

This pericope is part of John's articulation of Jesus before Pontius Pilate. The synoptics as well (Mt 27: 11-16, Mk 15: 2-25, Lk 23: 3-25) contain accounts of Jesus before Pilate. In TLH, LW, and LSB, this text is included in the lengthy reading for Good Friday. This text is the second option on the Last Sunday in the Church Year, Series B, in LW.

John's account is the longest, and this section – RSV Harper's Study Bible calls it Pilate's first questioning of Jesus – contains a spirited conversation between the two men consisting of questions that often remain unanswered. The verb ἀποκρίνομαι – "I answer, reply, take up the conversation" – is used throughout.

The simple definition of the word is "to answer," and it means that both men are responding to what the other has said. What that means is that the dialogue does not take place in a vacuum, with no context, but with a very immediate context. I make a statement or ask a question and you respond with the answer to that specific question or statement.

The focus of The Last Sunday in the Church Year is on the Church Triumphant. This text has Jesus and Pilate talking about kings and kingdoms and concludes with Jesus defining of what His kingdom actually consists. The conversation places sharply into focus the idea of the Kingdom of the Left and the Kingdom of the Right.

Textual Notes

33. The setting here is Jerusalem, at the home of Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor. John tells us that "Εἰσῆλθεν οὖν πάλιν εἰς τὸ πραιτώριον ὁ Πειλᾶτος – Pilate entered again into the Praetorium." The preposition indicates motion into, and Pilate would have entered into and exited out of his private residence on a regular basis, like the rest of us do.

Jesus has been arrested by the Temple Guard, whose boss was Caiaphas, who brought Him to the private residence of the High Priest. There He was tried and convicted of blasphemy, a hanging offense, but they had no more authority to execute people than I or my congregation or the LCMS. Paul Maier talks about this extensively in his *Pontius Pilate*.

That's where Pilate, who does have that authority, who uses that authority all the time, comes into the picture. Early in the morning, they went with Jesus from the home of

Caiaphas to the home of Pilate. They didn't go in, so as not to be defiled, and Pilate came out to them, and they had a conversation that ended with them asking for a favor.

At that point, Pilate entered into his residence, “καὶ ἐφώνησεν τὸν Ἰησοῦν – and he called for Jesus” to come into the house with him. Jesus apparently has no qualms about going into this unclean residence and being defiled. The night before, He had celebrated with His followers the Passover meal by turning it into the Sacrament of the Altar.

The verb is the same one used several times in the NT for the crowing of the rooster, and often means simply to make an audible sound that does not necessarily involve actual words. We ought not to think of this as some formal and polite summons; instead, think of the commander grunting at an underling, who knew the drill, who brought in the perp.

We detect irritation in Pilate – John makes it a point to tell us that “it was early” (28) – at having to deal with this Jewish matter. He gets right to it, “καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ Σὺ εἶ ὁ Βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων – and he said to Him “you are the King of the Jews?” Putting it that way, rather than “are you the King of the Jews?” better captures the meaning of the question.

The translations have Pilate asking a question that is seeking an answer. But what is really going on here is an irritated Pilate expressing his contempt for all things Jewish by mocking the idea that this person standing before him would be a king. In addition, there seems to be a moment of recognition here that this man being their king explains a lot about Jews.

It's hard to overstate the roles of occupier and occupied in this exchange. The Romans were the often-brutal occupiers of a people who valued their freedom and cultural identity. The Roman occupation chafed against them like it chafed against no other. And then there was the condition of the man standing before him, who did not look like a king.

He had on the previous night been so stressed that He sweated drops of blood. He had been betrayed by one of His chosen, and the rest had forsaken Him. John tells us that He had been slapped (22), and He accuses them of beating or flogging – not “slapping” Him (23), and I choose to believe Jesus when He says that He has been beaten or flogged.

Luke tells us that “the men who were holding Jesus mocked Him and beat Him” (22:63). It's the same word (δέρω) John uses, and it means “I flay, flog, scourge, beat.” Matthew tells us that they “spat in His face and struck Him; and some slapped Him” (26:67). The second verb, κολαφίζω means “to strike with the fist.”

Sometimes it's hard to get our heads around the cruelty of powerful humans to other humans in the world of the Natural Man. They beat Jesus because they could, and because it brought them great pleasure, and you can reference your Psychology 101 class to explain why that would be. They beat Him to a bloody pulp, and now He stands before Pilate.

