

WHO ARE YOU?

John 18:33-37 Text vs. 33 *"Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, 'Are you the king of the Jews?'"*

Today, we are looking into an intense moment in the Gospel of John when Jesus, after being arrested, stood before Pilate the Roman governor of Judaea. It is a powerful testament to the nature of Jesus' kingship and His mission on earth. Pilate wanted to release Jesus. But the Jews shouted, *"If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar's friend. Whoever makes himself a king, speaks against Caesar."* And when Pilate heard that, *"he asked Jesus, 'Are you the king of the Jews?' 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.' 'You are a king, then!' Pilate said. Jesus answered, 'You say that I am a king.'"*

Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judaea for 10 years, served under the Roman Emperor Tiberius. He is most famously known for presiding over the trial of Jesus and ordering Jesus' crucifixion. His role in the trial of Jesus is noted in the *Apostles' Creed*, which we just recited a while ago saying, *"He suffered under Pontius Pilate"*, and in the *Nicene Creed* we recite every time we observe the Lord's Supper and say, *"He was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate."*

Pilate's governance was marked by tension and conflict within the Jewish population. Quite often he offended the Jews' religious feelings due to his actions. History tells us he was eventually removed from office and sent back to Rome to answer for his actions. And his question to Jesus showed a misunderstanding of Jesus' true nature. *"Are you the king of the Jews?"* Pilate, representing earthly power, questioned Jesus about His kingship. But Jesus' answer introduced a radically different view of authority. Jesus' kingdom is not of this world. It is a spiritual realm where power is love, Truth, and sacrifice. Pilate was thinking in terms of earthly power where power is political, and military might. However, Jesus' response to Pilate took the conversation to a higher plane when He spoke of a kingdom *"not of this world."* That showed a spiritual reign goes far beyond earthly politics and power. Jesus' kingdom is Truth and spiritual authority unlike any earthly kingdom. Earthly kingdoms are maintained through force and conflict. Look at Russia. Iran. China. North Korea. Many earthly kingdoms throughout history have relied on force and conflict to maintain power and control that often involves military strength, political maneuvering, and sometimes even oppression to keep order and suppress dissent. That's happening in Ukraine right now! The use of force creates a cycle of violence and instability, as those in power seek to defend their position against internal and external threats. His statement, *"My kingdom is not of this world,"* challenges us to re-think *our* understanding of power and authority and to recognize the transforming power of God's love and Truth in our own lives. Our lesson today invites us to re-evaluate just how we view leadership and influence. We're watching that right now in our own country. Leadership and influence in the United States are shaped by a variety of factors that include political power, economic resources, and social movements. Political leaders, such as the President, members of Congress, and state governors play significant roles in shaping policies and decisions that affect our nation. True authority, however, as demonstrated by Jesus, is not about dominance or terror. It's about serving others. It's standing for Truth. It means using honesty and compassion, instead of control and force. Even in the face of adversity, authority calls for leadership by example. Inspire through actions. Give priority to the well-being of others. If we do that, we can transform our communities and personal relationships to where genuine respect and mutual support for others thrives. Mahatma Gandhi's Nonviolent Resistance led India to independence through nonviolent civil disobedience. His approach to peace and conflict resolution inspired countless movements throughout the world by emphasizing the power of peaceful protest. And Martin Luther King Jr. who led the Civil Rights Movement in the United States and fought against racial segregation and discrimination had a *"dream"* . . . a dream of a nation *"where one day people are judged by the content of their character rather than the color of their skin."* That led to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which stands now as a testament to the pursuit of justice. King's legacy continues to inspire movements for justice and equality worldwide. His commitment to nonviolence and his powerful oratory skills made him a symbol of hope and change. Mother Teresa dedicated her life to serving the poor and sick in Kolkata, India. Her unselfish acts of kindness and unwavering commitment to helping those in need demonstrated righteousness in action. Those individuals and movements represented that the teachings of Jesus *do* make a big impact on society. When Jesus said He came to *"testify to the Truth,"* He was pointing out His mission was to reveal God's Truth to humanity, which is God's love, justice, mercy. And the path to our salvation! Jesus' life, His teachings, and His sacrifice were all aimed at demonstrating and proclaiming this. "Truth" in John 18:37 is where Jesus told Pilate, *"For this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the Truth. Everyone on the side of Truth listens to me."* That statement means those who seek and hold to the Truth recognize, that when they follow Jesus' teachings and are *Testifying to the Truth* they are living in accordance with God's laws by sharing the message of Jesus' love and redemption. Standing firm in faith. Even in the face of challenges, it's about standing for the values of God's kingdom. It's being a witness to His power in your life. Throughout His life, Jesus continuously revealed the Truth about God's love, justice, and mercy. His teachings. His miracles. And ultimately His sacrifice on the cross all testify to the Truth of God's redemptive plan for humanity. Believers are called to live in a way that reflects God's saving work. This includes loving others. Seeking justice. And walking in humility and obedience to God's will. By holding and sharing these Truths, Christians testify to the power of God's redemptive plan for humanity. It's a message of Hope, love, and eternal life that continues to

