“I Find No Fault in Him”

John 18:28-38

In last week’s message from John 18, we read about the first three of the six trials that Jesus went through on the night of His arrest. First of all, Jesus was brought to the house of Annas (the son-in-law of the high priest, Caiaphas), where He was privately interrogated. Then, He was taken to the house of Caiaphas himself, where He was privately interrogated even further. All this was against Jewish law, since night-time trials were forbidden, and since no defendant was to be privately interrogated before being brought to a proper trial. Yet, to Annas and Caiaphas, the law didn’t matter in this case, because they were intent on destroying Jesus of Nazareth!

Later that night, the Sanhedrin (the religious “supreme court” of Israel) assembled at Caiaphas’s house; and the “official” trial began. False witnesses were suborned to make false testimony against Jesus. None of them agreed together in their witness; thus, according to both the Law of God and the law of the Sanhedrin, they could not make any sentence against Him. But that didn’t stop them from passing sentence, anyway. They ignored God’s requirement that the witnesses must agree, and unanimously condemned Jesus to be guilty of blasphemy, because He said that He is the Son of God.

However, there was one big obstacle to their plan. Since the Romans wouldn’t allow the Jews to put anyone to death without their approval, they had to convince Pilate, the Roman governor, that Jesus was a criminal deserving of death. That is what we will be reading about in this morning’s Scripture. As we study this passage, we will be taking a close look at the people who were involved in this trial, and we will draw some applications for our lives today. The title of this message is I Find No Fault in Him.

Read John 18:28-38

I. The blind Passover observers (v. 28)

While Jesus was being shuffled from one trial to another, the Jewish people were preparing for a very important event: The Passover feast! The Passover day (which falls on the 14th day of the month Nisan) had begun at 6 p.m., just before Jesus sat down to eat with His disciples; and it would continue until 6 p.m. the next evening. (The Jewish days go from 6 p.m. to 6 p.m.)

Now, the Passover was, without question, the most important of the seven feasts that God had ordained for the nation of Israel. The very first Passover had been celebrated by their forefathers 1,400 years earlier, on the night before Pharaoh gave them their freedom, and allowed them to leave Egypt under the leadership of Moses. All the firstborn children of the Egyptians died at the hand of the LORD that night; but the all the firstborn of the Jews lived. Why? Because the blood of the lamb was applied over their doorposts!

Read Exodus 12:1-13, 22-23, 29-32

This is the event for which the Jews were preparing. Between 3 and 6 p.m. that evening, in the last few hours before the end of the Passover day, each household of Israel would slay a
lamb, put the lamb’s blood on the doorposts, roast the lamb, and eat it together. All of this was a picture of Jesus Christ, who was about to die to take away the sins of the world. At 3 p.m. that day, Jesus Christ would die on the cross; and at that very same moment, the very first Passover lamb would be slain by the priests in the Temple. Jesus Christ was about to become the true Passover Lamb. In 1 Corinthians 5:7, Paul wrote that “Christ our passover is sacrificed for us.” Just as the innocent lamb was slain, so Jesus, the innocent, sinless Son of God, was slain on the cross. Just as the Jewish people in Moses’ day were spared from death by putting the blood of the lamb over their doorposts, so sinners are spared from eternal death in hell by applying Christ’s blood to their hearts through faith in Him. Just as the lamb was roasted in fire, so Jesus went through the fire of God’s judgment for sin. Just as the Jews ate bitter herbs with the Passover meal, so Jesus went through the bitterness of being separated from His Father for six hours, as the sins of all mankind were placed upon Him.

Little did the Jewish religious leaders know, as they were preparing for the Passover feast that evening, that they were playing their very part in slaying the true Passover Lamb, Jesus Christ. They were about to commit the ultimate crime—the crime of murdering the Son of God!

Now, these people were very careful about observing the Passover rituals exactly. They had cleared their houses of all traces of leaven, so that they would not be defiled, and unable to celebrate the Passover. Even here in verse 28, we find that the Jews were careful not to cross over the threshold of Pilate’s palace. (Read verse 28 again.) Why would they not go into Pilate’s judgment hall? Because Pilate was a Gentile; and if they defiled themselves by going into a Gentile’s dwelling, they would not be able to eat the Passover lamb that evening.

Isn’t it strange that the people can go through religious rituals strictly and devoutly, yet totally miss what the rituals are about? The true Passover Lamb—the One who is able to forgive sins—was right there in their midst; yet, in blind ignorance, they were about to murder Him.

