

The Jews, the Judge, and the Robber

3 Witnesses to the Truth
of the King on Trial

John 18:28-19:16

Aaron Lee | Youth Worship | March 19, 2023

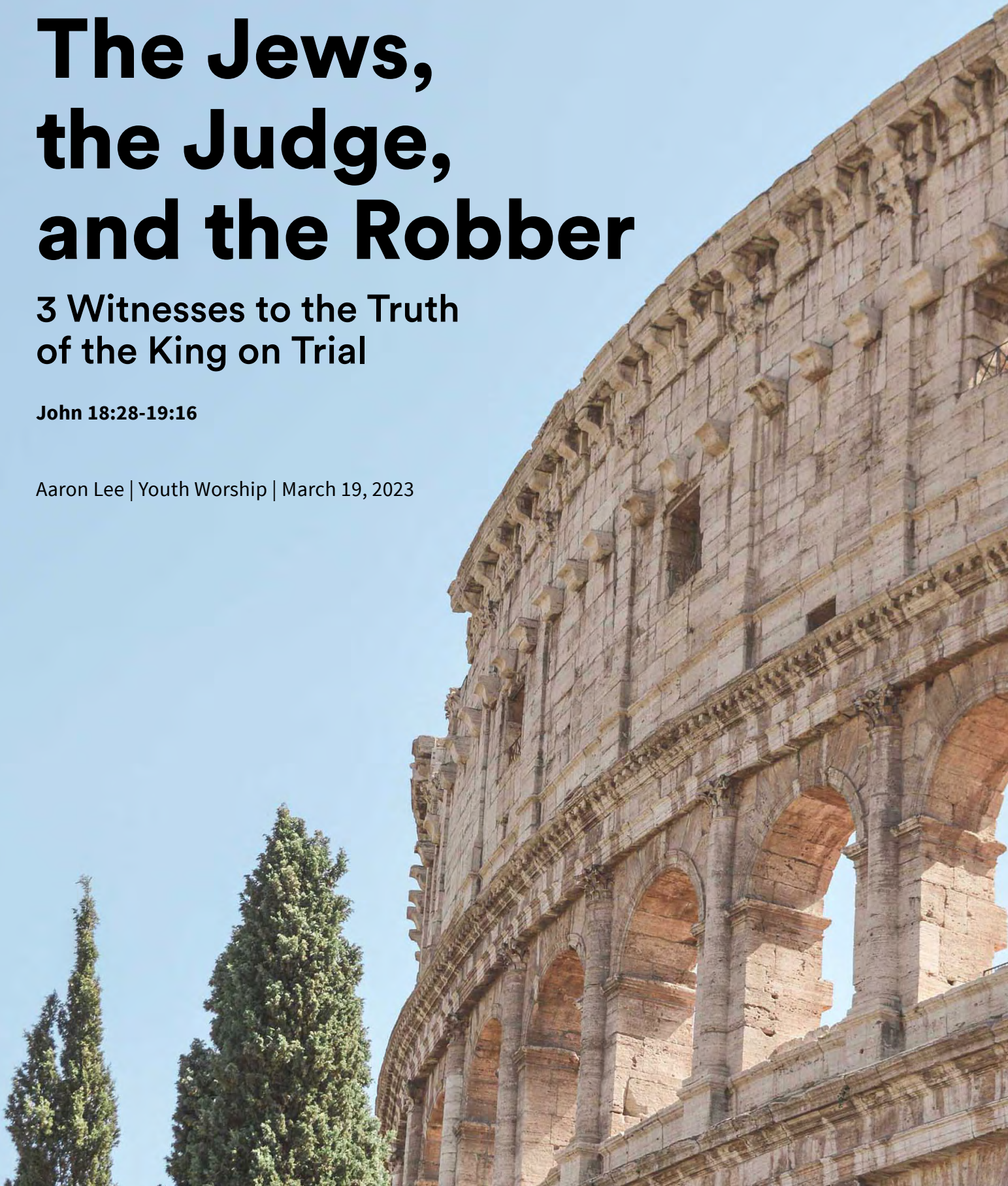


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Introduction

Is Jesus a mere man? This is the question at the heart of Christianity. When you behold him, who do you see? If he is a mere man, then we are all fools for believing in something fake. But what if he is who he says he is? What if he is the Son of God?

