

# Lent 2024 – Behold the Hidden Glory of the Cross

## *"It Is Hidden in the Savior's Rejection by the World"*

Text: John 18:33 – 19:1

*A Lamb goes uncomplaining forth, the guilt of all men bearing;  
And laden with the sins of earth, none else the burden sharing.  
Goes patient on, grows weak and faint, to slaughter led without complaint,  
That spotless life to offer;  
Bears shame, and stripes, and wounds and death, anguish and mockery, and saith,  
"Willing all this I suffer." (TLH 142)*

Dear Fellow Christians:

The theme for our meditations this Lenten season is *"The Hidden Glory of the Cross."* This evening we examine how the glory of the cross is hidden by the rejection of those who opposed Jesus. Yet to fully understand this opposition we need to separate Jesus' enemies into two very different and distinct groups – the world and "his own." This evening we first explore *the glory of the cross hidden in the Savior's rejection by the world.* The text that will form the basis for our meditation is found in the 18<sup>th</sup> Chapter of John's Gospel:

**ESV(John 18:33-19:1) So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" <sup>34</sup> Jesus answered, "Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?" <sup>35</sup> Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?" <sup>36</sup> 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." <sup>37</sup> 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." <sup>38</sup> 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. <sup>39</sup> 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?" <sup>40</sup> They cried out again, "Not this man, but Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a robber. Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged him.**

This is God's Word. Confident that our God will bless us through the study of these his own words, so we pray, **"Sanctify us by the truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

Jesus, again, had two very distinct categories of enemies: his own people (represented by the Jewish leaders like the scribes, Pharisees, and elders) and the world, represented in our text for this evening by the Roman governor Pontius Pilate. Before you slouch into "spectator mode," remember that according to your old Adam you have some of each within you. You are both "one of his own" and "of the world." You therefore face both internal and external dangers, and this evening our goal is to honestly evaluate just how much Pontius Pilate there is in each of us.

Objectively, as the world sees things, it would be hard to imagine a more pathetic spectacle than Jesus, the King of kings, as he stood before Pilate. His claim was that he was God incarnate – God in human form. Yet not one human being befriends him. No speaks up in his defense. Not a single individual will even admit to being one of his followers or in any way allied with him.

Contrast that view with the fact that Jesus stands under the control of a petty official of the Roman government. In this scenario, Pilate, the petty Roman official, actually serves as the representative and spokesman for the entire secular world, including also therefore the sinful flesh of each of us.

Unlike Jesus' own people, Pilate views and judges Jesus with the eyes of human reason. While Jesus' Jewish enemies demonstrated a total disregard for justice and honesty, Pilate, at least initially, seemed to want justice, and justice based on honesty. Yet as the world works, honesty and justice are always first weighed on the scale of "what's in it for me" and "will this be good or bad for me – something positive or some negative."

Pilate's initial search for honesty and justice ran into the bridge abutment of his love of position, power, and convenience. We know that to be true based on his own words: "***I find no fault in this man, and neither did Herod.***" That was truth. That was justice. Yet the moment Pilate realized that applying truth and justice would *cost* him something, he decided to have Jesus flogged.

Understand that not only was this neither honest nor just, flogging itself was a barbaric punishment that often resulted in death. So why the dramatic change? How could Pilate go from "***I find no fault in this man***" to first flogging and then crucifying him? It all comes back to Pilate's rhetorical question, "***What is truth?***"

Pilate wasn't looking for an answer because he didn't believe there *was* an answer. He certainly didn't want any truth from this impotent, self-proclaimed "King of truth" whose stated purpose for coming into the world was to "***bear witness to the truth.***" Understand this about Pilate, about the world around you, and therefore also about your own sinful flesh: *there is no truth, there is only me.* There is only my will, my goals, my desires, my ambitions. Everything that gets in the way of those goals must be rejected as false and unjust. Pilate didn't even want to consider the idea that there was such a thing as objective truth outside of himself and his own needs and desires.

