

John 19:12-16 “Behold Your 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.

God, we bow before you now. We come to adore you now. We come to receive from you the one who owns all things.

We need you. We worship you. We ask your spirit would so work in our hearts now that we'd rather have Jesus.

Help us. Help me. Teach us from your word. In Jesus' name. Amen. In John's account of Jesus' life, we are inching closer and closer.

To the cross. A cross where we know Jesus is headed to climb in a very unusual way up on his throne.

[1 : 10] And that's because, as we saw earlier in Jesus' conversation with Pilate, he is a king from another world. With a kingdom entirely different from what we might expect.

Just last week, Pilate has brought Jesus out before the crowd and said, behold the man. And though Pilate himself finds no guilt in Jesus, the crowds keep insisting that Jesus be killed.

Now we pick up the reading at verse 12 of John 19. Pilate's last attempt to release Jesus.

Already now, remember, beaten. The bloodied head. The bloodied head. The crown of thorns pressed into it.

And we hear some sobering words that we'll contemplate together about Jesus as a king. This is God's holy word given to us to point our often forgetful and wandering hearts to find hope and life in the right place.

[2 : 25] From then on, Pilate sought to release Jesus. 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, 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. What a poignant scene unfolds here outside the Roman praetorium in Jerusalem during the Passover feast.

[3 : 35] There's a lot going on. Now it's Friday, the day before the Sabbath. And the Jewish leaders turn up the heat on Pilate, don't they? They're getting worried. He's taking too long to deal with Jesus.

And they know Pilate is all too fearful of being found to have failed his boss. His boss is a recently unpredictable and vengeful Tiberius Caesar.

And so the leaders make their closing argument against Jesus. And Pilate finally walks out to render his verdict.

Although multiple times we've heard Pilate pronounce that he's found absolutely no guilt in Jesus. Pilate makes a last ditch effort.

Maybe one more time he offers them Jesus as their king. Certainly they don't want their king crucified. They'll go for this maybe. And the chief priests, the representatives of God's people reply, We have no king but Caesar.

[5 : 00] Wow. Those are powerful words in the moment. Get Jesus away. Kill him. Because we have no king but Caesar.

I want us to see how shocking those words are this morning for a few minutes. But I want us to do that with an awareness that there are really only two types of people in this room in this regard. There are those of us who explicitly reject Jesus as king. And there are those of us who claim Jesus as king but still sometimes reject his kingship by bowing to another king.

All of us this morning need to consider how we say we have no king but Caesar. And then we need to look squarely at Jesus and see him as king and know what that would mean.

We have no king but Caesar. First consider what it means to say these words this fateful night in John 19. Then we'll look at some background to this climactic moment in the story of God's people and their king.

[6 : 22] We have no king but Caesar means first that God's people are rejecting him. Rejecting Yahweh as king.

They're looking to other things. Something else. Someone else for life. Caesar would represent to them worldly power. Right? Control.

Influence. They're saying when they say these words that they want Caesar to give them life. He gives them lots of things, doesn't he?

And they're saying they'll follow what he wants them to live like in order to get what he gives them.

Did you hear that? That is a description of street-level idolatry.

Okay? That's what it means. That they will do what he wants them to do to get what he can give to them. An idol is something or someone that you look to for life.

[7 : 26] Something to shape you into its image in order to get what it promises to give you. That's why when I was a young baseball player, it fits to say that I idolized Greg Maddox.

Wow. I wanted to be just like him. Although somehow I never won a Cy Young Award or a World Series. Maddox, for those of you who don't know, was a great Braves pitcher who didn't throw 100 miles an hour like Nolan Ryan.

But he always seemed to make the ball move and end up right where he wanted it. He was crafty, consistent, control pitcher. So as a fellow pitcher with a fastball in the 80s, I idolized him as a pitcher.

Meaning I wanted to hold the ball the way he did. I wanted to throw the ball the way he did. I even wanted to wear my socks the way that he did. That was the ticket to life, to pitch in his image.

Part of Israel's idolatry is preferring to find life living in Caesar's image. That's the first part.

[8 : 44] But part of idolatry is also looking to enthrone ourselves, isn't it? Think about that. Before you bow to another idol, another king, you are putting yourself on the throne.

It's really evident in this passage because part of the irony here when they say, we have no king but Caesar, is that these Jewish leaders actually despised Caesar.

And Pilate knew it. Caesar kept them under his thumb, the Gentile ruler of their promised land.

What are they really saying?

What they're really saying is that they have no king at all. No king but themselves. They're rejecting the messianic hope.

