

John 18:33-37 – “Christ the King”

1. The Costa Concordia Disaster

In October 2012, in a court room in Italy, Captain Francesco Schettino, was on trial for manslaughter.

If that name doesn't ring a bell, then Captain Francesco Schettino was in charge of the cruise ship the Costa Concordia.

The court heard that Captain was entertaining his young lover – against the rules – on the ship's bridge, when the giant vessel struck a reef off the Italian Coast.

More, his former lover, the Moldavian dancer, Domnica Cemortan, admitted that she was not on the official passenger list and was not in possession of a ticket, and that it was her relationship with the captain that had allowed her on board.

If that isn't bad enough, the court heard that Captain Schettino had made a similar sail-by very close to the island off the Tuscan coast, a week before the accident.

Antonello Tievoli, a ship's waiter, said that he had asked the captain to sail close to Giglio to salute his family who lived there.

The first officer, Ciro Ambrosio, also told the court that Captain Schettino had left his reading glasses in his cabin, and repeatedly asked Ambrosio to check the radar for him.

Captain Schettino is also charged with abandoning ship before his passenger. He claims he slipped and fell into a lifeboat from which he was unable to extract himself.

The Captain was responsible for the lives of 3206 passengers, and 1023 crew.

The level of gross stupidity could not have been greater.

The level of gross irresponsibility could not have been higher.

And the level of pure selfishness could not have been more callous.

32 passengers and crew, and 1 salvage member lost their lives because of Captain Schettino.

This terrible tragedy provides us with a window insight into another trial that took place. This frivolous and heinous loss of life sheds light on another court room scene in history.

For this other court room scene is almost the exact reverse.

The person on trial stands on trial having committed no crime.

In fact the person on trial is seeking to save lives rather than callously take them.

Also, the court room itself is not a just, fair and impartial legal entity.

Rather, the court room itself is totally, biased, unfair, and partial to the view of one person.

2. The Political Threat - Are you the king of the Jews?

The court room is the headquarters of the Roman Procurator of Judea, Pontius Pilate.

The man on trial is the so-called 'messiah'.

And the charge made by Jesus' own people is that "he is the king of the Jews".

And so Pilate summons Jesus to answer the charge – "Are you the king of the Jews?"

And before we launch into our theological, and biblical understanding of that title,

We need to view the question from Pilate's perspective.

Anyone seeking to claim political power, was a threat to the order of the Roman Empire.

Even, here, in the backwaters of Judea,

the last thing needed was an uprising by the local dissidents.

And so the frame of Pilate's question are political in orientation.

3. The Questioning Answer

- Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?

Jesus knows exactly the question being asked, and responds in kind, with a questioning answer.

"Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?"

On one level Jesus' question makes sense – because he needs to know the reason for Pilate's question.

If Pilate simply repeats what others have said, then there is no point in giving an explanation.

However, if Pilate seeks to find out 'on his own', then there may be further reason given by Jesus.

Notice too, how quickly the power dynamic shifts between Pilate and Jesus,

Pilate starts as the questioner, but very quickly becomes the one questioned.

Similarly, Jesus starts as the interrogated, but very quickly becomes the interrogator.

4. The Direct Inquisition - What have you done?

Pilate's response is emphatically negative – in fact, that's something that we miss in English. For in Greek, you indicate when you ask a question what kind of response you want. It's kind of like - "Yes, can I have some more chocolate?"

Or "No, you don't want to have the last piece of cake?"

So here, Pilate in his response says – "Negative, I am not a Jew?"

And our translation has added the helpful rhetorical question – "Am I?"

Of course, Pilate is at pains to point out the fact that he's not part of this Jewish squabble. Pilate firmly attributes Jesus current predicament at the hands of the Jewish chief priests. But notice, also, then, that Pilate elevates himself above the Jewish chief priests, That they have to come to him, for him to sort out their problems.

And so the direct question, asked from the position of authority, The direct question is asked by Pilate – "what have you done?"

So Pilate, in this position of established power, seems to have Jesus under control...

But Jesus response flips the script again.

He doesn't respond with the

"Yes, you've got me, I am a king, and I was planning to over throw you, and Caesar, and anyone in between."

No. Jesus declares that his kingdom is not 'from here', that is 'not from this world'.

So Jesus is saying here that his kingdom is of a completely different order of magnitude than all the kingdoms that we see in history, and in the world today.

The kingdom that Jesus will establish will be radically different to the kingdoms of the world.

5. The Explicit Confirmation - So you are a king?

So, Pilate thinks that he's finally getting somewhere.

An admission to kingship, even if it is on the lunatic fringe of kingship – well that counts.

There isn't any category of incapacity due to mental illness for Pilate.

Pilate presses the point home – “So you are a king”

Again Jesus sidesteps – “You say that I am a king.”

Jesus doesn't directly admit to being a king, for that implies the wrong understanding of his kingship.

But again, just as Pilate thinks he has the upper hand,

just as Pilate thinks he has established his power,

Jesus flips the script – “For this reason, I was born and came into the world, to testify to the truth.”

Even more Jesus amps it up – “Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.”

Jesus has now cornered Pilate.

For either Jesus is speaking the truth, and is therefore innocent, and therefore should be freed,

Or Jesus is speaking a savage lie, and is therefore guilty, and therefore should be punished.

6. The pragmatists excuse - What is the truth?

Jesus' statement pushes Pilate over the edge.

Pilate responds with the pragmatist's excuse – what is the truth?

And so today, the same shift is made.

No longer are we allowed to argue about what is morally right and morally wrong.

No longer are we allowed to declare that there are universal truths, and universal lies.

Now, everything is about subjective opinions.

And every opinion is equally valid, and every opinion is beyond argument or refutation.

Because you can not invalidate someone's experience.

And their experience is the truth to them, and therefore it is inviolable.

Jesus cuts through our post-modern noise and folly.

Jesus declares to us – do we belong him and therefore belong to the truth?

- Where do we stand in relation to him – because there is no middle ground.

7. Christ the King & Anno Domini

And therefore, today of all days, as we celebrate Christ the king,
We rejoice in the liberation we have in Jesus' kingship.
For unlike any kingdom found in this world Jesus' kingdom is so profoundly different.

a. The Servant King

It is profoundly different because the paradox of Jesus' kingship.
Jesus is the servant king.
Jesus is the servant of all, for he died for all.
And yet, Jesus is Lord of all, for he rose from the dead, having conquered death itself!

b. The Personal King

Second, Jesus' kingship is radically different in that he is a personal king.
Jesus' demands total loyalty from his subjects, and yet, Jesus knows all his subjects personally.
That is, because Jesus rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and sits at God's right hand,
The Spirit of God has been poured out on all of his servants, so that we all know him.

So we, as the church have entered into the most profound union with Christ.
So that he is our bride groom, and we are his bride, being made ready for heaven itself!

c. The Returning King

And finally, Jesus kingship, even though it is not of this world,
Jesus' kingship will become a reality in this world, when he returns.

Every knee will bow, on heaven, on earth and under the earth.
Therefore, we are liberated from establishing Christendom on earth, for we wait for it from heaven.
We are liberated from conquering all other nations to pre-empt Jesus' kingdom.
For we know that at the right time, Jesus will appear to usher in his kingdom.

And so we say, Come Lord Jesus Come!

Let's pray.