The Blinding Spirit of Political Power

A message by Caleb Hyers | John 18:33-40 | John 19 | Luke 23

In this message from Caleb Hyers of The Resting Place Apostolic Family in Tampa, FL, Jesus before Pilate shows how a spirit of blindness can attach itself to political power. Working through John 18:33-40, John 19, and Luke 23, the message asks why so many people let tribal loyalty and the outcome they want outweigh the truth of God. Read the full transcript to follow Jesus before Pilate, Herod, and the crowd, and to see three ways to stay clear-eyed: see God as the source of all true power, hold alliances to the light of His Word, and live in self-sacrificial love.

BEWARE OF THE BLINDING SPIRIT BEHIND POLITICAL POWER

My title this morning is The Blinding Spirit of Political Power. That's because every single Wednesday morning or Wednesday afternoon, sometime on a Wednesday, I sit with the Lord the weeks that I'm preaching, and I say, "What are you saying to your people, Lord?" And note the question. I say, "What are you saying to your people?" You're not my people. I mean, you're my people, but you're not my peep. I'm with you. I'm one of the sheep here, okay? We're all brothers and sisters, amen?

So one of the reasons I'm sitting down here, I want to be like, I don't even like being up there. I don't know. I'm not mad at anybody who gets up there. What are you saying to your people, Lord? It's very rare that I get an actual internal audible word. It's very rare. It's happened before, but I don't usually get a sentence or a statement. But I did that week. I did. I was like, ooh. Okay.

And this is what he said. When I said, "What are you saying to your people that week, Lord?" I heard him say, "Beware of the blinding spirit behind political power." Beware of the blinding spirit behind political power.

And it just so happens that, in our 90 Day Word Challenge that week, Jesus is before Pilate and Herod, and these political actors are brought into the story. How cool is that? I think it's election day on Tuesday. We did not plan that. We said, 90 days from now, the Sunday before election day should be this passage, and Jesus just knows. He knows what he's doing. So I love it.

So let's answer a couple of questions, and then I'm going to ask you some really hard questions, and you're just going to have to sit there and ponder with me, all right? That's what we're doing.

WHAT IS POLITICAL POWER?

What is political power? Political power can look very different in different countries, different nations, and different structures of government. But let's just speak to the US here. The political power of the US, on paper, as it should be, is the ability to determine policy for a group of people in a certain area. The ability to determine policy. So, how you will be taxed, the infrastructure of our roads, the way the school systems work, what is allowed to be built in a certain area, grocery stores, homes, things like that. That's determining a lot. Amen. And so what we can and cannot do, in some sense, is determined by political power.

And I want to say a few things. The enemy loves to hijack the necessity of political leadership to enslave people. I believe it's necessary that someone decides these policy things. Don't you? Somebody has to make the decision. So we elect them to make these decisions, and we put our trust in them to make good decisions, when we're doing this right. So that's not bad, but the enemy loves to hijack it to enslave people, because it's setting a lot of parameters.

Politics itself is not bad. I know some of you think it's bad. Amen? Politics is not bad. The spirit of the age is bad. Politicians are not all evil. Only a couple of you believe that one. Politicians are not all evil. Have you met? Go talk to a few people. There are good people out there who want to serve our communities. Yeah, there are. You're just watching the highlight reel. It's just a lack of attention that assumes all politicians are evil. I could say it a little stronger, so I will. It's laziness to assume all politicians are evil because you've seen a few bad actors. So lazy. Politicians are not all evil. The prince of the power of the air is evil. And he's hijacking the necessity of political power to enslave people often.

And I just want to say, this is not a political message. And we're like, ooh, great. Thank God. But I'm going to mess with your politics for sure. Absolutely. It's not a political message. This is an exposure of the spirit of blindness that often accompanies political power. It's an exposure, and this is a rebuke to that spirit. Some of you currently are blind by this spirit, currently. And I'm going to rebuke it off of you today. All right? Whether you like it or not. I'm just kidding. I'm just kidding. You've got a choice, bro. You could stay blind. That's fine.

We're going to go through the interaction with Jesus and Pilate and the crucifixion timeline, maybe a little differently than you've ever heard it before. I'm going to go through these three different moments, and look at this.

