

2. The King of the Jews

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[0 : 0 0] Well, let us together bow our heads and I'll lead us all in prayer to the Lord. Why should I gain from his reward?

I cannot give an answer, but this I know with all my heart. His wounds have paid my ransom. Our gracious God, as we pray to you this afternoon, we remember those wounds of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross and we remember gladly this great truth that his wounds have paid our ransom and have shown us how precious, therefore, we are in his sight and in your sight, that we have been ransomed with the priceless, precious blood of Jesus.

And through his wounds, we have been able to receive forgiveness and acceptance by you. We haven't deserved this at all, our dear Father, but we thank you with all our hearts for it.

We thank you that your purpose has never been that the new heavens and the new earth should be deserted, but rather that it should be populated with those who belong to you and to Christ.

And we pray, therefore, that you will bless the churches as Christian people seek to preach and teach the glorious gospel to many. And we pray that in our own day, dear Father, you will give us the joy of seeing many more men and women and young people and children turn to Christ, become truly Christians who love and trust the Lord Jesus and devote their lives to his service.

[1 : 4 9] Please, therefore, strengthen your servants who seek to hold out the words of life and truth to many. And our prayer is that you will bring more and more to Christ and that you'll use even us, our words and our lives, to help with this great task.

And please speak to us today, dear Father, through the words of Scripture. And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, friends, let's turn to John's Gospel, chapter 19.

And if you have one of our big visitors' Bibles, you'll find this on page 905. Page 905. Last week we were looking at the first few verses of the chapter.

And this week I want to focus particularly on verses 10 to 16. But I'll read from verse 1 to verse 16 so that we can get the slightly bigger picture.

So here we have the account from John the Evangelist of what happened just before Jesus was crucified. So John chapter 19, verse 1. Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged him.

[3 : 0 6] 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. 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?

[4 : 14] 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.

From then on Pilate sought to release him, but the Jews cried out, If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar.

So, 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, 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! They cried out, Away with him! Away with him!

[5 : 15] 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.

Amen. Well, these are the words of God and may they be a blessing to us. Zebedee, the fisherman, had two sons, at least two that we know of, and they were called James and John and the Lord Jesus nicknamed them the Sons of Thunder.

They were amongst the apostles. Perhaps they were called the Sons of Thunder because they were very noisy and impetuous. Now James, as you may know, was put to death by King Herod and the sad tale of that is recorded in the Acts of the Apostles.

But John lived a long time, probably longer than any of the other apostles. And his gospel, which we've just heard a short reading from, most scholars agree, was written late in the first century AD, possibly between the year 80 and the year 90.

So John himself might have been 75 or 80 years old when he sat down to write this gospel. So John the Evangelist, John the Apostle, is looking back at the events of Jesus' life and death from a distance of at least 50 years.

[6 : 40] Now he spent his life as an active church leader, one of the apostles, but in his old age, he commits all this, these 21 chapters, to paper. Why?

To tell the truth about Jesus or to use John's own language to bear testimony, to testify to Jesus so that the reader should come to put their faith in Jesus.

Almost certainly, John prepared these chapters for a Jewish and Gentile readership. And he writes not simply to inform, but to persuade.

He's not just saying to the reader, I believe in Jesus myself, that he's the Christ and the Son of God, but I'm not really bothered about what you think about him. Not at all. He is wanting to persuade his readers to join him.

In other words, to become Christians. And this is how he puts it in chapter 20, verse 30. Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book.

[7 : 42] But these are written, now here's the purpose of this gospel, these are written so that you, you readers, may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in his name.

So friends, do let's bear this in mind as we look at chapter 19 again today. John is saying to his readers, both Jews and Gentiles, I want to persuade you that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

I want you to look at him thoughtfully. In fact, you could almost subtitle the whole of John's gospel with the three words, look at him. Remember how John the Baptist says back in chapter 1, behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Look at him. And Pilate says here, chapter 19, verse 5, behold the man. And again in verse 14, he says, behold your king. So why should John the evangelist want to persuade the reader to put their faith in Jesus?

If you're here today and you're not yet a Christian, why should John want to persuade you to believe that Jesus is the Christ? It's because eternal life is for those who put their faith in Jesus.

[8 : 58] And not to trust Jesus is not to have eternal life. In other words, there is so much at stake here. John is not simply telling a story. He's not like Shakespeare telling the story dramatically about Macbeth and Duncan or Henry VIII.

