "Am I a Jew?" Pilate replied. "It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me. What is it you have done?" Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my

servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place." "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." "What is truth?" Pilate asked. With this he went out again to the Jews and said, "I find no basis for a charge against him."

Jesus held on to his spiritual identity until the end. He did not try to defend himself. Rather, he testified that he is the true and eternal king of the eternal kingdom of God: "My kingdom is not of this world." Jesus helped Pilate to see that, although he was not a Jew, he could still understand and recognize that Jesus is the King who came into the world to testify to the truth. Here we recall John's testimony about Jesus from the first chapter of his Gospel (1:14): "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." During Jesus' Messianic ministry, Jesus had repeatedly testified to His grace and His truth. Now Jesus also invited Pilate to recognize this truth and to accept that Jesus is the spiritual king and his kingdom is the spiritual kingdom - namely, the kingdom of God. The kingdoms of this world come and go. Even the mighty Roman Empire would crumble again. But the kingdom of God is and remains for eternity. And Jesus is and remains the eternal king. Whoever receives Jesus as the true king and lives under his kingly rule experiences true happiness and the true meaning of life. This person can live in the right relationship with God and the order of creation is established in the life of this person.

Let us read verse 37 again: "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 served Pilate with the burning shep-

herd's heart to open his spiritual eyes and ears that he would recognize Jesus as the spiritual King and hear his voice.

Stephen, the first Christian martyr, testified at his stoning to the eternal King Jesus and his eternal kingdom (Acts 7:56): "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." In the 2nd century, Polycarp testified to Jesus' kingship over his life. When he abjured Christ, he said, "86 years I have served him, and he has never harmed me; how could I blaspheme my King and Savior?" And Jim Elliot, who went to Ecuador as a missionary to the Huaorani Indians and died there as a martyr in 1956, confessed God's dominion over his life, saying, "God, I pray, kindle this useless brushwood of my life that I may burn for you. Consume my life, my God, for it is yours."

But what was Pilate's reaction? To the end, he would not make a decision for the truth. He rejected truth and finally asked, "What is truth?" This question did not come from his searching heart. Rather, he despised the truth. "What is truth?" - this is also the question of many people in our time. Although they know the truth, they still do not accept it, but rather continue their sinful lives. A natural scientist recognized the truth of the Bible's doctrine of creation and yet rejected it, saying, "Then I would have to believe in God." Man's sinful pride and haughtiness are the greatest obstacles to accepting God, believing in Him, and receiving Jesus as the King of truth. John testifies about Jesus in John 1:11, "He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him." Pilate did not receive Jesus, even though he knew the truth. The consequence was tragic. He had to act against his conscience. He became a man of compromise and a very miserable person in history. Every Sunday until this day his name is mentioned in the Creed, where it says: "suffered under Pontius Pilate, crucified, died and buried." Politically, too, the end soon came for Pilate. He was deposed by the Roman emperor.

Pilate is a clear warning to us not to remain non-committal to the truth of God. Those who have recognized the truth about Jesus as the Christ and King, but still hold on to their own goal in life and their own imagination, are just as miserable spiritually as Pilate. God invites us to repent of our non-committal or compromising lives and accept Jesus as the King of truth. He was in our place and because of our sin, interrogated, mocked, sentenced to death and finally crucified. He even died on the cross to reconcile us to God. 1 John 1:8,9 say, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." In this Easter season, let us accept Jesus as the true, eternal King and His Kingdom as the true and eternal Kingdom of God.

Pilate now tried to use a trick to release Jesus, whom he believed to be innocent. There was a tradition at the Passover feast to release a prisoner. Pilate put Jesus and the robber Barabbas up for selection. He thought that the people would surely choose Jesus. But the crowd shouted, "Not this one, but Barabbas!"

Jesus is the true king and his kingdom is not of this world. You cannot follow Jesus to the end unless you are clearly on the side of truth. In the past, there was no truth in my life because I did not know Jesus and wanted to be my own king. But at the same time, because of the futility and under the power of sin and death, I cried out, "I wretched man, who will deliver me from this death-decayed body?" By God's initiative love and grace, through Bible study, I was able to meet Jesus as my Christ and true King (Mark 8:29) and accept His unconditional, forgiving love on the cross (Luke 23:34a). Now my new life no longer belongs to myself, but I am Jesus' property. He is my true king. And by His grace I am able to serve Him and cowork for His eternal kingdom.