Does this sound familiar? It should. You find a wallet on the sidewalk or the bank records a withdrawal as a deposit. What is the truth in that situation? That money is not yours, and to keep it would be stealing. What do you *want* the truth to be? Are you tempted to manufacture your own truth to align with your own personal desires?

The basic, underlying truth that Pilate, as representative of the rest of the world, refuses to even consider is that the entire mass of humanity is thoroughly corrupt from conception. That's the truth that every human being should see when they look into the mirror of God's law. But they don't. They won't. They can't. It's all just too... negative, too depressing, too irritating. It flies in the face of our own self-love that even at our very best we deserve nothing but hard times on earth and eternal punishment in hell. There is, in fact, a great irony here. We are by nature so sinful, so depraved, that we cannot stand to be told the truth of just how sinful and depraved we are.

Yet there's even more here. The truth that Jesus came into our world to proclaim was not only the declaration that we are all corrupt and condemned, but that he himself is the only solution; that he is the One who came to pay our debt of sin. He came to rescue us from ourselves. Yet we are by nature so thoroughly corrupt that we don't even want to hear *that* truth. Our sinful flesh actually *hates to hear* that the only solution for our sin problem is God's grace through faith alone in Jesus Christ.

The "truth" that the world (including Pilate) would have readily accepted is actually the lie that lies at the heart of every man-made religion – that human beings just need to do the best they can and all will be well. Pilate would have eagerly embraced that "truth" from Jesus. In fact, if Jesus had proclaimed *that* message, no one on earth would have called for his crucifixion. Think about that. Had Jesus simply declared the default "truth" of every damned sinner ("*I'm okay and you're okay*") he would have been universally loved and accepted. Had he offered free food and free health care, the world would have flocked to him adoringly. But free salvation through faith alone? Never. Away with him! Crucify him! In fact, give us Barabbas instead – a known thief and murderer.

Recognize your role in our text as that of Pontius Pilate. Recognize your own temptation to dismiss any truth that condemns, inhibits, or frustrates. We are fine with the truth that condemns sin in

others, even while we struggle to find justification for our own sin. People shouldn't commit sexual sins, but my situation is somehow different. Times have changed. People shouldn't hold grudges or gossip, but in this case you've just *got* to hear what he did to me. People shouldn't be prideful or arrogant, but let's face it, I actually *am* a better person than most.

Even the pronouncement of absolution in our church services can get tainted by our sinful flesh. God's truth is that he has forgiven our sins solely because of the goodness of Jesus Christ, without any "*merit or worthiness in me.*" That's God's truth, but our sinful flesh bristles at that truth, that divine reality. It imagines that there is something better or nobler in us because we believe in Jesus and try to do what he wants us to do. We aren't like the world. We are better than that.

For all of this, and so much more, we stand before our God with heads bowed, as did the tax collector in the temple, imploring only, "*God be merciful to me, the sinner.*"

This is the true glory of the cross. Jesus did all, provided all, every single aspect of our forgiveness and redemption. We bring nothing but sin and failure. Jesus came to save the unworthy, the unlovable, the ungodly. Despite what he came to do, he was despised by his own and rejected and ridiculed by the world. His message of peace and forgiveness provoked the hostility of the very world he came to save.

Our goal this evening is to rediscover the glory of the cross as we watch Jesus' reaction when both he himself and the truth he proclaimed were rejected and ridiculed by the world. He simply endured it. He accepted it and willingly suffered under it.

Why, we can't help but wonder, didn't the Creator of heaven and earth use the power at his disposal to offer visible proof? Why didn't he cause the ropes that bound him to simply fall to the ground. Why didn't he speak the names of those who blindfolded and hit him? Why didn't he come down from the cross when challenged to thereby prove who and what he was?

Because that's not how our salvation was earned and that's not how saving faith works. Our salvation was earned by Jesus silently suffering in our place. Saving faith is not based on evidence that we can see but on trust in God's unseen and unverified promises.

The glory of the cross is clearly seen when we poor, wretched sinners lay the burden of all of our sins at the foot of that cross – that very cross despised and rejected by the world – and there find perfect forgiveness, healing, and peace. Jesus did that. Amen.