You know, the same is still true today. Many people go through religious rituals meticulously, yet have no idea that they are rejecting the Son of God, and crucifying Him in their hearts. Many people do religious rituals that supposedly glorify Jesus Christ; yet, they have no idea that their sin was what nailed Christ to the cross. They have no idea that by trying to get to heaven by their own good works, instead of by simple faith in Jesus Christ, they are rejecting the One whose blood can wash away their sin. It’s as though they have slain the Lamb of God with their sin, but then refused to put the blood of Jesus over their heart’s door. Tragically, when Judgment Day comes, the LORD will not pass over them. They will perish eternally!

Though none of us was around when Jesus died, we all nailed Jesus to the cross with our sins. Our iniquities put Him there. But what about the people who were actually responsible for the death of the Son of God? What about the Jewish religious rulers, and the angry mob of Jews who demanded His death, and the Romans who actually carried out the act of crucifying Him? Surely they weren’t able to be saved after committing the actual crime of crucifying the Son of God, were they? Actually….they were! It was possible for even them to be saved, if they would only repent. As it turned out, multitudes of people who had joined in the slaying of Jesus Christ put their faith in Christ, and were saved, only weeks after His crucifixion!

Read Acts 3:12-19
Most of the people to whom Peter preached on this occasion had been in Jerusalem during the Passover only weeks earlier; and evidently, many of them had personally participated in crucifying Jesus. Peter reminded the people that “ye have delivered up” Jesus, and “denied him in the presence of Pilate.” Yet, Peter assured them that God was granting them the chance to repent (turn from their sin), and believe on Jesus. Peter said, “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.” Isn’t that amazing? Why would God forgive the very people who crucified His Son?

Well, the answer to that question is, first of all, that God loves mankind with a love that we can’t comprehend. And, secondly, God is willing to forgive us because of our ignorance. Remember what Jesus said on the cross? He said, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” Peter said the same thing in his sermon on the day of Pentecost. He said, “Now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers.” God was willing to show them mercy, because they had slain His Son in blindness and ignorance.

Ultimately, every sinner rejects the Lord Jesus Christ out of ignorance. Though a person may hear the Word of God, and be convicted by the Holy Spirit of his need of salvation, he is still very blinded by his own sin. The god of this world, Satan, has blinded sinners’ eyes, as well. The sinner has no idea of how grievously he is insulting and blaspheming God, nor of the great danger that his soul is in.

Now, please do not misunderstand: A sinner’s ignorance does not make him “innocent”; and it doesn’t make him unaccountable to God. He is still condemned for his sin, and for his rejection of God. He is still on his way to hell. Yet God, in His mercy, still lovingly reaches out to blind, ignorant mankind. He has provided a way of escape for all of us, through His Son, Jesus Christ. In Hebrews 5:2 Paul said that Jesus, our High Priest, “can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way.”

One of the most beautiful pictures of God’s compassion toward blind, ignorant sinners can be found in the sanctuary cities of the Old Testament. God made a special provision for people who were guilty of manslaughter on account of ignorance or negligence. If a person accidentally killed another person, not knowing what he was doing, he was given a chance, after his trial, to flee to one of six cities which were designated as “cities of refuge.” As long as the person stayed within the walls of that city, he was safe from the “avenger of the blood” (family members of the slain person who wanted to avenge their relative’s blood). If the manslayer stayed in the city of refuge until the death of the high priest who was in office at the time, he was then allowed to go free. Let’s take a look at this passage of Scripture.

Read Numbers 35:15-28

Jesus Christ is pictured in this passage in three ways. First, the victim who was slain is a picture of Christ, who was slain on the cross. The city of refuge is also a picture of Christ. The high priest is a picture of Christ, as well! Here is how the picture works. First of all, we are the manslayers. We have all slain Jesus Christ with our sin. Yet, we can be saved from God’s judgment if we run to our “city of refuge,” Jesus Christ! Those who place their faith in
Him are safe and secure in Him. He is also our High Priest, who intercedes for us; and because He died for us, we may be freed from the bondage of sin by placing our trust in Him.

My friend, perhaps you are not saved, and you are beginning to understand that your sin nailed Jesus to the cross. If so, I urge you to run to Jesus. He is your refuge from God’s wrath! He took God's wrath upon Himself on the cross, so that you might be saved by simply trusting in Him. But don't put it off. You have heard the truth; and hearing the truth makes you all the more accountable. Paul wrote, “For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth (the truth that Christ died and rose again so that we might be saved), there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries” (Hebrews 10:26-27). There is no other sacrifice that can atone for your sins than the sacrifice that Christ made for you on the cross. If you wilfully turn away from Jesus’ sacrifice, and try to get to heaven your own way, it is as if you are refusing to run to the city of refuge. You have nothing to look forward to but the fiery, eternal judgment of hell. Won’t you run to Jesus today? He is your City of Refuge! He is your High Priest! He is your Passover Lamb, who was slain for your sins!

