Unbelievable Unbelief
(John 18:38-19:16)
(preached 9/22/19; Pine Grove BC Sun AM)

Introduction

In the late 1850s, gold fever swept through Colorado.

Stories of mountains teeming with gold reached the ears even on those on the east coast.

Well, the Darby family of Maryland jumped at the chance to get rich quick in the hills of Colorado, so they headed west.

After staking a claim to a piece of land there, the soon found a vein of gold in the side of a mountain.

The more they dug, the more gold they discovered, but they lacked the equipment to extract all the gold that they thought was there.

So they covered up their mine, headed back to Maryland to get more money and then headed back to Colorado.

The purchased better equipment there, and began to gather more gold from their mine.

However, the vein of gold that they hope led to a huge deposit of gold eventually dried up.

Though they had paid back much of the debt they had acquired, the mine never turned a profit for them.

So they decided to sell their equipment and head back to Maryland.

A local “junk man” in Colorado bought the used equipment to finance their trip back home.

However, the junk man was interested in this mine that looked so promising but failed to produce gold.

He called in a local scientist and they headed up to the mine.

Using the Darby family’s old equipment they did some digging and testing.

After a week, the scientist concluded that the gold was still there, it had just likely shifted a bit due to an earthquake some time in years past.

The junk man called in some help and prepared to dig for a few weeks, but one the very first day, they found the large deposit of gold.

It was only 3 feet further into the mine.

That one deposit of gold ended up making the junk man, the richest man in Colorado.

To this day, the Darby family is the story of almost striking it rich.

As we come to John 18, the story of Pilate is the story of almost finding truth.

Here is Pilate, a Roman governor standing just feet away from Jesus, the source of all truth in the universe yet Pilate never sees it..

This is a tragic reminder to us all that being close to the truth is not the same as possessing that truth for ourselves.

Now, to bring us up to speed, it is after daybreak on a Friday in Jerusalem.

It is 30 AD, and the city is teeming with people in town for the Passover.

This was the first festival of the Jewish year that all Jewish males were required to attend by law.

So Jews from over Israel and all over the world are in town for the week long festival.

Passover was a commemoration of God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt was back in 1445 BC.

So for almost 1500 years, the Jews had been faithful to celebrate God'd deliverance of them.

And how had God delivered them from Egypt?

Well, the last plague sent by God on Egypt was the death of the firstborn child.

However, the Jews were told to take a lamb and kill it and smear the blood over their doorways so that as the angel of death passed through Egypt, he would passover any home marked by blood.

And that incredible protection and subsequent deliverance of Israel became a yearly celebration of God's goodness to them..

But the celebration of Passover also pointed Israel to a future time when God would provide a future deliverance of Israel through a greater Passover Lamb.

That Passover lamb would forgive their sins and fulfill all of God's promises to Israel.

Well, that Passover lamb was present on this Friday.

He had been present in the land for 30 years now.

The majority of those years were lived in obscurity in Nazareth and Jesus lived a sin free life.

For the last 3 years of His life, Jesus has been very public in Israel, teaching and healing and calling people to faith in Him.

But now on this Friday, the ministry of Jesus is over and his death as the ultimate Passover Lamb is fast approaching.

Now we have bee glued to our Bibles for the past 5 chapters, seeing the final 24 hours of Jesus' life unfold.

He spent Thursday evening with his disciples teaching and training and loving them to the very end.

He then took them to the Mount of Olives to a little garden named Gethsemane.

They had frequented the garden on previous occasions, but now they are there so that Judas can locate Jesus and have him arrested and set in the motion the crucifixion of Jesus.

As we arrive at John 38 this mooring, we are the middle of Jesus' trial.

As I said last week, the trial of Jesus was so unique.

It took place in 6 phases.

The first 3 phases were the Jewish phase, where Jesus stood before Annas, then Caiaphas, then the entire Jewish Sanhedrin.

Nearly every portion of the Jewish trial took place under the cover of darkness, which was completely contrary to Jewish law.

After the 3 Jewish phases of Jesus' trial, the Jews took him to the Romans for the 3 final phases.

The first phase is before Pilate.

Now John doesn't include in his description of the trial, but Pilate sent Jesus to Herod, who was also a Gentile ruler over Israel..

Herod sees the the whole situation as a joke and sends Jesus back to Pilate for the final phase of Jesus' trial.

