



Date: 17th & 24th November 2024

Theme: Christ the King

Bible Reading: John 18: 33-38a

(John 18:1 – 19:16)

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PREPARATION FOR GROUP LEADERS

Hold in prayer each member of your group in the week before your session. When you meet, please remind members that the passage for study from John 18 (part of John's Passion narrative) is the Gospel passage set for the Sunday before the start of the season of Advent. Its theme is '**Christ the King**'.

PREPARATION FOR ALL PARTICIPANTS (before the session)

At home, using either your own Bible or one borrowed from church, take time to read carefully the detailed and dramatic story of the arrest, trial and sentence of Jesus in Jerusalem: **John 18:1 – 19:16**.

This took place at Passover time when Pilate was the Roman governor of Judaea, and Caiaphas was the Jewish high priest. Look out for the charge that the religious leaders are bringing against Jesus, and compare it with the question that Pilate takes seriously (**John 19:7; 18:33**). You may also notice that the words '**I am not**', '**Am I?**' and '**I am**' are at the heart of the drama, on the lips of Peter, Pilate, and Jesus, respectively.

For the study passage (**John 18:33-38a**), it might be helpful to ask yourself these questions:
What strikes me? What amazes me? What raises questions for me?

STARTING THE SESSION: A PRAYER

(This prayer can be used either at the start of the session, or after the 'Finding our Roots' section.)

Thank you, loving God, for the time we have been able to spend reading of the courageous suffering of your Son before his crucifixion.

As we gather together now in our group, help us to be open to your voice through the insights of others and the discussion we share.

You bless us with these precious opportunities for fellowship when we listen for your word in Scripture.

As we share our journeys of faith, help us to watch over one another in love; in the name of our Saviour, Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

FINDING OUR ROOTS

Opening discussions (either in smaller groups, or in the group as a whole):

What did you find striking or amazing in the reading you have done from John's Gospel?

Has it affected your attitude to the opponents of Jesus, to the challenges of being a follower of Jesus, or to the claims Jesus makes for himself?

Do you find it helpful when studying a particular passage in the Bible to spend a bit more time reading around the text to appreciate its wider setting?

Where do you find help to gain real value from Bible reading and study?

READING THE SCRIPTURES

Read together the Bible passage: **John 18:33-38a** (ending with the words “What is truth?”)

Background Information: As we have seen, our passage is part of the story of Jesus’s passion, as narrated by John. It begins after Jesus has left the house he has used with his disciples just before the Passover Feast for an evening meal and a time of teaching and prayer.

Judas, one of the twelve, had gone out into the night to betray Jesus to the Jewish authorities. He guides soldiers and Jewish officials to an olive grove on the other side of the Kidron Valley. Jesus is arrested, after rebuking Peter for attacking and injuring one of the high priest’s servants.

Events move rapidly. Jesus is taken first to Annas, then to Caiaphas, both senior members of the Temple hierarchy. Next, he is led to the palace of the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. Pilate is unconvinced by the charges the Jewish leaders try to bring. They persist, and Pilate takes Jesus into his own quarters for a one-to-one interrogation, out of the public gaze. Interwoven into this bitter drama is the tragic three-fold denial of his friend by Peter, under intolerable emotional pressure.

Our passage, the climax of the interrogation, then follows. Pilate appears afterwards in public before ‘the Jews’ and gives them the opportunity to ask for the release of a prisoner. They call for the release of the rebel Barabbas. Jesus is flogged and humiliated, and Pilate tries again to persuade the crowd to spare Jesus, but they are being egged on by the Jewish leadership to confirm the sentence of death.

Finally, the crunch question is put to Jesus’s enemies, “Shall I crucify your king?” It is the chief priests who give the answer: “We have no king but Caesar” (**19:15**). Pilate then hands Jesus over for crucifixion.

DIGGING DEEPER

Discuss these questions together, allowing everyone time and space to share their views:

*What does Pilate ask Jesus in **verse 33**? Why was it a ‘life or death’ question for Jesus?*

In **verse 36**, Jesus acknowledges his kingship. *But what else does Jesus say? Does that mean that his royal identity is ‘other-worldly’? Or that he comes into our world to challenge worldly power?*

*Who is really on trial here? Who is being judged? Is it Peter? The Jewish authorities? Rome? One writer (**David F. Ford, 2021**) said that the final verdict on all of them was the **resurrection of Jesus**, because it revealed who Jesus is, and the secret of his non-violent power and authority. *Do you agree?**

Read again **verse 36**. *If Jesus’ only power is non-violent, is it still power?*

At the start of the Second World War, a bishop spoke of the **divine kingdom**. Such a kingdom “derives its authority from God alone,” said William Temple (1940), “and it can never fight for its ‘vital interests’ because by fighting it betrays them.” In justifying this statement, Temple pointed to the fundamental character of God as Love (**1 John 4:8**). *How do you react to this view?*

In the upper room, Jesus said that **he** was ‘the truth’ (**14:6**). Pilate, however, dismissed the language of **truth**, hurriedly asking a ‘what’ question: “*What is truth?*” (**18:38**). Yet, for those who *belong* to the truth (**18:37**), truth is essentially a ‘who’ question. *If I am on the side of truth, whose voice attracts me most?*

How can we help one another to listen for that voice, and to offer a willing response of heart and will?

ACTIVITY

Pick a **hymn** that is a favourite of yours and see if there are any references to Jesus as ‘**King**’ (or the one who reigns, and will reign). *Do such words inspire you or bring you any comfort and strength in the daily opportunities and challenges of life? (What other ‘King’-themed hymns can you think of?)*

PRAYING TOGETHER

Hold before God anyone on your heart or in your community who is in special need at this time.

Then use the words of Isaac Watts in the hymn **Jesus shall reign where’er the sun** (*Singing the Faith*, **328**) as an act of prayer, especially concentrating on verses 4 and 5.

Say **the Lord’s Prayer** together.