(*I indicated last week that we might return to one or two important aspects of Jesus’ trial before Pilate because we really only dealt with the trial in summary form. So I have decided to do that with just this one part of the trial that we are about to read, because it has to do with the core message of John’s Gospel and it is very relevant for today. So let’s again read vv33-38a*.)

Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

Where do you find power today? Who are today’s powerful or influential people? President Trump? Vladimir Putin? Xi Jinping? Mark Zuckerburg? Pope Francis, perhaps? If you were asked to write down a list of movers and shakers in the world today, would you include **the church** in your list?

Now, I am pretty sure that the first response of most of you to that last question about the church of Christ being a mover and shaker in the world would probably be, um, well, that depends. And you would be right to respond that way because it really depends on what the questioner has in mind with the question.

And that brings us right into this exchange between Jesus and Pilate. You see, as we learned last week, the Jews presented Pilate with a formal charge against Jesus. Luke tells us that the charge was: “*We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that He Himself is Christ, a king*.” And we see in v33 that Pilate focused on the last part of the charge by asking Jesus is He was the King of the Jews. And in v34, Jesus’ first response was in the nature of, Well, that depends.

You see, if Pilate meant, ‘Are you a political king of the Jews who is a threat to Rome?” the answer was a clear ‘No,’ but if he meant, ‘Are you the Messianic King of Israel, promised in the OT?’ then the answer was, ‘Yes, but not in the way that most Jews think.’ So Jesus’ initial response to Pilate’s question amounted to: ‘Pilate, have you personally investigated my claims and are you wondering if I am the promised Messiah, or are you just repeating the common misconceptions of others?’ And it is clear from Pilate’s answer in v35 that he just wanted to know if what the Jews were saying about Jesus was true.

So having established what Pilate had in mind with his question, Jesus could now answer his question. And as we consider the to and fro between Jesus and Pilate, we are going to see that **Despite appearances Christ and His Church are the true power in the world today**.

You see, at that moment, Jesus couldn’t have looked any less like a powerful king than He did. He was under *arrest*, He was *bound*, He was *alone*, and He was *on trial*. And in a few minutes He would be *flogged*, He would have a *crown of thorns on His head*, He would be *stripped* and *dressed-up with a purple robe as a form of mocking*. And soon after that He would be *nailed to a cross and dying*. So He was not ticking any of the boxes of how we usually measure power and influence. But we are going to see from His answer that the kingdom of Jesus Christ is not about what you can see with your eyes but about what you believe in your heart. And we will see this as we think about the **origin** of Christ’s kingdom and the **power** of Christ’s kingdom. And congregation, get ready for some powerful encouragement and some liberating or freeing truth!