And so John gives us a full picture of Jesus' time before Pilate..

We saw part of it last week in John 18:28-37, and this morning we will finish up Jesus' trial before Pilate..

And what I want us to focus on the tragedy of being so close to truth but never truly believing in Christ..

Unbelief in Christ is the unforgivable sin, but unbelief is often hard to detect..

So let's take some time looking at 4 traits of unbelief this morning.

The first trait of unbelief in found in verses 38-40 of John 18..

I. Unbelief is Unaware of Truth (18:38-40)

As we come to verse 38, we jump into the middle of a conversation between Jesus and Pilate..

Let me read verse 37 from last week to offer a little review..

37 Therefore Pilate said to Him, "So You are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."

Remember Jesus is standing before Pilate and it is a little after 6 am in Jerusalem.

He has been up all night going through the phony Jewish trials, and now he stands before Pilate, the Roman governor of the region.

The Jews have put a bug in Pilate's ear that Jesus is a threat to Caesar since he claims to be the King of the Jews.

But as Jesus stands before Pilate bloodied and beaten, Pilate isn't too sure..

So he asks Jesus again in verse 37, and Jesus affirms that He is a King.

Then Jesus adds that he came into the world to testify to the truth, and that only those who love the truth hear his voice..

So Pilate responds in verse 38..

38 Pilate *said to Him, "What is truth?"

With this simple question, Pilate identifies himself as someone who doesn't hear the voice of Christ.

Jesus is the truth and speaks the truth, and those who believe in Him hear the voice of truth that He speaks..

However, unbelief renders a person deaf to the truth.

In fact, Pilate doesn't even know what truth is.

And the same is true of any unbeliever in the world.

Now unbelievers know the truth of 2+2=4 and they know the truth that the earth is round and they know the truth of gravity..

But unbelievers have no concept of spiritual truth or eternal truth or gospel truth.

They may know what direction an apple goes when it falls off a tree, but they have no idea of the direction to heaven..

This is the word that we live in.

A world that says that you can have your truth and I can have my truth, but just make sure that your truth doesn't insult mine.

This is the folly of unbelief.

It claims to know truth while denying that truth even exists.

Pilate was the role model for the foolishness of unbelief.

He was feet away from the source of all truth in the universe, but he couldn't hear a word of truth that came from Jesus' mouth.

For years, I went to church as a kid and teenager.

For years, I sat through dozens of sermons, but to their day, I couldn't tell you the title of one sermon that I heard.

I was in the room and truth was being preached, but my ears were clogged.

It might as well have been Charlie Brown's teacher speaking..

WONK WONK WONK WONK..

And some of you may be here surrounded by the truth of the word of God, the truth of the gospel but you may be as deaf as Pilate and every other unbeliever in history.

Unbelief is unaware of the truth, and you see it here in the verses that follow..

Look at the middle of verse 38..

And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews and *said to them, "I find no guilt in Him. 39 But you have a custom that I release someone [m]for you at the Passover; do you wish then that I release [n]for you the King of the Jews?" 40 So they cried out again, saying, "Not this Man, but Barabbas." Now Barabbas was a robber.

Like the gold miners that sold their equipment while only 3 feet from striking gold, Pilate sells out Jesus even though Jesus is the source of all truth..

Instead of seeing Jesus as the truth, he sees Jesus as someone to use to win favor with the Jews.

And he proceeds to offer Jesus a pardon if the Jews desire it.

They reject a pardon for Jesus and ask Pilate to pardon a robber instead.

How sad to be so near the truth but yet so far away.

That is Pilate, but I pray that is not you.

A second characteristic of unbelief is found in verses 1-7 of John 19..

II. Unbelief is Unwilling to Face Facts (19:1-7)

Verse 1 of John 19..

Pilate then took Jesus and [a]scourged Him. 2 And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and put a purple robe on Him; 3 and they began to come up to Him and say, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and to give Him slaps in the face. 4 Pilate came out again and *said to them, "Behold, I am bringing Him out to you so that you may know that I find no guilt in Him." 5 Jesus then came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate *said to them, "Behold, the Man!" 6 So when the chief priests and the officers saw Him, they cried out saying, "Crucify, crucify!" Pilate *said to them, "Take Him yourselves and crucify Him, for I find no guilt in Him." 7 The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and by that law He ought to die because He made Himself out to be the Son of God."

