

John 19: 1-22; Easter Sermon # 3, “Who Really Has the Power?”
Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall
on Palm Sunday afternoon, March 20th, 2005

The power to sin seems so very great, so very prominent in this text that I have just read in your hearing, that we may be tempted to think that the power of wicked men to do their wicked deeds, is stronger than the power of God. Even many Christians fall into this kind of thinking when confronted with the strength and power of what sinful men seem to “get away with.” It does not seem righteous in God to permit sinful men to do what they do get away with, when they commit violent acts, and take the righteous away. How can God stand by and permit this, how can He not intervene? Why could He have not prevented this in the first place? These are questions which come to our minds. It did appear that evil triumphed that day when Jesus was delivered into the hands of wicked men and was falsely accused, unjustly tried, and so cruelly treated and put to death.

But I want you to understand this afternoon, that all of these events were perfectly orchestrated by God the Father, not in terms of the sinfulness of them, for God is not the author of sin; but perfectly orchestrated in terms of what our Lord Jesus would have to undergo and suffer on our behalf and in our place. No man’s decisions or actions were outside the bounds of the scrutiny of God the Father. No man’s will was stronger than God’s purpose. And although men had the power to sin against Jesus and to inflict upon Him terrible sufferings, He had the power to be able to speak and act as the most noble of Kings, knowing that power belongs to God.

So the question that I am asking this afternoon is; “How are the power of sinful men and the power of God to be understood when we look at the events leading up to the crucifixion?” We shall see that as we look at the events leading up to the crucifixion, that there are certain conclusions that can be drawn concerning the power of men and the power of God.

The 1st Conclusion is this: Pilate had the power to order the soldiers to scourge, and mock and strike Jesus, but Jesus had the power to endure this. (Verses 1-4)

We need to understand that God has given to all men the ability to exercise their will to do things that they want to do in accordance with the human nature that He has given them. And, when we see men acting as Pilate did on that day we may be perplexed, but this much we know. He did exactly what He wanted to do even though it appeared that wanted Jesus to go free. He kept saying, “I find no fault in this man, I find no fault in Him

at all." But yet He unjustly scourged Jesus and actually permitted Jesus to be mocked and cruelly treated. When we see these men sin against Jesus, they are sinning because they have decided to sin; they think and purpose the sin, and they know that they have the power to sin and treat Jesus in this way. God is separate from their sinful acts and motives and purposes; He is of too pure eyes to behold iniquity. And yet His is entirely the power to ordain what will happen to Jesus and exactly to what degree He will suffer. And He committed to Jesus the power to be able to endure all these sufferings all the way to the cross and death. Jesus says in John 10: 17, 18, "Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father." These sufferings of Jesus were very real because Jesus had a true human nature besides His divine nature. He would feel just as deeply as any of us and I believe even more so because of His sinlessness and His deity. This we do not sufficiently consider. We think that Jesus would endure easily because He was God made manifest in the flesh. I am saying that Jesus felt more deeply the evil perpetrated against Him because of His sinlessness and His divinity. His power to endure was related directly to His righteous and holy character. This insured that when He felt the Father forsaking Him on the cross, that still He had the power to endure and to triumph in His sufferings. His thought was that the Father was pleased with Him in these sufferings even when the Father had to look at Him as though He was a transgressor and punish Him for our sakes.

Now 2ndly - Pilate had the power to crucify Jesus or release Him, but Jesus knew that it was all in the hands of His Father.

(Verses 5-11)

Pilate, I do not think liked having to scourge Jesus, but I think that he reasoned that if he could show Jesus to them as one who was broken of His physical strength, that he would be able to convince the chief priests to release Him. He says to them, "Behold I am bringing Him out to you," and in verse 5 he says, "Behold the man." He is saying to them in effect, "Look, He says that He is a King, but, behold! It is only a man. He is a shattered King." But the chief priests and the officers cried out to crucify Him. Pilate is now willing to let them have Him and crucify Him themselves. The power at work in Pilate is not the power to do what is right, it is the power to please these leaders and to make concessions to their sin. The power to compromise in terms of administering justice is a sinful weakness in Pilate's character. The power to stay the course and suffer and die without complaint or the explanation which might ease His sufferings, is the power

of our King.

The Jews say to Pilate, “We have a law and according to our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God.” It then says, “When Pilate heard that saying, he was the more afraid.” He goes to Jesus and asks Him, “Where are you from?” But Jesus gives him no answer. Jesus did not need to give him answer, because He had already told Pilate that His kingdom was not of this world, that His kingdom was not from there. But Pilate thinks that Jesus is not speaking to him perhaps because of an unwillingness to recognize his power in that situation. “Are you not speaking to me? Do You not know that I have power to crucify You and power to release You?” Jesus knows that that issue was settled hours before in the garden, yea the issue was settled before the foundation of the world. It was determined there that Jesus would die and die in this very way.

So Jesus lets him in on the secret. “You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin.” He is saying that Pilate only has whatever power that he has, as a grant from God, and that his power to crucify Jesus is only there to accomplish whatever the Father has decided should take place. Acts 4: 27 says, “For truly against You holy Servant Jesus, who You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done.” We need desperately to see, as Christians, this blessed truth. Power really belongs to God. Psalm 62: 11 says, “God has spoken once, twice I have heard this; that power belongs to God. Also to You, O Lord, belongs mercy; for You render to each one according to his work. We need desperately to see this if we are not a Christian. The power to change people, to take away a stony heart and grant the gift of salvation is with God. The power to reward people according to their work, whether good or evil, is with God. And God will do it. He will weigh it all perfectly.

And then 3rdly- Pilate had the power to say that Jesus was the King of the Jews and to write that Jesus was the King of the Jews, but He had no power to resist the demands of the chief priests that Jesus be crucified. (Verses 12- 22)

Pilate was seeking from here on to release Jesus, after he heard Jesus speak about his, that is Pilate's, lack of power. He had the power to say to them in verse 14, “Behold your King!” And he had the power to ask the Jews, “Shall I crucify your King?” But he had no power to resist their demands for his crucifixion. What it all came down to, was the statement of

the Jews to him in verse 12, “If you let this man go, you are not Caesar’s friend. Whoever makes himself a king, speaks against Caesar.” This was where Pilate’s moral weakness is seen in its truest light. He could not bear the thought that his power, his position, his reputation, his life could be jeopardized by releasing Jesus. These Jews were implying that he was no friend to Caesar and in fact that he would be encouraging rebellion against the Roman government by releasing one who made Himself a King. He knew that Jesus was not a rebel and that He was not encouraging rebellion. But he feared the implications of all that they were saying, getting back to Tiberius Caesar. So, it says, “he delivered Him to them to be crucified. Pilate’s parting shot at the Jews in this matter is found in the fact that he wrote a title and put it on the cross. And the writing was, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. And this God’s power did permit to stand, even upon objection made to Pilate by the Jews. They wanted him to write, “He said, I am the King of the Jews.” But Pilate answered, “What I have written, I have written.” And the truth shall stand. And so Jesus was crucified, the King of the Jews. Ask yourself, now is He my King, for Jesus died not for the Jews only, to be their King, but for us among the Gentiles also who will receive what He has done for us to ourselves. Believe in Him. Come and have Him to reign over you.