I was listening to an interview recently from an unbeliever. This person says he examined the Bible and some of its stories. But what he failed to address in the interview was the person of Jesus. If you miss Jesus, you miss the entire point of the Bible. You cannot truly tackle the Bible unless you take on Jesus Christ. In a way, we all place Jesus on trial to examine if what he says is true.

Context

John 18:28-19:16 is a dramatic section of Scripture, where Jesus is on trial. Jesus has been betrayed by his disciple Judas, arrested by some soldiers sent by the Pharisees, questioned by Caiphas the High Priest, and is now brought to Pontius Pilate – the governor. The Pharisees have had enough of Jesus, and they want to see him executed. Jesus had been calling God his father, making himself equal with God. This especially angered the Jews because Jesus had been claiming the authority that only God can have, by calling out their sin and turning over their traditions.

Sermon Preview

We're going to see three witnesses to the truth of the king on trial. Jesus is showing these three witnesses who he really is. From a narrative standpoint, our main character today is Pilate. He is the judge in our second point. Pilate has an encounter with Jesus, and he must confront the truth of who Jesus is. Pilate will have to make a decision on who he deems Christ to be. We'll spend the most time in our second point with Pilate today. But we're also going to look at some side characters — the Jewish crowd and a robber named Barabbas. We'll jump ahead in our passage to see the Gospel, and then we'll trace back in the text for the conclusion. Christ's glory is revealed as he is questioned during this trial. My goal is that you would see Jesus for who he really is today.



1. The Jews

Our first witnesses are the Jews. We'll start with the Jews because they help us set the stage. The Jews had been under the Roman government. They were allowed to follow their own cultural customs, but they also had to follow Roman rules. Roman rules prohibited the Jews from executing criminals. So the Jews rejected Jesus, their own kinsman, and gave him over to the Roman government. This crowd of Jews who had Jesus arrested want the government to get involved, so they go to the governor. Let's read what happens:

*Then they led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the governor's headquarters. It was early morning. **They themselves did not enter the governor's headquarters, so that they would not be defiled, but could eat the Passover.** So Pilate went outside to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?" They answered him, "If this man were not doing evil, we would not have delivered him over to you." Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law." The Jews said to him, "It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death." **This was to fulfill the word that Jesus had spoken to show by what kind of death he was going to die.** (John 18:28-32)*

We see that the Jews wanted to eat the Passover, so they did not enter the governor's headquarters. There is irony here. Entering the governor's headquarters would defile them because the governor was a gentile. The Jews think that they are clean and pure, but in their hearts they want to murder Jesus. It's almost as if they are so blind to their own sin, so hardened in their hearts, that they really believe they are doing the right thing. Their self-righteousness and pride had reached its peak.

Do you see the extent of your sin? Or are you ignorant of it, like the Jews? They thought the Messiah, their king, would look or act a certain way, and Jesus was not what they expected. They thought that they belonged to the Kingdom of God, but it was not theirs to claim. This whole ordeal of getting Christ to be crucified was actually ordained by God to fulfill prophecy. It was to show what kind of death he was going to die. Jesus made mention of this back in John 12:

***And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.** He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die. (John 12:32-33)*

This shows that king Jesus continues to be sovereign over the situation. In no point does Christ lose control over this chain of events. And it also shows that the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are willing to die to themselves. Unlike the Jews, will you acknowledge your sin, and will you look up to Jesus on the cross? The cross is supposed to be disgusting. The blood and gore, the nakedness and shame should cause you to look away. But Jesus says that his cross actually draws people to him. Do you find putting an end to your sin attractive? The Jews were so blind that they could not even begin to see their sin. We must be continually softening our heart to see where we've sinned. God wants us to grow in our sanctification. Holiness is not an option.

I want to give you some practical tips for fighting your sin. I'm actually a really anxious person. It helps me to have some verses to memorize at your disposal. One of my favorites is Proverbs 3:5-6. I meditate on these verses in my mind. I pray the verses to God. And I ask others to help me apply and be accountable.

