

March 8, 2026 by Steve Brandon



I Find No Guilt in Him

John 18:38b-19:11

- 1. Pilate Offers a Deal (18:38b-40)**
- 2. Pilate Seeks a Compromise (19:1-5)**
- 3. Pilate Fears the Divine (19:6-11)**

One of the most precious and important doctrines of the Christian faith is the sinlessness of Jesus. Over and over, the Bible affirms that Jesus did not sin. “[Jesus] committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth” (1 Peter 2:22). “[Jesus] knew no sin” (2 Corinthians 5:21). Jesus was “tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15).

This doctrine is important for us, because our sacrifice for sins needed to be blameless. Throughout the Old Testament, God established the pattern that sacrifices brought to him must be without blemish. In other words, when a Jewish person sinned and brought a sacrifice, the sacrifice couldn't be blind or crippled. It couldn't be maimed or diseased. It couldn't be lame or injured. God required that the sacrifice be perfect. “You shall not offer anything that has a blemish, for it will not be acceptable for you” (Leviticus 22:20).

For the greatest sacrifice, the sacrifice of the Son of God for our sins, it was mandatory that Jesus be blameless and without sin. If Jesus were not sinless, then his sacrifice for us would not be accepted, and we would be dead in our sins! But thanks be to God, Jesus was the sinless sacrifice for us!

This is the backdrop to our text this morning in the gospel of John. So, I invite you to open in your Bibles to John, chapter 18. We are going to look at the last few verses in chapter 18, and then continue on through the first 11 verses of chapter 19.

In these verses, we will see Pontius Pilate continue to echo these words: “I find no guilt in him.” Pilate says this three times (18:38; 19:4, 6). It's as if John is pounding the point home: Jesus was blameless in his death. Indeed, this is the title of my message this morning: “I Find No Guilt in Him.”

In our text, we will see how Pilate tries in every way to escape condemning an innocent man to death. But the Jewish crowd, instigated by the leaders, overrules the day, and Pilate succumbs to their pressure and delivers him over to be crucified. In telling the narrative, John is telling us that Jesus is our perfect, sinless sacrifice.

So, let me read our text, beginning in John 18:38. As I read it, listen for Pilate saying, “I find no guilt in him,” and listen for the ways in which Pilate is trying to get out of putting Jesus to death, because he is absolutely convinced that Jesus is blameless!

John 18:38b-19:11

After he had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, “I find no guilt in him. But you have a custom that I should release one man for you at the Passover. So do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?” They cried out again, “Not this man, but Barabbas!” Now Barabbas was a robber.

Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged him. The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head and arrayed him in a purple robe. They came up to him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” and struck him with their hands. Pilate went out again and said to them, “See, I am bringing him out to you that you may know that I find no guilt in him.” So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, “Behold the man!” When the chief priests and the officers saw him, they cried out, “Crucify him, crucify him!” Pilate said to them, “Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no guilt in him.” The Jews answered him, “We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has made himself the Son of God.” When Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid. He entered his headquarters again and said to Jesus, “Where are you from?” But Jesus gave him no answer. So Pilate said to him, “You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?” Jesus answered him, “You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin.”

Our text opens with Pilate asking Jesus, “What is truth?” (verse 38). This wasn't a genuine question, as he quickly turned away from Jesus and went back outside to the Jews and told them, “I find no guilt in him.” Then, in verses 38 and 39, Pilate tries to make a deal with them.

1. Pilate Offers a Deal (18:38b-40)

Pilate says in verse 39,

John 18:39a

“But you have a custom that I should release one man for you at the Passover.”

This is called the “Paschal Pardon” or “Passover Pardon.” The Romans had military power over the Jews. There was much animosity toward them on behalf of the Jewish people. I would suspect that releasing a prisoner for them every year at the Passover was a good way for Romans to gain a little favor with the Jews each year. Pilate thought that this would be just the thing that would allow him to release Jesus to the crowds. So, Pilate mentions this tradition, and offers a deal to the crowds. He asks at the end of verse 39,

John 18:39b

“So do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?”

At this point, Pilate is playing Monty Hall, the original host of the game show “Let’s Make a Deal,” a show in the 60’s and 70’s where contestants were offered a choice: keep what they had, or trade it for something hidden behind a curtain or inside a box. Sometimes the deal turned out great, but at other times it was a disaster. In this case, Pilate is Monty Hall, asking the Jews, “Will you take this deal? Take Jesus back and we will be done with this matter.” I don’t think that Pilate was expecting their answer.

John 18:40a

They cried out, “Not this man, but Barabbas!”

John then adds,

John 18:40b

“Now Barabbas was a robber.”

