

Written Copy: John 18:33-37 "Return to the Kingdom"

Midweek Lent #5

Wednesday, March 24th, 2021

Text: John 18:33-37

³³ So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" ³⁴ Jesus answered, "Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?" ³⁵ Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?" ³⁶ Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of 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." ³⁷ Then Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" 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."

The text's intent

Brought before Pilate and charged with insurrection, we see Jesus acknowledging this Roman governor's earthly authority to question and pass judgment according to Roman Law. We also see Jesus confessing and acknowledging that He is a king like no earthly king. And His kingdom is not defined geographically, not by the people He rules over. His Kingdom is the reign and rule of the Creator God, who exists outside of this world, who has come into this world, and He Himself brings this reign and rule wherever He is. Not being an earthly king with an earthly kingdom, His reigning and ruling doesn't look like mankind expects it to. The truth is the King of all Creation shows His reign and rule by becoming the human sacrifice to save all mankind from eternal destruction. In doing so He opens the door for all who believe in the truth of who He is and what He has come to do to enjoy the eternity where His reign and rule is no longer cloaked and carried out by men He has placed in power. In eternal life He will reign supreme and unchallenged by evil. And all those who hear this truth with the ears of faith will be welcomed there.

Focus Statement:

Jesus is the Highest King not by human selection, but as the Creator God. He came into this world to bring the reign and rule of God among us. Wherever He is that is where God is reigning and ruling. The truth He came to testify to is that the King rules over the world by serving as the sacrifice for all mankind's sin and becoming the power and means by which His perfect kingdom, established at Creation, will be restored on the Last Day, populated by all who hear the Gospel truth with ears of faith.

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

We think of kings and kingdoms in a similar sense to the Jews of Jesus day, they reign and rule over a geographic area, over people who submit to their rule either willingly or through coercion. We therefore struggle to understand Jesus as a King who is ruling even now in this world with all the evil that springs up around us.

What the hearer should do as a result:

Recognize that because Jesus is not an earthly king with an earthly kingdom, we can't impose human judgments upon whether in any given situation is our world He is reigning or not. He does not reign in the manner of way we expect or demand. He reigns and rules in our hearts by faith, that's where His Spirit is. He will bring to completion the plan of restoration of His perfect kingdom on the Last Day with all who hear His Gospel Truth with believing ears.

Subject Sentence: Jesus Reigns from the Cross to Rule in Eternal Life

Introduction: Earthly Conception of Kings & Kingdoms

What comes to mind when you consider what a “king” is? Stop and ponder that for a moment. Do you automatically picture Queen Elizabeth and the English monarchy? I don’t, at least not how the English monarchy functions today. They seem to be more a figurehead than kings and queens that have any real power to rule. When I think of what a king is in the earthly sense, I picture the Middle Eastern kings of days gone by, the ones you would see in the movies, the kings of Arabia, who live in ornate palaces, surrounded by wealth, with harems, and unlimited power over the people they govern. And how do they become king? Some because they were born into it because their father was the king. Others took power by force. Either way they rule because a group of people submit to their rule, either by choice or by the point of a sword.

When I think of what a kingdom is, I think of the kingdom of King David. I think in terms of geography. David’s kingdom was composed of all the area of the Promised Land originally given to the 12 tribes of Israel and beyond. David’s son Solomon’s kingdom extended beyond that to cover most of what we consider to be Palestine today. In both cases we define David and Solomon as those rulers who controlled a specific geographical area and put the people who lived there under submission, either willingly or by force. Both used that power at times for the good of the people they ruled, but other times to their detriment. They both amassed great wealth, many times from the pockets of those they ruled over. Their greatness was defined by how much they controlled, by how much they held in their hands of power.

For most of you, this is probably the picture that pops into your heads when you hear the terms “king” and “kingdom”. It’s what the Jewish Ruling Council, and Pilate would’ve defined as a king having a kingdom. But Jesus has come to show them and us that this definition is wrong when we talk about the Kingdom of God.

