

Who Do You Fear? John 19:8-11

We looked at these verses last time we were together, but we need to investigate them just a little further today. We see that after the Jews accused Jesus of blasphemy before Pilate, that he claimed to be the Son of God and therefore equal with God, he deserved death according to them. But if Jesus is the Son of God, which he has proved on countless occasions then there is no blasphemy for him to say that he is the Son of God when that is who he is.

And we mentioned with the indictment that the Jews make Pilate fearful, but not so much that he might miscarry justice but that Jesus might be in fact some divine person. He might have other ideas rather than the Jewish Messiah, but with Pilate's interactions with Jesus it seems more plausible that the one before him is more than human. So in his fear he brings Jesus back to have a private conversation with him. He asks — "Where are you from?" And it is obvious that he is a Galilean just by the way he was dressed, and even how the religious leaders talked about him. The question goes beyond geographical origins to who Jesus is. And we see that Jesus is silent. And this silence is more judicial than anything. Pilate has already rejected what Jesus has spoken about himself, ended a perilous conversation with a question: "what is truth," and left the presence of Christ. So Jesus will give him no more light. This is also Jesus entrusting himself to the Father's plan and will. He will offer that perfect sacrifice for sin. Nothing will deter Jesus from carrying out the will of the Father.

And Pilate is angry with Jesus and insulted that he will not answer even though he has the power either to release or execute Jesus. And that is where we have that amazing statement by Jesus in verse 11. Look at what it says, "**Jesus answered him, 'You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin.'**" And we mentioned last time that the authority Pilate had actually came from God, even though he did not know God or recognize him. That authority was given to him, and we realize that the authority given by God to rulers is to punish the evil doers and also reward those who do well, but because of the sinful heart of man these rulers many times only rule for self and make some notoriously evil decisions, such as the one that Pilate is going to make. But even that decision was ordained and planned by God.

And we realize man has his intentions, and they are evil and selfish, but God has his intentions. He is able to bring his will to pass, even in the evil intentions of others. Joseph is an excellent example. His brothers make an evil decision to sell Joseph into slavery, but what they meant for evil God meant it for good. God is the sovereign ruler. So think through this because people want to deny so often that God has not ordained or planned to use the evil actions of man. Now, He is never culpable for them but has planned them. The gospel is stunning proof of that. But have you ever had someone who has done evil against you? Have you ever had someone do evil acts or say things that wound you or might have even injured you? Here is the question: is God sovereign over those actions? Was he reigning and ruling, and was his will coming to pass? We want to balk at it when it is us, but the reason why Pilate is in his position is because God will use his free and intentional decision to crucify Christ for Jesus'

ultimate glory and our eternal good. He is reigning and ruling over every aspect of our life. Man has evil intentions but God has his good.

So here comes the question I want us to look at today: what does it look like to submit to God's rule in the face of an evil society that is ruled by wicked and evil men? Fear grips so many today. If God has placed them there then what does it look like to truly worship God in these places? And I want us to see a couple things from verse 11. One is — Jesus' trust is in the midst of such evil. And secondly, we need to know there is a day of accountability for every evil ruler and for those who seek to do evil against the children of God, and that should engender a greater fear. My hope is that God's revelation will give us light in living in the growing darkness, especially among those who are in authority.

1. We need to see where Jesus' trust is. V. 11.

Do you see where his trust is? One of the things I have tried to do and I do it so imperfectly is to preach to myself what I know about God. I try and say a simple prayer every morning. One is a celebration: God I am one day closer to being with you. The second is a reminder that he is reigning and ruling over every aspect, relationship, circumstance of this very day. God, I thank you that you have ordained everything, every trial and difficulty I will experience this day, and you have good purposes in all of them. It gets me in a frame of mind to trust in Christ, to trust in this great sovereign God, because in my weakness so often I do not see God's hand at work, but here is the thing: just because I do not see it does not mean that God is not working.

So here Pilate angrily and proudly scolds Jesus to remember who is talking to him, as if he is the ultimate power. And Jesus response is, **"You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above."** In other words, Jesus knows that whatever happens to him is not ultimately because of the authority of Pilate, but the authority of God the Father. What a safe place to be, realizing that whatever laws that are passed, whatever threats people make, whatever comes our way, God is the ultimate controller of all. He is wise and he is good. And again, we might not have it all figured out what God is doing, but we know who has it figured out, and it is the one who has all authority. There is so much peace in the midst of turmoil.