As we come to chapter 19, Pilate is still unconvinced that Jesus deserves a death sentence for the crimes that He is accused of.

So he sends Jesus to be scourged and beaten in hope that the Jews would be appeased..

But even after the excruciating torture inflicted upon Christ by the Roman solderers, the leaders of Israel are still calling for his death in verse 6..

Crucify, crucify! is their chant.

Pilate then makes one last ditch effort to save Jesus' life in the end of verse 6, but the Jews won't have it and they cite a law that calls for the death of Jesus.

And now Pilate must act even though he knows that Jesus is being railroaded to his death.

Look, there are times when unbelief simply can't face the facts.

The book of Romans says that unbelievers suppress the truth in unrighteousness.

In other words, unbelievers have the law of God written on their heart.

They have a God-given conscience, but their sin is so great that it silences the truth.

Pilate has a God-given sense of justice, and he knows that Jesus isn't getting justice.

His conscience is also being assaulted by the fact that an innocent man is going to die..

But in the end, Pilate suppresses that truth because he is prideful and lustful for power.

Pilate's sinful greed and arrogance cause him to suppress the truth about Christ.

Pilate's sin overcomes Pilate's sense of right and wrong, and he ends up doing the thing that he knows he shouldn't do.

Sometimes, the facts are covered up by our sin.

Judas knew that betraying Jesus was wrong but he loved money more than Christ.

The same was true of the rich young ruler.

Unbelief is so blinding that a person can't see the facts right in front of their face..

A third characteristic of unbelief is found in verses 8-12..

We will call this…

III. Unbelief is Unsure of Anything (19:8-12)

Look at verse 8..

8 Therefore when Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid;

Pilate was already scared of the Jews.

If he doesn't sentence Jesus to the cross, they may riot and revolt which would lead to his removal.

Pilate was also scared of a miscarriage of justice.

By excepting an innocent man, Pilate could be in trouble with and be removed.

But neither of those fears compared to the fear that Jesus may be the Son of God.

Now the Romans had a large selection of gods, but the thought Jesus may the Son of God sent more shivers down his spine than the Jews of Romans.

John doesn't tell us but Matthew lets us know that Pilate's wife was telling him to stay away from Jesus.

All of this combines to send Pilate into a mini panic here, so he heads back to speak with Jesus a final time..

Verse 9..

9 and he entered into the [b]Praetorium again and *said to Jesus, "Where are You from?" But Jesus gave him no answer.

It is a terrifying day when Jesus goes silent, but that is exactly what happens here.

The days of examining Christ are over for Pilate.

Jesus has nothing more to say to him, which seems to further Pilate's panic..

Verse 10..

10 So Pilate *said to Him, "You do not speak to me? Do You not know that I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify You?"

Pilate threatens Jesus with his authority, but Jesus still doesn't answer his question…

Instead, Jesus returns Pilate's threat with a statement of truth..

Verse 11..

11 Jesus answered, "You would have no authority [c]over Me, unless it had been given you from above; for this reason he who delivered Me to you has the greater sin."

The frightening reality is that Pilate was at the mercy of Christ.

Like every government official, Pilate was in his position due to the sovereignty of God…

But that did not remove Pilate's culpability.

He was in sin as he refused to release Jesus.

He was in sin for not believing in Jesus.

Now Jesus makes it clear that the Jews had a greater sin in handing Him over to Pilate, but it is also clear in Jesus' statement that Pilate was guilt of sin as well.

Which leads to more panic on Pilate's part, so he tries to let Jesus go a final time in verse 12..

12 As a result of this Pilate [d]made efforts to release Him, but the Jews cried out saying, "If you release this Man, you are no friend of Caesar; everyone who makes himself out to be a king [e]opposes Caesar."

The fruit of unbelief is often seen in the uncertainty of those who reject Christ.

Since unbelievers have no sense of truth, they simply ride the waves of public opinion and act according to the expectation of others.

This is our world today.

We live in the midst of a culture that is always caving to the culture around it.

Today, we can't even define what it means to be a man or a woman.

Therefore, we can't define bathrooms, marriage, or gender on a job application.

Unbelief manifests itself in unsureness of anything.

Let me tell you something church.

Believers don't give up truth.

We don't say that we don't know.

We know things because we have been given truth.

We are people groping for truth in the world.

We are proclaimers of truth in the world.

We don't ride the waves of public opinion or political pressure.