I just gave you an easy example, but we should take extreme measures to eliminate our sin because it is dangerous and deadly. Work out your salvation with fear and trembling. God is holy, and he wants our hearts. Receive this warning from the Jewish crowd, and repent of your sins before your heart is hardened.

This is the truth that the Jews witnessed that day: Jesus is a king, but not one that the world would expect, and those who belong to the Kingdom of God are willing to admit their sin.



2. The Judge

Our second witness is the judge. The judge in our story is Pilate. Pilate is a governor. He's a Roman official who has been put in charge of the Jews. Remember, Roman rules prohibited the Jews from executing criminals – so the Jews bring Jesus to Pilate because they want him to officially charge Christ with a crime. The Roman government doesn't care if you claim to be the son of God. That's a religious matter. But what the Roman government does care about is if you claim to be a king. This would bring direct opposition to the Roman rule. It would be a threat to their power. Let's see how this plays out:

*So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?" Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?" Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world." Then Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice." **Pilate said to him, "What is truth?"** (John 19:33-38)*

Jesus does claim to be a king, but his kingdom is not of this world. This should not bother Pilate, but Pilate continues to probe. Jesus knows he is innocent of any wrongdoing towards the Roman government, and he talks about bearing witness to the truth. There is irony here. Jesus says that if you are of the truth, then you will listen to him. Pilate finds Jesus' statements absurd. Pilate dismissively asks Jesus, "What is truth?" In a way, Pilate was like a little king. And when he came face to face with the King of kings, he could not believe that this carpenter from Nazareth could know more than him. Pilate was a judge, the one who was supposed to find the truth of the matter at hand, and he says that he cannot know or claim to have the truth. This is the heart of the matter. Do you see Jesus for who he really is? The truth is a Person – Jesus, the Son of God. In our text today, the judge is judged by the King of kings because he fails to listen to the truth.

Do you listen to the truth? Do you listen to the voice of Jesus? Or do you dismiss it, like Pilate? Pilate is speaking to God himself, and he does not acknowledge it. The context dictates that I speak directly to unbelievers here:

Don't dismiss the truth. Listen to what I am saying. See that life is empty apart from Jesus. You will be judged, and you will be found guilty for all of the bad things you have done. You cannot earn your way to Heaven. Your grades will not save you. It does not matter who your friends or family are. Your wealth and health will not last forever. Come find forgiveness for your sins, and abundant, eternal life in Jesus Christ:

*Jesus said to him, "**I am the way, and the truth, and the life.** No one comes to the Father except through me. (John 14:6)*

Christians can also find something to chew on in our text today. It's easy for us to listen to the world. The world says that truth is subjective. The world says that the truth is relative. The world says that you can make your own truth. The world says that your sin is not so bad. Don't be swayed. Don't be fooled. You've heard preaching and teaching here at FCBC Walnut, and I urge you to "continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:14)

This is the truth that Pilate the judge witnessed that day: Jesus is the King of kings who will judge those that fail to listen to the truth.

Notice in the text that Pilate keeps going in and out from talking to the Jews and then talking to Jesus. He keeps going back and forth, almost to say like he cannot make up his mind. He's found himself pressed into a corner. He doesn't want to kill Jesus because he can't find any guilt in him. It's not a crime to say "I'm a king but I'm not a king of this world." But Pilate needs to calm down this crowd because they're quickly turning into a mob. He needs to regain control, so he offers an alternative.



3. The Robber

Our third and final witness is the robber. Pilate could release Jesus or release a robber. Pilate already found that Jesus didn't commit any true crimes. Surely the crowd would be happy to crucify a real criminal. There's not much that we know about Barabbas. Let's see what John says about him:

*After he had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, "I find no guilt in him. But you have a custom that I should release one man for you at the Passover. So do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?" **They cried out again, "Not this man, but Barabbas!"** Now Barabbas was a robber. (John 18:38-40)*

Barabbas was a robber. Other parts of the Bible say he was an insurrectionist and a murderer. He was not a petty thief; He was a dangerous criminal. There was a custom to release a prisoner during the Passover. Barabbas could be traded for Jesus. There is irony here. The name "Barabbas" has two potential meanings. It could mean "son of the father." This would be ironic, since the crowd traded the true Son of God for someone else. It could also mean "son of the rabbi." Again, still ironic because the crowd traded the true Teacher of Truth for someone else.

