

Last week, we had talked about Jesus standing before Herod, and we heard at that time that Herod had tried to use Jesus for his own purposes, for his own personal gain. But in this week, we are now faced with the last of Jesus's trials. He has stood before Caiaphas. He has stood before Herod. And now he stands before Pilate.

And Pilate, for his part, wants to figure out what exactly is going on, to figure out what exactly the accusation against Jesus is. That's why we hear in John 18 verses 33 and 34: "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?'" So Pilate wants to know: are you, in fact, a king? Are you, in fact, what they say you are? Is this the accusation that your own people have brought against you? But Jesus answers his question by asking Pilate a different question. Basically what his question is: "What do you mean, Pilate? Do you say this of your own accord, or did others tell this to you? What do you mean when you say, 'Are you the king of the Jews?'" Because there's really only two possible answers here. One is the answer that comes from faith, a genuine belief, a genuine longing for the King of Kings. Are you the king of the Jews? Are you the one who has come to us, the one who is been promised to us? The king, to use the language of John, who comes from above? The king who comes from heaven? Or, in another way we can understand the question, did others tell you to say this? Are you only going by what you've heard? Are you only going in an earthly sense? That I am a king who comes from below and is no different than any other king that has ever lived or ever will live? What exactly do you mean, Pilate, by this question: "Are you the king of the Jews?"

And Christians, I think it's a question that we need to ask ourselves, to be honest with ourselves. What do we mean when we say things about Jesus? When we say that Jesus is Lord, for example, or we say that Jesus is God, or that he is the king, do you say these things of your own accord, or do you say them because you've heard others say it about him? Something that you've heard time and time again from other people, so you know that it's the right answer, but it's not a question which flows forth from our faith. And there's a real easy way to figure out which one it is, Christians, to test ourselves in this regard. When we think about whatever we say about Jesus--that he is king, that he is God, whatever it may be--does that make a difference in your lives? Does that change the way that you live? So that knowing that God is king, for example, that Jesus is Lord, means that we will live as God's new creations. That we will be different in the way that we think, in the way that we speak, in the way that we act than all the rest of the world. If someone came up to you who didn't know you, would they be able to tell that you are a Christian by the way that you act or interact with them? If they can't do it, we have to ask ourselves, why? If there is no difference between us and the way that we think and the way that we act being creations of God and the way that the world acts and thinks, we have to ask ourselves, why is that the case? Because if we think and act like the world, then Jesus comes to us and calls for us to repent, to turn away from that, to be different from the world. Because the Holy Spirit has made you a new creation. We are no longer enslaved to sin. And these things that we say about Jesus will actually make a difference in our lives.

But Pilate, for his part, rejects the question. This is what he goes on to say in verse 35 and 36: "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." So Pilate doesn't want anything to do with it. He says: "Am I a Jew? Am I part of your nation? Am I part of your religion? Of course not. I am a good Roman, and I will believe good Roman things. I want nothing to do with your people or the things that you say. But are you in fact a king? Are you or are you not what they say about you?" This is why Jesus answers the way that he does. He says: "Yes, I am a king, basically, but I'm not a king in the way that you think that I am a king. My kingdom is not the kind of kingdom that you would expect from something in the world. My kingdom is not of the world. It is something totally different." Jesus is not a king, for example, the way that the Romans ruled over their empire. Jesus is not a king, for example, the way that the Jews wanted him to be a king. Jesus is not a king the way that we have our laws in our nation. Jesus's kingdom is something totally different, something not of this world, something which comes from above. And that's why his followers don't have to fight for him, because even death is not going to stop this kingdom. If he were an earthly king, his death would mean the end of it all. That would be the end of their hope. But because he is a king who comes from above, not even death will be able to stop it. It is a kingdom which will endure forever.

Because we want understand what Jesus is saying here, Christians, when he says that my kingdom is not of the world. My kingdom is not from the world. He doesn't mean that "my kingdom is something invisible far out there somewhere, just kind of floating out in space." He doesn't mean that "my kingdom exists only in our hearts like a moral kingdom." It's not something that is just kind of out there in the world and then the world is all around it. Jesus's kingdom comes from above. Jesus's kingdom is the kingdom over all things. Jesus is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, the one who is in all control and all authority, because his kingdom comes from above. It's like we hear in Matthew chapter 28. Jesus says, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." All earthly authority belongs to Jesus, because he is the Lord of all things. Or it's like Paul says: "At the name of Jesus, every knee shall bow." Every knee, not just some knees. "Every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father." So in other words, Jesus is the King that all people will acknowledge as the king either now in faith, when we acknowledge him as our king, the one who rules over us, or on the last day, when all people will kneel before him and acknowledge that he is the eternal Lord of Lords to their everlasting shame. Jesus rules, Christians, over an everlasting kingdom, one that will never pass away.