1. So we begin with the **origin** of Christ’s kingdom.
   1. And origin has to do with source or beginning location – *where* Jesus’ kingdom is from. And the way that Jesus explained the origin or the source of His kingdom was **negatively**; He said, “*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*.”
      1. One of the first things you associate with any earthly king worth his salt is servants or soldiers. So Jesus was calling on Pilate to look around and see the obvious – Jesus was alone; He had no servants or soldiers to do His bidding! In fact, a simple conversation with those who had arrested Jesus would have revealed that Jesus had just 11 men with Him when He was arrested, and when one of them whipped out a sword and sliced off an ear, Jesus healed the ear and told the disciple to put his sword away, and then those 11 men took off and abandoned Him. So Pilate had nothing to worry about in terms of Jesus being some sort of military threat.
      2. But notice that while Jesus was refuting the accusation that He was a worldly king, He was not denying being a king and having a kingdom. And Pilate understood this because after Jesus gave His reply, Pilate said, “*So you are a king?*” And this means **Jesus’ words were a *defense* and a *declaration***! Because Jesus knew that the Holy Spirit would cause these words to become part of the Bible, He was answering Pilate’s narrow question *and* preaching a powerful sermon. And His sermon was that the origin or source of His kingdom was Heaven. Jesus was not a king from the world; He was *The* King *from heaven*.
         * So He was not here for land or taxes or gold or privilege; He was here for souls.
         * He was here so that men and women and boys and girls would believe in Him and take hold of Him as Saviour and Lord.
         * He was here to establish His kingdom among all of the nations of the earth and eventually He would rule as King in the new heavens and the new earth.
      3. And this is why we read those **passages from the OT**:
         * Way back in Genesis, Jacob prophesied that the royal or kingly tribe would be the tribe of **Judah**. And Jesus was of the tribe of Judah!
         * And even before that, God had promised Abraham that **all of the nations on earth** would be blessed through one of His descendants. And Jesus was a son of Abraham.
         * And our Isaiah and Daniel readings are examples of OT prophecies that speak about God’s Messiah being **a king with an everlasting kingdom**.
         * But Isaiah also said that the coming King would be “**lifted up**,” and Jesus was about to be lifted up on the cross. And Isaiah also said that He would look so disfigured and beaten and lacking in majesty that people would turn their faces away from Him and despise Him and reject Him. And that is exactly how it was with Jesus in life and in death.
      4. So even though Jesus looked nothing like a king, He was ticking every single one of the OT kingly prophecy boxes! And that meant that the One who the Jewish leaders had just rejected was the King from heaven. And the One who Pilate was about to hand over for crucifixion was the King from heaven! **1 Cor. 2:8** says, “*None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory*.”
   2. And congregation, the fact that despite not looking look like a king, Jesus was the king from heaven is wonderfully liberating and encouraging news for us today. You see, King Jesus is in heaven right now. And the way that He reveals Himself to the world is through **the church**. It is in and through congregations like ours that Jesus Christ is building His kingdom.
      1. So what do people see when they look at us? They see the exact equivalent of how Jesus looked in Pilate’s eyes 2000 years ago – miserable, defeated, weak, ugly, torn, plain, ineffective, and unattractive.
      2. Think about it: What have we got to offer to people out there? Would anyone come in here and be impressed? And we know what impresses people today – gold, ceremony, hipness, lights, cameras, action, celebrities, programs, videos, lead singers, tear-jerking testimonies, and miracles. But we have none of that. It’s a plain old building, there is certainly no hipness in this pulpit, no celebrities, piano and organ and un-cool psalms and hymns, and just the preaching of the gospel of the forgiveness of sins in Jesus from Sunday to Sunday.
      3. And look at us – anyone willing to come up the front and offer themselves as an example of godliness? I didn’t think so. We have elders and deacons who are far from perfect, we have messy marriages, we have members who disagree with each other about theology or Christian living, we have professed lovers of Christ who participate in as little of church as is possible, and yet every week we call on people to believe in Jesus and to become members of the church! So what a tough sell, humanly speaking!
      4. But the church is the body or the bride of Jesus Christ. **1 Timothy 3** calls the church “*the household of God*” and “*the pillar and buttress of the truth*.” **Ephesians 2** calls the church “*a dwelling place for God by the Spirit*.” **1 John 1** explains that the church is where we enjoy fellowship with one another and “*with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ*.” And **Ephesians 4** tells us that it is in and through the church that believers are equipped for the work of ministry.
      5. Samuel Stone captured these twin realities in the hymn we shall sing after the sermon: The Church’s One Foundation:

*The church's one Foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord;  
she is His new creation, by water and the Word;  
from heav'n He came and sought her to be His holy bride;  
with His own blood He bought her, and for her life He died.*

*Tho' with a scornful wonder, men see her sore oppressed,  
by schisms rent asunder, by heresies distressed,  
yet saints their watch are keeping, their cry goes up, "How long?"  
And soon the night of weeping shall be the morn of song.*

*Mid toil and tribulation, and tumult of her war,  
she waits the consummation of peace for evermore;  
till with the vision glorious her longing eyes are blest,  
and the great church victorious shall be the church at rest.*

