

# John 18:33-38 “The True King”

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[ 0 : 00 ] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

Why Christmas? In some ways, that seems like a terrible question to ask on Christmas Eve. What do you mean, why Christmas?

We're all excited. Why not celebrate, right? Well, why Christmas for us, what we've been talking about this Advent season?

It means to us the reasons that Jesus gives for His coming to earth. We're going to discuss the culmination of all of these reasons tonight.

I'm excited about that. But one more this morning where Jesus is very clear. He's talking about His purpose. And in the final hours before His death, talking to a man who seems to hold His life in His hands, the Roman governor Pontius Pilate.

[ 1 : 08 ] We'll read just the statement that Jesus makes in John 18, 37, and we'll catch the significant context in just a minute. Jesus, speaking to Pilate here in verse 37, says, For this purpose I was born, and for this purpose I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth.

God, we give You thanks for Your truth. We thank You that You sent Your Son into the world to bear witness to it, to testify to the truth.

By Your Holy Spirit, would You write Your truth on our hearts and our lives today and for the rest of our lives, we ask in Jesus' name.

Amen. I want you to imagine for a minute this morning a world in which Christmas never happened. I know I'm really kind of, this is all not very good on Christmas Eve, is it? I'm kind of a grinch, okay? But just bear with me. It gets better. Imagine a world in which Christmas never happened, in which Jesus never entered earth to be born.

[ 2 : 37 ] In this hypothetical world, God might exist, but if He does, He certainly doesn't seem to have any ongoing relationship with people, any interest in this world and what happens in it.

He's basically a non-factor. No miracles, no Bible, no universal king. How would life go in this world?

What would you live for? What would give us purpose? I would argue we don't have to imagine too hard to come up with those answers.

We all find ourselves living in a hypothetical kingdom where our lives ignore the truth of God quite often.

Many in our world explicitly so, being honest about the fact that they don't believe in God's existence or the authority of King Jesus.

[ 3 : 52 ] And others of us claiming to follow King Jesus, but quite often finding ourselves caught up many days of our lives in the kingdom of this world.

It functions in many ways, this kingdom of this world, like the game of life. You've played that game before, right, with a little spinner. You spin your way through life. You see what you get each time.

You make a few key decisions about how you would like your life to go. And you see what comes.

And at the end of the game, how do you win? You count it all up, right?

Whoever has the most stuff wins the game, wins life. That's life, isn't it? It makes sense in a world where God is absent.

Get what you can for yourself. Look out for number one. Perhaps we could add to the list of values in this world the goal of getting power by any means possible.

[ 4 : 55 ] Be in control, right, wherever you can. Might makes right. So naturally, as scientists and others who are convinced of completely naturalistic explanations for everything around us, as they've concluded, only the strong survive, right?

Now, we all play the game a little bit differently, but that is the basic thrust of every single one of our favorite pop songs.

Believe me, I read all of the lyrics this week trying to make sure. They're all saying that. It is the basic message of every single one of our favorite politicians on both sides of the aisle.

It is the basic lifestyle of nearly all of our favorite celebrities that we like to watch and emulate. How do they live? It is this idea that you should be yourself.

Get what you can. Figure out how to be bigger, faster, stronger, and more successful, and you'll stay in the game. And maybe one day, you'll feel like you've won life in this world.

[ 6 : 10 ] You'll get enough. You'll have enough. You'll be enough. You will have arrived. And we breathe this air every day. It is the kingdom of this world. But then we hear about Christmas.

And if we're listening honestly to the Christmas story, we're going to realize that there is an entirely different world at least being proposed. Another kingdom with another king.

And the easy way forward, I would suggest, when you sit in a place like this and you're living in the kingdom of this world and you're encountered with the message of this other kingdom, the easy way forward is just to downplay the conflict.

Sing some Christmas songs. Exchange some nice gifts. Keep right on living as though the values of this world's kingdom are all that matter.

You can even let Christmas fit right in with the mantra of this world. Get whatever you can for yourself. It's not actually all that hard, is it, kids?

[ 7 : 17 ] For that to be what Christmas is all about. Let's see how much stuff I can get. That is an easy, often chosen path.

Jesus says, don't follow that path. I've come to testify to the truth. Right? I've come with a message for you all, for the whole world.

That there is a true king and a true kingdom for you to be a part of. Here in John 18, we find Jesus' kingdom and the world's kingdom in clear conflict.

As Jesus himself stands before the Roman governor Pontius Pilate. Pilate representing Rome in all its power and wealth and might.

And he wants to find out if he's got any sort of serious insurrectionist on his hands. Pilate. Any rival king to the power of Rome?

[ 8 : 25 ] Listen to their conversation starting in verse 33. Pilate. So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, Are you the king of the Jews?

