

John 18:33-37

- The Kingdom of Jesus is not of this world -

- He came to testify to the truth -

Author: Evert Jan Hempenius

© 2022

www.christianstudylibrary.org

For any questions about this Scripture passage or the notes, please contact us through the Contact Us tab on the website.

Introduction

- ❖ A few years ago, an interview with the Dutch ambassador accredited to Vatican City appeared in a newspaper. One of the questions was, why this was an interesting and important position. Vatican City as a State has only one thousand inhabitants, living on 1 square kilometre, in the middle of the city of Rome, the capital of Italy. And... Italy belongs to the G7, seven countries that dominate global trade and the international financial system. SO, what makes Vatican City such an interesting place to be?
 - His answer was illuminating. He said that although Vatican City is a very tiny state, news from all corners of the world reaches the Vatican fast, not by diplomatic channels, nor by journalists, but by eye-witnesses, often ordinary people, members of the Roman Catholic church, bishops, priests, ordinary people and believers.
 - Vatican City is a tiny state but at the same time the Pope, the head of the Roman Catholic Church, serves this worldwide community, and members of the church are living in remote corners of the globe, and also closed countries.
 - This example illustrates the words of Jesus: "My kingdom is not of this world" (Jn 18:36). At the same time, his Kingdom is present in the world: "they (disciples and all who believe) are still in the world" (Jn 17:11). "They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world" (Jn 17:16-18).
- ❖ **"Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice."** Everyone who listens to the voice of Jesus belongs to the His Kingdom.

- ❖ The context, form and structure, theological, technical and hermeneutical notes given in this sermon outline overlap with other sermon outlines taken from the Gospel of John. This makes it possible to use this sermon outline as a “stand-alone”. You can also fit this outline into a series of sermons.

Context, form and structure

- ❖ John 18:36-37 is part of the trial against Jesus:
 - The first interrogation by Pontius Pilate (John 18:28-38).
 - First attempt to set Jesus free; Barabbas or Jesus (John 18:39-40).
 - Second attempt to set him free; the humiliation of Jesus (John 19:1-7).
 - The second interrogation by Pontius Pilate (John 19:8-11).
 - Third attempt to release Jesus (John 19:12).
 - Finally, Pilate handed him over to be crucified, under the pressure of the Jews (John 13-16).
- ❖ An overview of the first interrogation (John 18:28-38):

Then the Jews led Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor. By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness the Jews did not enter the palace; they wanted to be able to eat the Passover.

So Pilate came out to them and asked, “What charges are you bringing against this man?”

“If he were not a criminal,” they replied, “we would not have handed him over to you.”

Pilate said, “Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law.”

“But we have no right to execute anyone,” the Jews objected.

This happened so that the words Jesus had spoken indicating the kind of death he was going to die would be fulfilled.

Pontius Pilate	Jesus
Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?"	"Is that your own idea," Jesus asked, "or did others talk to you about me?"
"Am I a Jew?" Pilate replied. "It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me. What is it you have done?"	Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is

	from another place.”
“You are a king, then!” said Pilate.	Jesus answered, “You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.”
“What is truth?” Pilate asked. With this he went out again to the Jews.	

Technical notes and theological background

- ❖ Pontius Pilate was a Roman Governor of Judea (A.D. 26-36/37) during the reign of Emperor Tiberius. He is known to have treated Jewish customs with contempt. Josephus recorded some conflicts between Pilate and the Jews. The Jews didn’t like him.¹
 - He had to keep order and peace under Roman power.
 - He had to uphold justice according to Roman standards.

	power – politics	(in)justice
Vs. 18:28-38		“What charges are you bringing against this man?” "I find no basis for a charge against him."
Vs. 18:38-40	“But it is your custom for me to release to you one prisoner at the time of the Passover. Do you want me to release ‘the king of the Jews’?”	
Vs. 19:1-7	“Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. ... Pilate answered, 'You take him and crucify him.'"	“As for me, I find no basis for a charge against him.”

¹ Hoehner, H. (1992). *Pontius Pilate*. In: *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (pp. 615-617).

Vs. 19:8-12	"Pilate said. "Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?"	"Pilate tried to set Jesus free,"
Vs. 19:12-16	"The Jews kept shouting, 'If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar.' When Pilate heard this, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge's seat."	"Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified."

