

December 13, 2015
Sunday Morning Service
Series: John
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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FEARFUL RULERS John 19:1-16

John established a very important principle about genuine love in the first letter that he wrote, the one we call 1 John. He wrote, *By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love (1 John 4:17-18).*

This statement teaches that love as God intended it to be, that is, supreme love for Him and then love that desires for our neighbor to be like Him, gives us incredible confidence as we look ahead to the day when we will face Him. There is in the conscience of every person the knowledge that God created us and, therefore, we must answer to our Creator. Sinful human nature does everything imaginable to dismiss or explain that knowledge away. Nevertheless, the thought of standing before our Creator is a fearful thing. Only those whose love for God embraces Him by faith as our loving Heavenly Father can face the Eternal Judge with no fear. No one is afraid to meet with the loving father.

But if a person rebels against their Creator, denies the existence of their Creator, breaks their Creator's laws without flinching, there is something in their conscience that reminds them that they are in trouble. People like that don't like to be reminded that God is their Creator and that they will have to give an accounting to Him. The reminder that there is a God who is my Creator coupled with the knowledge that I have ignored Him and rebelled against Him causes fear. It ought to.

The story of Jesus being arrested and brought to the governor of Judea by the religious rulers reveals men's fears. The story of the governor's dilemma of what to do with Jesus is a story about fear. The religious leaders claimed to fear God, but they didn't. They pretended not to fear Jesus, but in reality they did. Pilate acted like he feared no one, but in reality he feared almost everyone. He feared the Jews who might riot at any moment. He feared the religious leaders who could sully his name before the emperor. He feared the emperor. He feared Herod the king. And now he was afraid of Jesus—but not for the right reasons.

One thing Pilate and all the religious leaders had in common was love for self. That is not perfect love. Self-love is concerned for the safety, well being, prosperity, ease, and comfort of self. That is why self-love is so fearful. Anyone or anything might come along and disrupt the apple cart.

Genuine love for God, mature love for God highly esteems God and trusts Him implicitly. At the same time, real love honors those who deserve honor and loves others. Still when compared with God, true love takes others with a grain of salt. By that I mean, mature love does not fear what other people can do because it is so focused on what God does. Pilate didn't have that. Caiaphas didn't have that. The other members of the Sanhedrin didn't have that. Jesus had that. The others feared. Jesus didn't.

Rulers Debated Whether to Beat or Kill the Innocent Son of God (vv.1-7).

The fearful governor was content to beat the innocent man (vv.1-5). As has been the rule in the apprehension and trial of Jesus up to this point, the rulers who set themselves against God's anointed ignore inconvenient laws. *Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged him. And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head and arrayed him in a purple robe. They came up to him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and struck him with their hands (vv.1-3).*

The flogging mentioned in this text referred to a specific kind of flogging. According to D.A. Carson, there were three levels of flogging practiced in the Roman times. First, there was a beating called the *fustigatio*. This was a less severe level of beating reserved

for petty crimes, or for people who were being a public nuisance. It came with a severe warning to cease that kind of activity. A second kind of flogging was *flagellatio*. This was a serious, painful flogging for criminals whose crime was more serious and who deserved an intense beating as punishment. The third form of flogging was called *verberatio*. This was the most severe kind of beating. Authorities often ordered this kind of beating to those who were about to be crucified.

This third kind of beating was reserved for victims of capital punishment because it weakened them so they would experience an early death. This form of punishment was rendered by soldiers. They tied the victim to a post, and one after another would whip the victim until he was exhausted or unconscious or until the commander stopped the process. It was generally reserved for non-Jewish citizens, as Jesus was. The favorite instrument the soldiers chose for this torture was a whip with leather thongs with bits of metal or stone secured in the ends. This beating often left the victim with bones and vital organs exposed.

In the beating described in this part of the story, Pilate had Jesus flogged with the *fustigatio* beating. It appears that Pilate intended for this beating of Jesus to appease the Jews. The soldiers mocked Jesus with the “king principle.” They made a crown like kings would wear out of the date thorn which sometimes had spikes almost a foot long. They put soldier’s robe around His shoulders. They bowed before Him mocking Him and mocking the Jews by calling Him king. They struck Him in the face. “Surely” Pilate reasoned, “when the Jews see Jesus all beaten and bruised and warned to stop His ministry, they would be satisfied.” Or so the governor hoped.

As we read further in the story, we learn that the leaders and the crowd were not satisfied and still demanded the Lord’s crucifixion. Therefore, later, after the sentence for crucifixion, the soldiers administered the *verberatio* which left Jesus too weak to carry the cross beam of his cross. That is the beating Mark referred to when he recorded, *So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified (Mark 15:15).*

But in the current setting, this fearful ruler admitted he had flogged an innocent man. *Pilate went out again and said to them,*

“See, I am bringing him out to you that you may know that I find no guilt in him” (v.4). So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, “Behold the man!” (v.5).