affect lives around the world. And in this time of uncertainty and change, Hope is the Light that guides us through the darkness. In moments of despair, Hope can be the anchor that steadies us. Reminding us, that no matter how difficult the present may seem, there is always a possibility for change and improvement. It is the unwavering belief that better days are ahead. No matter how difficult the present may seem, there is always a reason to keep moving forward. For many, faith is a source of great Hope. Faith reassures us that we are not alone. That a Higher Power is watching over us. And that can provide comfort and strength reminding us that there is a greater plan at work. Even when we can't see it. Despite the trials we face, the strength and kindness of people around us can be a powerful source of Hope. Acts of compassion. Generosity. And kindness. They remind us, goodness still exists in the world. When we come together to support one another, we create a community of Hope that can overcome any obstacle. And we need to have *Hope in Ourselves*. Each one of us must have an inner strength we can draw upon in times of need that allows us to face challenges with courage and determination. By setting goals and working towards them, we can create a future filled with possibilities. A future that goes far beyond earthly politics and power, because the future is unwritten! Charles Dickens opening lines in *A Tale of Two Cities* *"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the time of belief, it was the time of disbelief, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of Hope, it was the winter of despair."* That could have been written for our time! Some things have made it the worst of times. Wars. Street violence. Disease pandemics. Yet, amid the hardships and heartaches, we've witnessed the best – of courage, of community and of compassion. We've lived in the best of times! From scientists who've developed vaccines in record times, there's no shortage of what's possible when we focus our attention on how we can improve our circumstances rather than complain about it. Yes, our time holds endless opportunities for growth and change. Embracing Hope means looking forward with optimism. Having a willingness to embrace new beginnings. It's the belief that in every ending, there is a new start. And that the best is yet to come! Hope is a powerful force that can transform lives and the world around us. It inspires us to keep on. To dream. To believe in the possibility of a brighter tomorrow. Hold onto Hope! Grow it. Share it with others. For in doing so, you become a beacon of light to a world that needs it desperately. Are you filled with the Truth that Jesus represents? Do you listen to His voice and follow His teachings? In a world often filled with confusion and falsehood, Jesus offers a clear and unwavering standard of Truth. Our challenge is this to live in accordance with His Truth. Allow it to shape our actions. Our decisions. And our relationships. Remember, Jesus' kingship is not about earthly power. It's about the transforming power of Truth and Love. His kingdom is one of peace, justice, and righteousness. May we all strive to be faithful citizens in His kingdom. Listening to His voice. Living out His Truth in our daily lives. Because, being faithful citizens of God's kingdom means, living in a way that reflects the values and teachings of Jesus Christ. And being part of a faith community, a church, is essential to that. It provides you with support, encouragement, and responsibility. Having fellowship with other believers helps you grow in your faith and stay committed on your spiritual journey. Jesus taught us to forgive others as we have been forgiven. That means, let go of grudges. Seek reconciliation. Encourage peace in your relationships. Because Jesus said, *"Everyone on the side of Truth listens to Me."* By standing for these principles, and listening to Jesus, if someone would ask you today, "Who are you?" You can say, "I am a faithful citizen in God's kingdom!" AMEN

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we thank You for the gift of Your Son, Jesus Christ, who came to testify to the Truth. Help us to listen and accept His teachings and live according to His example. May Your Truth guide us in all that we do, and may we be faithful witnesses to Your love and grace. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.