Gospel Lesson: Jesus the King Bringing Insurrection

The Gospel Lesson begins with Jesus being led away from Caiaphas’ house where the Jewish Ruling Council had been meeting to find charges against Jesus. They had heard Him confess that He was the Messiah who was promised to come from the line of David, the one who was to receive an eternal kingdom. They also heard Him confess that He is equal to God. The confession that He is equal to God Jesus would make Him guilty of blasphemy and worthy of death in the eyes of any faithful Jew. His confession that He is the Messiah, meant to them that He is proclaiming Himself to be the temporal king who was to resurrect and rule over David’s restored kingdom in place of Rome. With this confession they believe Rome will find Him guilty of insurrection and worthy of death.

So they march Him off at dawn to Pilate's residence who he functions as the supreme judge for Rome on all matters pertaining to Roman Law. They have to wait until morning because the Roman courts of law only operate from dawn to dusk. But when they arrive the Jewish Council is not forthcoming on what they are charging Him of. **John 18:29-30** ²⁹ **So Pilate went outside to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?"** ³⁰ **They answered him, "If this man were not doing evil, we would not have delivered him over to you."** Pilate comes out and takes his seat in the throne of judgement and asks what the charges are. Instead of listing them the Jewish Rulers simply say, "He's guilty! He's an evildoer, meaning He is doing evil against Rome. Trust us! That's why we're handing him over to you."

But Pilate knows these men. He doesn't like them or trust them. **John 18:31a** **Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law."** Pilate knows he is not getting the whole story. He refuses to be a tool to be played at the hands of these men. He tells them to get lost. If all He's done is broken one of your Jewish laws, then you deal with it. Don't come back unless you can charge Him with breaking Roman Law. (**John 18:31b**) **The Jews said to him, "It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death."** Here they insinuate the charges they are bringing against Him are worthy of death under the Roman Law. With that they must produce what these charges are.

While John doesn't list them in His Gospel, Luke provides a record of them. **Luke 23:2** **And they began to accuse him, saying, "We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king."** What is the truth here? He has not misled the nation. He has taught only the truth, which stands opposed to the lies these men are teaching the nation, causing them to reject the God in human form who has come to save them. As far as forbidding tribute to Caesar, **Mark 12:13-17** ¹³ **And they sent to him some of the Pharisees and some of the Herodians, to trap him in his talk.** ¹⁴ **And they came and said to him, "Teacher, we know that you are true and do not care about anyone's opinion. For you are not swayed by appearances, but truly teach the way of God. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? Should we pay them, or should we not?"** ¹⁵ **But, knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, "Why put me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me look at it."** ¹⁶ **And they brought one. And he said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?"** They said to him, "Caesar's." ¹⁷ **Jesus said to them, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."** **And they marveled at him.** That charge is another lie.

But the third, (**Luke 23c**) **and saying that he himself is Christ, a king**, that He is calling Himself “Christ” (meaning the “Anointed One”), and with kings being anointed ones as a sign they ruled as an extension of God’s reign and rule, that one has meat on it. And that one is worthy of Pilate stepping in and ruling as the arbitrator of Roman justice. **John 18:33 So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, "Are you the King of the Jews?"** Pilate has officially taken the case, taking him from the Jews and taking him inside to be questioned. He starts with the most important charge, that will either prove or disprove the others. Notice he asks not “Are you a king?” but instead “Are you THE King of the Jews?” Jesus is that in all reality, but not in the sense or with the definition that Pilate or the ruling council fill that term with.

And so in fine Jesus fashion, with a question (**John 18:34**) **Jesus answered, "Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?"** Here Jesus is moving Pilate to confess something: “are you voicing your own judgment about me? Or are you just repeating what they’ve charged me with?” **John 18:35 Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?"** We should read that response of Pilate with a sneer and a voice of contempt. He does not see the Jews as equal to him. They are a conquered people, ruled by Rome. They have repeatedly been a pain in his hindquarters. Despite the loyalty they will profess for Rome, and for Caesar, they detest Roman rule. And this Jew that he is looking at, this common man who appears to have been beaten up, would I, Pilate, ever mistake Him for what I, a Roman, would consider royalty? That’s a joke! So, let’s hear it. What have you done?” Pilate believes he is ready to hear the truth and pass judgment. So Jesus is going to begin to explain the truth to him.

Jesus: The non-earthly King Who Comes to Save Creation

John 18:36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of 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." Jesus begins by describing what He is not. He is a king, but not like Pilate, or the Jewish Council, or even you or I would consider to be a king. His kingdom, or better still, His reign and rule, doesn’t have geographic borders. He doesn’t have a trained army that is His muscle to keep Him in power, and there was certainly no one defending Him from being arrested by the Roman and Jewish guard. No Pilate, Jesus says, I am a king unlike you, or they, have every conceived of.