What a precious privilege that our new life no longer belongs to ourselves, but to

Christ. He is the King of truth who suffered so much for us and finally laid down his life so that we might be bought dearly by his blood, continue to serve him, and live for the fulfillment of his mission. Apostle Paul testified to Jesus' kingship in Romans 14:7, 8: "For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord." And Martin Luther testified in his catechism: "That I belong body and soul in life and in death, not to myself, but to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ. He has paid in full for all my sins with his precious blood and redeemed me from all the power of the devil; and he preserves me in such a way that without the will of my Father in heaven not a hair can fall from my head, indeed that everything must serve my blessedness. Wherefore also he maketh me sure of eternal life by his Holy Spirit, and willing and ready of heart to live unto him henceforth."

Let us give thanks to Jesus, the eternal King of truth. He suffered lonely in our place. He even bought us dearly with His blood. Our new life does not belong to ourselves. We belong to Him and may live with Him and for Him. Through prayer, one-to-one Bible study teams, and disciple making ministry, we proclaim Jesus as the eternal King and establish Jesus' kingship at the 1700 universities and colleges in Germany, Europe, and as far away as the Muslim world.

2. Jesus' condemnation (19:1-16a)

Let's look at verses 1-3: "Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They clothed him in a purple robe and went up to him again and again, saying, "Hail, king of the Jews!" And they struck him in the face." Pilate was too cowardly to release Jesus. He had Jesus scourged by the soldiers. This involved using a whip with pieces of metal or bone attached to the end and striking his bare back with it. Then the soldiers put a crown of thorns on Jesus' head, put a purple robe on

him, kicked him and mocked him. They did not know that this Jesus they were mocking was actually the King.

Let us look at verses 4:5: "Once more Pilate came out and said to the Jews, "Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against him." When Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, "Here is the man!" Pilate thought that the vengeance of the superiors and the people was now satisfied. He made Jesus appear before the crowd with a crown of thorns and a purple robe. But when the chief priests and the servants saw this, they cried out, "Crucify! Crucify!" Pilate wanted to hand over further responsibility to the Jews. But they said, "We have a law, and by the law he must die, for he made himself the Son of God." Let's read verses 8-10: "When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid, and he went back inside the palace. "Where do you come from?" he asked Jesus, but Jesus gave him no answer. "Do you refuse to speak to me?" Pilate said. "Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?" Pilate was so proud that he imagined he even had the power to release Jesus or else to crucify him. In reality, Pilate was a man without backbone. He was full of fear and did not dare to release Jesus. He was a prisoner of himself. Jesus told him in verse 11: "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin."

Let us read verses 12-16a: "From then on, Pilate tried to set Jesus free, but the Jews kept shouting, "If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar." When Pilate heard this, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge's seat at a place known as the Stone Pavement (which in Aramaic is Gabbatha). It was the day of Preparation of Passover Week, about the sixth hour. "Here is your king," Pilate said to the Jews. But they shouted, "Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!" "Shall I crucify your king?" Pilate asked. "We have no king but

Caesar," the chief priests answered. Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified."

When we read these verses, we think that Jesus had to die because of the envy of the chief priests and the Jewish rulers, or because of Pilate's indecision. But when we explore the Bible, we find that all these incidents had been foretold and promised by the prophets long ago. Nothing happened arbitrarily. Everything sprang from God's eternal plan of salvation. Let us give thanks to God, who gave for us lost sinners His only begotten Son, Jesus, as the King of truth, and through Him invited us into His eternal kingdom. Jesus was imprisoned, mocked, interrogated, scourged, finally condemned. And this, although Jesus was without guilt and without sin. The prophet Isaiah predicted about 700 years earlier about the Messiah (Is 53:4,5): "Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. "

Today we have learned about Jesus' imprisonment, interrogation and sentence to death. We must not look at these incidents in purely historical terms. Rather, we may personally recognize and accept that Jesus took upon himself this indescribably cruel and shameful journey to the cross for each of us. Jesus was without guilt, without sin. But he was interrogated, sentenced to death, mocked and beaten for my sin and yours. Let us thank Jesus for this with all our hearts in this Easter season. Let us renew our love relationship with Jesus and accept Jesus into our lives as the King of Truth. Let us live for His eternal kingdom and share in His remaining sufferings for the spread of the gospel and for the work of spiritual revival until the end.