Now here is the question: how do we respond to the presence and even the wickedness of the leaders? And let me name a couple ways. One is that we submit to these authorities even though they are wicked. Jesus gives us the example right here. He submits to Pilate. He does not overrule him. And the principle is given in Romans 13:1-3, **"Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval."**

Now that is tough. A good example of this is paying taxes. The taxes collected by the government go to somethings that we would say quite clearly are ungodly. We do not get to decide in the ultimate sense where our tax dollars go. But these individuals are placed in the positions they are in through the direct agency of God.

Remember when the Jews tried to trap him with a question about taxes? Matthew 22:21 records, **“They said, “Caesar’s.” Then he said to them, “Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”** The inscription on that and the image was probably Tiberius Caesar who was known as a cruel emperor, but Jesus said to even pay taxes to him, and remember these taxes paid for the Roman occupation. Every Christian should be a model citizen. They should be an example of what it is like to have your hope not in this world but in Christ. Jesus was a model citizen. Even earlier he says to Pilate that his kingdom is no threat to Rome. His kingdom really is not of this world.

But we also realize in this statement by Jesus, that Pilate would have no authority unless it was granted by God and that God is the ultimate authority. We all have authorities in our lives we need to submit to whether bosses, or parents, or in the marriage relationship the husband, or the government. We all have them but the ultimate authority is God. His authority is ultimate, and therefore our first and foremost obedience, even when we obey these lesser authorities is to God. But if there is a contradiction between authorities in what God commands, the greater authority takes precedence. We realize this with the preaching of the gospel. There are many believers who have lost their lives simply because they preached the gospel which was outlawed in their country. In fact, the same goes on today in many parts of the world. When Peter and John were before the Sanhedrin and commanded not to preach in that name anymore. Listen to the response in Acts 4:19-20, **“But Peter and John answered them, ‘Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.’** God is the greater authority. If there is a conflict in between the laws and commands of God and man, the greater authority is the one to whom we obey.

Let me name one other area that is covered by this greater authority, and that is our moral character, where we love others, and we take on the compassion of Christ. No government can command us to accept certain behaviours or laws that go against God’s laws. I was reminded of this in one of the commentaries I was reading. And in Nazi Germany the Jews were treated harshly and severely and cruelly, many of them being put to death in the most inhumane ways. And the government commanded the people not to have any contact with any Jewish people. There were many Christians that complied. But there were many that did not. They kept preaching the gospel, and they kept speaking out against the atrocities against the Jews who are made in the image of God. And many of them were imprisoned and even executed. Dietrich Bonhoeffer is probably the most recognized name. He was respectful to all. He took on the spirit of Christ, and even after his arrest until his execution was an example of Christ-likeness. He spoke out against evil, even when it was outlawed.

Now think of how that applies to us today. Are there any laws that we as believers should speak out against that go directly against God’s laws? And the answer is yes. In fact, to speak out against homosexuality as sin is against the law. Again, all of this has to be done in the spirit of compassion realizing all sin separates us from God, but are we to be silent when individuals are enslaved to sin and the answer to freedom from both the penalty and power of sin is found in Christ. There are other laws that we should speak out against such as abortion and euthanasia. We believe God creates

and gives life. It is a gift from him. We cannot be silent on these things. Again, we must speak the truth in love, and even those who are guilty of these sins hold out the same grace that is offered to us at the cross, but God expects us to speak even though there might be grave consequences to our vocalizing our faith in Christ. Jesus says so clearly here that God is the greater authority.

Again, as you look at this passage, it does beg the question who is the greatest authority in my life? That question as we look at our lives should be so easy to answer. For some it is a particular sin that has lordship or a particular person, or even the love of comfort so that I would never speak for Christ. God does not ask for our loyalty but demands it. The reason why is he is the ultimate authority. We need to trust in his authority whatever comes our way. God is just and he is good, and he is the highest of authorities. Let us listen to him. He gives us so much instruction and confidence to live in this fallen world.

2. We need to see as we live under fallen rulers that God will settle all accounts. 11b.

One of the things that get individuals so angry is that there does not seem to be any justice. That sense of what is fair and just, and the punishment of the wicked is built into us. When we see a powerful country war with a weaker country just for their own glory and greed, it creates in us a longing for justice, and when justice is upended or not apparent it creates anger. When we hear some of the unjust laws or whatever from even our own politicians. When they speak of Christians of not holding to moral values of the country, in other words, they are immoral and a detriment to society, and pass laws that make it more difficult for us to serve and make of Christ, we crave for justice, but many times we can feel absolutely helpless. Have you ever felt that way? Here is someone who is more powerful and authoritative and there is nothing I can do.

