

SERMON INTRODUCTION: Today we continue our Questions that Jesus asked sermon series. We are also in the season of Lent coming into land at Easter. Jesus' question that we considered last week was **why did you strike me?** The context is that Jesus has been arrested and hauled in front of a make-shift Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was the religious ruling council based in Jerusalem. As Cat pointed out, this happened not at daytime as was the rules, but at night. Behind closed doors, Jesus was questioned by religious leaders including the former high priest Annas and the current high priest Caiaphas who was Annas' son-in-law. What we find is that the religious establishment and a family dynasty under Annas wielded a lot of power. And that they were willing to exercise that power in a way that furthered their cause and standing, whilst undermining the values they purported to uphold. Their reasoning was that the ends justified the means.

Thank goodness...

... I'm not like that lot back then!

...I'm not like that lot now in the halls and corridors and rooms of power!

...all my dealings with people and conversations about people are always in the light

...I never lash out

...I never use underhand methods or manipulate to get what I want.

...I always live by and uphold my values and convictions.

...on the rare occasion when I don't, I still uphold my superior values in a superior way to 'them'

I wonder if any of you can relate to that kind of thinking? I know I can.

I'm not saying that I am or you are Annas or Caiaphas or whichever ruler in whichever hall or corridor or room of power that comes to mind. But that tendency lurks in all of us does it not? But not in Jesus. Jesus is different. Cat highlighted this last week. What Jesus says and does in public and private matches. That's what he is saying in chapter 18 verse 20...²⁰ **'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...'**²³ **'If I said something wrong,' Jesus replied, 'testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?'**

With Jesus, we find that the means are just as important as the ends.

With Jesus we discover that *how* he saves is just as important as *why* he saves.

That is the story of the cross and Easter

In our passage today we move away from the temple **SHOW PIC** and the High Priest's house to the Palace of the Roman Governor. The Roman Governor's name is Pontius Pilate! And he resided in the old palace of Herod the Great.

As well as the religious power dynamics at play, we have the political and royal power dynamics playing out at a local, national and international level.

At the local and regional level we have the Herods. There are a few Herods mentioned in the Bible and it can be a bit confusing who is who. Unlike other previous kings of Israel or Judea, the Herods were appointed by the Roman Emperors and the senate.

The first Herod is often known as Herod the Great. In Matthew chapter 2 this Herod is recorded speaking with and trying to use the wise men to find Jesus. He is also recorded ordering the slaughter of infant boys in Bethlehem to prevent any rivalry and any of them becoming 'the king of the Jews'. Only Herod the great was given the title 'King of The Jews' by the powers that be in Rome. The following Herods were not given this official title.

The second Herod is often known as Herod Antipas or Herod the tetrarch. He is the son of Herod the Great and he shared his father's land with two brothers and a sister. All of this approved by the Roman Senate. This Herod (Herod junior) is recorded killing John the Baptist. It is this Herod that Jesus is sent to during his trials before his execution (Luke 23).

There is also another Herod. Herod Agrippa I. This is the grandson of Herod the Great. He is mentioned in Acts chapter 12. He is recorded executing apostle James.

As well as these local and regional kings, there were the Roman kings - the emperors! I think it's helpful having who came when in our heads. In the advent story we also hear that a census is taken. Who decrees it? Luke 2:1 **In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world.** **SHOW PICS...**

1: Augustus (Octavian) B.C. 24 – A.D. 14

2: Tiberius A.D. 14-37 who was Augustus' stepson

3: Caligula A.D. 37-41 who was Tiberius' stepson and nephew

So, at Jesus' birth Herod the Great and Emperor Augustus
At Jesus' death was Herod junior and Emperor Tiberius.
And the Roman governor of the Roman province of Judea at this time was Pontius Pilate. He was the 5th governor.

