

"Pilate Also Wrote An Inscription"

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[0 : 00] We're going to focus especially on these words that we find at verse 19. Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross.

It read, Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. Quite often throughout the Bible, you'll find an account of people saying things which were really beyond what they knew at the time. Not realizing indeed at times that what they spoke was true. For example, Jesus was ridiculed by the Pharisees and the scribes. As you find in Luke chapter 15, this man receives sinners and eats with them.

It was a term of contempt. They threw that out as something disparaging about Jesus. But of course, it is essentially a great truth.

This man receives sinners and eats with them. You'll find in John the same thing. For example, if you cast your mind back to chapter 11, you'll find an example there at verse 50.

[1 : 06] Where you find Caiaphas, the high priest that year, said in verse 50 there as he speaks to the people, 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, not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.

Now, Caiaphas didn't really know that he was prophesying. He didn't want Jesus to be king. This was something that words that he used fitted into the situation.

And he spoke without really knowing the truth of what he was saying in respect to somebody dying for the nation, somebody being Jesus.

And God uses such things in his own plan to further his own plan. People who are not necessarily at all worshippers of God, followers of God, and yet they are used by God in order to further his plan of salvation for his people.

[2 : 13] And here in verses, in chapter 18, from verse 33 onwards, you find references to Jesus as king. Most of them are said, are spoken in jest or spoken mockingly about Jesus being king.

You find many references there from verse 33 of the previous chapter 18. Are you the king of the Jews? Jesus said, do you say this of your own accord?

Or did others say it about you? Jesus, my kingdom is not of this world. And then you find in chapter 19, of course, the mocking of Jesus. Hail, king of the Jews, as they put a thorn, crown of thorns on him, and arrayed him in purple robes and struck him with their hands.

And all of that is done mockingly. All of that is done disparagingly. And yet all the way through, as you read the gospel of John, as you realize, as you know who this Jesus really is, you can see that the words they are using, mockingly and disparagingly of Jesus, are actually the truth about him.

One of the features of John's gospel is the way that he brings out, ironically, the speaking of the time about Jesus and how, in fact, that was true. And when you come to the inscription that Pilate put above the cross, this inscription, the Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews, and especially how he refused the request or the insistence of the Jews around the cross to change that.

[3 : 45] He didn't like this, so they said, change that. Write that he said, I am the king of the Jews. And Pilate then said, what I have written, I have written. In other words, Pilate was standing on his own authority as a Roman official, in his own proud authority.

And yet he is there used by God just simply to emphasize the fact what he had written, he had written. He was not going to be deflected from it because that is the truth. This is the king.

And I want to take that concept today and look at Jesus himself in this situation and certain things that are said here that apply to him as he came to be crucified and to die the death of the cross.

But to take with us the fact that he is the king at that point. He didn't become king afterwards. Afterwards, he didn't cease to be king by his death on the cross. All the way through that, he is in fact the king, the king of his people, and indeed the king of the universe.

That's what makes the cross all the more remarkable as we'll see. There are two things that we're going to see and then a third thing in regard to the situation. First of all, you can learn from this that the king, Jesus, relinquished his royal authority.

[5 : 06] He relinquished his royal authority. We want to look at that as how Jesus willingly did this as part of his sufferings, part of his service to God the Father, part of his being as a servant in the world.

He relinquished his royal authority. Secondly, the king was reduced to the worst in dignity. The king was reduced to the worst in dignity.

And thirdly, we'll emphasize that the king remained king throughout all of that. He remained the king throughout it all.

The king relinquished his royal authority. Now, you can't do much more dishonor to a king than deprive him of his kingship, of his powers, of his authority, of his rule.

How much more is that the case with King Jesus? You cannot do anything more disparaging or dishonoring to Jesus than to deprive him of the exercise of his kingly authority as the king that he is.

[6 : 19] Although I'm saying later that he did this willingly still from the point of view of what was done to him, this is really something that dishonored him greatly as God, as the king of the universe, to bring him to the point where his royal authority is something that he is deprived of.

Indeed, you can see that Jesus is king all the way through the Bible. Psalm 2, for example, where God says in response to the clamor of the world in regard to the Lord and his anointed, meaning Jesus the king, that psalm finishes, as you know, despite the clamor of the world, that he would be removed from his throne and would do so if they could.

I have set my king upon Zion as God's response. He's been appointed king and he remains king. But here's the king, actually in this situation, giving himself to be abused in this way.

Go back to the very beginning of John's gospel, the words of Nathanael, where you find in verse 49 when Jesus showed Nathanael something of his own authority.

Nathanael said to him, Rabbi, you are the son of God. You are the king of Israel. It dawned on Nathanael just who exactly he was dealing with. And when you find that, you come back then to this chapter, chapter 19.