PILATE WAS BLINDED BY A FRAMEWORK OF EARTHLY POWER

So number one is Pilate was blinded by a framework, a framework of earthly power. He was blinded by the system. This is just the way things are. He was blinded by the necessity of ranks and understanding who has real leverage on whom. We're going to read, and hopefully you'll see that. So, John 18:33 through 40. We're going to read a lot of Bible, and I'm going to ask you a lot of hard questions. That's the deal today, all right?

John 18:33.

> *So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, "Are you the king of the Jews?"*

Now, the context here is that they've already arrested Jesus in the garden. They've already had their mock trial overnight, in the middle of the night, where no one had an actual accusation against him. No one could actually bring a charge against him. And they were appealing to the authority of Rome. And so they brought him before Pilate. And so Pilate takes him in and says, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

> *Jesus answered, "Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?"*

Can we just appreciate the sass on Jesus? "You ask this for you, or somebody else? Who wants to know?" You know what I mean? I just like it. It's not important for my message, but it's fun. "Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?" The other thing that's funny about that is he knows the answer to the question. So he's just, I don't know. Anyway.

Pilate answered. Hear the offense, ready?

> *"Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?"*

Your own nation. Framework. Earthly power framework.

> *Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not in this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world."*

And so the framework is broken. He's like, "I see what you're trying to do here, Pilate." And then he gives him a framework that's eternal and other and doesn't fit in the box.

I also want to point out, and this is fun, he says, "or else my servants would have been fighting." Peter just did that less than 24 hours ago. Jesus is covering for Pete. He's covering his sins even now. He's already forgiven him, so he's apparently forgotten it in his sovereignty. Don't quote me on that. That was just a little tongue in cheek. All right? But "or else my servants would be chopping off people's ears with swords." Yeah, they were. But he wasn't dictating that they would fight. He said, "Put away your sword. Those who live by the sword die by the sword." The other wrinkle in that is he told him to buy the sword. And it's like, yeah, just because the Lord says arm yourself, he didn't say shoot the gun. Swing the sword at the word of the Lord and not before. All right? Spiritual ADD this morning. I'm not apologizing for it. There's a lot we could say about this.

So he says, "My kingdom's not from the world."

> *Then Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?"*

He's totally missing it. He's like, "Governor, king?" He's trying to figure out who has more power in the situation.

> *Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. 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." Pilate said to him, "What is truth?"*

He's lost. He's like, "What is truth?" He's so confused, all right?

> *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. He had led a rebellion. He was an actual bad dude. And they asked for him. There's so much we could say about that.

But the thing I want to point out here is, Pilate said, "So you are a king?" Jesus didn't fit into the framework that Pilate was operating from. Pilate, if you don't know, is a governor for Rome at the behest of the emperor. So he's literally trying to figure out the rank of the person he's talking to, because that's his whole world. It's ranking systems and authority and who can tell who what to do. Pilate could not understand what was actually happening in the moment. All Pilate could do was use the moment to further leverage favor with the people by releasing a prisoner. He was like, "What is truth? I don't know what to do with you. I'll do the thing where I'll release you, because that incurs favor with the Jews." So again, he's getting back into the Monopoly board of earthly framework power because he doesn't know what else to do. Are you seeing this?

And then he sends him to Herod because he finds out he's a Galilean. So he's like, "Oh, you belong to Herod. I've got to send you to the guy who makes decisions for Galileans." He sends him over there. Herod sends him back, and it says this in Luke 23:13 through 16:

> *Pilate then called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, and said to them, "You brought me this man as one who was misleading the people. And after examining him before you, behold, I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him."*

That's twice pronounced innocent by Rome.

> *"Neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Look, nothing deserving death has been done by him. I will therefore punish and release him."*

Again, earthly power. He can beat him up and send him out, but that's all he can do.

"I did not find him guilty, and neither did Herod." Pilate did everything the earthly power can do. He made sure the right hierarchy was consulted. He made sure the right counsel, the right vote was taken. Are you hearing what I'm saying? He did this the right way. He was still blind to the purposes of God. Why? Because the spirit operating behind his earthly framework of power was all he could see. He was hyperfixated on authority structures and kingship and Herod. Do you see this?

Okay, so here's my question. Have we allowed the earthly frameworks of power amongst us to blind our eyes to the work of the Holy Spirit? One honest person in the room. I love it. I'm just kidding. There are at least three honest people here. It's fine. Vocally honest. Have we done this? Are we fixated on, "Well, if this person gets in power, then God will be able to. But if this person doesn't, then God will not be able to"? Is there fear in our hearts that God can't if they win the whatever? Or if this amendment goes, or if that referendum?