Here is a man telling us that eternal life depends upon whether we receive Jesus as the only saviour or not. John is deeply convinced that there is no other saviour, no other way to God the Father except through Jesus.

So friends, let's bear that in mind as we read this passage today. John is at one level recording history for us. He's recording for us the words of Pontius Pilate and the things that Pilate did.

He's telling us about the Jewish priests and leaders and how they pressurised Pilate to have Jesus put to death. But in John's mind, the really important figure is that of Jesus himself.

You see, Pilate says ironically, nastily, behold your king. But John is saying to the reader without any irony, behold this man and you will see that he really is your king.

[10 : 07] John wants to persuade us that Jesus is the true king and if he is, we are in honour bound to submit to him gladly. Well, let's notice two things in John's account here.

First, the insubstantial figure of Pontius Pilate. The insubstantial figure of Pilate. A big element in the drama here is the relationship between Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, and the Jewish leaders and priests.

And it is not a cordial or happy relationship. To put it bluntly, they are spitting feathers at each other and you can understand why. Think of the Romans.

They had been in charge in Judea and Jerusalem for some 90 years. They had not deprived the Jews of all their rights and privileges and so on and powers. The temple was still up and running.

The priesthood was able to serve. The Herods, the family of the Herods were still allowed as puppet kings to exercise a certain limited authority. It wasn't until 70 AD, about 40 years after Jesus' day, that the Romans blotted out every last trace of political independence from Judea.

[11 : 18] But in Jesus' day, around 30 AD, the relationship between the Roman power and the Jewish leaders was uneasy. Well, of course it was.

Nobody sits happily in their own country when an invading strong power has swept in and taken control. Nobody likes to be under the heel of another nation, especially a powerful military nation like ancient Rome.

And yet, John is making the point that Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, is little more than a strutting cock sparrow. Now, Pilate imagines that he's the one with all the power.

But look at the way John describes it all in verses 7 to 11. In verse 7, the Jews tell Pilate that Jesus deserves to die because he's made himself the son of God.

And when Pilate hears this, John says in verse 8 that Pilate becomes even more afraid. Now, that's an interesting remark because John has not told us earlier that Pilate was fearful.

- [12 : 21] But that little phrase at the end of verse 8 tells us that Pilate had been fearful for some time. He was out of his depth, not knowing how to handle a prisoner of this kind. Now, he knew how to handle the ordinary robber and insurrectionist like Barabbas, but a man like this, a man of shining integrity.

This was a new category of prisoner. And when it is suggested to Pilate that this Jesus might be the son of God, Pilate becomes really alarmed. It's not that he believes in the God of Israel or a king of the line of David, but he's superstitious.

Most Romans believed in a whole cluster of gods who were capricious and not to be trusted. And yet Pilate here is blustering and swaggering. Look at his question to Jesus in verse 10.

Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you? Fearful inside, but outwardly asserting that he had the power of life and death over Jesus.

Now, look at Jesus' answer in verse 11. You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. A majestic answer from one who knows where the authority really lies.

- [13 : 39] Just look at that great sentence in verse 11. Jesus acknowledges that Pilate does have a certain authority over him on the level of politics and the administration of the law.

Jesus recognizes that certain things are to be rendered to Caesar and Pilate is Caesar's representative. So Pilate does have administrative authority.

But at the same time, Jesus reduces Pilate to the stature of a nobody. You don't have an ounce of personal authority over me, he's saying. Yes, you can crucify me.

You have the power to do that. Administrative authority comes from God above and such authority has been delegated to you. But without that delegated authority, you would have no authority over me at all.

In other words, in yourself, Pilate, you're a nobody. And then Jesus goes on to say, it's not so much you, Pilate, who are at fault in my being put to death.

- [14 : 39] You hardly count. The real sinner is the one who delivered me over to you. In other words, Caiaphas, the high priest. So there is Pilate, strutting, but insubstantial.

Now second, let's notice the death-dealing venom of the Jewish leaders who are Jesus' real adversaries.

You see, Pilate would gladly have released Jesus because he says three times in this passage that he finds no guilt in Jesus. But the Jewish leaders insist and prevail over Pilate and in the end they force his hand.

In fact, verse 12 is the point at which Pilate buckles. And it's worth seeing just how the Jews finally force Pilate to do what they want. They know how to handle him. They've sussed out his weak point.

