

Series: What Jesus Would Say

VBC

Pastor John Johnson

December 14-15, 2013

John 18:33-19:12

“The Bankruptcy of Secular Power”

In an article in the NY Times this week—“Have We Met?” Mark Hermann comes out of the closet to admit a condition he has suffered with all of his life—prosopagnosia

-the inability to identify faces

-apparently some five million people in the US suffer from this affliction

-meaning that outside of their own face, and maybe close loved ones

-it is hopeless when it comes to recognizing people

-so parties with lots of people and movies with a large cast of characters are huge challenges

-as is attending a large church and hoping to remember faces

There are times I know I suffer this—I will ask someone if they are new—and they graciously remind me I prayed over their marriage two weeks or dedicated their home yesterday

In John 18—Pilate failed to recognize the face of God—who stood right in front of him

-Pilate was a Roman governor—charged with maintaining order, carrying out the will of an empire led by an emperor who loved to be worshipped

-he was a man in the know—a man who can see—but before Jesus, he was blind

-and when we miss God—we start playing God

-in John 18, we are introduced to Pilate—read 18:28

Here are things to note in this story—

1. THE IRONY

-like most legalists—they strain out a gnat and swallow a camel (Mt 23:24)

-they will not enter a pagan’s quarters for fear of defilement

-but give no pause to sanctioning hate and murder

-they want to be ritually pure before the Passover meal

-but are okay with crucifying the *Lamb of God!*

2. THE DILEMMA

-they are obsessed with killing Jesus—but they know that their religious concerns will cut no ice with Pilate

-he could care less about Sabbath laws and religious codes

-they must convince Pilate just how dangerous Jesus is

-for only Rome has the authority to put men to death

-so they refashion their case in political terms—

-Jesus is a “doer of evil”—i.e. a terrorist leader with messianic notions inciting rebellion against Rome

- and Pilate will find himself in a dilemma—will he show courage or cave in?
- so in subsequent scenes (chapter 18-19)—Pilate must move outside to inside—front stage to back stage
- inside the governor’s headquarters—outside into the public square
- Jesus is inside and the crowd is outside—and Pilate shuttles back and forth like a mad diplomat
- like so many others in the book of John (Nicodemus, the lame man, the blind man)—Pilate will have to choose
- outside—he is not impressed with their charges
- inside—he wants to know if Jesus is a political threat—is He a king?
- he must probe—because his life has been about politics—and all politics is about establishing power and authority

3. *THE CONVERSATION*

A. the FIRST thing to note is that it that—for Pilate—it is about POSTURING—read 18:33-34

- Pilate makes it clear Jesus is on trial
- “YOU are king of the Jews?”
- as if to say—“Really! YOU—some pretender, some misfit from some backwater town in the north, with a band of weak kneed followers who have already scheduled out of town flights?”

- but the Interrogated flips the conversation
- puts the interrogator on trial—verse 34
- where did you get this idea? What is your source? Does this come out of your own curiosity?

- Pilate represents the empire—he is not used to being questioned—not used to being put on the stand
- so Pilate maneuvers to keep Jesus in His place—so he maintains the role of asking the questions—read verse 35

- Pilate wants to know what is behind this animosity—*that is messing up his Friday afternoon!!!*
- he’s trying to get out of town for Spring break—escape these colonized people

- his aides are gathering the evidence—
- Jesus had one misdemeanor—providing wine at a party—and He does have a reputation as a party goer of sorts
- threatened to take down the temple—perhaps with explosives—but then talked about a rebuild
- tried to pick up on a woman in Samaria—but it turned out to be rumor
- but He has hung out with prostitutes and other riff raff
- fed the 5000, but they did pick up the litter
- was pulled over at the Sheep Gate for healing the lame
- upset a man’s eternal rest by calling him back from the dead

-His sermons have really ticked the religious—especially the comment about “white washed tombs”

-He did call Herod a fox

-and He did talk a lot about some other kingdom

-which Jesus does again—read verse 36

-WHAT IS IT JESUS HAS DONE?