Have we allowed the earthly frameworks of power amongst us, which matter? They're not natively evil. They're necessary. But have we allowed that spirit of blindness to hijack it? And blindness to what maybe the Holy Spirit is [inaudible]. Maybe the Holy Spirit wants someone you don't want in office. Who gets to vote then? Okay. I don't have enough time to mess with you at the level I want to mess with you. That's okay.

PILATE AND THE JEWS WERE BLINDED BY POLITICAL ALLIANCES

Not only was Pilate blinded by the framework of earthly power, Pilate and the Jews were blinded by political alliances, political alliances and positions. So let's look at John 19:1 through 12.

> *Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged him.*

Horrible to say. No, terrible.

> *And 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. And 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. And Pilate said to them, "Behold the man!"*

Now, at this point he would have been bleeding everywhere, atrociously, just horribly abused. My Jesus. It wasn't enough, because there's blindness at play. And let me caveat this whole thing. I understand the sovereign work of God. The redemptive arc of humanity was at play. I know that. But I'm showing you that these people had no idea what was happening, and they were caught up by something. You know that God uses the enemy as well? This is what I'm saying. That doesn't mean we just accept the work of the enemy. Hello? You could say, "Well, if they didn't do that, Jesus wouldn't have been crucified, so it's not a big deal." No, you still very well may be blind, thank you very much, blind by this same spirit.

> *The chief priests and the officers saw him when he brought him out. 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."*

Everyone say that. He has made himself the Son of God.

> *When Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid.*

I'm going to explain why in just a moment.

> *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?"*

Just a hilarious statement, knowing what we know.

> *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."*

Little side note: the whole "all sin is equal" stuff, that's garbage. That's not true. Jesus said there is a sin that separates God and men, to blaspheme the Holy Spirit. He said this has a greater sin. Paul said sexual immorality is against the body. It's not like other sins. Okay, so stop saying that. It's annoying. All right. Back on my page.

> *From then on Pilate sought to release him.*

Did you hear that? Pilate. Not a good dude. Already beat him. Already mocked him. Pilate's not a good guy here, okay? But he still is like, "I've got to release this guy. I've got to figure a way to get him out of here."

> *But the Jews cried out, "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar."*

Now, listen. When they said he has made himself the Son of God, you need to understand that the Caesar of that day called himself by that title. The Caesar of that day, in that time, called himself the deified son, the son of God. A little bit different in the verbiage, but the same idea. So that's why it says Pilate is even more afraid. It's like, "Wait a minute, this isn't just some rabble-rouser. This guy is taking Caesar's title and throwing it around and saying he's that?" Do you understand? Pilate's a governor. He works for the emperor. He's going to keep that guy happy. And here we have a man who's using the emperor's title.

The Jews, in that moment, used the political alliance with Caesar to get their desired outcome. Do you hear that? Because they're like, "You're going to release him? No, he called himself the Son of God, Pilate. You're no friend of Caesar. If you don't put that down..." Do you see how they leveraged the political alliance to get their desired result? They were blinded to the fact that they were the ones guilty of the greater sin. When the outcome you want blinds you to the issues of your alliances, you've been blinded by that spirit.

I know that he's that or she's that, but the platform. I'm voting for the platform, not the person. Oh, yeah, I knew that would be quiet. You're like, "But we want the outcome." You're voting for a person. We are so far off the biblical posture here, friends. God cares about character. The people of God should care about character. And if you're thinking of people, I don't know what people you're thinking of. So I'm not going to talk about those people. I'm not in your head. I'm just saying, is there not a blinding spirit that says, "I want this outcome, so a lesser of two evils. It's okay, just

blink, and I know you repented, and God knows, and we're okay, we'll get over it. It's fine, because blink real hard, so I see it, God sees, we're fine." I'm just kidding. But you might need to repent. Hello?

It says, "I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you." Pilate thought his earthly position as governor under Caesar gave him authority over God. His political position, his alliances, he knew who had his back, and that had blinded him to what real authority is. He's talking to God. Hello? He has no idea. Is this making sense? Are you seeing what I'm saying here?

Okay. So if we continue that passage from John 19:13 through 16:

> *When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Stone Pavement, and in Aramaic it's called Gabbatha. Now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover. It was about the sixth hour. He said to the Jews, "Behold your king!"*

Now this is pretty [inaudible] on Pilate. He's poking the bear, all right?