This is true about Barabbas. He was a thief. Yet, he was so much more than that. Barabbas is mentioned in all of the other gospel accounts. It is helpful to see how they describe him. Matthew says that Barabbas was a “notorious prisoner” (Matthew 27:16). Mark says that Barabbas “had committed murder in the insurrection” (Mark 15:7). Luke combines both of these by saying that Barabbas was “a man who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection started in the city and for murder” (Luke 23:19). In other words, Barabbas was not in prison for some petty crime. He was, as Wikipedia calls him, a “rabble-rouser.”^[1] The Jews chose him over Jesus. This speaks of the hatred that the Jewish people had toward Jesus, that they would choose this insurrectionist-murderer to be released rather than Jesus.

Can you think of things from Barabbas’ perspective? He’s in prison. It’s the day that he was going to be executed for his crimes. The jail door opens, and rather than facing execution, he is granted freedom! What joy that would be. I love the painting by James Tissot called “Barabbas.”^[2] It captures well the emotions of all that he must have experienced, being let out of prison, being reunited with all of his Jewish friends once again. The picture shows this incredible smile on his face, almost as if the completely unexpected happened and life turned to his favor.

Barabbas is a great picture of all of us who believe. Think about Barabbas. He was in prison as a guilty man, destined to die for his crimes. Yet, by the grace of God, he was freed from the punishment that he deserved, and Jesus died in his place as a substitute. What happened to Barabbas has happened to every one of us who believe. We are sinners and stand guilty before God, destined to die for our sins. Yet, by the grace of God, through faith, we are freed from the punishment that we deserve, because Jesus has died in our place as a substitute.

This is the good news that we have to tell! We in our sin are like Barabbas, chained up and bound, but a pardon for our sin is available! It’s available to all who believe in Jesus. He died in your place, if you but believe in him.

2. Pilate Seeks a Compromise (19:1-5)

If the Jews wouldn’t set Jesus free by way of the Paschal Pardon, well, perhaps they would be satisfied if Jesus were punished. We see this in verse 1:

John 19:1

Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged him.

Flogging was a common way for both Jews and Romans to punish crimes. That’s why John doesn’t expand upon these words further, because he knows that his readers would know what he’s talking about, having seen it before. But we, as modern readers, don’t really know.

Have you ever seen a flogging? We don’t flog people today because it’s seen as cruel and unusual punishment. Listen to how one commentator described it:

The actual flogging would have been extremely violent. It is likely that Jesus was stripped, tied to a post or thrown to the ground, and beaten with leather whips to which were attached pieces of iron, bone, or spikes, which would shred the skin, often leaving it hanging from the victim’s back in strips. Unlike the thirty-nine maximum lashes prescribed by Jewish law (Deuteronomy 25:3), the Romans did not limit the number of lashes, thus leaving the victim helpless to the cruelty of the supervising soldiers”^[3].

Thus began the sufferings of Jesus.

But Jesus didn’t only experience physical sufferings. There were emotional sufferings as well, as the Roman soldiers who carried out the flogging also saw fit to humiliate him. Somehow, they had heard that the charge against Jesus was that he claimed to be the King of the Jews. Perhaps they were in on the conversation that Pilate had with Jesus, as recorded in chapter 18: “Are you the King of the Jews?” (John 18:33); “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36); “So you are a king?” (John 18:37). So the Roman soldiers made him to be a king.

John 19:2

And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head and arrayed him in a purple robe.

When kids play dress up, they will put a crown upon their heads, put a robe upon their backs, and find some sort of staff to hold in their hands as an expression of their power. But this is no child's play. These are hardened Roman soldiers, pressing a crown of twisted thorns upon his head.

My closest experience with any sort of thorn like this is the thorns on a lemon or orange tree. My in-laws live in California and have these trees in their back yard. To get an orange or lemon, you need to navigate with care around the thorns that are two or three inches long. I imagine that this crown of thorns had similar length thorns that were woven together and pressed down hard upon his head. This would have inflicted puncture wounds upon his scalp and bringing blood flowing down his face.

This purple robe would have been some sort of fabric flung around his shoulders. Purple is the color of kings.

With the crown and robe in place, the mocking began.

John 19:3

They came up to him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and struck him with their hands.

This all would have been done in an effort to humiliate Jesus, this king of the Jews.

I picture a gang scene when a member from a rival gang found himself accidentally in enemy territory. He's surrounded by the enemy gang, who are slowly circling around him, taunting and poking him, all the while invoking fear in the poor fellow in the center.

After some time of this, Jesus is delivered back to Pilate. We read in verse 4,

John 19:4

Pilate went out again and said to them, "See, I am bringing him out to you that you may know that I find no guilt in him."

