

The King of All
John 19:19-22

We have come to this sobering text. We see the trial has concluded and Jesus is hung on the cross between two criminals. We realize that at his baptism Jesus identified with sinners, and in his death he is identified with sinners once again. We also mentioned last time that all of human history, and ever since Jesus was born into this world has been leading up to this point. John identifies him as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. And here is our Great High Priest offering himself up as that perfect Lamb that we might have forever forgiveness. Jesus said to Nicodemus in John 3:14-15, **“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.”** This is the Son of Man being lifted up. There is no other way. Jesus says this must occur. This is God’s plan and God’s doing.

We will see in this passage that John is actually an eyewitness to these events, so many of the details that he gives are just recorded in this gospel and not in the others. Such as Jesus being crucified in the midst of these two criminals, or he hung in the middle cross. And the paragraph we are looking at tonight is unique about the sign that hung over the cross of Jesus. All the other gospels point out the sign and even what it said, but John gives so many details, such as it was written in three languages, and also the protest of the religious leaders of what was written and their request that the charge be changed. And all of these details John gives us are so significant. And there is not much thought given to the official charge of Jesus’ death that hangs over the cross. Maybe you never heard a sermon about it. Well, we will look at the significance of that charge tonight.

And a casual reader might think as they look at the last couple chapters that everything seems to be downward as far as the fate of Jesus. But these verses right here indicate you could not be further from the truth. And these details are significant because we realize that God is sovereign over the details of all of life. Even this last insult that Pilate gives to the Jews that no one would have thought much about, even though everyone read it as Jesus was paraded through the streets and then read it when it was affixed to the cross. God’s plan and God’s goodness is evident in this passage. This sign in the midst of so much misery reminds us of the glory of God’s plan but also Jesus’ submission to that plan.

And there are a couple of challenges I want us to see tonight. One is that Jesus truly is King. He truly is the great ruler of his people who came and died to purchase our salvation. It is incredible to me that hordes of people claim to trust him as Saviour but never trust him as Lord or as King. Listen to me as clear as possible. This is who Jesus is, and you cannot divide him up. He is the King of kings. There is no one more powerful or authoritative than Jesus. The call in salvation is to bow the knee and believe on him. And how is that trust and belief seen or demonstrated in our lives? It is submitting to his Lordship. Jesus is King. To trust him means there is a different ruler in our life. He is the Saviour King. God puts this sign above Jesus to remind all of us who Jesus is and call all of us to bow before his will not ours.

The second thing is God is over the details of our lives and those details have purpose. The details of life are not there as some sort of irritation or frustration in our

what would be happy lives without these things. Even the evil that individuals do to us have purpose and reason. And the greatest purpose is to reflect the One who has called us by his grace. God is in control. He is sovereign over the simple sign that happens to be over Jesus. He is over the differing nuances that make up our lives. No one would have recognized the significance of the sign until after the resurrection, but that does not change the fact that God is sovereign and giving hope and meaning to all in all that is taking place. We might not understand why God sends us through deep waters but if God can control all the events around the cross and even the sign above the cross then your life is not too hard for God. He really is in control.

So as we look at the sign above the cross marvel at your conquering king. Marvel at Jesus our Lord. See none other than God's glorious sovereignty and control of all these events. Glory in the love and submission of our King and Lord. Are you living in light of Jesus as Lord? Are you seeing his sovereign control over your life? Your life even though it might seem from your vantage point a chaos, nothing could be further from the truth. Everything is planned out by your loving Lord, even your pain and heartbreak, and it is there for your good and his glory. And the sign above the cross is a sign of the goodness, grace, and sovereignty of God. I want us to see a couple things tonight that I hope will increase our love and trust in Christ over the details of our lives.

1. We need to see the significance of the sign written. V.19-20.

There are signs that are all around us. Signs that direct us on the roads, or signs in stores indicating the price of an item. Signs are never the main thing but what they give is some sort of message, directing us beyond the sign to the main thing, whether a destination or an item we want to buy. We do not park underneath signs. That is not the destination. We do not buy the sign in the grocery store announcing pickles are on sale. We buy what the sign is pointing to. Signs are important in directing us.

And we are even told that Jesus did signs and wonders. And the miracles that Jesus did were never meant to be the main thing. It is amazing how people get enamoured with the signs of Christ today, but not with what the sign points to or indicates. The sign pointed to Jesus as the Messiah, the Anointed One, the long awaited King. But much of Israel missed that and desired the sign rather than the message of the sign, just like today. People want miracles but not Christ.