Verse 12 begins, From then on, Pilate sought to release him. You see, that's what Pilate really wants. He wants to let him go. But the Jews then cried out and apparently the verb used there is a very strong verb that really means he yelled or screamed they then cry out.

- [15 : 51] Friends, don't worry, I'm not going to yell or scream. But what they cry out or scream is if you release this man you're not Caesar's friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar. So those are the words that swing the issue for Pilate.

Why? Because the Jews are suggesting to Pilate that it would be anti-Roman, anti-Caesar to release a man who was known to be or known as the king of the Jews.

You see, remember how Pilate held his post? He held his post as governor of Judea because the Roman emperor Tiberius had appointed him. And Pilate knew, he knew the workings of the Roman Empire, he knew that these Jewish leaders could easily write a letter to Tiberius the emperor and tell Tiberius that Pilate was a weak leader who didn't have the courage to execute a man who might incite a Jewish rebellion in Jerusalem.

Most Excellent Caesar, they might have written. Pontius Pilate is a weakling. He's lacked the stomach to put to death a man who claims to be the king of the Jews. Please send us a new governor who is more resolute and more determined.

So do you see what happens here in verse 13? It's when Pilate hears these words and registers the danger signal to his own position. That's when he officially opens the court because he then ceremonially sits down on the seat of judgment.

[17 : 17] He has the prisoner brought out and he prepares to make his judicial pronouncement. Mind you, Pilate is such a nasty and spiteful individual that although he knows the Jews have him cornered and have forced his hand, he is still going to score a point or two against them if he possibly can.

And that's why he says to them in verse 14, behold your king. There stands Jesus mangled and blood spattered and tortured from his flogging.

And what Pilate means when he says look at your king is a beaten up wretch like this is a fit king for a rabble like you. But that's not all. In verse 15 they shout crucify him.

And he says there with equal spitefulness shall I crucify your king? and this forces them to say the words that he's really been waiting for.

We have no king but Caesar. Now just think of that. Here are the official representatives of the Jewish theocracy. The people known all over the world to worship the God of Israel as their king.

[18 : 26] And Pilate forces them to say we have no king but the Roman emperor. So the Jews have won the day. That's why in verse 16 Pilate eventually hands Jesus over to them to be crucified.

But Pilate has scored some sharp points against them even while he has to concede the main issue. Now when we see just how fierce these Jewish leaders are and how determined they are to have Jesus put to death we're bound to ask the question is John the evangelist anti-Semitic?

Again and again throughout his gospel he uses this term the Jews with a certain edge to it. It's not a neutral term. You'll see it in this very chapter at verse 7 and again at verse 12 and again at verse 14.

In fact the term the Jews occurs on almost every page of John's gospel and it usually carries the force of the Jewish leaders in their hostility to Jesus. In a sense the whole drama and momentum of John's gospel turns on the relationship between Jesus and these Jewish leaders.

Is John then damning Judaism and writing an anti-Semitic tract and teaching his readers too to be hostile to Jews? Well the answer is no not at all.

[19 : 53] John was himself a Jew. All the apostles of Jesus were Jews. Most of the early disciples of Jesus were Jews. Jesus himself was a Jew.

The New Testament never suggests that the Christian gospel is antagonistic to Judaism. Quite the opposite. The New Testament gospel is seen as the fulfillment of the law of Moses and the writings of the Old Testament prophets.

What John is really showing the reader is that there are two types of Jew. There are those like Caiaphas and many of the Pharisees who resist Jesus and regard him as a blasphemer.

But there are many others like the apostles who recognize Jesus as the Messiah promised in the Old Testament. What John is resisting is not Judaism properly understood but a Judaism that refuses to see Jesus as the promised Messiah.

A Judaism that is at odds with its own scriptures. So the fact is that any true Christian delights in the Old Testament in the Hebrew scriptures because the Hebrew scriptures teach us who Jesus is.

[21 : 05] It's from the Old Testament that we learn that Jesus is the promised king of the line of David. That he is the exalted son of man of Daniel chapter 7. That he is the suffering servant of Isaiah chapter 53.

Any true Christian is delighted, humbled and delighted to call Abraham his forefather in God's purposes. Not of course in terms of blood descent but in terms of spiritual ancestry.

When a Christian opens up the Old Testament and reads the prophets from Moses to Malachi that Christian says these words here are the very words of the God of Israel and they are true.

The true and only God is the God of Israel. And all the evangelists and all the apostles in the New Testament are constantly quoting the Old Testament because to them it is the very word of God which must be fulfilled.