This is now the second time in the context that Pilate says, "I find no guilt in him." Pilate knew that Jesus was not guilty of anything deserving death. This is why Jesus was merely punished and mocked. He was hoping that this punishment would appease the crowd, that the Jews would see that Jesus had learned his lesson.

So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. This would have been true theater at its finest, with Jesus, beaten to a pulp, standing there before the Jews. I can't help but remember the words from Isaiah 53.

Isaiah 53:2-3

For he grew up before him like a young plant,
and like a root out of dry ground;
he had no form or majesty that we should look at him,
and no beauty that we should desire him.
He was despised and rejected by men,
a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;
and as one from whom men hide their faces
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

The scene would have been repugnant to see. Sometimes in football games, there is a great injury that happens on the field, and they show it over and over on the television screen. When such slow motion replays come on the scene, I often turn my face away when the injury is about to happen. The one that gets me most is when a knee goes backwards. I know what is going to happen, and I just turn away. That is something of what is happening here with Jesus. Isaiah says he was "one from whom men hide their faces." When the Jews saw Jesus after being beaten by the Romans soldiers, they would have turned away from the horror of the scene.

Then Pilate said to them, "Behold the man!" This brings us back to the beginning of the gospel of John, back to chapter 1, when John the Baptist, who was more theologically informed than Pontius Pilate, said, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

Remember, it is the time of the Passover, when the Jews would take a lamb and set it upon the altar as a sacrifice for their sins. This is what Jesus would be. He would be the true and ultimate Passover Lamb, sacrificed upon the cross for our sins.

But Pilate didn't know this. He didn't present Jesus as the Passover Lamb of God. He said, "Behold the man!"

I love the subtle imagery here of Jesus wearing this crown of thorns, which came as a result of sin in the garden. Do you remember when Adam and Eve took of the fruit? The LORD spoke a curse upon the serpent, the woman, and the man. To Adam, he said,

Genesis 3:17-18

"Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field."

If Adam had never sinned, there would have been no thorns to place upon the head of Jesus. But Adam sinned, and the curse of the thorns was borne by Jesus upon his head.

He was the man who would take away the sin of the world. "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live

to righteousness" (1 Peter 2:24). That's what's going on with Jesus. He is being presented as the perfect man, to be the perfect sacrifice for our sins.

By way of application, I say this to you all. We can easily deal with our sin in the same way that Pilate dealt with Jesus. We can make deals with God, somehow trying to compromise with his justice. Yes, you acknowledge your sin. But you try to make up for it with some suffering. You promise to do better next time. You spend extra time in prayer and Bible study. You do some sort of good work to balance the scales. Maybe you try to punish yourself with guilt and shame, thinking that if somehow you feel bad enough, the guilt will go away. Maybe you even try, as some have done, to inflict harm upon your body to in some way pay for your own sins. This is what Martin Luther did when he was in the monastery, sleeping on cold floors at night, buffeting his body in an attempt to atone for his sins.

But your own punishment will never satisfy God. It will never satisfy your guilt. Our sin cannot be paid off with a little suffering of ours, with a few good works, or with a moral improvement plan. Only the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ can satisfy the justice of God.

3. Pilate Fears the Divine (19:6-11)

Now, getting back to Pilate, we see in verse 6 how Pilate once again declares the innocence of Jesus.

John 19:6

When the chief priests and officers saw him, they cried out, "Crucify him, crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no guilt in him."

Verse 6 is an echo back to chapter 18, when the Jews first brought Jesus to Pilate. Pilate said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?" (John 18:29). "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law." The Jews said to him, "It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death" (John 18:31). Then John adds that this was to fulfill the word that Jesus had spoken to show by what kind of death he was going to die, speaking about being lifted up upon the cross (John 12:32; 18:32).

Here, we see the same thing. Pilate says, "Take him yourselves," and the Jews speak openly about the cross. They demand crucifixion: "Crucify him, crucify him!" The Jews couldn't crucify anyone. They were requesting a Roman execution. Of course, as the story progresses, this is what we will see take place (verse 16). But here is the lead-up to that crucifixion. Pilate is making clear to the Jews that he doesn't deserve death: "I find no guilt in him."

But the demand of the Jews comes in verse 7:

John 19:7-8

"We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has made himself the Son of God." When Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid.

Something in this statement stirred fear into Pilate's heart. If you are "even more afraid," it means that you were afraid before, but now your fear has been increased. What was it? I think it's that last phrase, "Son of God." By invoking that title, the Jews brought Jesus into the realm of being a god, one with divine powers. This is why I call this point "Pilate Fears the Divine," because that's his first question to Jesus when he returned to him: "Where are you from?"