34. For His part, Jesus is probably relieved to be away from those crazed religious leaders, in the presence of the pagan who at least does not seem to be unhinged. In response to the question about kingship “ἀπεκρίθη Ἰησοῦς Ἀφ’ ἑαυτοῦ σὺ τοῦτο λέγεις – Jesus responds ‘from yourself you say this?, ἢ ἄλλοι εἶπόν σοι περὶ ἐμοῦ - or others say to you about Me?

What had been a sarcastic, mocking question from the pagan is – in the mind of the King of the Jews – a very serious one, to be taken seriously, and that’s where He’s taking this. When Pilate thought about things, he probably did not spend a whole lot of time thinking about Jesus, let alone wondering whether or not He was a king.

To be sure, the Magi had proclaimed Him to be King of the Jews. But that was a different time and place and we have no reason to believe that Pilate bothered himself with such a proclamation. If somebody had thought thirty years ago that this was the King of the Jews, clearly nothing had come of it; Jesus had not even raised an army or fought a battle.

Nor did He talk like somebody who wanted to do something like that. The fact of the matter is that it is one thing to proclaim yourself or for others to proclaim you King. It’s quite another thing to actually be King, which is always held onto and often initially gotten by use of military force. But a bug certainly had been placed into the ear of Pilate.

Luke tells us (22:66 – 23:2) that when they brought Jesus to Pilate “they began to accuse Him, saying, ‘we have found this man perverting our nation, and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that He Himself is Christ, a King.’” Those things are all lies, but as is often the case, the seriousness of the charges will suffice.

Luke also mentions “things they testify against you” (13) and Mark talks about “charges they bring against you (15:4).” So the answer to the question of whether Pilate came to the conclusion that Jesus is the King of the Jews on His own, or whether it is because of things that other people said to him about Him, it’s the latter.

His answer, furthermore, reflects a bit of irritation, the kind of irritation you get when people tell lies about you, which is irritating, but even more irritating is when people who know you believe the lies told about you. If Jesus seems to be copping an attitude here, which is a very human thing to do...

35. The conversation continues, with “ἀπεκρίθη ὁ Πειλᾶτος Μήτι ἐγὼ Ἰουδαῖός εἰμι – Pilate responded, ‘am I a Jew?’” The participle is an “interrogative particle expecting a negative answer.” Clearly, Pilate is about as far away as one can be from being a Jew, but the gist of his answer is that he is both apathetic and ignorant of Jewish political matters.

He doesn't answer the question about whether he came to his own conclusions on the King of the Jews question because he doesn't have to. He doesn't have to because he's the authority, the one in charge of these proceedings. He doesn't have to because everybody knows the answer to what turns out to be something of a rhetorical question.

Then what sounds like a little bit of a dig, and then let's get down to business, “τὸ ἔθνος τὸ σὸν καὶ οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς παρέδωκάν σε ἐμοί· τί ἐποίησας – your people and your leaders handed you over to me. What did you do?” The obvious assumption is that Jesus has done something bad – a capital offense – for His own people to turn Him over to him.

It seems to be a constant of being occupied that collaborators with the occupiers are frowned upon by the rest of the occupied. These occupied people were no different. One of the points of contention between the Sadducees and the Pharisees was on the issue of cooperation with Rome; the Sadducees did more of that than the Pharisees.

To hand one of your own over to them would have, under normal circumstances, been highly irregular, but we know that there is a method to their madness, as stated by them earlier. They simply need somebody to off this guy, and we can't legally do that, and Pilate can. It was all about eliminating the Jesus problem by death.

Like Pilate before Him, Jesus never does answer the question about what He has done. He doesn't answer because he doesn't have to. He doesn't have to because he's the authority, the one in charge of these proceedings. He doesn't have to because everybody knows the answer to what turns out to be something of a rhetorical question.

36. Continuing the dialogue, “ἀπεκρίθη Ἰησοῦς· Ἡ βασιλεία ἡ ἐμὴ οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου τούτου – Jesus responded, ‘My Kingdom is not from this world.’” Firstly, He proclaims that He does have a Kingdom, so He is a King. The preposition of motion followed by a noun in the genitive case indicates motion out of or “from this world.”

As referenced earlier, Kings keep and often gain their crown by means of force; military action, battles, wars, and the like. It's how we gained and keep the U.S. Constitution, and that's the norm in all of human history. Power derived from force of arms is the thing Jesus has in mind when He says that His kingship does not come “from the world.”