We stand and we speak biblical truth into a world of people that are unsure about anything.

Look, I don't claim to know everything because the Bible doesn't provide answers to everything.

But I do know the God who created the world.

I do know how long it took him to do it.

I do know the way to heaven.

I can define what is right and wrong.

I do know that hell is real.

And I know how to live a life that pleases the Lord.

We are not people of uncertainty.

We are people of certainty.

Life is not a big mystery that we are trying to figure out.

Our lives are meant to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

To hold such a position of power, Pilate was clueless about the real truths of life.

And now, the source of all truth was no longer offering truth to Him…

That is the scariest reality of all..

But one more reality of unbelief is found in verses 13-16..

And again all these characteristics of unbelief are closely related to one another, but let's with this final fruit of unbelief..

IV. Unbelief is Unable to Act Decisively (19:13-16)

13 Therefore when Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out, and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called [f]The Pavement, but in [g]Hebrew, Gabbatha. 14 Now it was the day of preparation for the Passover; it was about the [h]sixth hour. And he *said to the Jews, "Behold, your King!" 15 So they cried out, "Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him!" Pilate *said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar."
16 So he then handed Him over to them to be crucified.

In this final scene, we see the guilt of the Romans and the Jews in the crucifixion of Jesus.

The Jews blaspheme God by saying that they have so king but Caesar.

Then Pilate, the Roman governor, capitulates to their demands…

And what a tragedy this is.

The Jews pledging allegiance to Caesar.

And the Roman governor pledging allegiance to the Jews in meeting their demands..

What a sad picture of unbelief.

It not only prevents people from seeing truth.

It not only covers up the facts.

It not only leads to unsureness.

Unbelief also binds the human heart from acting decisively.

Theologians call this reality the bondage of the will.

Even though truth is evident, the will of man is bound up in unbelief to the point that it can't act on its own.

Pilate knew that Jesus was innocent but he could not bring himself to release him.

The Jews knew that God was their only king but they could acknowledge that publicly.

This is the absolute worst outcome of unbelief.

It binds people in their own sin.

And it kills the only source of truth in their lives.

You see, unbelief is not some tame issue in the lives of people.

It blinds people to the truth.

It hardens people to the truth.

It leads people to eliminate the truth.

This is what is going on around you everyday.

Truth is being systematically eliminated from the world every day.

The idea of just leave me and let me believe what I want to believe is a lie.

Unbelief is not content with being left alone.

Unbelief is not satisfied until truth is dead.

So what do we do?

How do we respond to this text?

Conclusion

#1 - Affirm the reality of truth.

Christian, do not shrink back from the truth of God revealed in the Bible.

Christian, do not be ashamed of what God has said in his word.

Speak the truth with kindness but speaks the truth with sureness.

We are not of timidity and fear like Pilate, we are people of sound minds because we are lovers and readers of the truth..

Now does this mean that speaking the truth will keep us from trouble?

No, in fact, you will probably find trouble when you speak truth.

But graciously accept the consequences and continue to speak as the Lord allows.

I was speaking to a man just this week about his daughter about his daughter possibly going to Harvard.

Do you know what the motto of Harvard is?

It is the Latin word Veritas, which means truth.

Sadly, Harvard and 1000s of other places of supposed higher education have done more to destroy truth that endorse it.

Some colleges now claim that they are searching for truth.

Let me tell you something.

Truth is not lost.

It is found right here in the Bible, and we must be people that speak the truth despite the attempts to silence it.

#2 - Adore the source of truth.

Lost in the picture of unbelief today is the incredible sacrifice of Christ.

In 19:1, Jesus is scourged.

In 19:2, a crown of thorns is pressed into his flesh.

In 19:3, he is slapped and mocked.

And all of this pales in comparison to what is about to come upon the Son of God on the cross.

Yet, this is the plan of God.

While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Yet the question remains..

Who would do this?

Why would the source of truth submit to the lies of unbelief?

Simple.

He has to be the substitute for those who would believe in Him.

He has to lay down his life for the sheep.

And that is exactly what He did.

This is why we love and adore Christ.

If it were us before Pilate and this angry group of Jews, we would have called fire down from heaven and torched the whole city.

But not Christ.

He knows there is no other way for His people to be have their sins forgiven, so he offers his life in the place of guilty sinners

The reality is that the source of truth offered up his life to become the source of salvation, and that is why we love Jesus so.

Let us pray.