Well, there is one thing we can do, and that is to realize there is an ultimate authority and he is good and just. And because he is authoritative and good, sin and ungodly rulers might have their day, but there is a day of accountability. I think of many of the ungodly and evil tyrants that have ruled even in my life time, and many of them have already died either of age or because of their crimes, and they are now in the presence of an all holy and just God. And it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands, come into the presence of none other than the glorious and all mighty King. Then there is a realization of the magnitude of their sin and there is no escaping his justice. I can rest in Christ no matter what abuse I take or my fellow believers, knowing that God will settle every account either at the cross or before his holy judgement seat. Revelation 20:11-12, speaks of the last judgment called the Great White Throne judgment, **“Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done.”** No one will escape the judgment of God. Every single person who has ever lived will appear before him to answer about the things he or she has done in this life.

And there is a principle that is taught in Scripture, and that is the greater the authority or responsibility someone has because of their position in life, the greater

potential for good that they can do, but also, the greater potential for evil. Therefore the greater the judgment before God. And you can see that right in our text. Look at the end of the verse again, **“Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin.”** There are a couple things we have work through in this statement.

One is who is Jesus referring to? And it could be Judas. We realize he plotted to hand Jesus over to the religious leaders away from the crowds at an opportune time and he did it for money. But in the context where Jesus is talking about authority given by God to leaders, it would seem that he is talking about at the very least Caiaphas, and also the Sanhedrin. Now how are they more culpable because they didn't have the power that Pilate had? And the way they are more responsible and their judgment before a holy God is going to be more graver is they had more revelation. They knew, and many of them had even seen some of the miracles of Jesus. Remember, they all met together after the resurrection of Lazarus whether they should put Lazarus to death because everyone would soon believe on him. But from that very day they plotted to put Jesus to death. And then after bringing him to Pilate, they knew how to manipulate Pilate and force his hand to execute Jesus.

And Jesus indicates that some sins are worse and are deserving of more judgment than other sins. The sins of a teacher or pastor because of his position and influence will have a greater judgment or reward. Listen to James 3:1, **“Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.”** The greater the authority here, the greater the judgment. All sin is worthy of judgment but some sins are worthy of greater judgment. And think of those who teach millions their false gospel. Think of the judgment before God because of their influence. Or think of so many hiding behind a pulpit playing the hypocrite but secretly having the most deplorable sins in their lives, where there is no repentance and it brings into question whether they are truly saved or not. There is a day of accountability. None will escape the justice of God. God is just, if God was not just than Jesus didn't have to die on the cross. The death of Jesus not only shows the grace and mercy of God, but his inflexible justice and righteousness and holiness.

And here in these final words to Pilate there is both grace and warning, because Pilate also has authority given by God. And Jesus does not exonerated him of his sin because someone else has a greater sin or a greater culpability in the death of Christ. He doesn't say that he is sinless but the exactly opposite. Look at how it is worded here, **“Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin.”** But you are not sinless. You still have your offence and guilt before a holy God. And his offence and guilt were very grievous. Here is one last opportunity of Pilate to really change course, repent and release Jesus. And think of it, the last word that Pilate hears from the lips of Jesus is “sin.” His personal sin, and that he is not the greatest authority. You are answerable to that greater authority, and it is not Rome!

And so there are two take always. One is that all of us have to appear before God. All sin will be punished. All sin will be punished according to God's justice, and there is no way in that day that you will take comfort that someone will be judged more severely than you. Your sin deserves an eternal judgment, especially when you know the gospel of grace. Many people do not have the Biblical knowledge you have. Your culpability is actually greater before God. But God is not just a God of judgment but

one of grace. And the call is today to come. Today is the day of repentance and trust in this one who stands before Pilate. Let the last word on your life not be about sin but about the marvellous grace found in Christ alone.

The second take away is that we can live in this cruel and fallen world with even wicked rulers ruling, because we know there is an ultimate authority. There is one who rules and reigns apart from God, even when his rule is not apparent. Yes, at times it is tough to obey and not only do the right thing but have the right attitude, but our confidence is in the character of the One who is ruling. He will always do what is most beneficial to his people and what is most glorifying in his name. And think of it — truth and righteousness will win the day. And how do we know that? It is because God is the ultimate authority. We can truly trust in him during these evil days.