II. The false accusers (vv. 29-33)

(Read verses 29-33 again.) In these verses, we find that the people are now outside the judgment hall of Pilate: and they are getting ready to make their accusation against Jesus. Now, at first, they didn't make any specific accusation against Jesus. They beat around the bush, and tried to say, in a general way, that “Jesus is worthy of death: just trust us.” However, Pilate wouldn’t accept this. He needed an actual charge.

Now, remember, what was the charge that the Sanhedrin had made against Jesus? They had charged Him with blasphemy. Under the Law of God, blasphemers were to be executed. The people of Israel were to stone the perpetrator to death. In Leviticus 24:16, the LORD said, “And he that blasphemeth the name of the LORD, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him.”

The Jewish rulers had a big problem ahead of them. They knew that the charge of “blasphemy” wouldn’t sit well with the Roman governor. Yes, the Romans did allow the Jews to be governed by their own religious laws, to an extent. However, Rome would not allow anyone to be put to death except with their authority: and matters like “blasphemy” against the Jewish God were not considered to be death-worthy by the Romans. Furthermore, anyone who was put to death was to be put to death Rome’s way—by crucifixion.

The Jewish rulers probably weren’t overly concerned about whether Jesus was put to death by stoning, or by crucifixion: they just wanted Him dead. However, they knew that “blasphemy” would not be a sufficient charge for Rome’s approval. After Pilate had forced them to get specific about their charge against Jesus, this is the charge that they made.


All of a sudden, the Sanhedrin’s charge against Jesus changed from “blasphemy” to “insurrection against Rome.” The Jews accused Jesus of claiming to be the King of the Jews.
Now, they knew very well that Jesus had never tried to make Himself king. On one occasion, after Jesus had fed the 5,000, the people tried to make Him king by force; but He would not allow them to do so. But the truth didn’t matter. The rulers were willing to do whatever they had to do, and say whatever they had to say, to get Jesus put to death. They also charged Jesus with teaching the Jews that they should not pay tribute to Caesar. This was also a huge lie. When Jesus was asked about giving tribute only a few days earlier, Jesus had commanded the people to render to God that which is God’s, and unto Caesar that which is Caesar’s.

Jesus’ accusers weren’t concerned about truth. They weren’t really concerned about following God’s laws or man’s laws, either (at least, not when it didn’t suit them). As we’ve already seen, the rulers of Israel broke nearly two dozen laws in the whole process of arresting and trying Jesus. In fact, they were breaking the law at that very moment. Jewish law stated that the Sanhedrin “shall not judge on the eve of the Sabbath, nor on any festival” (Mishna, “Sanhedrin” IV, 1). In other words, no one was to be tried or put to death on a holy day. Well, guess what day it was? It was the Passover. Jesus’ accusers were, themselves, breaking the law by pushing to execute Jesus on a holy day.

You know, many people today are just like Jesus’ false accusers. Embittered against the Lord for one reason or another, they hurl false accusations at Him. They accuse the Lord of being uncaring or unloving, because He allowed this thing or that thing to happen to them. They blame every problem in their lives on God and His Son Jesus Christ, because they want to justify their pushing Him out of their lives. They act as though they were God, and as though God were a criminal, whom they have the moral right to condemn. Yet, they are quite willing to overlook the glaring sin and unrighteousness in their lives. They are quite willing to overlook the countless lies they have told to people; the people they have hated, cursed, and virtually murdered in their hearts; the people they have used and trampled in order to get their own way; the things they have stolen, and the people they have defrauded; the innumerable acts of adultery that they have committed in their hearts, if not also in deed; the countless promises they have broken; and the innumerable times when they have cursed God’s and Jesus’ name, and mocked God’s Word. They don’t care about the truth concerning themselves and their sin, or about the truth concerning God and Jesus Christ; they just want to get rid of God from their lives, because they love their sin. They never stop to consider that perhaps the misery in their lives is precisely because of the fact that they have pushed God out of their lives, and rejected Him! The Bible says, “But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked” (Isaiah 57:20-21).

Now, let’s return to verses 31-32 again. (Read verses 31-32.) What does John mean when he says, “That the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled, which he spake, signifying what death he should die”? He’s talking about the times when Jesus foretold that He would be put to death by crucifixion. Only two days earlier Jesus had said, “Ye know that after two days is the feast of the passover, and the Son of man is betrayed to be crucified” (Matthew 26:2).