The promise of a king coming to deliver God's people. They will bow, they've decided, to whoever or whatever gets them what they want right now. Keeps them in control for now.

[9 : 48] They want that king. They're in charge. But this moment, these fateful words where his own did not receive him have been building for centuries, for generations, haven't they?

I think that's part of why they're so often on our hearts and our lips too. We love to be on the throne, don't we? Don't we enjoy being in control?

Well, part of that's understandable. All the way back in the beginning, God the king creates man and woman in his image. And he tells us that part of that reflecting the image of the king is to rule on his behalf.

To be vice regents. That's what he made us for. To rule the way that Yahweh, the true king, would rule over his whole creation.

So our instinct, as a good one, is to rule. But we can't do it right unless we're living in relationship with the true king. Tending the garden.

[10 : 56] Caring for the animals. Creating beauty in the image of the king. And listen, God's people definitely have a king.

It's not unclear. They sing about him all the time. Psalm 29. The Lord Yahweh sits enthroned over the flood. The Lord sits enthroned as king forever.

Psalms 47. Sing praises to God. Sing praises. Sing praises to our king. Sing praises. For God is the king of all the earth.

Psalms 145. They sing about his kingdom. Your kingdom, God, is an everlasting kingdom. Your dominion endures throughout all generations.

This is why the Hallel Passover prayer that would have been prayed over and over in Jerusalem this very weekend. Says to Yahweh, we have no king but thee.

[11:57] Wow. Sound familiar? We have no king but Caesar? From the very first sin in Eden, men and women, boys and girls, have been rejecting the true king for our own idols.

Looking to what looks good to us, right? What will give us life? Adam and Eve, right? The nation of Israel at the time of the judges.

Another great example of this. Gideon rescued God's people. God sent him as a judge to deliver them. And they wanted to make this flawed man their king. Gideon said, no way.

Gideon said to them, I will not rule over you. My son will not rule over you. The Lord will rule over you. You have a king. You have a king. But the problem was they had quit acknowledging Yahweh's rule.

The whole book of Judges says over and over, in those days, there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

[13:13] Man, we go there quickly these days, don't we? I know who I am, how I should live, what I want. I know that. When the Israelites do ask God for a king like the nations, Samuel, their last judge, is distraught.

And God says to Samuel, hey, don't take it personally. Obey the voice of the people and all they say to you. For they have not rejected you. You're not the king, Samuel.

They have rejected me from being king over them. They want a king that they can see and they can follow wherever he leads. They don't care if he leads them after Yahweh or not.

See, they were made to look like Yahweh. But they were longing to look like the nations. To be remade in their image. They reject Yahweh and they get Saul.

When that doesn't go well, God says, look, if anyone's going to be king of my people, the point will be to point them to me with your whole heart.

[14:30] Point them away from the idols of the nations around them. Remind them to rule over my world in my image. Show them, king, what the true king looks like.

And so David and Solomon come to the throne and it's repeatedly called the throne of Yahweh. The throne of the Lord that they will sit on. And many, many evil kings, if you've read through those books before, follow them.

They lead the people away from God. Even many of those kings setting up new idols for the people to worship. That's what happens all through the history of the Old Testament.

When you reject Yahweh, like we read earlier in Jeremiah chapter 2, you look somewhere else for life. Another idol to bow to.

Something to be shaped in its image to give you what you want. We're always being shaped, right? Formed into something's image all the time. The question is, what is it?

[15:36] So look at the description of a pretty good king. There are some. Hezekiah. 2 Kings 18. What does a good king do? He tears down idols. He rules God's way.

He points the people to Yahweh. And to hope in his promises. Because what's clear throughout these centuries in the Psalms and the Prophets, over and over so many examples, is that Yahweh is going to send a king for his people.

There's someone coming. A king who will never leave the throne. A king who will perfectly reflect God's image. A king who will destroy every idol and any other pretender to the throne of God and lead God's people in life everlasting.

That is where the term Messiah, anointed one, comes from. That was the hope of generations of Jews, right? They needed a king like that.

The Messiah. The king. The faithful servant of God who will rescue us once and for all by bringing us back into relationship with the true king. That's what they're longing for.

[16:45] That's what they're looking forward to for generations and generations. Yet on this night, when Jesus stands before them in a purple robe, with a bloodied face, topped by a crown of thorns, they reject messianic hope as well.

He came to his own. People who grew up hearing about him all the time. But his own did not receive him. We have no king but Caesar.

Really, no king at all, right? If you don't listen carefully to their accents, you might think that they're American patriots.

Our country has a rich history of rejecting kings, their tea, and their taxes. We're proud. And we have a rich history of enthroning ourselves as king, don't we?