Jesus answered, Do you say this of your own accord or did others say it to you about me? Pilate answered, Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me.

What have you done? Pilate doesn't care about the Jewish squabbles over their leader. He wants to know what kind of trouble this upstart leader might cause him.

Or maybe has already caused. Is there anything there that should make Rome want to squash him right now? Well, with that clarified, Jesus can assure him that Rome need not issue a call to arms on his account.

So now he can clarify. Verse 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.

[ 9 : 38 ] But my kingdom is not from this world. Hmm. That's a different kind of kingdom altogether, isn't it? So Pilate said to him, So, you are a king.

Jesus answered, You say that I am a king. Yes, I'm a king, but of a different type. Pilate said to him, Pilate said to him, What is the truth?

Pilate throws up his arms. Pilate Circuit, Pilate said to him, He's a king. But Jesus is not God's king. But he is confident now that Jesus is posing no threat to his power.

And so he's happy to let him go and move on with his life. Whatever Jesus' kingdom is, he won't let it interfere with his own, right?

This is the easy path for him, for us. But when Jesus says the purpose for which he has come into the world is to testify to the truth, he means not some vague philosophical reality out there somewhere, but rather a very particular reality of a kingdom whose origin and power and influence go far beyond Rome's.

[ 11 : 18 ] He has come to announce the true kingdom. And this is huge in this conversation, right? Because Jesus is saying there really is another kingdom.

It's not merely that there may be life out there somewhere, maybe on some other planet, but that the king of this kingdom cares enough to enter our world personally.

Jesus has come with something to say, with a message to deliver. Like the angels had that first Christmas night, right?

There is always the telling of the king and his kingdom. And they're showing too.

The king's show and tell. They go together. Just as the angels told the good news of great joy, today in David's town, a king, in fact, the king, a savior is born to you.

[ 12 : 20 ] And then they showed it to the shepherds, right? Come see a baby in a manger. Jesus is about this all the time.

Already we know this kingdom will be marked by completely different values from the world's kingdom. Because the king is a baby in a manger in little Bethlehem.

His birth announced to shepherds. And then when Jesus begins his public ministry, he announces the kingdom of God is at hand.

That's the message, right? Repent and believe the good news. Do you hear the call? The message of the kingdom has a call for us to respond to.

It's repent. This is no small thing. In kingdom terms, what's he saying? You need a new king.

Change your loyalties. Upend your values.

[ 13 : 26 ] Follow a different direction. The good news of the true king. Quit living as though it doesn't exist or doesn't matter. That's the message.

Jesus says he has come to spread. Mark 1.38. After some time in prayer.

Making sure that his will is aligned with his father's. Jesus is told by his followers, there's a chance for you to become a big time celebrity. Everyone is looking for you.

Come out and give the people what they want. And Jesus says what? Let's move to other villages. Because I came to testify to the truth.

To announce this good news to people everywhere. So he keeps going. Everywhere preaching.

That's the tell part. And casting out demons.

[ 14 : 23 ] The show part, right? Part of an announcement of this magnitude of a kingdom coming. A new kingdom. Is that you've got to show it at some point.

I mean, you can chant, we're number one. We're number one. All day. But unless you eventually show up on the field and win a game. Nobody's going to think you're number one.

Jesus is announcing the true kingdom. And he's showing his authority to make such a claim over all the evil powers.

Everywhere he goes. We read he's preaching and healing. He's telling and showing. I think of his announcement in Luke 4 when Jesus reads from the prophet Isaiah.

The spirit of the Lord is upon me. Because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives. And recovering of sight to the blind.

[ 15 : 26 ] To set at liberty those who are oppressed. To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. And Jesus goes on to say, Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.

There is a message to announce to the poor. And the captive. And the blind. And the oppressed.

The promised king has come.

And in case you think he's all talk. Sometimes he makes the blind see. And the lame walk, right?

Many times. So when John's disciples come to ask if Jesus is the true king.

Jesus doesn't say, Listen. No, he says, Look. Look. What do you see? The lame are healed. The blind are seeing. The poor are rejoicing in good news for them.

You noticing just a little bit how different this king and this kingdom are from the one we know well? From the one Pilate understood naturally?

[ 16 : 28 ] There's not a lot about the rich and famous in here, is there? Jesus tells and then shows in his kingdom true power comes not through control and status, but through weakness.

But through weakness and suffering, the poor, the meek, the merciful are blessed. In his kingdom, only the dependent survive.

Apart from him, from being connected to him, the righteous vine, you can do nothing. And you will eventually be withered and dead branches. He really means this.

Nothing unless you're connected to him. In fact, in his kingdom, life is given when you admit not how much stuff you've gathered, when you admit your emptiness, your need.

