

That's a Good Question – 28
John 18:33-34
“Jesus and the Court of Public Opinion”

1. Someone has estimated that worldwide, over 60,000 books have been written about Jesus.ⁱ Along with those books, countless and varied opinions of Jesus have been expressed by His followers and foes alike.
2. The 16th century reformer, Martin Luther said of Jesus, “No other God have I but Thee; born in a manger, died on a tree.” The poet, Percy Shelley said, “The Galilean is not a favorite of mine. So far from owing him any thanks for his favor, I cannot avoid confessing that I owe a secret grudge to his carpentership.”ⁱⁱ
3. The great American preacher, Phillips Brooks said, “Jesus Christ, the condescension of divinity, and the exaltation of humanity.”ⁱⁱⁱ On the other hand, Bill Maher, the star of the 2008 anti-religion documentary, *Religulous*, said, “UFO’s are a lot more likely than a space-god [who] flew down bodily, and [who you knew] was the son of god...”^{iv}
4. Since He lived on this earth some 2,000 years ago, men of every succeeding generation have spoken their minds about Jesus. Questions about His identity, nature, and significance are always being discussed.
5. In John chapter 18, we read of some the events that transpired in the legal trial (if it can be called that) that led to the crucifixion of Jesus. In order to fulfill their desire to have Jesus put to death the Jews had to bring Him before the Roman authority in that province, a man named Pontius Pilate.
6. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, John gives us an insight into the private conversation that took place between Jesus and Pilate in that Roman court.
7. In verse 33 we read, “Then Pilate entered into the judgment hall again, and called Jesus, and said unto him, Art thou the King of the Jews?” To this Jesus carefully and wisely responded with a question of His own. Verse 34 says, “Jesus answered him, Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me?”
8. Note that question that Jesus posed to Pilate. It is a good question for each of us to personally consider. What do you think about Jesus? How did you arrive at your opinion of Him?
9. In this text, as Jesus stands in Pilate’s court, we are reminded of three different views of Jesus that exist in the court of public opinion. Chances are that most everyone here holds to one of these three views. Notice them with me, and then as we close, we will consider more closely our Lord’s question in this text. Notice first of all that we see here:

I. THE ADVERSARIAL VIEW OF JESUS

1. In verse 28 of this chapter, John tells us that the Jews did not follow Jesus into Pilate's judgment hall. It is somewhat ironic that while they were determined to murder an innocent man, they did not want to risk defiling themselves in the Gentile court.

2. While they were not present at this hearing before Pilate, they were a part of the conversation. They were the accusing party – the plaintiff in the case against Jesus.

3. Luke 23:2 records their charge against the Lord. They brought him to Pilate and said, "We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that he himself is Christ a King."

4. The Jews set themselves up as adversaries against Jesus the King. Unfortunately, they are not His only adversaries. Still today there are people who are completely opposed to the kingly claims of Jesus Christ.

5. Notice a couple of things about those who hold this adversarial view of Jesus. First of all, those who hold this view:

A. Reject the claims of Christ

1. The Jews complained to Pilate that Jesus had called Himself a king. Though they misrepresented His testimony, by identifying Himself as the Messiah that is essentially what Christ had claimed.

2. Obviously, the Jews completely rejected this claim. Though they had seen His works, and heard His words, they chose to reject Jesus as their Messiah.

3. Since the founding of Christianity, there have been those who have opposed Christ, denying the Scriptures, and rejecting the claim that Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God and the Savior of the world.

4. In the late 1800's the German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, said, "Jesus died too soon. Had he lived to my age, he would have repudiated his [own] doctrine."^v

5. In recent years, there have been a number of books, films, TV specials, and so-called news reports dealing with the person of Jesus and the question of His authenticity.

6. An example of this is the 2005 independent documentary *The God Who Wasn't There*. The film claims to prove that Jesus never even existed.