John 18:37 Then Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" 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 understands that Jesus is confessing to being some kind of king. But what does He mean that His kingdom is not of this world? Jesus responds, "You've judged correctly. I am a king. I am the king who has come to bear witness to the truth." And what is the truth? It is something that in its totality is beyond Pilate's ability to comprehend. Jesus is the king who didn't receive a kingdom because of who His earthly father was. He didn't assume it by exerting power and influence over people. His kingdom is not of this world, because His origins are not of this world. He is the One True King over all things. He is the Great I AM, the one who spoke all things into existence. He rules over all things as Creator God, existing above and beyond any and every earthly kingdom and king. In fact all those who exert reign and rule in this temporal realm do so because He allows it.

And the even greater truth is why He has entered Creation, what He has come to do. He is the Creator who came down and entered His creation as a baby. Born not in a palace, born not demanding the reign and rule as humankind would expect. But born as a lowly servant. Because this king of the universe is going to show all mankind what it means for Him to reign and rule, it means not ascending to a throne, but climbing onto a cross. This king loves those He reigns and rules over so much that He came to give His life for them, to forgive them for all the times they disobey Him as their king. He came to forgive you for all the times you doubt that He is reigning and ruling your world and your life. You and I deserve to be cast out of His kingdom forever. But instead He suffered our punishment and died our death. So that in the end you and I would be welcomed into a kingdom far greater and more glorious than anything on earth. A kingdom that is the return to the perfection of His original creation: eternal life.

But Jesus kingdom, His reign and rule, is not just something to be realized in the future. It is here among us now. Even as Creation fell into sin God has not stopped reigning and ruling. If He has the earth long ago would've stopped spinning on its axis, stopped revolving around the sun, or would've been destroyed at the hands of sinful warring human beings. But into this world of sinful selfish human beings He came to bring the reign and rule of God to mankind, to you and to me. **(Matthew 4:17) From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."** His reign and rule is manifested in your heart through His gift of faith, by which you believe that He died on the cross to forgive all your sins, making you worthy enough to be a part of His kingdom now, and worthy enough so that on the Last Day you will live forever in His eternal reign and rule, which will consume all reality.

What is **The Truth** we need to hear and believe? **John 14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. John 3:16-17 ¹⁶"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.** And **John 17:3 And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.** When you believe these things as the absolute truth, you have the reign and rule of God in your heart by the presence of His Holy Spirit.

What His Reign and Rule Means in Your Life:

How can others see the reign and rule of Jesus manifested in your life? When you realize and confess that you didn't choose to be a part of His kingdom, no more than the Israelites in our Old Testament Lesson did. God chose them and called them to be His special people, His Holy nation, just as He has called you. He called you by those words of truth. Being given this as a gift of grace you love and treasure your faith as a gift, one that you desire to share. You look upon your fellow believers as those in whom your Lord and Savior is reigning and ruling. And as Paul cautions us in our Epistle Lesson, we should never let petty disagreements or demand that our fellow believers think the same as we do about matters that are not commanded by our King, serve to sever the fellowship we have as His kingdom people. Paul cautions us that, by our lack of love, grace, and patience for our fellow Christians, we could cause them to fall from faith, fall from grace, and therefore fall from that gracious reign and rule that the Spirit is working to engender and strengthen in their hearts.

Conclusion

Where was The True King of the Jews, and of the Romans when Pilate brought Jesus into the governor's residence? Right there in front of Him, even though He didn't look like it to Pilate, or the Jewish Ruling Council. He was not the kind of king that Pilate, or the Council, or even His disciples expected Him to be. Jesus was and is the King that the Father sent Him to be, the One that gave His life to save all those He reigns and rules over. He is your Savior, and your King. He is the most loving king that you can ever know. And you and I at times choose to recognize Him as our Savior, but not our Lord. We at times refuse to listen to His commands as our King. But He came to save us from falling from faith, from falling from His reign and rule. He is at work to keep you and I in that reign and rule, until it explodes and becomes all of reality on that last day. He is at work right now to bring that about. When you begin to turn away, hear His call in His Word. **Joel 2:13 "Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster.** Amen