

## Bible Study Guide: Week of 11-15-2021

1. Read through the passage below
2. Read my notes and commentary
3. Read the questions at the end and ponder or discuss with others

Pastor Andrew

### John 18:33-37

<sup>33</sup>Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” <sup>34</sup>Jesus answered, “Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?” <sup>35</sup>Pilate replied, “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?” <sup>36</sup>Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.” <sup>37</sup>Pilate asked him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.”

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This passage picks up in the middle of Jesus’ trial before Pilate. In John 18 Jesus has appeared before Caiaphas, the high priest. After that trial, Caiaphas’ entourage of priests and temple police took Jesus to appear before Pilate. John tells us that the Jewish leaders there did not enter Pilate’s headquarters in order to avoid ritual defilement. This fact sets up a strange scene in which Pilate is the intermediary between Jesus and the Jewish leaders. Pilate leaves Jesus in the headquarters and goes out to speak with the leaders about their reasons for handing Jesus over to him. Here, he enters the headquarters after this initial discussion with Jesus’ accusers. Pilate’s question is a political one. He wants to know if Jesus represents a threat to Roman power. Does Jesus claim to be a political ruler representing a realm other than the sovereign state of Rome or not? Jesus, of course, refuses to answer on these terms. With his initial question back to Pilate, Jesus presses Pilate to unpack and process his own question: Is Pilate himself becoming aware of Jesus’ true identity and mission, or is he merely parroting what Jesus’ accusers have said? Pilate attempts to turn the focus back to Jesus and his alleged crimes.

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In “reply” to Pilate, Jesus changes the subject yet again. Pilate wants to know: “What have you done?” In other words, Pilate wishes to know if Jesus has been acting as a political dissident or otherwise threatening law and order. Jesus, though, knows the truth of his actions up to this point in John’s gospel: What he has done are signs and miracles that attested to the truth of Jesus’ identity as God incarnate. So Jesus clarifies this distinction for Pilate: The power and authority Jesus have are not akin to the power and authority that Pilate claims to have. Pilate has worldly authority and power; Jesus, on the other hand, demonstrates the power and authority of God.

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Rather than asking Jesus about this other world, Pilate latches onto the idea of Jesus as a king once again. For Pilate, earthly versus heavenly kingship is not a distinction that makes sense. All he hears is this: Jesus is claiming a kind of authority or kingship and must, therefore, be stopped. He retorts, “So you are a king?” In reply, Jesus expresses to Pilate that given his narrow focus and lack of ability to hear Jesus’ voice, all Pilate will be able to ascertain is that Jesus is claiming to be a king. Yet Jesus reveals his true purpose to Pilate: “For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” Ironically, in reply in v. 38 Pilate will ask Jesus, “What is truth?” The interplay between Jesus and Pilate helps us mull this notion of earthly versus heavenly power and authority. Throughout his arrest, trials, crucifixion, and resurrection in John’s gospel Jesus demonstrates authority. He is in charge here, despite the appearance that he was betrayed and condemned. Nothing happens to Jesus that he does not allow to happen. As he said in John 10, “I have the power to lay down my life and the power to take it up again.

No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.” Pilate clearly does not belong to the group that can hear Jesus’ voice and know the truth. There is still hope for us, however. We must be careful that our notions of power and authority are consistent with the power and authority Jesus exercises, rather than the power and authority of a regime like Pilate’s.

**Discussion/Reflection Questions:**

- 1. Do you think Pilate was sympathetic toward Jesus, antagonistic toward Jesus, or simply caught up in a power struggle about which he knew nothing?**
- 2. Why do you think Jesus refused to answer Pilate’s questions directly?**
- 3. What do you think it means to belong to the truth and listen to Jesus’ voice?**