-He has introduced another kingdom

-but it is not the kind of kingdom Pilate can relate to—it's not out of this world—though it is FOR this world

a) it is not about the kind of power that dehumanizes—but the kind that makes one fully human

b) it is not coercive—it is compassionate—

-it is ruled by love—not oppression

-it liberates—it does not dominate

-it forgives—rather than condemns

-it is about humility—not egoism

c) therefore—it is not a political threat

-if Jesus came as a revolutionary on a mission to ostentatiously undercut the powerful, stockpile power, and seek for personal privilege—

-He would not have restrained His disciples at His arrest

-would not have fled when a crowd wanted to make Him their royal king

-would not have ridden into Jerusalem on a donkey and then took leave for a home in the suburbs

-would not have hung out with prostitutes and people with serious moral and medical issues—but with power people

-attended palace parties and hob knobbed with the rich and famous

-so political animal he is—Pilate must probe further—read verse 37

-Pilate believes he is getting to the bottom of things

-is getting Jesus to admit He is a king, a subversive one at that

-and Jesus admits to Pilate He is—born to be a King!!

-King of a subversive kingdom

-it works underground like seed—rather than above ground to impress people

-*its greatest weapons are not sword and chariot but word and prayer*

-its core characteristic is truth—rather than lies, false promises, and cheating

-telling people the truth about the nature of man

-the truth about what God requires

-the truth about man's need for a Savior

-it is a light that exposes darkness—uncovers hypocrisy

-but it is all too much for Pilate—read verse 38a

-Pilate terminates the conversation and walks away without waiting for a reply

-*here is the empire—so certain about everything—conceding it does not know anything about what matters most*

-the great irony is that the Truth is right in front of him—I am the way, the truth, the life
-but Pilate has a certain prosopagnosia—he cannot recognize its face

-the problem is—Pilate cannot walk away
-he tries to mollify, appease the crowd by having Jesus flogged
-but it is not enough—read verse 19:7-9

B. If the first thing to note about this conversation is that it is about POSTURING—
establishing authority...
-here's the second thing to note—it is about POSTURING—establishing authority

-Pilate still assume he has Jesus on trial—where are You from?
-he is asking what many have asked in John—cf 1:46; 7:27-29; 8:14; 9:29—and no one really knows for sure
-and Jesus will not answer Pilate—and Pilate cannot handle this—read verse 10

-so Pilate finds it finally necessary to assert himself
-remind Jesus—in case it has slipped His mind—that Jesus stands before the
greatest empire ever
-Jesus stands before rank and privilege
-Pilate is a representative of the world's only superpower—he controls the destinies
of men
“To ME—do You not speak! Do You not know I have the authority, the might, the
office to release You or crucify You?”

-this is what worldly power does

*“Power, whenever and wherever it can, will present itself as a totalizing system”—
Brueggemann*

-this is the wishful thinking of every empire—that it dominatesⁱⁱ

-but God has His way of intruding and shattering that claim and putting power in its
place—be it Egyptian Pharaohs or Persian Kings or Roman governors—read verse 11

-in one statement—Jesus exposed the world's power as a fraud
-what power and authority every mayor, every governor, every president, every one of us
have are what is given
-it does not come from what one has won or accomplished
-*God is the power of our being*

CONCLUSION

What is John using this conversation with Pilate, a world leader, to say to the church?

1. WE MUST ALL CHOOSE BETWEEN THE DEMANDS OF THE WORLD AND THE WILL OF GOD

-you can't live in the middle—play one against the other—have it both ways
-in almost every conversation in John—it ultimately is a confrontation

- a confrontation between God's kingdom and the world
- a confrontation between truth and falsehood
- and at some point—the reader must decide where he will stand
- and as Pilate shows us—indecision is ultimately to decide for the world

-but there is a bigger lesson here—for this is a story about POWER

2. WE MUST ALL CHOOSE BETWEEN BEING ENAMORED WITH POWER OR CAPTIVATED BY TRUTH

- in the halls of power—Jesus refused to go after power and status and privilege
- line up with governments or political parties or hobnob with kings
- His primary mission was to bear witness to truth—and this must be ours
- and here is what is true—it is faith, hope, and love that abide—not sex, money, and powerⁱⁱⁱ*

-Colson tells the story of two prominent cabinet members who once traveled with the President, and had their aides measure the proximity of their cabins to determine pecking order—ensure no one had more influence

-this is what power can do to us

- whenever we have sought to go after power to advance the kingdom—become entranced by power, moving into positions of influence at every level, education, corporate, political

- in almost every case—it comes at the price of accommodation

ⁱ Duke, Irony, 127-28

ⁱⁱ Brueggemann Truth speaks to power, 150

ⁱⁱⁱ Crouch, 274