As well as the Gospels, Jewish Historian Josephus and Philosopher Philo of Alexandria (Egypt) attest to the tension and violence between the Jewish population and the Pilate's Roman Administration. One area of conflict was taxes – tax too high, squeeze the locals too hard, then there would be a backlash or rebellion. Tax too low or not get enough tax off the locals to send back to Rome, then Pilate's neck would be for the chop. Another area of tension and conflict was the Jewish Religion and rites, and the jurisdiction of the Temple. Roman intrusion or offence would be met with push back and uprising. If there was too much trouble from the Jewish people, the temple and worship and the festivals could be curtailed. For many this was an unholy alliance. For some it was beneficial.

It was Pilate's job to keep order and a profit for Rome. Historian Josephus records Pilate going too far, even by Roman standards (which is quite a thing), and being ordered to Rome to give account for his brutal suppression of a Samaritan uprising. Fortunately for Pilate, Emperor Tiberius died before he got to Rome. Nothing more is heard of him after this point.

So, there are all kinds of power dynamics and powerplays. The terms 'King', 'King of the Jews' and 'Kingdom' are absolutely loaded with all kinds of political and religious and meaning. So, who is the true king? What does their kingdom look like? Where does their power and authority come from and how is it exercised? These were and are really good questions.

The setting for Jesus' interaction with Pilate is not yet this...**SHOW PIC** that's part 2 in John chapter 19. It is this...**SHOW PIC** in the palace.

BIBLE: John 18:28-40

²⁸ Then the Jewish leaders took Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor. By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness they did not enter the palace, because they wanted to be able to eat the Passover. ²⁹ So Pilate came out to them and asked, 'What charges are you bringing against this man?'

³⁰ 'If he were not a criminal,' they replied, 'we would not have handed him over to you.'

³¹ Pilate said, ‘Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law.’

‘But we have no right to execute anyone,’ they objected. ³² This took place to fulfil what Jesus had said about the kind of death he was going to die.

³³ Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, ‘Are you the king of the Jews?’

³⁴ ‘Is that your own idea,’ Jesus asked, ‘or did others talk to you about me?’

³⁵ ‘Am I a Jew?’ Pilate replied. ‘Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What is it you have done?’

³⁶ Jesus said, ‘My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.’

³⁷ ‘You are a king, then!’ said Pilate.

Jesus answered, ‘You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.’

³⁸ ‘What is truth?’ retorted Pilate. With this he went out again to the Jews gathered there and said, ‘I find no basis for a charge against him. ³⁹ But it is your custom for me to release to you one prisoner at the time of the Passover. Do you want me to release “the king of the Jews”?’

⁴⁰ They shouted back, ‘No, not him! Give us Barabbas!’ Now Barabbas had taken part in an uprising.

There are quite a few questions in this passage - mainly from Pilate.

Pilate asks the religious leaders two questions...

V29 What charges are you bringing against this man?’

V39 Do you want me to release “the king of the Jews”?’

Pilate asks Jesus four questions

V33 ... ‘Are you the king of the Jews?’

V35 ‘Am I a Jew?’ ... ‘Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What is it you have done?’

And his final question to Jesus is **V38 What is truth?**

Jesus asks Pilate two questions in response to his question **are you the king of the Jews?...**^{V34} **Is that your own idea...or did others talk to you about me?**

Let's consider Pilate's first question to Jesus and Jesus' response.

³³ **Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, 'Are you the king of the Jews?'**

³⁴ **'Is that your own idea,' Jesus asked, 'or did others talk to you about me?'**

Once again, we see Jesus answering a question with a question. Jesus asks the questions to get at the heart of the matter and to get at Pilate's heart.

In essence Jesus is asking Pilate *why are you asking me that question? Is it for your sake? Is it for the religious leaders' sake? What are they after? What are you after? What do they mean when they say 'king of the Jews'? What do you mean when you use say 'King of the Jews'? Who are they saying I am? Who do you say I am?* Jesus is interested in Pilate and his thoughts. He is interested in yours and mine.