Maybe we should be less proud of that part. But I think that you and I inherit that heart from our spiritual fathers and our cultural fathers.

[18 : 14] Just think for a minute. I bow to idols all the time. Shape myself in their image. Enthroned myself. Just thinking of a few ways.

I do worship Jesus as king, but I reject him as king when as a parent, I think my hope for my kids lies in my controlling what they do and where they go and what they believe.

I reject the messianic hope that Jesus alone rescues them when I quit praying so much for them and I start pressuring them to perform the way I want them to.

God, forgive me. That's idolatry. We reject Jesus as king by searching for life, for a firm foundation, for a successful life somewhere else.

You know, I'll do things Jesus' way and prioritize my relationship with God once I get the next promotion and settle into my long-term career and have financial security.

[19 : 21] Then I can live for Jesus. For the time being, I'll bow to Jesus on Sundays, but honestly, I'm living my life formed by another king and another kingdom most of the week.

Friends, just in case you don't recognize that, that's idolatry at its finest, right? Honoring God with our lips, with hearts far from him.

Focusing on our outward appearance while neglecting our inward formation in God's image. Living like the firm foundation is worldly success while singing about God being worthy.

Spending way less time pursuing God than pursuing success and somehow expecting to be formed into his image. God, forgive us.

If you're there right now, these idolatrous habits and patterns of life, they're hard to break, aren't they? And we... We still think we're worshiping God.

[20 : 23] We just have forgotten how to quit bowing to the idols. We reject Jesus as king when we say we love and follow him but live according to our own designs.

We read God's design for our sexuality, for marriage, but we're pretty sure we've got better ideas these days. From where we sit, on our throne, this makes more sense and it feels like more life, better life.

Maybe we think in the back of our minds, after all, if Jesus doesn't come through, I better have some hope and some life already, somewhere else.

God, forgive us. Y'all, I've seen all this idolatry and much more in my own heart and life. Do you see any idolatry like this in your own heart and life?

Can you think of anywhere you're silently rejecting the kingship of Jesus, preferring your own rule? It's understandable, friends.

[21 : 34] You were made to rule just as number two, not number one. In the name of the king, not in your own name, for his glory, not for your own success and comfort.

Do you honestly think you're managing life fine without him most days? Do you feel at peace only when you're in control and spend most days deeply anxious, worried, afraid?

Do you believe you know better what to do with the time that he gives you, the body he made, the others he made in his image? We have no king but Caesar.

It's a rejection of God. It's idolatry. It's a rejection of hope in the Messiah. All of us are guilty at times.

We need to repent. We need to quit bowing to worthless idols. We need to turn back to King Jesus. How do you do that?

[22 : 52] Pilate, whether he knows it or not, is offering us the path to true life. Behold your king.

It's the only way that I know to dethrone the idols of your heart, to kick yourself off the throne, to behold your king, to bow to Jesus.

What I mean when I say that is instead of the eyes of your heart looking to other things for life, looking to enthrone yourself, instead look to Jesus desperately as the only one in control.

Not him with a little bit of you. As the only king you can trust to rule over all things. The one without whom you must give up hope of peace and joy and life.

You've bowed to other idols. Only King Jesus can restore you to God and enable you to live the life that you were made for. That's looking to him desperately.

[24 : 05] Jesus, I need you. And look to him daily. Not just bow the knee once. Many of us have done that, have acknowledged Jesus as king, but actually realize that he is ruling for you in every moment, in every situation, even the ones you can't see it.

He's not cheering you on in hopes that you can win the battle yourself. He's not a cosmic cheerleader. He's coming in to conquer you, to actually to let you off the throne and give you rest. So that when you do stand up to fight, it is in his already accomplished victory. That's the kind of king that he is. When King Simba comes back to Pride Rock, there are many lions and other good animals.

They've been fighting but mostly cowering in fear and losing. And he doesn't just provide inspiration for their fight so they do better. What happens? They fall back and stand behind him and he steps forward to defeat their greatest enemies and then at the end they rush forward and clean up the scattering hyenas.

just as David defeated Goliath on behalf of God's fearful people and they then rushed forward to plunder the fleeing Philistines.

[25 : 32] So Jesus, our champion, defeats all his and our enemies and in so doing this king invites us to rest, to rejoice in his victory and then in his train to plunder the fleeing darkness in the battle that he's already won.

Bowing to King Jesus, it actually means really truly looking to him, doesn't it? Remembering often that he is on the throne, applying that reality, that truth that we say we believe to the relationships, the decisions, the situations of my life that seem out of control.