❖ Truth²

- Truth = "ἀλήθεια" **1. the quality of being in accord with what is true, truthfulness, dependability, uprightness** in thought and deed; **2. the content of what is true, truth.**³
 - Truth is an important theme in the Gospel John:
 -
 - "For the law was given through Moses; **grace and truth** came through Jesus Christ." (Jn 1:17) This is not meant to contrast Moses and Jesus, but to supplement Moses. Ex 34.6.
 -
 - Contrary to the Greek background of the concept, **truth** is personally embodied in Christ Jesus, not merely intellectual. Truth is acquired through the revelation of God, not through mental exercise, nor by philosophizing, or personal experiences:
 -
 - Jesus said: "**I am the way and the truth and the life.** No one comes to the Father except through me." (Jn 14:6) In this famous saying the words way, truth and life are synonymous. The "**way**" refers to the Thora, the law given by Moses to Israel.

² Crump, D. (1992, p. 859-862). *Pontius Pilate*. In Green, J. B., McKnight, S., & Marshall, I. H. (Eds.).

³ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000, p. 42)

Exposition

Verse 33-35

❖ **“Pilate then went back inside the palace”**

- In the previous verses, Pilate had asked the Jewish leaders which accusations they brought in against Jesus.
 - They replied: “If he were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you.” They do not specify their accusations.
 - Carson: “Jesus claimed to be the Messiah, the Son of God; their problem was how to formulate this claim in a manner calculated to impress Pilate with how dangerous Jesus was, and therefore to bring down the death penalty. The solution lay ready to hand. In Jewish expectation, the Davidic Messiah was necessarily the promised king of Israel.”⁴ See Luke 23:1-5.
 - Pilate rightly judged: **“Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law”** (Jn 18:31). He knew that Jesus’ activities had nothing to do with rebellion or illegal political actions or any crime against Roman law. Therefore he wants to take the case back to the court where it belonged, the Sanhedrin. The Romans tried to avoid meddling in internal Jewish religious matters.⁵ **“But we have no right to execute anyone,”** the Jews objected.”
 - Did these Jews want the crucifixion of Jesus?
 - John comments: “This happened so that the words Jesus had spoken indicating the kind of death he was going to die would be fulfilled” (Jn 18:32; **Jn 12:32, 33**; see also Mt 20:17-19). “John teaches his readers to see everything in Jesus’ life (and, by implication, believers’ lives as well) as **sovereignly** ordained and **predetermined** by God.”⁶

❖ He **“summoned Jesus and asked him, ‘Are you the king of the Jews?’”**

- **“You are the king of the Jews?”** You is emphatic.
- This question presupposes the charge that the Jewish leaders had brought in, but as the unfolding history makes clear, Pilate did not take this accusation seriously. He said, “I find no basis for a charge against him” (Jn 18:38; 19:4, 6).

⁴ Carson, D. A. (1991, p. 592).

⁵ Köstenberger, A. J. (2009, p. 252).

⁶ Köstenberger, A. J. (2009, p. 252).

- Jesus cannot answer with a simple yes or no.
 - If he answered with “yes”, he would have given Pilate enough reasons for a verdict, being a (potential) threat to the Roman Empire.
 - If he answered with “no”, he would have denied his messianic mission, being the “Son of David” (Jn 7:42; but especially Mt 21:41-45 and Ps 110:1).
- ❖ **“Is that your own idea,” Jesus asked, “or did others talk to you about me?”**
 - As in other situations, Jesus is confusing or even irritating his interlocutor. See also John 3:1-12: Nicodemus; John 4:1-26: the Samaritan Woman; John 6:25-59: the Jews.
- ❖ **“‘Am I a Jew?’ Pilate replied.”** The irritation is obvious. “It is clear he has no personal interest whatsoever in this matter.”⁷
- ❖ **“What is it you have done?”** Jesus will answer in verse 37: **“to testify to the truth”** But before he does so, he will explain the nature of his kingship and kingdom.

Verse 36

- ❖ **“My kingdom is not of this world.”**
 - This “primarily depicts the *source* of Jesus’s kingdom, not its *space* (territory).”⁸
 - Köstenberger states that this is a **cosmic spiritual conflict**.⁹ It is the conflict between the prince of this world (Jn 12:31; 14:30; 16:11) and the Word of God, the conflict between darkness and light (Jn 1:5; 3:19; 12:35, 36), truth and lie (Jn 8:44).
 - John 1:10: “He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, **the world did not recognize him.**” (See also Jn 8:23.)
 - **“My kingdom”** – “the world was made through him.” Jesus is king!
 - John 6:15: “Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.”
- ❖ **“If it were, my servants (officials) would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews.”**
 - **“servant”** = “ὕπηρέτης” is frequently used in chapter 18. In the other passages, it is translated with “officials” (Jn 18:3, 12, 18, 22; 19:6).
 - During the arrest: “Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest’s servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant’s name was Malchus.) **Jesus**

⁷ Osborne, G. R. (2018, p. 424).