Jesus is asking the question *who am I?* and *how are you going to relate to me?*

Pilate goes on the defensive...³⁵ **'Am I a Jew?...Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What is it you have done?'**

And then Jesus ups the ante. ^{V36} **'My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.'**

And it seems that Pilate, on one level, is recognising something kingly about Jesus. These are remarkable claims that Jesus is making and Pilate isn't just brushing them off or saying 'rubbish!' ³⁷ **'You are a king, then!' said Pilate.**

Jesus answers... **'You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.'**

Jesus is saying quite a lot in these two sentences. Jesus is making an absolute truth claim and he's asking Pilate (in the midst of all the power dynamics, and tensions and forces) for his response. Jesus doesn't want Pilate's politically correct Roman answer or an answer to appease the make-shift Sanhedrin. Jesus is calling Pilate to respond personally. Pilate retorts...³⁸ **'What is truth?'** This is a really good question and worth pondering! However on this occasion, Pilate uses it as a deflection tactic to avoid dealing with Jesus' *who do you say I am?* question.

In this sermon series I've often repeated this...In the Gospels, Jesus is recorded being asked 183 questions, asking 307, and answering only 3 directly...instead, preferring to respond to people with quotes and stories from the Old Testament and with metaphors and analogies, parables and questions!

I now think that Jesus answers 4 questions directly and **What is truth?** Is one of them. In the Bible passage there is a pause and a gap between this question **What is truth?** and Pilate going back out to the religious leaders outside. The irony is thick here – these religious leaders who formed a kangaroo court in the darkness behind closed doors aren't coming into Pilate's house because they don't want to be contaminated by this pagan and unable to worship God cleanly in the temple.

How does Jesus respond in between, in the pause, eye to eye with Pilate? I think the painting on the screen helps. That's the answer is that Jesus responds to the question **What is truth** eye-to-eye in person. Not only is Jesus God incarnate and love incarnate, he is truth incarnate. Jesus is communicating with his silent eye-to-eye presence to Pilate what he spoke out aloud in John Chapter 14 verse 6. **I am the way the truth and the life.**

To conclude, I'm going to read a poem by Professor of the New Testament Don Carson. I've read this before. It's one of my favourite poems. It captures so well the point and claim that Jesus is God and love and truth incarnate.

I

I AM the way to God: I did not come
To light a path, to blaze a trail, that you
May simply follow in my tracks, pursue
My shadow like a prize that's cheaply won.
My life reveals the life of God, the sum
Of all he is and does. So how can you,
The sons of night, look on me and construe
My way as just the road for you to run?
My path takes in Gethsemane, the Cross,
And stark rejection draped in agony.
My way to God embraces utmost loss:
Your way to God is not my way, but me.
Each other path is dismal swamp, or fraud.
I stand alone: I am the way to God.

II
I AM the truth of God: I do not claim
I merely speak the truth, as though I were
A prophet (but no more), a channel, stirred
By Spirit power, of purely human frame.
Nor do I say that when I take his name
Upon my lips, my teaching cannot err
(Though that is true). A mere interpreter
I'm not, some prophet-voice of special fame.
In timeless reaches of eternity
The Triune God decided that the Word,
The self-expression of the Deity,
Would put on flesh and blood — and thus be heard.
The claim to speak the truth good men applaud.
I claim much more: I am the truth of God.

III
I AM the resurrection life. It's not
As though I merely bear life-giving drink,
A magic elixir which (men might think)
Is cheap because though lavish it's not bought.
The price of life was fully paid: I fought
With death and black despair; for I'm the drink
Of life. The resurrection morn's the link
Between my death and endless life long sought.
I am the firstborn from the dead; and by
My triumph, I deal death to lusts and hates.
My life I now extend to men, and ply
Them with the draught that ever satiates.
Religion's page with empty boasts is rife:
But I'm the resurrection and the life.
(D. A. Carson, The Gospel according to John, p492-93)

PRAY

SONG: Rejoice the Lord is King **CH4 449**

PRAYER, BENEDICTION & OFFER OF PRAYER MINISTRY, TEA & COFFEE

PHIL & BAND TO PLAY