If that were the case, then “οἱ ὑπηρέται ἂν οἱ ἐμοὶ ἡγωνίζοντο, ἵνα μὴ παραδοθῶ τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις – my underlings would be fighting, that I might not be turned over from the Jews.” The preposition is omitted – an ellipsis – between “turned over” and “the Jews,” and some of the translations have Him being turned over “to the Jews.”

Others have Him being turned over “by the Jews,” which is what we actually observe going on here. But if we note how John uses “the Jews” to mean only the Jews who are opposed

to Jesus, then that happened. Ordinary Jews like Judas and the Temple Guard captured Jesus and turned Him over to those who opposed Him, who turned Him over to Pilate.

Either way, His people turned Him over to Pilate, and He tells Pilate that His kingdom does not derive its legitimacy from the barrel of a gun, and if that were the case, then He would indeed be commanding those who are presumably under Him to fight for His kingship and His kingdom. That they aren't underscores the nature of His Kingdom.

In case you missed it the first time, and every other time, the genesis of His kingship and His Kingdom are not like the others; “νῦν δὲ ἡ βασιλεία ἡ ἐμὴ οὐκ ἔστιν ἐντεῦθεν – now, my Kingdom is not from here.” The adverb “νῦν – now” ominously for Pilate indicates that there may be a time when His kingship would come from the use of military force.

I think that in saying that, He might be messing with Pilate.

37. Pilate ignores the “for now” and proclaims, “Οὐκοῦν βασιλεὺς εἶ σύ – so then, you are a King.” Jesus agrees, and then proclaims, “ἐγὼ εἰς τοῦτο γεγέννημαι καὶ εἰς τοῦτο ἐλήλυθα εἰς τὸν κόσμον – I was born into this, and for this I have come into the world.” The last verb – have come into the world – is in the perfect tense.

That means that Jesus is saying that His birth was a thing that happened in the past, whose effects continue to the present and into the future. It's a claim not many people would make, but one that is observable in the life of Jesus in a way that no other person can even approach. The effect of His birth, in fact, continues into eternity and affects lots of people.

Then, He articulates a different way to look at the concept of kings and kingdoms, “ἵνα μαρτυρήσω τῇ ἀληθείᾳ· πᾶς ὁ ὢν ἐκ τῆς ἀληθείας ἀκούει μου τῆς φωνῆς – in order to bear witness to the truth. Everyone being of the truth hears my voice.” This kingdom is based on and derives power from truth, and that's a different kind of kingdom.

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Proper 29B – November 22, 2015
Watch – Mark 13:24-37

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Introductory

When we speak of The End, or The End Times, or the Lord's Day, or Judgment Day, or even The Second Coming of Christ, we are talking about essentially the same time and series of events. These events include the return of Jesus in glory, the Resurrection of all flesh – even those who don't want to be resurrected, the final and public judgment of all men (as described by Matthew), the final assignment of some to heaven and others to hell, the destruction of the old creation, and the beginning of life in the New.

Eschatology is the term that we use to describe talk of and teaching about the end of the world. The term has generally been used in a religious or philosophical context, but The Bomb brought with it, for the first time in modern times, talk of a *man-made* end to the world, and just when the Iron Curtain fell and it looked like we were over that sort of fiddlefaddle, the leftist radical Environmentalists jumped right in to tell us that we are actually *already in the process* of bringing about the end of the world, even as we speak.

Non-radical, right leaning Environmentalists, who might do things like; drive Prii, burn wood, grow and consume organic fruits and vegetables, faithfully recycle, strive for sustainability, and vote Republican know that neither nukes, nor global warming, nor anything else that man can do will bring about the end of the planet, and that's not a matter of personal opinion, but a matter of very basic Christian theology. God made it, and God will one day destroy it, but only in His good time and at His good pleasure.

The material that we dealt with last week focused on the question of the timing of the coming of The End. After that, the eschatological material takes on an *apocalyptic* tone; the end times are seen as bringing *unusual and cataclysmic events*. To be sure, some of the events spoken of last week, like earthquakes, are cataclysmic, but they are not unusual. The things spoken of here are not only cataclysmic and unusual, but almost exclusively one-time, things that have pretty much never been seen before.

When He is done talking in those apocalyptic terms, Jesus will then return to the original question asked of Him, the one about the exact timing of all of these events. By doing that, He shows Himself to be an excellent preacher and teacher. Pastors likewise need to answer