7. On a website selling the DVD, it says, among other things, that “the founders of Christianity were...unaware of the idea of a human Jesus,” and that “the Jesus of the gospels...[resembles] other ancient heroes...of pagan savior cults.”^{vi}

8. In spite of the clear testimony of Scripture, the historical record, and the preserved words of Jesus himself, there are many adversaries that reject the claims of Christ.

9. Notice something else about those who hold an adversarial view of Jesus. Not only do they reject the claims of Christ, but notice also that these people:

B. Resist the cause of Christ

1. It was not enough for the Jews to deny Jesus, and to reject His claims as the Messiah. They were intent on stopping Him completely, and ending His ministry.

2. They wanted Him dead. They were enemies of Him and His ministry. In much the same way, there are many today who have placed themselves in active opposition to the cause of Christ and His Church.

3. In recent days, the world has seen a rise in militant, evangelistic atheism. That is, a new breed of atheist who not only denies the existence of God, but works to combat those who *do* believe in God.

4. Examples of this are men like Richard Dawkins, author of the 2006 best-seller, *The God Delusion*. In his book, Dawkins equates religious faith with a form of insanity, and claims that those who believe in God are mentally ill.

5. In 2007, *The God Delusion* was followed by another militant atheist book by a man named Christopher Hitchens. His book is entitled *God Is Not Great: How religion poisons everything*. Hitchens takes the anti-religious rhetoric to another level by saying that religion is, “...violent, irrational, intolerant, allied to racism, tribalism, and bigotry... [and is] contemptuous of women, and coercive to children.”^{vii}

6. Much like those who originally opposed Him, there are still those who completely reject the claims of Christ, and vehemently resist the cause of Christ.

7. It is likely that no one listening to this sermon holds the same views as men like Dawkins and Hitchens. However, the church needs to know that there are plenty of people who, if they had their way, would completely remove the Church and the Christian faith it seeks to proclaim.

8. Sadly, there are those who hold an adversarial view of Jesus. As we look further at this text, we find a second point of view regarding Jesus. There is not only *the adversarial view of Jesus*, but notice also further that we see:

II. THE APPREHENSIVE VIEW OF JESUS

1. The figure of Pontius Pilate, as revealed in Scripture is an interesting personality. Though he does not completely support the Jews, he does not side with Jesus either.

2. He is skeptical, cautious, and apprehensive toward Jesus. Look again at his question in verse 33. He asks, “Art thou the King of the Jews?” When read in the original language, the emphasis of that sentence is on the pronoun.

3. In other words, Pilate looked at Jesus and said, “You? You are the king of the Jews?” Pilate looked at Jesus and was not convinced about His royalty.

4. Pilate represents the multitudes of people who are not necessarily opposed to Jesus, but they do not fully believe in Him as well. They keep Jesus at arms-length, and never truly embrace Him as their King and Lord.

5. From this text, we find that this apprehensive view of Jesus stems from a couple of things. First of all, notice with me:

A. The misunderstanding behind this view

1. Pilate looked at the haggard, bound, submissive figure of Jesus, and in his mind thought, “This doesn’t look like any king I’ve ever met.”

2. The problem was the Pilate misunderstood the kind of King that was standing before him. In verse 36, Jesus would say to Pilate, “My kingdom is not of this world.”

3. There are many people still who do not fully accept Christ because they misunderstand who Jesus really is.

4. For some, there is a misunderstanding about His *purpose*. There are those who view Jesus only as a moral teacher, or a mere religious leader. For them, Jesus is something akin to Gandhi, or the Dalai Lama.

5. These folks never fully embrace Jesus as Savior and Lord because they do not see Him in those terms. While many simply misunderstand His purpose, still others have a misunderstanding about His *people*.

6. They look at all those who claim the name of Jesus, and they assume that every cult and every sect that uses the name of Jesus actually represents Him.

They misunderstand Him based on those who claim to be His people. There are those who do not fully accept Christ because they misunderstand who He really is.