> *"Behold your king!" 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." So he delivered him over to them to be crucified.*

He sat down on the judgment seat to pronounce judgment over the judge of eternity. If that's not arrogance and blind pride, I don't know what is. Yes, I understand it was the sovereign working of God, but wow, there's a spirit behind that, yes? His position of power had blinded him to the audacity of that moment.

And them saying, "We have no king but Caesar." What? You know what they were doing? They were leveraging their political alliance at first. But now it's transformed into full-on tribalism. They've fully given themselves to the flag that serves their desired outcome. Sound familiar? "I want this, so this is my party. And I'm going to ignore all that. I didn't come to make friends. It's fine." This was no longer about conviction of right or wrong. It's categorically shifted here. Do you see this? Because before, it's like, "He's blaspheming. He claims to be God." They don't realize he is God. He looks like a rebel, and you could have a right and wrong conviction about the fact that they think he's blaspheming, so he needs to be punished. Okay, that's one thing. But saying "We have no

king but Caesar" in order to get the outcome that they want, of him dying, that's tribalism. That's national blindness. That's making you an American Christian, not a Christian who lives in America. We've got a lot of American Christians blinded by this spirit. I don't mind telling you.

This was about defending a national identity and a political alliance, is it not? "We have no king but Caesar." Am I making this up? Am I exaggerating what they did? No. So here's my question. Have we allowed our political alliances to blind us to our own selfish desires, arrogance, and earthly tribalism? Praise God if you haven't, but it's a good question to ask. Hello? My mom says, if the shoe doesn't fit, kick it off. You know what I mean? But if the shoe fits, [inaudible]. All right, let's keep going. Even though you're mad, it's fun.

PILATE AND THE PEOPLE ARE ALSO BLINDED BY SELF-PRESERVATION

Pilate and the people are also blinded by self-preservation, all right? John 19:19 through 22. I'm going to paraphrase this for time. It's where it says that he wrote "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." Go ahead and put that up there, guys. John 19:19 through 22. It was written in Aramaic, Latin, and Greek, and the Jews say, "Don't play." They say, "You don't put 'the king of the Jews.' You say he claimed to be the king of the Jews." Pilate's like, "It's only this big, guy." I don't know. I'm just kidding. He didn't say that. I just think, how are you going to put "He claimed to be the king of the Jews" in Aramaic, Latin, and Greek? It's not all going to fit. That's what I think.

Go to the last slide of that. They said, "Take that down. Change it."

> *Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written."*

Why? Because Pilate wanted to be known. He wanted to be known as having crucified the king of the Jews. He wanted to be known as taking a stand to honor Caesar. He wanted it to be known that he was snuffing out a rebellion by an enemy of Rome. He was preserving his political campaign friends. "What I have written, I have written," because "I want you to know I did that. I took him out." It's self-preservation. And it blinded him to the truth of God's redemptive work.

The crucifixion moment underscores the self-preservation paradigm they're operating in as well. Let's read it. Luke 23:33 through 40.

> *When they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left.*

I wish I had more time. Just because you're on the right or left doesn't mean much. You might just be a criminal on a cross. "Oh, but I'm the one that made it in [inaudible]." You're still a criminal on a cross. All right.

> *And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." And they cast lots to divide his garments. And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!" The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" There was an inscription over him: "This is the King of the Jews." One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?"*

What are they saying? They're saying, "Let him save himself." "Save yourself. Save us." They were all blinded by the idea that real power always works to preserve itself. This is the spirit that blinds you behind [inaudible]. It's self-preservation. The soldiers, the priests, the crowd, the criminal, all mocked him for acting powerless in this moment, when, in fact, he is redeeming the entire human race, and they have no clue whatsoever. It's the most powerful moment in history, and they're saying, "You're just a little wimp," because you're not preserving your own life. This idea of self-preservation has blinded them to the true power of love. Love has nothing greater than laying down its life for someone else, Jesus said. You don't overcome the enemy by looking out for yourself. You don't overcome the enemy by self-preservation. It's the opposite.