The governor having ordered the beating and mocking of Jesus brought Him outside for the Jews to see. They, of course, had to remain outside in order not to be defiled by the sinful Gentile. This is a picture of Pilate essentially mocking the Jews. They brought Jesus to be tried by the official representative of Rome. He admitted that he found no guilt in Jesus. He had Him beaten anyway and then presented this beaten, worn down, harmless shell of a man. It was as if He was saying to the Jews, “What do you fear about this beaten, humiliated man?” What almost no one that day understood is that Pilate displayed to the people the “body” of the Incarnate Word of God (John 1:14).

With the mocking statement, “Behold the man,” Pilate was hoping the people would decide that he should release Jesus, not Barabbas. “Behold the Man” indeed! The “man” is the creation’s only hope. He promised, *“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life” (John 3:14-15).* So the eternal invitation to all who will hear: *“Declare and present your case; let them take counsel together! Who told this long ago? Who declared it of old? Was it not I, the LORD? And there is no other god besides me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none besides me. Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other” (Isaiah 45:21-22).* One day everyone will behold the man—and it will be a fearful time. John saw the future in the *Revelation. Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen (Revelation 1:7).*

The fearful religious leaders desired to kill the innocent man (vv.6-7). They demanded crucifixion. *When the chief priests and the officers saw him, they cried out, “Crucify him, crucify him!” Pilate said to them, “Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no guilt in him” (v.6).* The chief priests and the officers all knew what crucifixion meant and what it looked like. No doubt most of them had observed this most gruesome punishment ever invented by evil, wicked, fallen creatures. No doubt they had specifically pushed for

this horrible travesty in the counsels they took against the Lord and against His anointed. Now when it looked like Pilate was going to waffle and set the innocent man free, the wicked religionists whipped the crowd into a frenzy crying out over and over for Pilate to crucify Jesus.

Pilate, exasperated, said emphatically, “**You** take Him and crucify Him because **I** find no guilt in Him.” His argument was, “**You** brought Him to me to be tried. I tried Him according to the law and found Him innocent. But you refuse to accept my judgment. Fine! Then kill Him yourself if that is what you want!” Though he turned Jesus over to the people, he did not remove responsibility for Jesus’ death from himself.

In response to Pilate’s gripe, the rulers simply affirmed the truth Jesus had declared about Himself. *The Jews answered him, “We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has made himself the Son of God” (v.7)*. When it looked like their plan to be rid of Jesus was in jeopardy, they appealed to their law. Rome maintained an agreement with the Jews stating that they could practice their unique laws and that the governor was supposed to help them uphold their laws. To that end, Pilate had to be aware for many of their unique laws. He was probably not surprised when they threw at him the law Jesus supposedly broke.

Here they appealed to Leviticus 24:16, which requires: *Whoever blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall stone him. The sojourner as well as the native, when he blasphemes the Name, shall be put to death (Leviticus 24:16)*. The religious rulers acknowledged that they fully understood that Jesus of Nazareth had clearly derided the name of God (in their opinion) by claiming to be equal with God. They were right on that matter. Jesus had stated that equality beyond question and especially claimed it whenever He used the title Son of God for Himself. The leaders insisted that the law Moses gave them required them to stone Jesus—which they were more than willing to do. However, Roman law did not permit them to execute Jesus.

Hence the dilemma. What should Pilate do with this “Son of God”? That is still the dilemma most religions struggle with. What if Jesus really is God?

Rulers Needed to Be More Afraid (vv.8-12).

A fearful king claimed to have great authority (vv.9-10). Actually it was all the religious talk that caused his fear. *When Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid (v.8)*. Pilate feared more when he heard that Jesus claimed to be equal with God. This Roman ruler might not have been particularly religious, but, like most Roman rulers, he was very superstitious. The Roman culture recognized hundreds of gods. The emperor himself demanded worship as a god. But a common fear among the people was the possibility of offending the main God, the most important God, whoever or whatever that might be.

So Pilate was now saddled with the same fear people ought to experience today: “What if Jesus is who He claims to be?” The real King didn’t help remove the governor’s fear. *He entered his headquarters again and said to Jesus, “Where are you from?” But Jesus gave him no answer (v.9)*. Didn’t everyone know the answer to this question? The common people all understood that Jesus was from Nazareth, that His father appeared to be Joseph, His mother was Mary, and they knew his brothers (Matt. 13:55). Surely, Pilate the investigator would have been privy to this information.

Yeah, but where was Jesus really from? Everyone knew that Jesus grew up in Nazareth. But even the “teacher of Israel” Nicodemus acknowledged that they also knew the Jesus was a teacher sent from God. Had that news reached Pilate’s ears? Did Pilate now wonder if this Jesus fellow was one of those mythical Greek gods who came to earth to live like a human? Was He really God the Son, part of the Trinity with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit?

That Jesus is all of that and more should strike fear in the human heart. He is our Creator. He is the Savior who paid the penalty for sin by shedding His own blood. He alone can save us from the penalty of sin. And in that great and horrible day, He will be the Judge who will determine our eternal state as either heaven or hell. Fear the Son of God!