In fact, John himself quotes from the Old Testament four times in this very chapter in the later verses. Twice from the Psalms, once from Exodus and once from the prophet Zechariah.

[22 : 10] John is not anti-Semitic. He is teaching all his readers both Jewish and Gentile how to understand the Hebrew scriptures. Above all, he is teaching us to understand how Jesus is the central figure of the Old Testament as well as of the New Testament.

For a Christian to bow before Jesus is to fall at the feet of the God of Abraham. And what a privilege it is for any Gentile to be grafted into the glorious saving purposes of the God of Israel.

Now with all that in mind, let me ask you to look with me at verse 14 here. Don't you think it seems odd?

Here we are in the middle of this fast-moving tale, this grubby, murderous spat between Pilate and the Jewish leaders. And John suddenly writes in verse 14, now it was the day of preparation of the Passover.

Now why should he say that at this point in the story? Well the answer is that he is teaching us the real meaning of the horrible events that he is describing.

[23 : 24] At ground level, the Roman governor is being pushed into a corner and then at verse 13 he capitulates to the Jewish pressure. He then constitutes his court by sitting on the judgment seat and he then sentences the prisoner to death.

I hand him over to you for crucifixion. And immediately afterwards Jesus is taken away out to Golgotha and is crucified there. Now that's what is happening at ground level.

And friends, it is shocking. For any innocent man to be condemned is a shocking thing. But for this peerless human being to be treated like this is unspeakably horrible.

But in verse 14 John is saying to us I want to show you what all this really means. This momentous miscarriage of justice is in fact the accomplishment of the great purpose of God.

My readers, John is implying, you know your Old Testament. You know what happened at the first Passover. By God's merciful commandment every Jewish householder chose a perfect unblemished lamb and he slaughtered it.

[24 : 39] He then took the blood of the lamb and daubed it all over the lintels and the doorposts of his house. And when the destroying angel came in that night to kill every firstborn son in the land of Egypt the angel passed over the houses where the blood of the Passover lamb was displayed.

And every person in that house was spared. So the lamb died in place of the Israelite. The lamb forfeited its life and the life of the Israelite was saved.

So John is saying to his readers Jesus is the Passover lamb. This cross at Golgotha is the real Passover sacrifice. Jesus was not put to death at any random time of the year.

Not at all. God arranged it that he should die at Passover so as to teach us what his death means. John the Baptist you remember back in chapter 1 had said behold the Lamb of God the sacrificial Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

So John the Evangelist's message to us is this death the death of Jesus is not a mistake. It's not an aimless tragic random killing.

[25 : 53] This is the means lovingly provided by God whereby the sinner who is alienated from God and under sentence of death can be reconciled to God protected everlastingly by the blood of Christ and thus brought to eternal life.

John is saying to all of us behold the man the second Adam who came to restore what the first Adam had lost. And John is also saying behold your king this blood spattered humiliated man is the true king of the Jews and of the Gentiles bow at his feet and gladly become his subject.

And John is also saying to us behold the Lamb the Passover Lamb who shed blood will certainly protect us and save us in the day of the wrath of God when finally he punishes all those who have refused to trust the Saviour.

That's the message. So let me say this friends if you have never yet come to him will you come to Christ today? It's because God has loved us so greatly that he has given us this Passover Lamb to be sacrificed.

It's at the cross and nowhere else that our sin has been dealt with by God all our rebellion against him dealt with there and forgiven.

[27 : 20] but each of us individually needs to ask for the benefits of it. Each of us needs to come humbly to him and put our trust in him.

So let me ask will you do that if you've never done it before? No more important decision could be taken by any man or any woman than to come to Christ who is the Passover Lamb.

Let's bow our heads and we'll pray. Now it was the day of preparation of the Passover.

Dear Lord Jesus we cannot thank you enough for being prepared to go through with this horrible ordeal. We know that in one sense you were in the hands of these men who were persecuting you and insisting upon your death but we know that in a different way this was all in your power.

You told us yourself that no one takes your life from you. You lay it down of your own accord and have authority to do so and authority to take it up again.

[28 : 46] So we thank you Lord Jesus for your death for our sins and your resurrection which is the guarantee of eternal and wonderful life for all who belong to you.

So please have mercy Lord Jesus upon each one of us here today and help us as John the Evangelist teaches us help us to trust you to come to you in faith and we ask it for your dear name's sake.

Amen.