Revelation 12:11. It says:

> *They have conquered him, the enemy, by the blood of the Lamb, the word of their testimony.*

And everybody puts a period right there. Trust me, [inaudible]. No, there's a comma. I went to English class. So a comma means you pause for a millisecond and keep reading. But there's a reason we leave this last part out:

> *For they love not their lives, even unto death.*

Because we've been blinded by something that tells us you need to preserve yourself. And it happens in politics all the time. It happens in our relationship to politics all the time. If I vote for them, then maybe I won't get my things done the right way. Well, maybe God doesn't want your things done the way you want it. "Oh, he can't use them." He uses you. God only uses imperfect politicians because imperfect politicians are the only kind of politicians he has. God only uses imperfect people because imperfect people are the only people that he has. Hello?

Apply. So have we allowed self-preservation to blind us to the high-powered calling of sacrificial love? Good.

WE MUST BEWARE OF THE BLINDING SPIRIT BEHIND POLITICAL POWER

We must, friend, we must beware of the blinding spirit behind political power. We must. My whole message, in what I've put on the screen here: the framework of earthly power, political alliances, and self-preservation often have a blinding spirit behind them, and we must not be deceived by it.

You get a little bit of authority at your job, and all of a sudden you forget that you ain't the best thing since sliced bread. You think you're it. There's a blindness to that. It happens in other areas, but political power is where it happens the most.

PLEASE PARTICIPATE, BUT DO NOT PARTICIPATE BLINDLY

So let me just say this. Here's my statement on the elections. You ready? Tuesday is election day. Please participate, but do not participate blindly. Please participate, but do not participate blindly.

I'll give you a quick little example of blind participation. You ready? Here's what a lot of people do. They don't do any research, they don't look up anything, they don't know anything, and they just go in and write down party lines. Red or blue, right or left. Just, "Oh, they're that?" You have no idea what you're voting for, and you're still just voting. It's not like you're going to get graded on how many you answer. Did you know that? If you skip one because you don't have conviction about it, or you're not sure, you didn't do the research, you're not going to fail the test. All right? You can skip over stuff that you don't have conviction about. You don't know. The Lord isn't telling you anything. Hello?

So you might need to go in and vote on just one of the amendments, because that's the only thing you feel God telling you. [inaudible] Amen. You participated, and you didn't participate blindly. Hello? Does that make sense? Okay. I can tell some of y'all are mad. I may have just done my job.

HOW TO NOT BE DECEIVED BY THIS BLINDING SPIRIT

All right, let's talk about how to not be deceived by this blinding spirit. Let's do three things. Ready?

See God as the source of all true power

Number one, see God as the source of all true power. You don't have to like it, but Romans 13:1 through 7 says all power is instituted by God. All authority is placed in by God. You don't have to like it, but it's still in here, friends. It's still there.

Hold your political alliances accountable to the light of God's Word

Number two, hold your political alliances accountable to the light of God's Word. Hold them accountable. When they violate the truth of God, say it and vote them out. Come on. What if we started? People talk about the Christian voting bloc. What if the Christian voting bloc not only showed up but started voting Christian-like? Imagine who would actually stay in office. Did you hear what I just said? Imagine we started voting the way God has set in place rulers. Look at the way he gives accountability to those in charge and in authority, the high standard he holds. What if we held elected officials to that standard at the polling box?

Everybody talks about the Christian vote, how it can sway the whole vote. Well, good. Let's just start voting Christian. And not blindly, not as an American Christian, but as a Christian who lives in America. You understand? First John 1 says, "Walk in the light as he is in the light." That means you don't have to hide the fact of, "Oh yeah, let's ignore that. Yeah, I'm going to vote for them, but I'm going to ignore this part, which totally disqualifies them." Hello? How angry are you? This is like contemplative, quiet, angry, quiet. I don't know. [inaudible] It's all right. Jesus is smiling. I can feel his smile right now, so I don't care. That's my only test: am I pleasing the Lord?

Operate in self-sacrificial love at every opportunity

Number three, operate in self-sacrificial love at every opportunity, because Jesus said, in John 15:13:

> *Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.*

You do those three things, you will not be deceived by that blinding spirit. I promise you, it'll pull it right off. And the Lord is answering by rain. He is confirming his Word. You don't have to be happy about it. It's okay that you're convicted.

This morning we're going to take communion, and I want us to go to the communion table recognizing that the Lord is the ultimate authority, that we are called to walk in the light as he is in the light, and that we are to lay down our lives for one another the way Jesus laid down his life. Amen. So would you stand? Dan is going to lead us in this in just a minute. But I would have our staff come forward and get ready.

Transcript of a message by Caleb Hyers delivered at The Resting Place Apostolic Family | Tampa Bay, FL | trpfamily.org