Do you find your life exchanged with Christ's? Do you know that you are a robber, like Barabbas? The Bible says that we are all robbers. We have all robbed God of his glory. There's an Old Testament passage, Malachi 3:8, that says that the nation of Israel had robbed God from his tithes and offerings. They had robbed God of what he was owed. We rob God of what he is owed every day. Our sin is not small. Our sin is sweeping.

The Good News is that your life of sin can be exchanged for the righteous life of Jesus Christ:

*For our sake **he made him to be sin who knew no sin**, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21)*

If you believe this, and repent from your sins, you will belong to God. You will be adopted into his family. I want to give some encouragement today to those who are Christians. Romans 8:1 says: "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

I've had many regrets in my life, many of them stemming from my own sin. Some that immediately come to mind are broken relationships, jealousy and selfishness, being a poor parent. I've felt the weight of my sin and it



has caused sleepless nights. I'm learning to repent, to trust God with my failures, and to be better moving forward. Jesus died for my sins. There is no condemnation.

No matter your sin struggle — depression, loneliness, jealousy, covetousness, anxiety, fear, anger, temptation — when you feel shackled by your sin, Jesus sets you free. Jesus did not object to his exchange with Barabbas. He did not cry out injustice or unfairness. It's almost as if Jesus wanted this to happen. He let this guilty man go free, and he does the same for you and me. Go and sin no more.

This is the truth that the robber Barabbas witnessed that day: Jesus is a king who exchanges your sinful life for his righteous life, and there is no condemnation for those who belong to him.

The Gospel

We've met our three witnesses. There are more characters we can profile, such as the soldiers who mocked Jesus or the disciples who went missing during this whole ordeal. But we will have to save that for another day. Let's get back to Pilate and Jesus:

*He entered his headquarters again and said to Jesus, "Where are you from?" But Jesus gave him no answer. So Pilate said to him, "You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?" Jesus answered him, "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin." **From then on Pilate sought to release him, but the Jews cried out, "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar."** So when Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Stone Pavement, and in Aramaic Gabbatha. Now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover. It was about the sixth hour. He said to the Jews, "Behold your King!" They cried out, "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 but Caesar." So he delivered him over to them to be crucified. (John 19:9-19:16)*

The Jews said that Pilate was no friend of Caesar's if he let Jesus go. Caesar was the emperor, so he was above Pilate in terms of rank. If Pilate was like a little king, Caesar would have been the big king. The irony is that Pilate

feared the wrong king. You see, Pilate was scared of losing his job. He might have even been scared of losing his life. But he failed to fear the one who causes kingdoms to rise and fall, and he failed to fear the one who gives and sustains all of life in this world. The rich young ruler was unable to let go of what he loved. Following Jesus will cost you everything. But the cost does not compare to the reward. Jesus told his disciples:

*“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. **For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.** For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? (Matthew 16:24-26)*

Pilate thought he was the one with authority. Jesus says that his authority had been given to him from above. In the same way, you might think that you are in control of your life. In reality, none of us can totally control our lives. From the day you are born, until the day you die, Jesus is the one with total authority over your life. And he controls everything in between. He is the true King, and he will judge the entire world in the end. Humble yourself and submit to him now. If you believe that Jesus is the Son of God, if you believe that he died for your sins, and if you believe that he resurrected again — you will be saved.

I titled our sermon The Jews, the Judge, and the Robber: 3 Witnesses to the Truth of the King on Trial. I chose the word “witness” because it means that they saw Jesus. They witnessed him and could testify about him. But just because they were really there with Jesus, it doesn’t mean that they saw what was really there with Jesus. You have the opportunity to see Jesus for who he really is. Come witness him for all that he’s worth. Hear him as I speak to you now: “My kingdom is not of this world. Take up your cross and follow me. I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?” If you have been moved by anything I’ve said today, come talk to me after the sermon so I can pray with you.