But there is probably no more clear or greater sign or pointer that has ever been written than this one here in verse 19, **“Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, ‘Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.’”** Now look who wrote it. It was Pilate. And it does not mean that Pilate wrote it personally but he had it written and the precise details written. And all the gospels record the message with slight variations, but the main thrust that Jesus is King of the Jews. Now Rome was very serious about law and loyalty to the Empire. And so when the accused was found guilty the charge or infraction that the person was guilty of was written on what was know as a “titlos,” we get our word “title” from that word. It was carried in front of the person as he was led away through the streets to be crucified. And then it was attached to the top of the cross for all to read. And the message of Rome was don't break this law or don't do this infraction, or this fate could be yours also. The sign was a warning from Rome. It gave a direct and unmistakable message.

So as you read this charge there is a message by Pilate of what Jesus was guilty of. And you'll remember that this was the first accusation that the religious leaders hurled at Jesus before Pilate. And the reason why Pilate writes this is not because of a warning about going against Rome or establishing justice but he does this as a dig against the religious leaders knowing this will infuriate them, which it does. The message of the sign was: look how pitiful your nation and your king. Here is Jesus in seeming weakness led away and then executed as not only a common criminal but the worst of them. He is one who should be forgotten and despised, just like the nation. And this is your king. Pilate did not write this to honour Jesus or warn but as a sign against the religious leaders and the nation as a whole. What a pathetic nation!

But what man means for evil, God means for good. All of this is ordained by God. Pilate and his free actions, do what he wants to do, but are all done in some mysterious way under the governance of our great God. Peter, praying with the church at Jerusalem says, Acts 4:27-28, **“for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.”** This is God's predestined plan to have this sign above Jesus. Pilate has his plan but God has his. Jesus truly is king! I do think it is significant that the two human instruments that put Jesus on the cross, and both of them evil, both of them speak in such prophetic fashion better than they know. Pilate right here. Jesus is not only King of the Kings, but he is the reigning and ruling king. He is the great conqueror. But the other is Caiaphas. He is High Priest and the leader of the whole mob called the Sanhedrin.

Listen to what John records in John 11:49-52, **“But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, ‘You know nothing at all. Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish.’ He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.”** Here Pilate, like Caiaphas before become the unwilling and unknowing mouthpiece of God. I mean the sovereignty of God is so all over this crucifixion narrative. Oh, how we need eyes to see it!

Now look at the next verse in our text, **“Many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Aramaic, in Latin, and in Greek.”** This is one of those little details found only here in John's gospel. And I do think it is unique and glorious. There are other instances of a person's crimes being written in multiple languages. And notice the three languages. Now the first is Aramaic. And it is interesting that most Bible interpreters think that this is what is meant even though the Greek word used is “Hebrew.” Aramaic was the language spoken by the people — the Jews. Latin was the language of power. And Greek was almost spoken by everyone through the world of the Empire. And by having it written in three languages, God was giving a message through Pilate, even though Pilate didn't realize it, that Jesus was the King not just of the Jews but the entire world.

And I do think this is so significant, because we are told that people read this. And here is the question as they saw this man writhing in pain and so beaten and

bloodied, did he look like a king? And the answer to that question is no, at least not to the natural eye. We need the eyes of faith that only God can give to see the significance of all that is taking place. Because think of what a king does. He represents the people, nation, and kingdom. He is sovereign. One of the characteristics of a king is he conquers. He conquers all things that oppose his rulership. Jesus conquers our great enemy the devil. The death knell to Satan is the cross of Christ. Jesus also conquers the penalty of sin that is over any and all of us. We are delivered from its grip — power and penalty of sin — our King conquers sin forevermore on the cross. No king was ever stronger than our conquering King Jesus. A king also rules, and through this act Jesus rules. His will is being done. He dies for us and then in power brings us to himself. It is one of the ways that we see that we are Jesus' people or that we are citizens of his kingdom. It is by his rulership in our hearts and lives. And we see the kingship of Jesus here because a king seeks to bring peace. And this is exactly what is taking place here. The wrath of God is poured out on Jesus that we might have peace with God.

Now think about that simple sign hung by an evil man and all that sign entails. Think of it because the message of that sign is our hope. It again is not the sign in and of itself but who that sign points to. It points to the One who has authority to lay down his life for us that we might have life. It points to our King. And now think of all the events of your life. What man means for evil God means for good. Think of all the areas where you doubt the sovereign rulership of Jesus, or that he cannot be in control because nothing good can ever come from this. Here again is the most heinous evil but the greatest good. Here is an evil man trying to infuriate others, but the very sign points to the greatest good. Our King is over all the events of your life. And this simple sign screams out he can be trusted. He truly knows what he is doing!