Fear in Pilate’s heart generated threats from him. He wasn’t very happy that Jesus chose not to answer his question. *So Pilate said to him, “You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?” (v.10)*. Jesus’

refusal to respond to Pilate's question angered him. He was accustomed to having people quake in his presence. When he gave an order to hillbillies from Galilee, they obeyed with fear and trembling. Jesus didn't flinch, because though He had submitted to beating and humiliation, He was still in control.

Pilate appealed to his authority. It was true that Rome gave the governor the authority to try such cases and, according to his own conclusion, either release the accused or execute the accused. However, what if the emperor really wasn't God? What if there really is a Creator God whose plan to redeem His creation from sin required that the man Jesus (who was really God the Son) had to be crucified? By the way, where is the emperor today? Where is Pilate? What became of all that authority? Things tend to change according to God's design and desires. Obviously, it is better for us to submit to the authority of the eternal, unchanging God.

Jesus pointed out a great truth to this confused and agitated governor. He told him that creatures have only the authority the Creator gives (vv.11-12). God grants authority to who He chooses. *Jesus answered him, "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin" (v.11).*

The Lord's reference to "above" coupled with the accusation that He claimed to be the Son of God added to Pilate's concern. All this stuff was getting spooky. Did Pilate stop to consider that maybe he wasn't in charge? No, that is pretty doubtful. Like all stubborn humans, he would need to dismiss that thought immediately. Most humans greatly fear the possibility that they are not in charge, that circumstances are beyond their control, that someone else might determine what happens to them.

Fear or not, it is true that God gives authority. He gives certain levels of authority to everyone from parents, to bosses, to pastors, to teachers, to government officials. And God has every right to expect those who receive authority to exercise that authority properly because one day we will answer to the Author of the authority for how we used it.

As often happens when opinionated crowds have gathered, so it happened to Pilate. That popular opinion tends to erode authority. *From then on Pilate sought to release him, but the Jews cried out, "If*

you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar" (v.12). The governor, being motivated by fear of the unknown, wanted to be rid of this unusual fellow who landed in his courtroom. But the crowd took away the governor's supposed authority by playing the "loyalty" card. They knew that Pilate believed with all his heart that Caesar was the ultimate authority. They knew they could threaten to expose his disloyalty to the boss. They knew this would help them get their way. Too bad Pilate didn't trust God to be in charge.

Fearful Creatures Desire Kings Like Themselves (vv.13-16).

The restless crowd virtually admitted, "We have no king but ourselves." The fearful governor presented the King to the people. He set the King before the judgment seat. *So when Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Stone Pavement, and in Aramaic Gabbatha (v.13).* This was the necessary setting for Jesus' formal sentencing. Pilate, in all his authority, sat Jesus down on the judgment seat where he pronounced the sentence of crucifixion. What irony in that one day, Jesus will be the eternal Judge seated at His judgment bar where He will sentence Pilate to eternity in the lake of fire where he will experience ceaseless agony, weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth, the place where the worm does not die.

Pilate presented "the King." *Now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover. It was about the sixth hour. He said to the Jews, "Behold your King!" (v.14).* Still mocking the Jews who he hated, Pilate presented their King. Even while the Jews were busy preparing to celebrate God's past deliverance from bondage in Egypt, they rejected God's eternal sacrifice who delivers from the power and penalty of sin.

The fearful people took issue with Pilate's mockery and boldly claimed that Caesar was their king. Away with the true King. *They cried out, "Away with him, away with him, crucify him!" (v.15a).* Crucify your King?! *Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King" (v.15b).* It was abundantly clear from the testimony of the Jews' lives that they did not desire Caesar either. *The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar" (v.15c).* Do you get the idea that these

people lied continually. They lied about their love for God and got angry when Jesus exposed it. They lied about keeping their own laws and seethed at Jesus for exposing their hypocrisy. They lied about Jesus' claims and teaching. So we are not surprised to see them lying about loyalty to Caesar.

This story is a wonderful reminder that human rulers accomplish only what the Creator allows. The people raised such a fuss that Pilate concluded he had no choice but to submit to them in fear. *So he delivered him over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus.* Consider what they imagined took place. They imagined that they had won the war. They imagined that Jesus of Nazareth was forever dead and on His way to hell.

But what actually happened? They sealed their eternal fate in the lake of fire. Jesus, the righteous, eternal Judge had already announced their sentence. *Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin" (v.11b).* Pilate is now suffering the torments of hell forever because of the part he played in killing the King. But the religious rulers, and Caiaphas in particular, sealed their eternal fate by cooking up this scheme and delivering Jesus to Pilate who they forced to kill the King.

"Behold your King." That is the message for all creation. But most created beings reject the only true King who is their Creator. They claim they are independent enough, wise enough, strong enough mentally, physically and emotionally to get along without the crutch called religion. But one day they will stand before the King and Judge Jesus. Will they fear Him? Finally in the end they will fear Him, but it will be too late to make any changes to their eternal destiny. Today we must fear the Lord and not people.