You know, everything that was happening in Jesus’ arrest and trial was vitally important, because Scriptures were being fulfilled one after another. Even Jesus’ means of death was vitally important. If, at some point, the Jews had taken it upon themselves to kill Jesus by stoning, Scripture would not have been fulfilled. But because they took Jesus to trial before
Pilate, they couldn't put Him to death the Jewish way: it had to be by crucifixion. Not only was Jesus’ crucifixion vividly described in prophecy in Psalm 22, but God had specifically said that those who were executed by hanging on a tree were cursed! Let’s take a look.

Read Deuteronomy 21:22-23

Read Galatians 3:13

Jesus had to be hung on a tree, because hanging on a tree was a sign of God’s curse. Every time we see the cross, we are reminded that Jesus became a curse for us—that He took the curse of our sin upon Himself, so that we might be redeemed to God. Christian, take this to heart, and never forget it!

III. The cynical judge (vv. 33-38)

(Read verses 33-38 again.) At this point, the Roman trial of Jesus Christ began. Jesus was now standing before the man who had the actual legal authority to condemn Him to death. The rulers of Israel had made their charge to Pilate. Jesus, they said, had claimed to be the King of the Jews, and was therefore worthy of death for insurrection against Rome. Therefore, Pilate asked Jesus the obvious question: “Art thou the king of the Jews?”

How did Jesus answer this question? He said very straightforwardly, “Thou sayest that I am a king.” Yet, there is something else that Jesus said prior to this. Before affirming that He is, indeed, the King of the Jews, Jesus asked Pilate a question. He said, “Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me?” Basically, Jesus was asking, “Are you asking me this yourself, out of a sincere desire to know the truth? Or are you reacting to a rumour that you’ve heard, and are trying to find a reason to condemn me?” As Jesus so often did with people, He was asking Pilate a question in order to prick his conscience, and get him thinking.

Jesus was always ready to explain truth about Himself to those who were earnestly seeking the truth; but to those who were casual, indifferent, or who just wanted to be amused, He had little or nothing to say. Jesus is meek and mild, merciful, longsuffering, and willing to save; but He will not be trifled with. So it is today. My friend, are you only casual in your search for the truth? Or are you genuinely seeking the Lord? The Bible says, “Seek the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near” (Isaiah 55:6).

Now, Pilate was not so happy at this point. You can hear the contempt for Jesus in his response to Jesus’ question. He said, “Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee unto me: what hast thou done?” I don’t know what Pilate was expecting to hear Jesus say: but I assure you that he was not expecting to hear anything like what came out of Jesus’ mouth! Let’s look again at Jesus’ answer. (Read verse 37 again.) Jesus completely avowed that He is King; but His Kingdom, He said, is not of this world! What did Jesus mean by this? Was Jesus saying that He will never sit down on a throne here on earth? Hadn’t Jesus promised His disciples they would one day sit on thrones in His Kingdom, judging the twelve tribes of Israel? Yes, Jesus had, indeed, spoken of an earthly Kingdom, many times. He will one day set up a literal, visible Kingdom on earth, when He returns to earth. In the book of Matthew, this physical, visible Kingdom is called “The Kingdom of
heaven,” because it will be of heavenly origin. Jesus Christ will descend from heaven with His army of angels and resurrected saints, and will destroy all kingdoms of earth, in the Battle of Armageddon. He will then set up His Kingdom of perfect righteousness for 1,000 years.

But, all that is still in the future. When Jesus came down to earth 2,000 years ago, He came to set up a spiritual kingdom—one that cannot be seen. This is the Kingdom that Jesus was talking about when He said, “My kingdom is not of this world.” This Kingdom is called “the Kingdom of God.” This invisible, spiritual Kingdom consists of all who have been born again into God’s family, by placing their faith in Jesus Christ. It is the Kingdom of all who are indwelt by the Spirit of God. One is not born into this Kingdom by physical birth or nationality, but by a spiritual birth, which only God can impart. The citizens of this Kingdom do not take up physical arms to fight against their enemies: instead, the citizens of this Kingdom lovingly tell others how they can become a part of the Kingdom of God themselves!

Read John 3:1-8, 14-16

Read Luke 17:20-21 (The “Kingdom of God” does not come “with observation.” It is invisible.)