Obviously, Pilate could tell that Jesus was different. Though he was clothed in humility, the Jews feared him as a revolutionary. In the interactions in the inner room of the headquarters, Pilate could see the confidence and trust of Jesus.

Now, the Jews had said that he claimed to be "the Son of God." Jews and Romans would hear this differently. For the Jews, being "the Son of God" is blasphemy. But for the Romans, "the Son of God" was met with superstition. Maybe Jesus is divine. Maybe Jesus is one of the gods come in the flesh.

Remember when Paul and Barnabas arrived in Lystra, Paul did a miracle, and those of the city saw the power and assumed that the gods had come down in the likeness of men (Acts 14:11), and those of the city began worshiping Paul and Barnabas. With Pilate, this is the same culture. Perhaps his fear was heightened because he had just had Jesus flogged. What if he was a god?

This possibility changed everything in the mind of Pilate. In verse 5, he had presented Jesus as a man to the crowd, and now he was thinking that Jesus may well be a god! That's why,

John 19:9

[Pilate] entered his headquarters again and said to Jesus, "Where are you from?" But Jesus gave him no answer.

So, he tries to intimidate Jesus in verse 10:

John 19:10-11

"You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?" Jesus answered him, "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin."

Jesus affirms his divine character, that any authority that Pilate has comes from above, where the kingdom of Jesus is, not of this world. Paul would flesh this out in Romans 13: there is no authority that has been given except it has been given by God.

By way of application for this last point, let's just step into the divinity of Jesus. From the very first verse, John's gospel relentlessly points to Jesus being God. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). This is the Word that

became flesh and dwelt among us. Jesus and the Father are one. Jesus is the "I am." Jesus is Yahweh God.

This has huge implications for us. Is Jesus merely your forgiving friend? Or is Jesus your God, your sovereign king? Is this demonstrated in your life?

- Where is the ultimate authority in your decision-making? Do you submit it to Jesus' lordship? Do you seek him in all things? When Jehoshaphat was facing war and didn't know what to do. He said, "Lord, we do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you" (2 Chronicles 20:12). When you don't know what to do, are your eyes upon the Lord, willing to submit to him in all things?

- Is your moral compass guided by the Lord? Do you trust that he is your sovereign king? When he calls you, do you seek him? What he calls you to avoid, do you pull away from?

- In the midst of the chaos of the world, are you at peace? If you were living in Iran right now, would you be at peace? He is the ultimate authority. He has everything in his hand.

- Are you a man-pleaser or a God-pleaser? Are you bending to what people think, or are you standing before what the Lord would think? When he has your sovereign authority, you can live, answering only to him..

- Are you free from fear? If you fear the Lord, you have no other fears.

- Do you rest in his forgiveness and grace? All that God has said is true for us in Jesus. The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. God is great, but he is also good. Are you trusting in those things?

- Is he the authority in your life? Does it demonstrate itself in your life? Some think they just pray a prayer and they are a Christian. You must pray a prayer confessing your sin before the Lord, but you then bow to the Lord. You must confess Jesus Christ as Lord, that is, confessing him as the authority in your life.

We see in verse 12 that the resolve of Pilate is still the same:

John 19:12
From then on Pilate sought to release him.

This has been Pilate's motive all along.

First, he tried to make a deal with the Jews (John 18:38b-40). He was willing to release someone for the Jews during the Passover, hoping that they would want Jesus. But they wanted Barabbas. Making a deal didn't work.

Then, he tried to seek a compromise by merely punishing Jesus (John 19:1-5). He sent Jesus off with the soldiers to scourge him and humiliate him. Then, Pilate presented Jesus bruised and bloody. But that didn't persuade the crowds. They continued to cry out, "Crucify him, crucify him!" (John 19:6).

And now, especially in seeing the true character of Jesus, Pilate continued on his quest to release him. Pilate recognized that Jesus was without blame. Three times in our text, he says, "I find no guilt in him" (18:39; 19:4, 6). This is why Pilate is going back and forth with the crowds. Because Jesus is our sinless sacrifice.

At the beginning of my message, I quoted three verses that tell us this.

"[Jesus] committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth" (1 Peter 2:22).

"[Jesus] knew no sin" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Jesus was "tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15).

I quote them again to drill into your mind that Jesus is our sinless sacrifice:

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on March 8, 2026 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org.

[1] <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barabbas>.

[2] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barabbas#/media/File:Barabbas_\(James_Tissot\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barabbas#/media/File:Barabbas_(James_Tissot).jpg).

[3] Edward W. Klink III, *John*, Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 776.