

John 18:28-19:16
(Zechariah 9:9; 1 Timothy 1:15-17)
“Behold Your King”

Introduction

For most of those around Jesus, this was simply another Passover season, just another day in their lives, just another civil disturbance in a country accustomed to disturbances, just another poor Rabbi run afoul of the authorities and of Rome. Little do they know that all of human history has led to this moment, that humanity itself is on trial, that from this time forward, eternal destinies will be decided by the response we make to this Rabbi named Jesus.

In the trial before the high priest, religion passed its judgment upon Jesus: He is a blasphemer who speaks of himself as God’s Son and who therefore must be destroyed. Israel’s sentence for blasphemy was death by stoning. But, as Lesslie Newbigin observed, God had determined that his son would not be buried beneath a pile of stone as the act of a single nation, but rather that he would be lifted up in a place of prominence for all to see, crucified by the greatest political power of his day, and so in the united action of Jew and Gentile, he would stand condemned by us all. And for that to happen, the charge could not be one of blasphemy but rather of sedition. Jesus calls himself God’s Son and so is seen as a threat to his own people. But he also calls himself a king and so is seen as a threat to Rome.

Our text describes a face off between the kingdom of God and the Kingdom of man, between God’s power and human power, between Christ and Caesar. Jesus here confronts this world’s power embodied in the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, who represents all those who look to human wisdom and power to do what only God can rightly do. In Pilate, political power poses the question to Jesus, “Are you the king?” It’s fine, this world thinks, for Jesus to be a religious teacher, as long as he keeps to his place. But he has no right to step into the public square and claim to be king of politics and work and education and entertainment. He’s welcome to an hour or so on Sunday, but he ‘d best not claim the entire week as his. Fine to ask of us the tithe, but don’t dare say that all I am and have is his. “Are you the king?”

The religious leaders refuse to enter Pilate’s judgment hall for fear of defiling themselves before Passover, little realizing that they are preparing to sacrifice the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. The scene changes seven times as Pilate takes Jesus inside for questioning, then goes back outside to address the religious leaders, then returns for more questions. Back and forth, inside and out, goes Pilate, and in response to all the questions and all the activity, Jesus makes only three simple, yet crucially profound, statements. It is to these three statements that I would turn our attention this morning. This may seem just another Sunday to you. Yet the response we make to these three statements has eternal consequences for each of us.

Body

1. First, Jesus reveals the nature of his kingdom:

“My kingdom is not of this world” (18:36).

*To enter this kingdom, one must be “born of the Spirit” (3:5).
Have you been born again of the same Spirit that filled Jesus?*

2. Then, Jesus reveals the nature of his mission:

“For this purpose I came into the world – to bear witness to the truth” (18:37).

*To know the truth, one must know Jesus (14:6&7).
Do you know Jesus, even as he knew the Father?*

3. Finally, Jesus reveals the nature of his authority:

“You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above” (19:11).

*To wield legitimate authority, one must live in submission to God (17:1-3).
Are you in submission to Jesus, even as he was in submission to his Father?*

Conclusion

Our response to these three statements determines our destiny. Pilate’s response ensured that he would be remembered for all of time as one who went against his own conscience through fear of the crowd, and condemned to death an innocent man. His name lives in infamy for subverting the power entrusted to the state, power meant to punish the guilty and protect the innocent. The religious leaders subverted the great truth entrusted to them, that Israel had no King but Yahweh, the covenant Lord of Israel, and so ensured that they would disappear from history, as they did within a few years, when Rome destroyed the temple, and the Sadducees and priests disappeared from history.

What of us? What response will we make to Jesus’ astonishing claims? The response we make to Jesus’ claims will also determine our destiny. Have you been born anew, born from above, born of the Spirit? If not, you can neither see nor enter the kingdom of God. Do you know Jesus – not know *about* him – but *know* him in the intimate, loving relationship that is the essence of salvation? Are you seeking to submit daily to his Lordship so that you can take up his life and ministry, even as he gladly submitted to his Father’s will? Is that your highest joy, the glad obedience of faith? On our answers to these questions hang our eternal destinies. Cry out to him today to accomplish in you all that he came to do, who is the way, the truth, the life.

© John M. Wood, all rights reserved