2. We need to see the objection to the sign. Vv. 21-22.

One of the things we see about clear signs is there has to be some response to them. In Nova Scotia at the scenic Peggy's Cove, you have huge rock formations, and also huge waves. But the waves are not constant. The larger waves or rogue waves are quite deadly and come unexpectedly. There are signs warning of the danger. But every year people disregard the signs and there are fatalities almost every year. A rogue wave will come take them out to sea or smash them on the rocks. Signs carry a message. Some of impending danger and some of great hope. The sign above the cross had both of these elements. The sign both warns individuals and also gives them hope — there is a King that cares for us. There is a glorious Saviour who rescues us from the greatest peril. Many like the sign at Peggy's Cove ignore the sign to their own peril. The question for us is how do we read the message on the cross?

So look at verse 21 and the objection to the sign, **“So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, ‘Do not write, ‘The King of the Jews,’ but rather, ‘This man said, I am King of the Jews.’”** Now notice it is the chief priests. This is what they were denying all along that Jesus was the Messiah — the long awaited king of Israel. The sign declared a couple of things if Jesus is truly the King of the Jews. One is that he is innocent of all charges. He would be guilty if the changes were made that the religious leaders requested of Pilate. The other is Jesus is not guilty of treason and blasphemy but they are guilty of treason and blasphemy. Jesus is your King! And all through the

gospel of John you see the hardness of these men, and the opportunity God gives over and over to bow the knee to Christ. But their pride and arrogance lead them to the murder of an innocent man. They will not seek the offer of mercy in this sign. But the message is that if Jesus is the eternal king, then this very one they crucified they will one day meet in his judgment. Today is the day to bow the knee in repentant and humble faith before the King.

And this response of the Jews reminds us that we have a response to the sign above the cross. Every single person when the gospel is preach, when Jesus is proclaimed as our King and Saviour respond in one of two ways. And it is indicated in 2 Corinthians 2:16, **“to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things?”** To one, like these men, the cross is a fragrance of death. They vent and scorn the grace of God in Christ. It is putrid to them. But to us who are being saved this message is life. The message above the cross is hidden to all those present before the cross, and yet not hidden. It was there right at the top of the cross — the identity of Jesus, it is such a beautiful fragrance that never loses its allure or glory or beauty. This is my king. This is my Jesus. Again, have we lost the glory of that fragrance of the cross? Have we lost that sense of wonder for our conquering King Jesus? Though he looked so weak and helpless, we see the One hanging on the cross still had all authority and power and might, but the love of the King drew salvation’s plan. And all of this took place according to the predetermined plan of God. Look to Jesus, smell the glory of the message here. What looks like death to the religious leaders is nothing but hope and life for the subjects of King Jesus.

Now look at the last verse in this paragraph, **“Pilate answered, ‘What I have written I have written.’”** Even though Pilate does not realize it, the message is clear — Who Jesus is, is who Jesus is. You might try and deny it, or get rid of the parts of Jesus that you do not like, but who Jesus is, is who Jesus is. He is king. He is the Lord. Richard Phillips in his commentary on John quotes Charles Spurgeon’s summons, **“He claims to be King, so stand at the foot of the cross, I pray you, and admit his claim. If you would have Jesus to be your Saviour, you must have him as your King; you must submit to his government, for he claims the right to rule over all who acknowledge him to be Jesus; yea more than that, he claims to rule all mankind, for all power is given unto him in heaven and in earth, and we are bidden to proclaim his kingdom throughout the whole world, and to say to all men, ‘Jesus of Nazareth is your King, bow down before him.’ ... The claims of Christ ... were published even from the tree on which he died; so do not resist them, but willingly yield yourselves up to Jesus now, and let him be King to you henceforth and for ever.”**

You cannot accept a half Jesus. He is king. And what a glorious and loving king. You might deny that Mark Carney is the Prime Minister of Canada, but it does not change the fact. For the religious leaders and others, they might deny Jesus is King, but it does not change the fact he is, and one day every single person will appear before him. Every single knee will bow before him. What great grace that we can bow before him today as the One who was loving and authoritative enough to take our punishment on him. Bow the knee to our King today. Come to him who receives sinners and makes them kingdom citizens.

And for those who are believers, you and I forget so often who is in control. It is part and parcel of much of the frustration of our lives. We want to be in control. We want our wills done, and we are convinced, at least practically that no one is in control. And tonight in our text, as an encouragement to your aching and struggling soul, look at this evil man and the sign he affixes above the cross. It seems like a passing detail, but John wants us to know that Jesus is the Christ and have life through his name. And the way we live out that life is trusting in him through the details of our life. Everything in your life, every relationship, everything both what we would call good or bad is in my life by divine appointment. And here is the encouragement, just like that sign it is there for two things. It is there for my good, somehow and somehow God is up to good in our lives and to conform us into the image of Christ. But secondly, all these things like the sign are there to point us to our need of Jesus. He truly is our king. We truly can cast all of our anxiety and all our care on Christ because he truly cares for us. Do you want evidence? Look to who the sign points to, none other than the man below the cross, the great King dying for our sins. Let us encourage our hearts tonight with his kingship and sovereignty and bow the knee.