Can you imagine what was going on in Pilate’s mind? Standing before him was a man who claimed to be the King of a Kingdom that is “not of this world.” What did he think of all this? Did he laugh in scorn and contempt? No. Strangely enough, he did not. Let’s look at verse 37. (Read verse 37 again.) Think of this! Here is the Roman governor of Judaea—the man who is supposed to sniff out all hints of rebellion against Rome, and crush all rebels; and what is he doing? He is looking into the face of a lowly carpenter from Galilee and seriously asking Him, “Art thou a king then?” Pilate could see that there was something truly other-worldly about Jesus of Nazareth; and his flippant attitude toward Jesus seemed to be softening. The fact that Pilate went out from the judgment hall and said, “I find in him no fault at all” shows that he was under conviction. Under normal circumstances, he would have immediately condemned to death anyone who claimed to be “the king of the Jews”! Yet, amazingly, he said, “I find no fault in him!” When you also consider the fact that Pilate was jeopardising his position as Roman governor by defending a man who claimed to be “king of the Jews,” you cannot help but see that God was working on his heart.

Yet, despite the fact that Pilate was under conviction from God, he did not repent and believe on Jesus. Perhaps he looked on Jesus merely as a fanatical, but harmless, individual, who wasn’t really trying to overthrow Rome, and who didn’t deserve to die. But whatever his reasoning was, he rejected Christ. And make no mistake about it: Jesus was challenging Pilate personally about his need to believe on Him. Jesus told them, “To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness of the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.” That was a direct challenge to Pilate! If those who are “of the truth” listen to Christ’s voice, then those who are not “of the truth” do not listen to Christ’s voice. Those who are earnestly seeking the truth will find the truth in Jesus Christ, because He is the Truth! (See John 14:6.) Those who do not want to hear the truth will reject Jesus Christ, and will not listen to His voice. Sadly, Pilate chose not to hear Jesus’ voice.
Now, Pilate did acknowledge that he could find no fault in Jesus. In our day, many people would express it this way: “I believe that Jesus was a good man.” But believing that Jesus is a “good man” is not enough! In fact, believing that Jesus is the pure, sinless Son of God, as the Bible tells us, is not even enough. Merely accepting, intellectually, certain biblical facts about Jesus will not save your soul. You must personally respond to Jesus’ voice, and receive Him. You must respond to His call to come to Him for salvation. Jesus said, “I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved” (John 10:9). Jesus also said, “Repent ye, and believe the Gospel” (Mark 1:15). You must repent (change your mind about your sin, agree with God that you are deserving of eternal death in hell, and be willing to allow Jesus to take your sin away, and to be your Lord). And, you must believe the Gospel—the message that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again to pay for our sins in full. If you truly repent and turn to Christ, you will also believe this Gospel message. You will stop believing that you can make it to heaven by your own attempts at good works and clean living, and instead put your complete trust in Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. My friend, have you heeded Jesus’ voice, and come to Him for salvation? Have you truly repented of your sin, and believed the Gospel?

Probably the saddest words that Pilate uttered that morning were these: “What is truth?” (Read verse 38 again.) You can hear the cynicism in that statement, can’t you? Pilate had started to listen to what Jesus was saying; but then, in an instant, he put up a mental “block” to the conviction that he was feeling, and cracked a cynical joke. He was not sincere in his desire to know the truth. If he had sincerely desired to know the truth, he would have waited to hear the answer from the One who is Truth incarnate. But he didn’t. He got up from his throne, and left the judgment hall. Pilate never did believe on Jesus. When he died, he departed this world without God, without Christ, and without salvation.

**Conclusion:** As we close this morning, I would ask you this: Are you one of these people we’ve read about this morning? Are you like the Passover observers who were devoutly religious, and punctilious in their rituals, but who had no idea that they were crucifying the Son of God, and rejecting the one whose blood could wash their sins away? Are you like the false accusers, who self-righteously hurled false accusations against the Son of God, yet who were themselves breaking the law, and didn’t care? Are you like Pilate, who was briefly under conviction from the Holy Spirit, and who went so far as to acknowledge Jesus’ innocence, but who turned away from the opportunity to repent and believe on Jesus? No matter which of these people you may be like, you are lost. I urge you to repent and believe on the one who died and rose again to pay for your sin!

Christian, this message has been mostly addressed to those who do not know the Lord; but I would also ask you a question. On the day you were saved, you heard the voice of the Son of God, and you answered His call to salvation. Are you continuing to hear His voice to the extent that you should? Are you reading His Word every day, and praying, so that you can hear His voice? Are you obeying everything He bids you do? Should you be wandering off the path, and listening to your own heart, please turn your ears once again to the voice of your Good Shepherd! Hear Him!