

“Auto-Pilate”

John 18:33-37

Pastor Jeff Fox-Kline | Sermon for Sunday, November 21, 2021

³³ Then Pilate entered the headquarters[□] again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” ³⁴ Jesus answered, “Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?” ³⁵ 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?” ³⁶ 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.” ³⁷ 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.” ³⁸ Pilate asked him, “What is truth?”

Hey there, I'm glad we're able to talk, because I think there's some confusion lately. I want to start by making sure that if you know one thing about me, it's that I'm a nice guy. I know you've heard my name before and thought “oh, Pontius Pilate. That guy's a real piece of work”. But you're wrong. I'm a nice guy. You said you wanted to know about Jesus? Umm... Remind me, was he the...? Oh yeah, the King of the Jews. That's right. I remember him. Scrawny, shaggy looking homeless guy. I liked the guy! Honest. I did. I mean, there was a lot of superstition floating around him, like he was some kinda magician, but who cares? Right? Everybody's got their own thing, so I figure, why not let him have his thing. And, quite frankly, some of the stuff he was saying actually made my job easier. For starters, people were a lot nicer to Samaritans for a while. I know he lost me some tax collectors, but they were skimming so much off the top that they were hardly worth the payroll. Plus, render unto Caesar, right? Law abiding, tax paying, nobody. I can't

believe you're actually asking me about him.

Okay, so here's what I remember. Some of the local community leaders were getting antsy about this person. He walked around saying he was King of the Jews, so I get it. It would probably annoy me if somebody was walking around saying "look at me, I'm a Roman governor", but that wasn't what he was saying, so it didn't annoy me. But I want to treat my people right, so I hear them out. And here he comes looking grungy and tired (seriously, did that guy just pull an all nighter?), and they say he's a criminal. Ok then, so what did he do? And can you believe this? They actually said (John 18:30) "If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you". Not really an answer to the question, but sure. Why don't you deal with him then, right? Whatever this guy did, it obviously wasn't bad enough for you to actually tell me what it was. But they remind me (John 18:31) "We are not permitted to put anyone to death." Ah. I get it now. So now I'm on the hook. I try to stay out of things. Honest. I'm a nice guy and a seriously good governor, so I usually try to let the kids fight it out for themselves, but they can't make that decision. Alright, bring him in, I guess.

"Hey buddy, are you the king of the Jews"? This guy, I tell you, he had some spine on him. He looks at me and is just like "who wants to know"? Which is annoying. At that point I'm basically like "I don't care! You don't bother me, but your leaders? Wow, you've really been working their nerves". So he says to me "My kingdom is not of this world". like I said, superstition. So finally I just went for it. "Are you a king?" And then he said "you say that I am a king" (which I didn't mean it like that) and I remember him saying this, because it was just so weird "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". Huh? What is truth? What are you talking about? But I'm not going to put someone to death because they're being cryptic, I can't stress this enough. I'm a nice guy, and that would be cruel. So I head back out and let the people all know that I really don't get the big fuss, so I'll throw him back to you, or I guess Barabbas. Take your pick. Obviously, you know what happened then. So I gave them Barabbas. Now that's a guy who deserves his punishment, but I'm a friendly guy, so I always give them a choice.

So at this point, I'm in a real bind. I mean, what did this guy do? Say some weird stuff and tick off some powerful folks? I'm not about to put him to death for that. But my loyal, adoring subjects want me to. Ultimately, isn't it my job to listen to the people? Isn't it? I'm their governor. Ok then. I really have no choice in this matter, of course. So, I've got him back in the flogging room, and boy he got flogged good. And my soldiers started mocking him and kicking him, and it's like "hey guys, he's already been flogged, what's with the spiky hat?" I didn't tell them to do that. They chose that. Some bad apples if you ask me. And I look at him, poor guy, and think maybe they'll give up if they see this. And I bring him out in that humiliating costume, battered and bruised. Hey folks, we messed him up and this is probably pretty humiliating. How about we just let this one go. Seriously, we just beat the heck out of this guy even though he's obviously innocent. Doesn't that work? Nope, guess not. They really want to do this. You can't honestly say I didn't try. Really, I'm *not* a bad person. I'm not. I'm not a bad person.

But the folks who wanted this guy gone, they knew how to work the system. They told me that he claimed to be the son of God. Yikes. I knew it was up to me to get to the bottom of this. "Where are you from?" and he said nothing. I'm a good man, a patient man, a kind man, but I'm the governor. If I talk to you, you talk back. If I ask a question, you answer it. I hate being ignored. I'm a patient man, but I have my limits. So by this point, I'm pretty mad. "Do you refuse to speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?" That's right. I've got the power here. I'm the one who makes the decisions. I may be a wise and benevolent ruler, but I'm the ruler and you don't. make. Me. Angry. He stayed cool, though. "You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above". That's right, we all know Caesar gave me this job. I guess I lost my cool, but he's right. "I'll try again" I figured. But the second I said I'm not going to kill him, they reminded me that this guy called himself a king. And they were right. They reminded me "Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor". They were right, they knew the system, and now I'm out of options.

I know he didn't actually do anything wrong. I know that, ok? But if I let

one self-styled king go free, then the next thing you know the streets will be full of kings. If word gets around to the emperor about that? I'm gone. And I won't let that happen. I'm a good man. And a good governor. I use my power to make the world a better place. If I lose my job, how much worse would the world be? If I have to kill a few innocent people for that? Well, that's the cost of doing business. I'm not perfect, but I try. That counts for something. And, what if he actually was some kind of king? Then I did my job perfectly. I mean, he wasn't a king. Like I said, just some 'who cares' from 'who knows where'. But if he was? I had no choice in the matter. The people wanted him dead. They were getting angry, unruly. I had to. I couldn't let them down. I had to do it. And quite frankly, it wasn't my fault. We have rules in place here. And he broke the rules. I know it's not fair, but that's the system. I can't go around making the laws, I just enforce them. You want something to change, change the system, I'm just doing my job here. I know that look you're giving me. I told him I had the power to release him. I said that, yes. You're right. I... I did have that power. But I really couldn't have done that, right? Right? I know what you're thinking, and you're wrong. I'm a good person. I *AM* a good person. I couldn't help it. They made me do it. It's their fault. I'm a good person. They're the ones to blame. They're bad, not me.

Put yourselves in my shoes. I knew he was innocent. But at a certain point, does that even matter? That's just the way the world works. Do you really think you can change it? Sure, you can think you're a good person all you want, but what happens when you have to actually follow the rules? What are you going to do? Break the rules? I doubt it. You wouldn't take that risk. Disappointing your people, letting them down, putting your job on the line, maybe even get your own self in some legal trouble. You wouldn't do it. No one would. Right? Seriously, show me one person like that and I'll give them my own crown and start calling him king.