And so when we're faced with all of the troubles that we have going on right now, all of the struggles in our nation, all of the evil which we are facing, we don't have to be afraid or wonder: what's going to happen to the kingdom? Is it all going to come crumbling down? Do we need to do something different? What should we do? No, we don't have to be afraid, because Jesus is the King. And nothing changes that fact. Nothing can ever get in the way of that truth. All things are subject to him and will be put under his feet. And even the evils which we see in our nation will be brought to an end, and all the evildoers will acknowledge either in faith now or to their shame later that Jesus is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. So we can trust him, Christians, because he is in control.

But Pilate doesn't get that, does he? He goes on to say in verse 37: "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?' After he had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, 'I find no guilt in him.'" Pilate doesn't understand. He can't understand. Jesus has told him a heavenly reality. Pilate has not been born again. Pilate has not been born from above. There's no way he's going to understand what Jesus is saying. But he latches on to the one thing that he thinks he understands: "So you are a king?" By which he means a king in an earthly sense, a king like every other king in the history of the world. Is this what you mean by everything that you just said? This is why Jesus says, "You have said so. Those are your words, not mine. But I have come into the world for this reason, Pilate, to bear witness to the truth. And whoever listens to the truth, whoever is of the truth listens to my voice." We should hear there a kind of invitation that Jesus is extending to Pilate. He is giving him an opportunity. He's basically saying to him: "I speak the truth, and whoever listens to the truth listens to my voice. So will you, Pilate, listen to me? Will you listen to what I have to say, to turn towards me in sincere repentance and call on my name so that you might be saved?" But Pilate doesn't want anything to do with it. He says, "What is truth? Forget that. I don't want to hear anything about it." That's why he turns away without even waiting to listen to anything else that Jesus has to say, because he has rejected the Lord and rejected everything that Jesus has come to bring.

But Christians let me ask you this, something else that we need to think about this evening. Jesus is the King. We recognize that. And what Jesus says is the truth. We also recognize that. But the question we have to ask ourselves is, will we listen to Jesus in everything, or will we turn away from him in some things and not want to listen to his voice? That could happen very straightforwardly, very overtly, if someone were to say: "I don't believe what the Bible has to say about this or that. I don't believe that this is right. I think this is outdated, that this is bigoted," whatever they might throw at it. And then they might even say, "But I still consider myself to be a Christian." That would be a very overt, obvious example of not listening to what Jesus has to say. But that can happen also in a more subtle way. Do we try to listen to what Jesus says in one thing, but then we don't really pay attention as closely in something else? Let me use some examples so you know what I mean here. Do we drive a wedge, for example, between what we believe as Christians, between what we do on Sunday morning, and how we live as Americans? Do we think that church is one thing, and what we believe politically is something else? But Christians, if Jesus is speaking the truth, we don't stop being Christians when we go to the polls. We don't stop being Christians when it comes to living in society. We are called to listen to him in everything, regardless of what that might mean. Let me use another example. Maybe we speak up against the sin of homosexuality, saying that it is something that is contrary to the will of God for marriage, that it is something that he has never intended for marriage to be. And that would be right. That's what we should say. This is part of God's Word. But then will we listen to what he has to say about other sins connected to marriage? To listen to what he has to say about divorce, for example, or adultery? Do we kind of give those things a pass, because they're not like that other thing? Are we willing to listen to God in one thing but not another? Or let me use one more example. When we're dealing with the issue facing our nation regarding transgenderism, this idea that our identity is fluid, that what separates us as male and female is really just kind of a choice, that we can go between one or the other. And we might say that's against what God intends for us as male and female. God has made us who we are, and we would be right to say so. But are we going to listen to him in that and then ignore what he has to say

about other things that he says about being male and female? About the order, for example, that exists within marriage or that exists within society? Are we going to listen to him in one thing but not another?

But Christians, we might not do this intentionally. Maybe we are simply giving in to some things from the culture around us. I get it. It's hard sometimes to be consistent when it comes to some of these things. But God calls for us to be consistent. God calls for us to listen to him in everything. Because if Jesus is King, he's not just king over here. He is king over all things, over everything that we say and we think and we do.

So yes, let us listen to him, to pay attention to his voice. Listen to what he has to say, because it's meant for our good. We have become a new creation through him and through the working of the Holy Spirit. And he says all of these things to bring us closer to himself. Listen to him, Christians, because he is your king who has redeemed you forever.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, you have sent us your Son Jesus Christ to reign over all things. We pray that you would help us to see his reign in everything and to listen to his voice in everything, so that we may follow him in all our days. In his name we pray. Amen.