⁸ Klink, E. W., III. (2016, p. 764).

⁹ Köstenberger, A. J. (2009, p. 253).

commanded Peter, 'Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?' (Jn 18:10, 11).

- Beasley-Murray: "Hence *he constitutes no threat to Roman authority.*"¹⁰

○ His Kingdom is different:

- One day the mother of Zebedee's sons asked Jesus to grant "that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom" (Mt 20:21). Jesus said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mt 20:25-28). "To serve": See also John 13:12-17.

❖ **"But now my kingdom is from another place."** It is not an earthly kingdom but a spiritual from above. His Kingdom is not based on ethnicity, race, historical and geographical claims, power and splendour. It is the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Heaven. It is characterized by love, mercy, righteousness, grace, wisdom, and truth.

- "If you (disciples) belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you" (Jn 15:19).
- "They are not of the world, even as I am not of it" (Jn 17:15).

○ To see en to enter this kingdom, one must be born again by the Spirit:

- John 3:3, 5: "In reply (to Nicodemus) Jesus declared, 'I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.'
- 'I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.'"
-
- Note the solemn declaration "I tell you the truth."
- John 14:16, 17: "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever— the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you."

¹⁰ Beasley-Murray, G. R. (1999, p. 331).

- “Jesus’ kingdom is directly related to the concept of the kingdom of heaven and the reign or authority of God. It is both a proleptic reality now and a future expectation yet to come in its fullness.”¹¹

Verse 37

❖ **“You are a king, then!” said Pilate.** Pilate is confused and surprised, just as Jesus intended. His idea of a “king” falls far short of reality.

- What was his idea of a king? Luke recounts of an encounter between Herod Antipas, who ruled over Galilee, and Pontius Pilate: "When he learned that Jesus was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time. When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had been wanting to see him. From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform some miracle. He plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer. (...) Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. Dressing him in an elegant robe, they sent him back to Pilate. That day Herod and Pilate became friends—before this they had been enemies" (Lk 23:7-12).
- Herod Antipas was a tetrarch (which means: a ruler of a quarter). He didn't bear the title of king officially. Mark in his Gospel calls him “king” (Mk 6:14-29; compare Mt 14:1, 2; Lk 9:7-9). He officially ruled Galilee and Perea as a client state of the Roman Empire. He was responsible for the construction of his capital Tiberias, named after Emperor Tiberius. He had arrested and beheaded John the Baptist.
 - There is a sharp contrast between (king) Herod and Jesus.
- Already Nathanael professed Jesus as king (Jn 1:49).

❖ **“Jesus answered, “You are right in saying I am a king.”** Indeed Jesus is king. He is even more powerful than all other rulers of this world. He will bring salvation and judgment.

- See above: through him all things were created (Jn 1:1-5).
- The Greek text is far more emphatic than most translations:

Jesus about Pilate’s statement	Jesus about his mission
You (<i>emphatic</i>) say that I am a king.	I (<i>emphatic</i>) for this purpose was born and for this purpose

¹¹ Borchert, G. L. (2002, p. 242).

(**status** as king)

I have come
into the world
—to bear witness to the truth. (**mission**)

- Pilate is talking about status, Jesus about mission!
- ❖ **“In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world,”**
 - **“I was born”** and **“I came into the world”** are parallel expressions.
 - **“I was born”** = “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.” (Jn 1:14). Jesus is the Eternal Word of God (Jn 1:1-5), the Son of God (Jn 11:27)
 - **“I came into the world”** He came from the Father (Jn 16:28) from above (Jn 8:23). He was sent by the Father (Jn 3:17). **He is the Christ, the Son of God** who was to come into this world (Jn 11:27).
 - Jesus was the true light coming into the world (Jn 1:9; 3:19; 8:12; 9:5; 12:46).
 - To take away the sin of this world and to save it (Jn 1:29; 3:17; 4:42; 12:47).
 - He will give life to the world (Jn 6:33, 51;
- ❖ **“to testify to the truth.”** **His kingdom is not based on power but on the word of God.**
 - He came to show the love and reliability of God (Jn 3:16-21; 8:26).
 - He came to expose sin and evil (Jn 16:8; Jn 7:7).
 - He came to show the righteousness and mercy of God (Jn 16:8; 17:25).
 - He came to judge the world (Jn 8:26; 9:39) and Satan (Jn 12:31; 16:11) and to save everyone who has faith in Him (Jn 12:47).
 - Truth is synonymous with **“light.”** “While I am in the world, I am the light of the world” (Jn 19:5; 8:12). **“Whoever lives by the truth comes into the light”** (Jn 3:21).
 - Truth stands in opposition to **“lie”** (Jn 8:44), **“deception”**, **“illusion”**, **“darkness”** (Jn 12:46), and sin.
- ❖ **“Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.”**
 - “I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. **They too will listen to my voice**, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd” (Jn 10:16).
 - This requires a new birth (Jn 3:1-13).
 - “The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all. He testifies to what he has seen and heard, but no one

accepts his testimony. The man who has accepted it has certified that God is truthful. For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit. The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."