7. When the classic film, *Casablanca* was translated into German, the most famous line in the film got lost in the translation. Humphrey Bogart says, "Here's looking at you, kid." When the German version of that line was translated, the line changed to, "I look into your eyes, little one."^{viii}

8. For many people who are apprehensive about Jesus, the truth of who He really is gets lost in translation. Notice not only the misunderstanding behind this apprehensive view, but notice also further:

B. The misinformation behind this view

1. The Jewish authorities had brought the charge against Christ that He called himself a king. What they meant by this was that Jesus was setting Himself up in opposition to Caesar, and was threatening the peace of Rome.

2. Obviously, this was a distortion of Christ's words. He had never claimed to be an earthly king, or to be seeking to build a secular kingdom. Part of Pilate's apprehension toward Jesus was the misinformation he had received.

3. Likewise, there are many today who hesitate coming to Christ because they have been misinformed about Him. This misinformation often begins with how Jesus is portrayed.

4. When most people think of Jesus, in their mind they get the picture of an ancient sort of hippie, in a robe with a pair of sandals, talking about peace and love.

5. Most paintings of Jesus portray Him as a sort of effeminate, pale, weakling of a man. Many people have no concept of the victorious, all-powerful, death-breaking, sin-crushing Christ that is truly portrayed in the Bible.

6. The misinformation does not stop with how Christ is portrayed; it also bleeds over into how he is proclaimed. Too often, Jesus is proclaimed simply as a martyr. His substitutional death is emphasized exclusively to the neglect of His victorious resurrection and promised return.

7. The result is that people hesitate to embrace Jesus as their king, because in their minds all they see is a weakened martyr, not a risen Savior. They see Jesus as a mystical religious figure, not the Monarch and Ruler of the universe.

8. Pilate was somewhere between a follower of Christ and a foe of Christ. He was hesitant, and apprehensive about Jesus. Far too many have repeated

Pilate's mistake, and have failed to fully believe in King Jesus as the Lord and Savior.

9. Their misunderstandings and misinformation about Him has kept them from embracing the salvation that He offers.

10. There is one more viewpoint that is implied in this text. Notice not only *the adversarial view of Jesus*, and *the apprehensive view of Jesus*, but notice also thirdly and finally:

III. THE ACCEPTING VIEW OF JESUS

1. Though Jesus was not the kind of king that Pilate was referring to in verse 33, He did not deny that He was in fact a King. In verse 37, Jesus said, "Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth..."

2. The Jews despised Him, Pilate doubted Him, but there were then, and there are still now those who accept the fact that Jesus of Nazareth is the promised seed of David, who will one day rule the nations with righteousness, justice, and peace.

3. There are those who believe and are convinced that Jesus is the King of kings, and they accept Him and embrace Him as their Lord and Savior. Though once in unbelief themselves, now with the Apostle Thomas they say, "My Lord and my God!"

4. There are a couple of truths we draw from this text regarding those who have come to hold an accepting view of Jesus. Notice first of all that this view:

A. Must be individually reached

1. Pilate asked Jesus, "Are you the king of the Jews?" Jesus asked Pilate, "Is that something you are saying yourself, or did you hear that from someone else?"

2. The implication of that statement is that in order for someone to come to a settled conviction regarding Jesus Christ, they must do so personally, and not based on second-hand information or influence.

3. It is never enough to learn *about* Jesus. One must meet Him and know Him personally in order to understand Who He really is.

4. Just because your parents know Christ doesn't mean that you do as well. Just because your wife knows Jesus, doesn't mean that you have met Him as well.

5. Being in church, around those who know and love Jesus is not the same as you personally and individually coming to know and love Him.

6. The decision to embrace Jesus, and to accept Him as the Savior, Master, and King of your life is a decision that you alone can make. You cannot leave it to others to make for you. You must individually come to a conviction about Christ.

7. On June 21, 1982, at St. Mary's hospital in London, a little baby boy was born and named by his parents, William. Though baby William had no idea at the time, and no choice in the matter, he was born into the royal house of Windsor. His grandmother, Elizabeth II, is the queen of England, and it is likely that one day, William will succeed her or his father as the king of the United Kingdom.