Or they seem harmful to me. I mean, honestly, ask yourself, if you're not at any point in your day remembering that Jesus is on the throne of your life, how would you expect to be formed in his image?

What happens when you do behold him? What happens when your eyes are fixed, when you see who's really on the throne, who the true king is? Then idols are displaced. self is dethroned, the true king is crowned, and his image starts to be formed in us more and more.

Behold your king. That's what I'd like us to spend the last few minutes doing together. If you've never seen Jesus as king, I'd like to encourage you just to imagine what it would be like to have a king like this, to bow to him.

[27 : 17] I assure you that he is quite unique in ways that you might not even believe, but if you'll look at him and just imagine, wouldn't it be wonderful to follow a king like this?

If you know him but you've started bowing elsewhere, I want you to just take a deep breath and gaze on his beauty and his majesty for a few minutes with me and so rest and find hope and find life in Jesus our king.

I'm grateful for the inspiration and some words from Pastor Shadrach Meshach Lockridge. What a great name. Shadrach and Meshach in the same.

He ministered in California in the last century and he once preached an Easter themed sermon titled That's My King. I'll say that's our king.

Just behold him for a few minutes. He's the king of creation. He's the king of righteousness. He's the king of promise.

[28 : 28] He's the king of redemption. He's the king of heaven. He's the king of glory. That's our king. The king of kings. The lord of lords.

Look at him there for just a moment in this passage we just read. There he is. He's bloody. Yet he doesn't fight back. He's misunderstood.

He's accused falsely. He's mocked unjustly. unjustly. He sits silent when he knows he's being led to the slaughter.

Y'all he is absolutely committed to seeing this through. To the death in our place. When betrayal is rearing its ugly head.

When the awful cross looms nearer and nearer. when the terrors of bearing sin torment his soul. Our king stands firm.

[29 : 33] So listen nothing in heaven or on earth will keep him from loving you. From rescuing you. From holding you. He is enduringly strong.

He's entirely sincere. He's eternally steadfast. He's immortally graceful. He's imperially powerful. He is impartially merciful.

He's our king. His promise is sure. His goodness is limitless. His mercy is everlasting. His love is unending.

His word is eternal. His grace is sufficient. His reign is righteous. His mission is accomplished. And his yoke is easy.

And his burden is light. That's our king. Marvel at him for a minute. Close your eyes if you need to. Y'all he dignifies his followers with high callings and forgives us when we fall short.

[30 : 38] He is condemned right here at the judgment seat so that there will be no condemnation at the judgment day for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Amen. He conquers all of his and our enemies except for those that he picks up off the ground long enough to hang him on a cross where he conquers our greatest enemies once and for all.

And he lifts us up then from the ash heap to seat us with him in the heavenly places far above all other rule or power or dominion that ever existed or ever will exist.

That's our king and we're seated with him. He's the visible image of the invisible God. He shows us what God is like in the flesh standing there as you look up at him.

He shows us God's heart. He shows us God's commitment to us as he restores us to God and to the very image that we were created to reflect.

[31 : 47] Religious leaders couldn't stand him but they found out they couldn't stop him. Pilate couldn't find any fault in him. The people couldn't decide about him.

The witnesses couldn't agree about him. Herod couldn't kill him. Death couldn't handle him and the grave couldn't hold him. That's our king. He's risen and reigning.

Listen, he's never out of control. Never. He's never out of love. He's never out of patience. He's never out of grace. Our good and gracious king, you need to see him and know he's never out of control.

Nowhere in your life never is he out of control. He strengthens the weak. He helps the tempted. He sympathizes with the downcast.

He draws near to the brokenhearted. He forgives sinners. He heals the sick. He discharges debtors. He sets captives free. He defends the feeble. He blesses the young.

[32 : 49] He regards the aged. He beautifies the meek. He's the son of God. He's the savior of sinners. He's the friend of failures.

He's the shepherd of the sheep. He's the light of the world. He's the hope of the nations. And he's our king. He's the alpha and the omega.

The beginning and the end. He always has been and always will be. He had no predecessor and he will have no successor.

He's not up for re-election and he will never resign. He is unparalleled. He's supreme. He is pre-eminent. That's our king.

He wants you to see him. He wants you to see him like that. He invites you to rest in him. He calls you to worship him.

[33 : 56] He enables you to find life in him. He offers you to have hope in him. He urges you to trust him.

That's our king. O king Jesus, give us eyes to see.

Give us knees to bow. Give us hearts to worship and to light in and rest in you.

our king. We ask it in your name. Amen. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org.