

Who Jesus really is.

No. 3 **Jesus – the God who died as man**. Bible reading John 18:28 – 19:16.

In this Bible passage Jesus speaks four times. Each time he speaks to Pilate, the Roman governor, 18:28. Jesus, the God-man, knew exactly what he was doing. He steadily pursued the direction he had set for his life, to die for others. Pilate, representing the man-god Caesar, ducked, dodged and dived as he looked after himself. This whole trial of Jesus before Pilate is recorded more by John than any other gospel writer.

If we remember *why* John wrote his gospel we may also try to see how his purpose is fulfilled in this narrative: “that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name”, John 20:31. Here we read of Jesus, the travelling teacher from Nazareth, standing accused and facing capital punishment. He is apparently in the hands of Pilate, historically known to be the governor of Judea from AD26-37.¹

At a much deeper level than could be seen, something of immensely awesome significance was happening. “The Lamb of God” was about to “take away the sin of the world”, John 1:29. “He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God”, John 1:11-13. John had written in the opening verses that Jesus

¹ D. A. Carson, The Gospel According to John (Leicester: IVP) 1991, p.590.

came to all people without distinction. But he noted there would be exceptions – people who excluded themselves from what Jesus was doing – people who would not receive him.²

By chapter 18 the climax is near. Linking together the finish and the start of John's gospel we note that there is:

1. **something to believe:** "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God", John 20:31
2. **someone to receive:** "The Word", John 1:1; "the true light", John 1:9; "God the One and Only", John 1:18; "Jesus Christ" John 1:17.

Reader, please allow me to ask you important questions at this moment.

1. Do you believe in Jesus Christ? Do you believe (trusting yourself to and committing yourself to) Jesus Christ?
2. Have you received Jesus Christ into your life? Have you received (taken into your life to enjoy friendship with, all day every day) Jesus Christ?

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that *whoever believes* in him shall not perish but have everlasting life", John 3:16. Many people love the darkness too much to welcome the light! Lots of people chose not to listen to God's expressed word – who is Jesus! Crowds do not appreciate Jesus Christ as God's sole Incarnation – uniquely God on earth! But what is important at this moment is, *what do you think?*

² D. A. Carson, The Gospel According to John (Leicester: IVP) 1991, p.151.

Four times Jesus speaks to Pilate in this Bible reading. By setting the conversation in context we will learn something from each one.

The first speech is **John 18:34**. Having heard something of the accusation from the Jewish leadership Pilate asks Jesus a question. “Are you the king of the Jews?” Jesus replies to him, “**Is that your own idea or did others talk to you about me?**” This reply is unique to John’s gospel.³

Notice that Jesus the prisoner has become Jesus the one who is asking the questions. Jesus is really the judge. Today, we consider who Jesus is. One day *he* will consider us, as our judge!

Pilate’s question, “Are you the king of the Jews?” is impossible to answer without a definition of “king of the Jews”. If the governor was fearful of the common understanding for a military rebellion led by a charismatic leader or guerrilla mercenary, then the answer was “No”. But in the true understanding of what was really happening beneath the surface of events, then the answer was “Yes”. Jesus was the Jewish Messiah, on David’s kingly throne. Which did Pilate mean?

And what would you mean? Is your believing in Jesus and your receiving of Jesus based upon your own ideas, or on a revelation of what was genuinely happening, from God himself? Is your believing and receiving ‘surface’ or ‘spiritual’? Is it visible or actual? Is it ‘guess-work’ or ‘God’s work’?

³ See Matthew 27:11; Mark 15:2; Luke 23:3 and John 18:36-37.

Jesus is God: God is at work in Jesus in a very special way.

The second speech is **John 18:36**. Jesus' second words in this passage are: **“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”**.

John has already strongly shown that God is at work behind and through all that is happening. For example: “This happened so that the words Jesus had spoken indicating the kind of death he was going to die would be fulfilled”, John 18:32. The political situation was going to bring about Jesus' death, and bring it about by crucifixion – not any other way. This would fulfil Jesus' own words on several occasions.⁴ He had warned that he would be betrayed. The Jewish priests and teachers would condemn him. He would be turned over to the Gentiles (Roman authorities), who would mock, flog and crucify him. And on the third day he would rise again. These words of Jesus would be fulfilled.

So uncannily to some extent, Jesus already knew what was going to happen. How did he know? If he was only a man, that is a puzzle. But God knows all things. And the Bible shows us that Jesus is God as a man!