All of a sudden, his life enters right there. It's not when you accumulate the most stuff and prove your worth to him. Oh, he promises abundant life.

[ 17 : 33 ] And just as surely promises that life does not consist in the abundance of one's possessions. It's an upside-down kingdom for sure, isn't it? It's an upside-down kingdom to kids who are looking at Christmas presents.

It's an upside-down kingdom to adults who have worked hard and tried to achieve. And if you ever doubt that it's upside-down, look how he shows it on the cross.

When the king of this kingdom is crowned with thorns, is mocked and cursed, cries out in agony, even eventually dies.

But he's already whispered, this is the way to glory. Follow me downward. Because one day, the world is going to be flipped right side up.

One day, I'll rise from the grave. Death will work backwards. And the kingdom of life, an abundant life ruled by the king of life, will reign forever and ever. It's coming, he says.

[ 18 : 44 ] In fact, it's here. Man, how do I get to live in that true kingdom? Is there a kingdom like that where people operate like that? Listen, pastor, you've got my ear.

I'm interested. I can't just ignore Jesus and go along with the world's easy path of living for myself. Everybody does that. Maybe what I need to do is just get out of this world and avoid it altogether. That's the problem is being around all these people. Well, no. If you listen to Jesus, his kingdom is not so much set against the creation, humanity, and cultures.

It is offering, even demanding, to renew and redefine and reorient all of them.

Jesus tells us to pray what? Please take us out of this terrible place so that we can enjoy your kingdom in heaven one day. Is that how it goes? Father, your kingdom come on earth here as it is in heaven.

[ 19 : 52 ] He wants his upside down values and lifestyles to be experienced and expressed, to be shown and told right where we live.

Our mouths have to be moving as we proclaim his excellencies, as we share the reason for the hope that is in us, as we declare his glory among the nations. Go tell it on the mountain, right? We have a message to announce. We do too, don't we? There's a king. There's a different kind of kingdom. And we also show it with our hands and feet.

The reality of the poor being loved. Suffering being endured. Joy being found beyond self-promotion.

Did you know that's part of what you announce? When you endure cancer treatment without losing hope?

[ 20 : 55 ] When you invest in the lives of your neighbors more than your own. When you sacrifice your reputation to befriend someone that others despise.

You're announcing that there is a kingdom beyond this world. That it really exists. That it's really worth it. Don't miss out on it.

How do we make sure we're aligned with that kingdom? With the true kingdom? Jesus tells Pilate the answer.

Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice. You align with the true king. Won't you listen, Pilate?

Jesus is giving him a version of what he's elsewhere said. When he said, I am the truth. I am the way. The truth. And the life. Face to face with the truth himself.

[ 21 : 55 ] The true king. Pilate rejects this offer. While not hating Jesus or outright rejecting his claims, Pilate ends the conversation with, what is truth?

He doesn't want to condemn Jesus, but he doesn't bow to him either. He decides to stick with the life he's got. Life by the kingdom of this world. Lord, please don't leave here this morning making that same choice.

Don't leave here saying, you know what? It's okay. The way I live. The things I pursue. The places I've put my hope.

Jesus is nice, but I've got enough. Jesus is calling each of us to bow to him. To embrace the true king. And as a result, his true kingdom that will often feel quite jarring to our natural sensibilities. You'll feel left out. You will feel at times like the only one who doesn't get it. Like you're missing out on life. You're not.

[ 23 : 12 ] You're not. Because here's the catch. Where Jesus is different again in a wonderfully glorious way.

With most kings, you know you're a part of their kingdom. That you are in with them when you commit to laying down your life for the king, right?

You commit to that. You are in. This is how the kings of this world work. This king, the one born at Christmas, is so different.

Part of his coming to testify to the truth involved the announcement of an upside-down kingdom. He flips that on its head.

He, the king, would first lay down his life to welcome you into life in his kingdom before demanding anything from you of laying down your own life.

[ 24 : 15 ] He first lays down his for you. He came so that every one of you here this morning would receive the announcement of the good news of such a king.

He is born. He reigns. His kingdom is real. And you have eternal hope. Merry Christmas. Let's pray. Jesus, what a wonderful gift that you would bear witness to the truth to people like us who hear a lot of different messages of truth every day.

It's easy for us to believe the only true things are the things we can see right in front of us. It's easy to think the only things that are valuable are the ones we can touch and taste and hold.

We need your reminder that there is another kingdom with a king who has welcomed us in by his birth and life and death and resurrection.

[ 25 : 24 ] Thank you, Jesus, for what you have done. Give us joy in celebrating the gift that you have given us this Christmas. We ask in your name. Amen.

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