[7 : 48] You see chapter 18 and you see that Pilate says to Jesus, where are you from? Chapter 19 at verse 9, he entered his head course and said, where are you from?

You see, Pilate is perplexed at this stage. He's afraid at this stage. He's heard an account of the fact that Jesus made himself the son of God. This is why he must die, the Jews said.

And he was even more afraid. Where are you from? Who are you? What's your identity? And we've seen that so much through the gospels.

At times we've looked at other passages of the other gospels as well as John's. It's a question that constantly comes across to us. And as we read the gospels, that's why that gospel comes.

That's why that emphasis, why that question comes across to us. Who is he? What's his identity? Who is this Jesus? What is he about? Who is he for me?

[8 : 43] Who is he for you? What do I make of him? How is he in relation to my life? These are the things that we should be asking as we read through these great passages of the Bible.

So, when you come to verse 14, you can see there that the Jews have rejected him. We have no king but Caesar back in the previous chapter.

And all of that really is indicative of what Israel has come to. Choosing Caesar, the Roman emperor, instead of the rightful king, the son of God.

We can't imagine how much that must have contributed to the sufferings of Jesus. That he was disparaged to the extent of being rejected and of being spoken of as not worthy to be regarded as their king.

And Jesus did all of this willingly. He still is the king. He has in himself that authority. He showed his power back in chapter 18, verse 6, when they came to arrest him in the garden.

[9 : 57] He said that I am he. He said that I am he. Royal words. Words that God used in the Old Testament of himself. And what happened?

Well, these people that came and said I am. When he said I am he, they fell backwards. They were overcome with the power of his words. Nobody but God can do that.

And Jesus was just giving a glimpse to them of who he really is. And that he was giving himself willingly to be arrested, to be treated abominably.

He was exercising his kingship not by using the power of it to bypass the sufferings of the cross, but to actually give himself to the sufferings of the cross and nail.

He was exercising his kingship by restraining his power and authority and willingly giving himself to suffer the death of the cross.

[10:57] And you know that choice of Barabbas really adds insult to injury. Go back to the end of chapter 18. Pilate says, do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?

They said, not this man, but Barabbas. Barabbas was a robber. He was more than a robber. It's a word that means a man who was involved in raising riots and violence, insurrection.

But Barabbas, the word Barabbas means son of the father. And John is not blind to the fact that that's what it means.

And so, the rejection of Jesus, Jesus willingly giving himself to that rejection, Jesus willingly laying aside his royal authority, what it's come to is really that Barabbas, this thug, this criminal, son of the father, is released.

And the son of the father, the son of the father, gives himself to be crucified instead.

[12:14] What is Christ's authority to you today? Do we just read this and pass over it and say, yes, it's history, yes, I know it happened? Do we ask ourselves, what does that mean to me today?

That the son of God came into this world as the king of the universe? That he lived in it as the king in a state of humiliation that he willingly took to himself? That he walked through his course in this life, not exercising the power and authority of his kingship as he could have done, but rather made himself a servant and made himself the servant of the father and took the sin of his people and died the death of his people in their stead.

And even on the cross, showed not the power of his kingship in coming down from the cross, but in staying there to die the death that his people deserve.

What is he to you today? What impact does this have on your own mind, on your own life, on your own soul? Is this Jesus for you, one who stands centrally and foundationally in your life?

Well, he relinquished his royal authority and he did it willingly for the benefit of his people. Secondly, he was reduced to the worst in dignity.

[13:41] Now, of course, in dignity for Jesus began at his birth. It began really at his, it began at his development in the womb. I suppose you could say his very conception was an indignity in the sense that he, as God, became man, became that created human.

And all the way through his life, from the time of his birth, when he's laid in this feeding trough as it was, in this outhouse, no room for him in the inn.

This is the pattern of his life. He's reduced to indignities. He's reduced to sufferings. He was reduced to being despised. As he himself said, the birds of the air have nests, foxes have holes, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.

It's a description of his own situation as one who came and suffered so much. And as he came to enter Jerusalem, just coming to this climax of his life, in reaching the point of the cross eventually, remember as he came into Jerusalem, in chapter 12 of John, a large crowd had come to the feast. They had heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So they took branches of palm trees. They went out to meet him, crying out, Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel.

[15:08] And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written. And he quotes, John quotes from Zechariah, the prophecy, Fear not, daughter of Zion. And behold, your King is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt.

Yeah, you find the ironic situation. There is the King of the universe. He's not coming to Jerusalem in a great chariot. He's not coming in a stagecoach. He's not coming in something that really shows splendor and keeping with who exactly he is.

He comes riding on a donkey. He comes not displaying the trappings of kingship, but showing his kingship and giving himself to be despised, to be lowly, to indignity.