* + 1. Someone who was only half joking once said, “If you should find the perfect church, without one fault or smear, for goodness sake! don't join that church, you'd spoil the atmosphere.” And the point being made is that there are no perfect people, so if you put a bunch of them together there will be conflicts and flaws and pain.
    2. Now, none of this is to suggest that we should ever be satisfied with bad behaviour in the church of Christ. But in the same way that King Jesus was at work when He looked pathetic to human eyes, so, today, He builds His kingdom through congregations that look pathetic to human eyes.
    3. And if you understand this it will set you free to serve in the church *even when it is tough*. You see, the world says that you get things done only when everyone is happy and they are running at 100% efficiency and there is mutual respect between members and leaders and a shared vision and strategy. And the Apostle Paul fell into this way of thinking once also when he asked the Lord to take away his thorn in the flesh so that he could serve the Lord to his maximum potential. But the Lord said to Paul, “*My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness*.” So Paul said, “*Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong*.”
    4. So if we are a congregation of those who are committed and willing so long as we are happy and we agree and we feel loved and valued, there simply will not be much kingdom work done in and through us. But if we are a congregation of those who are content to endure weaknesses, insults, hardships, and calamities, for Christ’s sake, then get ready to see the power of Christ at work in and through us in ways that are immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine!

1. And that brings us, secondly and very briefly, to the **power** of Christ’s kingdom, which is what Jesus spoke about in the rest of His conversation with Pilate. For after Pilate said, “*So you are a king*,” Jesus replied, “*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*.” And then. Of course, Pilate delivered the line that has made him so infamous, “*What is truth?*” So here we see that the power of Christ’s kingdom is the truth.
   1. And while there are all sorts of philosophical and religious angles that we could helpfully probe and discuss, I want to keep this as simple as possible today by using one illustration, which I borrow from Rev. Kevin De Young.

*It is the analogy of the six blind men and the elephant. Have you heard that one before? It is told to disprove Christianity. It goes like this: There are six blind men touching an elephant, trying to figure out what it is that they are touching. One man touches the side of the animal and thinks it’s a wall. Another grabs the ear and thinks it’s a fan. Another touches the tail and thinks it must be a rope. And on they go, each grabbing a part of the elephant, without any one of them knowing what the thing they are touching really is.*

*And the point of that analogy is to show that when it comes to God we are all just blind men. We may know a part of god, at best, but we don’t really know who or what he is. So Christians are not more right than Buddhists or Hindus or Muslims. We are all just grasping in the dark, thinking we know more than we do.*

*Now, it is true that we are blind and we cannot know God by our own devices. But what if the elephant talks? What if he tells the blind men, “Hey guys, I am an elephant. That wall-like structure is my side, and that fan is really my ear, and that’s not a rope; it’s my tail. I am an elephant” You see, if the elephant were to say all this, then if the six blind men still refused to believe that what they were touching was an elephant, they would be fools!*

And it is the same with God. God wants us to know the truth about Himself and the way back into fellowship with Him. That is why He has given us the Bible. Or it is in the Bible that God says, “Hey guys, I exist and if you listen to Jesus you can know who I am and how you can enjoy fellowship with me.” For it is in the Bible that we read Jesus saying, “*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*.” And it is in the Bible that we are told that “*God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life*.” And this is the truth!

And Jesus’ last words in v37 are powerfully encouraging and liberating because He told us there that “*Everyone who is of the truth listens to [His] voice*.” We do not need to convince people that we are speaking the truth; we just need to proclaim the truth and the Holy Spirit will do the rest!

And in the same way that those blind men would have been fools to reject the truth about the elephant, Pilate was also a fool for rejecting the truth about God in Jesus. But how about you? You have heard the truth today. Don’t foolishly reject Jesus. Instead, believe and become a part of the kingdom that is the true power in the world today. Amen.