8. No one is born into the Kingdom of Christ. All those who live under the rule of King Jesus do so because they have individually chosen to follow Him as their King.

9. The accepting view of Christ is one that must be individually reached, but notice also further that it is a view that:

B. Must be internally revealed

1. In Matthew 16:16, Simon Peter made a historic and wonderful confession. He said to Jesus, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." To that great theological statement Jesus said, "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven."

2. Understanding those words of Jesus, we realize that for someone to come to a conviction about the royalty and majesty of Jesus Christ there must first be a work of God in their hearts.

3. The Jews denied Him, and Pilate dismissed Him because their hearts were darkened to Him. They could not see Jesus for who He truly is.

4. However, the millions who have confessed Jesus as Lord and Christ have done so because somewhere the Spirit of God spoke to their hearts and pointed them to the truth about Jesus!

5. I can tell you about Jesus, but only the Holy Spirit can reveal Him to your heart! The accepting view of Jesus is something that must be internally revealed.

6. One of my favorite historical characters is a Welsh evangelist and preacher named Billy Bray. Bray lived in the early nineteenth century, and was a passionate witness for Jesus Christ.

7. Once, the Church of England sent a new preacher into Billy Bray's hometown. After hearing him preach, Billy was convinced that the preacher had never been saved himself. The preacher's name was Rev. W. Haslam, and when Billy told him what he thought, it understandably upset the preacher.

8. He wrestled all week with what the rough, outspoken coal miner had told him, and when he stood to preach the next week, he took as his text Matthew 22:42, "What think ye of Christ?" As he preached, suddenly his eyes were opened to the truth of Jesus, and right there, during his own sermon, the Rev. Haslam believed on Christ.^{ix}

9. It doesn't really matter who is preaching, the real sermon must come from the Holy Spirit and must be spoken to the heart if someone is to come to faith in Christ. Those who view Jesus with acceptance, do so because He has been internally revealed to them.

1. We have seen three different views of Jesus in the court of public opinion. What is your view of Him? I pray its not so, but could it be that you oppose Him? Or, could it be that like Pilate, you don't oppose Him, but you don't accept Him either?

2. For many here, their view of Jesus is one of acceptance. That is, they accept fully His claims as the King of kings.

3. Whatever your view of Jesus, I want you to look again at His question in verse 34. Imagine for a moment that Jesus is asking this question directly to you. "Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me?"

4. The question of Jesus is too important to leave to second-hand information. As you sit there, examine your heart to see not only *what* you believe about Him, but also *why* you believe it.

5. As one who personally believes that Jesus is in fact the King of kings, and the Savior of the world, I encourage anyone who has not personally and fully believed on Him to trust in Him completely today.

6. May we all be able to say with the Apostle Paul, "...I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day (II Tim. 1:12)."

ⁱ McHenry, Raymond, McHenry's Stories for the Soul, (Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 2001), p. 157

ⁱⁱ Famous Quotes about Jesus Christ, *Book of Famous Quotes*, accessed 1/22/09, <http://www.famous-quotes.com/topic.php?page=1&total=52&tid=676>

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid

^{iv} Bill Maher: America's #1 Bigot, 1/28/08, Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, accessed 1/22/09, <http://www.catholicleague.org/release.php?id=1384>

^v Jesus Quotes, *Thinkexist.com*, accessed 1/23/09, <http://thinkexist.com/quotes/with/keyword/jesus/>

^{vi} The God Who Wasn't There, accessed 1/23/09, <http://www.thegodmovie.com/>

^{vii} God Is Not Great, *Wikipedia* article, accessed 1/24/09, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/God_Is_Not_Great

^{viii} Misunderstandings, *Anecdotage.com*, accessed 1/24/09, <http://www.anecdotage.com/index.php?aid=8387>

^{ix} Morgan, Robert J., Nelson's Complete Book of Stories, Illustrations, & Quotes, (Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, 2000), p. 150