

Can you put yourself in their shoes?

I'm talking about the 12 disciples. Can you begin to imagine what they were thinking and feeling as Jesus' trial unfolded?

The Bible doesn't tell us where all of them were when the whole incident with Pilate (that I read a bit ago) played out. We know John had been at the High Priest's house. Had he followed the crowd from the High Priest's house to Pilate's? Had some of the others joined him in sulking in the shadows hoping to avoid a confrontation like Peter had had the night before in the High Priest's courtyard? Were they already locked away in that same upper room where Jesus would find them just a few days later on Easter, just faintly hearing the distant crowd's homicidal chant of "Crucify him! Crucify him! Crucify him!"?

Wherever they were, I'm betting their minds were reeling. They probably couldn't stomach much food. Their necks were probably stiff from all the stress. They were probably exhausted but sleepless and trying to figure out how things could have spiraled so drastically out of control in just 12 hours.

No matter where they were when Jesus was having this little powwow with Pilate in John 18, I think all of us can begin to put ourselves in their shoes, at least a little bit, because we've been there.

All of us, at one point or another, have experience what it is like to have something in life spiral completely out of our control.

From little things out of our control, like a check engine light when you don't have the mental space to deal with car issues or getting sick the day your vacation starts, to much bigger things out of our control like a marriage that crashed and burned or one of the many cancers, life has a way of spiraling out of our control.

So, it's not all that terribly hard to put ourselves in the shoes of these men on that Friday morning.

Control – it's something we desperately crave.

So much of our lives are spent trying to obtain and maintain control. We try to obtain and maintain control our health by eating the right foods and getting exercise. We try to obtain and maintain control of our homes and our kids by finding and reading the right parenting books. We try and control what other people think about us by how we dress, what we drive, what we say, what we do. We try to control our financial futures by getting the right degree from the right school, networking with the right people, working hard to climb the corporate ladder, setting up financial plans to control the kind of retirement we have.

Control, we think, brings with it safety and peace of mind because when I am the captain of my ship I call the shots. Life seems like it would be safer and easier if I can just stay in control.

But here's the thing about control in this world... it's a mirage.

We spend so much of our lives chasing control, but time and time again, our experiences in this world teach us that chasing after control is like chasing after a mirage – just when we thought we had it, we realize control is just a little bit further off in the distance.

Just ask the disciples.

Their brains ticked just like ours do. They looked at what they had with Jesus and they finally felt like they had obtained some control over their lives.

When Peter's mother-in-law got sick, before Jesus it would have been completely out of his control. He would have had to stand there helpless while his mom either died or got better. But then Jesus came into his life, and that out of control situation suddenly became controllable when Jesus reached out his hand, touched her, and healed her.

Just a little while earlier they walked up to the tomb of Lazarus, a man they had all come to consider a friend. Before Jesus they would have been wailing and weeping with the rest of people that day because death was the ultimate proof that they were not in control of their lives. But then Jesus came into their lives and that out of control situation suddenly became controllable when Jesus called out, "Lazarus, come out," and the dead came back to life, and Lazarus walked out of his own tomb.

But just like a mirage, that control they thought they had found by following Jesus was proving too good to be true on that Friday morning we read about in John 18. That Jesus who had finally brought some measure of control to their lives was on trial – a trial he didn't seem to have any control over.

And you've been there. Life has a way of giving the illusion of control, of letting us experience how safe control feels, only to have that control slip through our fingers.

But that doesn't stop us from chasing it, does it? We chase control with everything we have because while it is true that trying to obtain and maintain control always frustrates, it's not nearly as frustrating being completely out of control, feeling completely helpless and useless.

It's an uncomfortable but inescapable truth that much of our lives are spent seeking control, knowing full well that we will never have control.

Have you heard of the term "Sisyphean Task"?

It's a term that comes from good old Greek mythology.