Big Idea

Let's recap the truths that we witnessed today in our text. We saw that Jesus is a king, but not one that the world would expect, and those who belong to the Kingdom of God are willing to admit their sin. We've seen that Jesus is the King of kings who will judge those that fail to listen to the truth. We've seen that Jesus is a king who exchanges your sinful life for his righteous life, and there is no condemnation for those who belong to him.

With all of that in mind, here is our big idea: Jesus is the King, but his kingdom is not of this world. He judges the world by his truth, and those who believe belong to him and his kingdom.

Application Questions

I gave you different applications throughout our sermon. I will do a quick summary in the form of application questions before our conclusion.

1. Do you see the extent of your sin and seek to eliminate it from your life?
2. Will you listen to the truth of Jesus and turn away from the world?
3. Have you found your life exchanged with Christ's and free from condemnation?

The Conclusion

Let's go back to the beginning again for our conclusion. I asked you: Is Jesus a mere man? This is the question at the heart of Christianity. When you behold him, who do you see? If he is a mere man, then we are all fools for believing in something fake. But what if he is who he says he is, this would impact your entire life. If Jesus is the Son of God, this changes everything. It should change your priorities and trajectories. It should change your hopes and dreams. It changes your entire purpose for living, and it changes the whole meaning of your life.

Let's go back and read John 19:1-8:

Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged him. And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head and arrayed him in a purple robe. They came up to him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and struck him with their hands. Pilate went out again and said to them, "See, I am bringing

*him out to you that you may know that I find no guilt in him.” So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. **Pilate said to them, “Behold the man!”** When the chief priests and the officers saw him, they cried out, “Crucify him, crucify him!” Pilate said to them, “Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no guilt in him.” The Jews answered him, “We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because **he has made himself the Son of God.**” When Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid. (John 19:1-8)*

This is the greatest irony. They dress Jesus up as a king, with a crown of thorns and a purple robe. Pilate tells the Jews: “Behold the man!” He does this mockingly. He does this while Jesus is in a way that says “Look at this man, is this your king?” And Jesus knows Pilate is putting on a show. But John shows us Pilate’s heart. John says that when the Jews say that Jesus has made himself the Son of God, Pilate was even more afraid. Pilate had feared that it might be true. There was a sense of being scared of the truth. Is Jesus a mere man? Pilate looked at his beaten body. Pilate looked at his bleeding face. Pilate looked at his blackened eyes. Is Jesus a mere man?

Our text today asks you the same question. Who do you see when you look at Jesus? Pilate said behold the man, but maybe there’s a different way to behold Jesus. Here’s a verse from the very beginning of Jesus’ public ministry, a proclamation by John the Baptist:

*The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “**Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!**” (John 1:29)*

Here at the end of Jesus’ ministry, you’re asked the same thing: to come and behold Jesus. It’s a beautiful bookend. Do you behold the man or the Lamb? We all put Jesus on trial to examine if what he says is true. And when you examine Christ, you won’t be able to escape from the truth. You’ll see his holiness and you’ll see your sin. Don’t dismiss him. Hold on to him, and you’ll find mercy and grace. Jesus really is the Son of God – the Lamb of God – who takes away the sin of the world. My prayer is that God would open your eyes, for if you behold Jesus in this way, you are blessed: Jesus is the King, but his kingdom is not of this world. He judges the world by his truth, and those who believe belong to him and his kingdom.



Behold Him as the Lamb!

There are three who saw the king
On trial as a man.
Come and witness, worship, and
Behold him as the lamb!

The Jewish crowd, the leaders who
Would want to see him killed.
May I not be blinded by
My sin and by the world.

The judge, the one who held the court
And could not see the truth.
Would you help me to believe
In Christ I cannot lose.

The robber, and a murderer—
A rebel was exchanged.
Teach me now to find my rest—
I'm set free from my chains.

There are three who saw the king
On trial as a man.
Come and witness, worship, and
Behold him as the lamb!

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