- Everyone who listens to Jesus is a disciple, a follower. He walks in the light (Jn 8:12) and remains in the love of God (Jn 14:15, 21, 23; 15: 9, 10, 12, 17).

Application

Glorification

- ❖ Glorify Christ, because he is the truth of God. He embodies the truth (Jn 14:6).
- ❖ Glorify the Father for his love and faithfulness in sending his beloved son: "For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice."
- ❖ Glorify the Father for sending the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of truth (John 14:16, 17).

Explain

- ❖ The origin and character of the Kingdom of Christ:
 - Not from below (this world) but from above.
 - Not based on power but on spirit.
 - Not identified with a location, but entering the world even in remote corners.
 - The Kingdom of Christ is the Kingdom of mercy, grace and forgiveness, faith, hope and love, righteousness and justice, and ultimate wisdom.
- ❖ The character of truth is not based primarily on facts but on godly character.
 - The fact that "truth" aligns with the "light." "While I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (Jn 19:5; 8:12). "Whoever lives by the truth comes into the light" (Jn 3:21).
 - Truth is the core value of love.
 - Truth guides righteousness, justice and mercy.
 - Truth protects peace and purity of heart.
 - Truth brings joy and wisdom.

Comfort and encourage

- ❖ When Christians gather in small groups: they belong to the Kingdom of Christ.
- ❖ When Christians are oppressed and persecuted, because they do not belong to this world.

Listen to his voice

- ❖ By teaching and preaching the Gospel.
- ❖ By submitting to his commands (Jn 15:9-12).
- ❖ By studying his word.

Warning

- ❖ Some pastors and Christians try to establish their kingdoms.

Quotes

- ❖ **AUGUSTINE:** Listen, everyone, Jews and Gentiles, circumcised and uncircumcised. Listen, all kings of the earth. I am no hindrance to your rule in this world, for “my kingdom is not of this world.” Banish the groundless fear that filled Herod the Great on hearing that Christ was born. More cruel in his fear than in his anger, he put many children to death (Mt 2:16), so that Christ would also die. But “my kingdom is not of this world,” says Christ. What further reassurance do you seek? Come to the kingdom that is not of this world. Do not be enraged by fear, but come by faith. In a prophecy Christ also said, “He,” that is, God the Father, “has made me king on Zion his holy mountain” (Ps 2:6). But that Zion and that mountain are not of this world.¹²
- ❖ **EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA:** And when they were asked about Christ and his kingdom, of what nature it was, and where and when it would appear, they answered that it was neither of the world, nor earthly, but heavenly and angelic, and would appear at the end of the world when he would come in glory to judge the living and the dead and to give to every one according to his works. ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY 3.20.3–4.¹³

Bibliography

Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Beasley-Murray, G. R. (1999). *John* (Vol. 36). Word, Incorporated.

Borchert, G. L. (2002). *John 12–21* (Vol. 25B). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Carson, D. A. (1991). *The Gospel according to John*. Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans.

¹² Elowsky, J. C., (Ed.) (2007, p. 289-290).

¹³ Elowsky, J. C., (Ed.) (2007, p. 289).

Elowsky, J. C., (Ed.). (2007). *John 11–21*. InterVarsity Press.

Freedman, D. (Ed.). (1992). *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (Vol. 1-6). New York: Doubleday.

Green, J. B., McKnight, S., & Marshall, I. H. (1992). *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press.

Hendriksen, W. (1953). *The Gospel of John* (NTC). Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

Klink, E. W., III. (2016). *John* (C. E. Arnold, Ed.). Zondervan.

Köstenberger, A. J. (2009). *A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters: The Word, the Christ, the Son of God*. Zondervan.

Milne, B. (1993). *The message of John: here is your king!: with study guide*. Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Morris, L. (1971). *The Gospel according to John : the English text with introduction, exposition and notes*. NICNT. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Osborne, G. R. (2018). *John: Verse by Verse* (J. Reimer, E. Ritzema, D. Thevenaz, & R. Brant, Eds.). Lexham Press.