The story goes like this: There was once a king of Corinth named Sisyphus. He lived a life of pure wickedness - in just about every way you can conceive. But in his life he always was able to escape retribution for his wickedness because he was the craftiest man who ever lived. Sisyphus was so crafty he could even out-think the gods. One time Zeus sent Hades to chain Sisyphus up - to keep him from doing more wicked things - but Sisyphus was so crafty that Hades ended up in the very chains he had brought for Sisyphus.

When Sisyphus finally did die, Zeus and Hades condemned him to what has become known as the Sisyphean Task. For all eternity Sisyphus had to roll a huge boulder up a steep hill, but every time, right before he reached the top, the boulder would escape him and roll back down the hill and he'd have to start over again – that was his punishment for his life of evil craftiness.

So, are we condemned, like Sisyphus, to keep trying to roll the stone of control up the hill only to have it roll right back down again once we get close? Is that the life God wants for us – one giant Sisyphean Task?

No, not at all.

God does want us to realize we will never be in control in this world. Some times as we desperately seek that control, he allows things to spiral completely out of control, lest we stubborn, forgetful sinners overlook how little control we have. But that doesn't mean that God wants us to live a life of frustration because we can't have control.

No, when God shows us how little control we have in this life, *what he wants is for us to realize that He is in control*. He wants us to realize that Christ is in control – that he is King of kings, and Lord of lords. He wants us to know that everything and everyone on this planet, every minute of our lives fall under Christ the King's watchful, controlling gaze.

Even if it doesn't always look like he is in control, he wants us to know that he is.

Just look at John 18 again. Things seemed to be spiraling out of Jesus' control. From the disciple's perspective, from the Jewish leader's perspective, from Pilate's perspective Jesus was a man who was about to die on a cross because he had no control over his situation.

But in the midst of this situation that seemed to be spinning out of control look at Jesus' conversation with Pilate again:

Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

<sup>34</sup> "Is that your own idea," Jesus asked, "or did others talk to you about me?"

<sup>35</sup> "Am I a Jew?" Pilate replied. "Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What is it you have done?"

<sup>36</sup> Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place."

<sup>37</sup> "You are a king, then!" said Pilate.

Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."

Does Jesus sound like a man panicking because things are spiraling out of his control? Not even a little bit!

Jesus doesn't react at all like we would if we were in his place. He isn't worried. He's not frustrated, he's not panicked, he's not on his knees begging to be released. He's just having a conversation telling Pilate this is exactly why he came.

The simple and breathtakingly beautiful truth for us control-crazed by not-in-control people is that Jesus came to make The Truth, one ultimate and universal Truth, abundantly clear to the world and to us.

What truth?

The truth that even though our sin has sent us and this world into a giant downward, out-of-control spiral, from which we cannot possibly pull out, God wanted to save us. When sin, death, and the devil had complete control over us, Jesus was born and came to wrestle that control back – and the only way he could get that control back was by living for us and dying for us. This is why he had come – to make this truth clear to us – that he still has control in this seemingly out of control world.

God was then and is still now in complete control of this world as King of kings and Lord of lords. Pilate and those Jewish leaders were doing nothing to Jesus that he didn't allow them to do. And he allowed them to do it so that he could take control of your life now and your life forever in heaven.

Look at Jesus today and know that he is in control - it may not always look like it, it may not always feel like it, but it is true. That is The Truth that Jesus came to testify to – the gospel, the good news, that Jesus came to take control of this world and your life.

The more we understand, the more we dig into this God-taught truth that we are not in control in this world, the freer we become. You don't have to have control over your life. And you can be ok with that because we are not surrendering that control to hopelessness (like Sisyphus). We are surrendering control to Jesus. He is King of kings. He is Lord of lords. We are surrendering the control of our lives to the God who loved us enough to die for us so that he could take control of us and never let us go.

It's a truth that the disciples learned on Easter morning. It's a truth that we remember again today – Jesus is in control.

Praise the LORD!

Amen.