⁴ See Matthew 16:21, 17:22, 20:17-19.

“My kingdom is not of this world”, John 18:36. The word “kingdom” (Greek: basileia) means “rule or reign” much more than “territory”.⁵ Jesus is concerned with ruling over people, not places. Unlike other kings Jesus rules people without borders. “My kingdom is not of this world.... my kingdom is from another place”, John 18:36.

John has written that Jesus (the Word or expression of God) was living long before everything else. Earlier than the start of everything else “In the beginning was the Word”, John 1:1. John has recorded Jesus as saying, “You (people) are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world”, John 8:23. The reign and the rule of Jesus are resourced from out of this world! They affect this world but they are not attributable to this world. The reign of Jesus offers heaven on earth! It overcomes this world by using other-than-worldly methods. Jesus’ kingdom may not suit mankind’s ideas, but it show us God’s idea! Jesus rules his people wherever they are. Christians can be godly even where it is godless! In spiritual wellies Christians can slosh around in the world’s mud, keeping clear of the mud itself.

From the two sayings of Jesus we have looked at we have learned that we should see below our surface guesswork to God’s real work. Remember, Jesus rules over certain people, not in certain places. His special people influence for him wherever they are.

⁵ D. A. Carson, The Gospel According to John (Leicester: IVP) 1991, p.594

The third speech is **John 18:37**. Pilate seizes on Jesus having a kingdom.

“You are a king then!” he says. Jesus replies: (I paraphrase verse 37) “King’ is your word, not mine, because you don’t understand what I mean by it. We are talking of two different things”.

In John 18:37 Jesus makes three clear statements:

1. **“For this reason I was born”**. This is the only clear reference to Jesus’ birth in the gospel of John. God was born as a man.
2. **“For this reason I came into the world”**. Many people leave this earth hoping to go to heaven. Jesus did the reverse! He left heaven and he came to this earth.
3. **“Everyone on the side of truth listens to me”**.

“For this reason I was born”. John 1:14 says, “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”. Jesus was born so that God could become a flesh and blood human being. God put skin on. The Creator himself became the outstanding special One in his own creation. Jesus stood out from everyone else. This man was stunningly God!

“For this reason I came into the world”. John 17:5 records Jesus as saying: “And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began”. It is as if he says: “I belong where I was; I don’t belong here”. “Before this world was, I was!” “I came here, Pilate, on a mission from my kingdom to the people of your world”.

Why was Jesus born? For God to engage on a saving mission. For people to be able to understand God, and especially enjoy his love for them.

“Everyone on the side of truth listens to me”. John likes to use the word, “truth”. “(Jesus) who came from the Father, full of grace *and truth*”, John 1:14. “For the law was given through Moses; grace *and truth* came through Jesus Christ”, John 1:17. “God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit *and truth*”, John 4:24. “Jesus answered, “I am the way and *the truth* and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me””, John 14:6.

Many times Jesus began his answers with the phrase, “I tell you *the truth*”.⁶ He told people, “You will know *the truth*, and *the truth* will set you free”, John 8:32. He said, “But when he, *the Spirit of truth* comes, he will guide you into all *truth*”, John 16:13.

God is truth. God knows the truth. God reveals truth. “The ultimate truth is the self-disclosure of God in his Son, who is the truth”.⁷ On this axis the whole of life turns. Those who *believe* this truth spoken by Jesus and who *receive* the truth who is Jesus himself, are born again into Jesus’ kingly reign. They leave the apparent world for the actual world. They exchange life’s reflection for life’s reality. All of this is God’s idea and God’s implementation. It is not man-made!

⁶ See John 1:51, 3:3, 3:5, 3:11, etc. Twenty-eight times in all.

⁷ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester: IVP) 1991, p.595.

Did Jesus invite Pilate to be converted with his last statement, “Everyone on the side of truth listens to me”? Whether he did or not Pilate turned his back on Jesus, John 10:38. He did not really want to know. We learn from this that those who don’t want to know are not forced! God is love. *Faith is never forced on to anyone.*

*The fourth saying is **John 19:11**.* Following Pilate’s offer the crowd choose Barabbas to be freed and Jesus to be crucified, John 18:40; 19:6; 19:15. Jesus is flogged to teach him a lesson, John 19:1. Such terrible flogging would take his strength from him. He could not even carry his own cross all the way to the execution site.⁸

Jesus would have been hurt by false homage jeered towards him. He would have bled from the barbs of the date palm fronds. He was not only rejected, but also ridiculed. The words spoken by the Roman perpetrators of the flogging were terribly true: “Hail, king of the Jews”, John 19:3. In John 1:49 Nathanael whole-heartedly recognised Jesus, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God. You are the King of Israel”. Here the Roman guards cold-heartedly dismiss him. They pretend to worship one they see merely as a deluded pretender.