It goes on from there, all the way through to chapter 19, as we mentioned, the beginning of the chapter, mockingly, Hail, King of the Jews, a crown of thorns just to make fun of him.

And all of that really is just making him a laughingstock. And you could really see what's working in their minds because basically that's just saying, He can't be King.

[16:15] There's no way this person can possibly be King of the Jews or King of anything. Let's just make fun of it, which is what they did. And all the time it's true that he is the king who has given himself to this abuse so that you and I could have salvation to come to.

And the crown of thorns, that they twist it together and put it on his head. You can't imagine that they just took thorns and then just gently placed that on his head.

These thorns would have huge, long barbs. You know what it's like when you're pruning in the garden or something? Something like a berberus or a rose and something that has barbs or thorns in it and it pierces your hand.

It's sort of imagine a crown of thorns twisted together, made out of that stuff and then put on his head. It's not just gently dropped and it's just forced down upon his head.

So it cuts into his skull. And then he's robed and made fun of. But that crown of thorns is symbolic.

[17:27] They didn't know what they were doing in taking thorns to compose this crown. But thorns, you remember, are mentioned as part of the curse that came due to man's sin.

The crown would not bring forth anymore, God said, as it did previously. Thorns and thistles it will bring forth to you. In the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread. Thorns are throughout the Bible mentioned frequently in association with God's curse.

With God's curse due to our sinfulness. It's a symbol. It's an emblem of the curse. It's an emblem of the suffering that we ourselves brought upon ourselves. So here is Jesus, this crown of thorns.

And remember Galatians 3, verses 13 and 14. Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law by being made a curse for us.

There it is. Wearing the crown of thorns. Symbolic of the curse. The curse of the law he takes to himself.

[18:32] He dies the death, as Galatians then goes on to say, for cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree or hanged on a cross. That's who you're seeing.

That's what you're seeing. That's the indignity that Jesus took to himself. Willingly. What a substitute. But there's more than that.

The curse, of course, is something spiritual. But even the physical sufferings that he endured, you might say themselves, were representative of the greater sufferings of his soul.

Because it was the practice that those who would be crucified would be stripped of their clothes. And when you read here in verse 23 about tunic, as the word is translated here, they took his garments and divided them.

Also his tunic, which was seamless, woven in one piece. Now the tunic was the garment next to the skin. You might call it nowadays a vest, whatever. But it was next to the skin under the clothes on top of that.

[19:41] In other words, Jesus, like every other person that would be crucified, was stripped naked. Shamed into nakedness physically.

Representations of Jesus crucified, all the many paintings that you find from famous paintings, most of them don't have them completely naked. It's understandable because it's an indignity.

But that's exactly what it was. And the Bible doesn't hide the fact from us. Painters may hide it.

Painters may hide it out of respect.

Painters may hide it understandably. But when Jesus was crucified, his nakedness was obvious to all. And the physical nakedness was representative of that inner nakedness where he was exposed to the wrath of God and the cursed Judas.

The indignity is far more than we can possibly imagine. Far more than we can actually describe. But the Bible lays it out for us in all its horror, in all its plainness.

[21:01] And you know, the one thing we must never do, either in preaching the Word or studying the Bible, we must never actually water down the emphasis the Bible gives to things that are distasteful.

We must never find words that will actually mitigate the horror of the situation. We must never replace the words the Bible uses when it presents such things to us.

In other words, you must never in your mind try to lessen the depth of the curse that he endured. You must never lessen the degree of shame that he experienced.

for whatever reason it might be understandable, let the Bible speak for itself. This is the king willingly laying down his authority, willingly using his authority to give himself into custody, to be tried in a mockery of a trial, willingly giving himself to the worst indignities physically of the cross that are but representations bad though they are, of the indignity of his soul being exposed to the wrath of God due to sin.

Is he your king? Can anybody here at all actually hear this today and look at this today and think about this today and still remain unsaved?

[22 : 36] Still remain outwith the rule of this kingship in your own soul in your own life? This is why it's here friends. This is why we're dealing with it. We're anticipating God willing a communion in the coming weeks.

But this is what the communion is about. It's about this death. It's about the reality of this death. It's about the Bible's description of this death. It's about what this death really was in itself.

This is the cross. It's not actually there somewhere near the courts of the king. It's within the courts of the king. It's not outside his purposes.

It's not something that doesn't belong there. And as the king he took that cross to himself, cup which my father has given me as he came out of Gethsemane, as John records it, shall I not drink it?

When I survey the wondrous cross on which the prince of glory died, my riches gain I count but loss and poor contempt on all my pride, see from his head, his hands, his feet, sorrow and love flow mingling down.