In John 19:5 Pilate utters a shattering phrase without at all understanding what he is saying. “Here is the man”, in Latin “Ecce homo”. Pilate may have thought, “You Jews think this man is so dangerous you want him executed. Here he is bloodied, bruised, bowed, and surely beaten. Here is the man”. In

⁸ See Matthew 27:26-31; Mark 15:15-20. Matthew 27:32; Mark 15:21; John 19:17.

the deeper perspective this man Jesus was the Word made flesh – real flesh, unmistakably a human being. Here is God as man.

In 19:7 religion accuses God of blasphemy. God's Law is used against God!

This charge has been slowly surfacing throughout the gospel of John.⁹ A jittery Pilate questions Jesus again, drawing from Jesus our fourth and final statement in this passage:

“Jesus answered (Pilate), “You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above (where I come from)”, John 19:11. Behind Pilate's next decision – to send Jesus to die on a cross – Jesus recognises, and remembers, and respects even if he cannot rejoice in it, the hand of God. Unwittingly, Pilate's choice executes the will of God.

We learn that Jesus did not meet earthly power with power. He met it with proper perspective. It was as if Jesus thought: “This is not what it looks like to you, Pilate. God is still sovereign. I know that because I am God, not just the bloodied man you think I am.”

The phrase said to Pilate: “the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin”, John 19:11, could refer to Judas the betrayer or to Caiaphas the High Priest. To some extent Pilate is cornered by two men who were both calculating in their rejection of Jesus.

⁹ See John 5:18; John 8:58-59; John 10:33; etc.

So in John 19:13 and 19:16 Pilate judges the one to whom the judgement of the entire world has been entrusted by God himself.¹⁰ Yet we must remember it is never man's judgement of God that counts, but God's judgement of man. It is God's judgement of us that really matters.

Pilate said to the Jews, "Here is your king", John 19:14. Neither Pilate nor the people recognised the real Jesus. When the chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar", John 19:15, they did not only reject Jesus. They seemed to rule out any idea of a Messiah, "the betrayal of the nation by its own leadership".¹¹

We must never follow *any* human leadership without questioning. All people can go astray. Only Jesus, the God-man, deserves total obedience.

So what have we learned from these four sayings of Jesus in our Bible reading?

1. It is God's work and not guess work that shows us Jesus as the God who died for humankind.
2. Jesus rules people – not places, people who can cross over any earthly borders. It is God's way to use people. Weak people often exhibit God's strength.
3. Faith can be found by people, but it can never be forced on people. God lovingly respects all of the people he has made.

¹⁰ See John 5:22.

¹¹ D. A. Carson, The Gospel According to John (Leicester: IVP) 1991, p.606.

4. The way to meet earthly power is not with similar power, but with perspective. Always remember to look for what God is doing behind the things you can see.

Think about Jesus speaking to some Pharisees within everyone's hearing. He talked about the shepherd giving his life in the service of his sheep:

"...I lay down my life only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. *I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father*" John 10:17-18.

It was as if Jesus was thinking: "No, Pilate, you're not in charge. Not even Emperor Caesar is in charge. High priest Caiaphas was not in charge. Ex-disciple turned traitor Judas was never in charge. The baying mob does not rule, however loudly they shout, "Crucify him". No, Pilate. *I lay down my life*". Today we may say, "Democracy may choose by a vote, but it is still God's will that prevails". Power is from the Sovereign God above. In the crucifixion of Jesus God is ultimately removing the sin of the world. God becoming himself the sacrificial substitute to whom the entire Bible message

points.¹²

Can you believe it? Will you believe it? Do you believe it?

Believe Jesus and receive Jesus into your life right now.

¹² Including the animal skin in Eden; the Passover in Egypt; the sacrifices for atonement in the Temple; etc.

Faith is never forced. It is given by God. Accept it. The choice and its consequences are yours.

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