[23 : 53] Did e'er such love and sorrow meet, or thorns compose so rich a crown? the king, the king, the king, the king crucified, the king laying aside his authority, not displaying his power in avoiding death, the king reduced to the worst indignities, physically, his nakedness before all, mocked on the cross, spiritually, the sufferings of his soul, bearing this curse of God, what's it all for?

So that we can just pass from it? So that we can just treat it with respect but not necessarily with commitment? commitment? No. It's there so that you will accept him as your king, that you'll bow your life, your whole life to his authority, that you'll give yourself to be ruled by him, that you will love him, that you will serve him, that you will honor him, that you will do everything possible to make his name great.

Because that's what he deserves, nothing less. And he remained king throughout all of that.

Remember the Shorter Catechism 23?

What offices does Christ exercise as our Redeemer? Christ as our Redeemer exercises the offices of prophet, priest, and king, both in his estate of humiliation and exaltation.

In other words, when you think of the kingship of Jesus, you don't think of it beginning with his resurrection. You don't think of it as not applying to the time that he was on the cross.

[25 : 58] As a state of humiliation and exaltation, he exercises these three great offices. He is the king on the cross as anywhere else.

That's why the title that Pilate put there is so appropriate. The title, the inscription, whatever word we use, that was actually sometimes carried also when the cross was being carried by the person to be crucified as Jesus himself did, or at least the bar of the cross to which he'd been attached. It was often the case that this inscription was already actually around the person's neck on that piece of cross. But here, it says that Pilate actually, whenever it happened, he wrote an inscription, put it on the cross.

At that specific moment, he put it on the cross. The inscription said, Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews. Now, the thing about the inscription was it set out the charge, the legal charge, against the person.

Because when you crucified somebody, you had to have a charge that led to his being crucified, something of which he was rightly accused. And Jesus had this charge, this was the charge spelt out in these words, this is Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews.

[27 : 22] That was the charge. That's what the Jews had actually said of him, that he'd made himself the son of God, but they refused him as being their king. And yet Pilate's title, Pilate's inscription, is just setting forth God's truth.

This is who he is. Which is why, as we said, verse 22 is so important. What Pilate said, what I have written, I have written. This is how it will be.

Nothing is going to be changed. It stands as it is. And that was written in three languages. It was written in Hebrew and Greek and Aramaic, the three main languages in Aramaic and Latin and in Greek.

the three great languages of the time of the world. And what that really is saying to us is that here, this inscription that was above Jesus, the truth about him, unknown to Pilate and accepted by Pilate, and yet it's really saying, this is for the whole world.

This is a proclamation to the whole world represented by these three languages. Jesus, this is your king. This is your king.

[28 : 45] In verses 12 to 13, this is really what persuaded Pilate finally to give him over to be crucified. He said, where he was told by the Jews, if you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend.

Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar. There's still a very persuasive argument that you hear in your own heart and your own conscience, that you hear around you, in resistance to Jesus as king.

If you accept Jesus, the world will no longer be the king of your heart. Caesar represents all the alternatives that are offered instead of Jesus.

And for you today and for me today, this is the vital question. Is it Caesar or Jesus as the king of your life?

Is it the world, yourself, every other religion, all other philosophies, secularist, atheism, humanism, alternative religions, or is it Jesus?

[30 : 14] And this passage is really crying out to us today to have Jesus as the king installed on the throne of our lives because that's why he died.

And if he's not king of your life today, you too are disparaging what he has done in his death on the cross.

May God bless these thoughts to us. Let's sing to his praise as we conclude from Psalm 24. Psalm number 24, that's on page 230, Tunis and George's, Edinburgh.

From verse 7, page 230, ye gates lift up your heads on high, ye doors that last foray be lifted up, so the king of glory enter me.

glory, but who of glory is the king, the mighty lord is this, even that same lord that great in might and strong in battle is. Words, of course, that apply to the ascension of Jesus to glory, but they also are indicative of, if you like, the doors of our own hearts too, and that we say that, surely, just now as we sing these verses, to the gates of our hearts, to the doors of our hearts, lift up, so that the king of glory enter me.

[31 : 39] We'll sing these in conclusion. Ye gates, lift up your heads on high, ye doors that last foray, ye lifted up the king of glory enter me.

The dew of glory is the king, the mighty lord is this, hear that sin, lord, that great in might, and strong in battle is, hear that sin, lord, that great in might, and strong in battle is, hear that good heads, ye doors, doors that do last foray, ye lifted up that saw the king of glory enter me.

And truth is he that is the king, the king of glory is the lord of hosts and and which he the king of glory is the lord of hosts and and which he the king and peace and glory is he is Hallelujah.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

I'll go to the side door to my left this morning. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and evermore.

[34 : 47] Amen.