

No King But Caesar

John 19:1-16

Let me pick right up where I left off last week, and be so bold as to declare to you that this is truth, “There is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.”

“There is only one God,” and that is one of the fundamental definitions of our faith. That is what Scripture teaches.

Deut. 6:4 “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!”

That is truth. Unchanging, absolute, timeless truth. There is only One God, only one true and living God. He is the God of the Bible, the God of Christianity. The God who created the heavens and the earth. The God of justice and holiness. And there is only one Mediator between this God and men his creatures. Jesus Christ.

Therefore no one comes to the Father except through Jesus Christ. The MAN Jesus Christ. That is to say, no one can come to the Father, no one can have life or salvation, except by believing the truth of the gospel that tells us what Jesus did as a man. As a man, he was put to death upon the cross, enduring in his body the wrath and curse of God as the just punishment and penalty for sin. As a man, he remained under the power of death until the third day. And as a man, he was raised from the dead and ascended to the right hand of his father in heaven.

It is that work of the man Christ Jesus that we will be studying this morning. Though actually, we will be studying the rejection of that man. Though he was rightly acknowledged to be king, as we saw last Sunday, and though he acknowledged and defined his own kingdom, yet the people of Jerusalem, the Jews under the

authority of the Roman governor Pontius Pilate, would declare with such astounding foolishness, “We have no king but Caesar.”

And in that damnable blasphemy, they were,

I. REJECTING AN INNOCENT MAN.

In this encounter between Jesus and the worldly authorities, it is important to note, as I did as well last week, that,

A. Jesus’ human innocence was magnified.

Pilate himself declared Jesus innocent.

v.4

That, of course, didn’t satisfy the chief priests, so Pilate said again,

v.6b “You take Him and crucify Him, for I find no fault in Him.”

“You take care of it.” No, that is an astounding statement, because the Jews, under Roman authority, had no right to put anyone to death. And if they were to try to do so, they would be taking the law in their own hands, which they did when Stephen became the first martyr not long after Jesus’ crucifixion. What is astounding is that Pilate would so wish to be rid of this whole matter, that with exasperation he tells the Jews to take the law into their own hands. That, of course, would undermine Pilate’s authority, but at this point, he doesn’t even seem to care. So fully conscious is he that Jesus is innocent.

Three times Pilate uses that expression, “I find no fault in him.” And it is certainly appropriate that he who had the chief hand in slaying the Lamb of God, the Sacrifice for our sins, should three times publicly declare that he found no spot or blemish in him. Jesus was proclaimed a lamb without spot or fault, after a searching examination by the man who would slay him.

So in perfect fulfillment of the OT ceremonial sacrifices, Jesus was the sacrificial lamb. “The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” A spotless lamb. As Peter writes,

1 Peter 1:18 “Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.”

Jesus was the spotless passover lamb, whose blood in the Old Covenant protected the people of God from that plague of the death of the firstborn.

Ex. 12:5 “Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats.”

Jesus was the lamb without defect which had been sacrificed in the Old Testament as the Sin offering. And he was the lamb without blemish offered in those Old Testament burnt offerings.

And so we sing, “Spotless lamb of God was he.”

But why was that necessary? Because our very salvation depended upon it! Animal sacrifices would not atone for our sins. Only the sacrifice of a man. A perfect man. And so our high priest would have to be untainted by sin, otherwise he could do nothing more than pay the penalty for his own sins. But Jesus is far greater than the priests of the Old Testament. Indeed, he is the final priest, putting an end to the priestly work. For his work was done once and for all.

Heb. 7:17 For He testifies: “You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek.”...23 Also there were many priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing. 24 But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. 25 Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost

those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. 26 For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; 27 who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people’s, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. 28 For the law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, appoints the Son who has been perfected forever.”

Hallelujah, what a savior. A lamb without defect.

And it is that innocence that makes his suffering all the more horrible, and John doesn’t shy away from teaching us about the cruel affliction which Jesus experienced.

B. Jesus’ human suffering was intense.

v.1-3

Let me describe just a little bit what the word “scourging” meant in the context of the Roman empire. The injury inflicted on our Lord’s body was probably far more severe than we might think. It was a punishment which among the Romans generally preceded crucifixion, and was sometimes so painful and violent that the sufferer died under it. It was often a scourging with rods, and not always cords as usually depicted. Smith’s dictionary of the Bible says that under the Roman mode of scourging, “the culprit was stripped, stretched with cords or thongs on a frame, and beaten with rods.”

For Jesus, the suffering continued beyond that.

v.2

There was abusive mockery in that, presumably putting a

tattered robe upon Jesus in the color of kings, mocking him for claiming to be a king. And they gave him a crown, but one made of a plant with particularly sharp thorns, which when pressed down into Jesus' head would have inflicted further pain and drawn more blood.

This was cruel and barbaric torture, and we can well believe that these Roman soldiers were quite expert and trained by practice in the best way of torturing a prisoner.

Then, again combining their mockery with their physical abuse, we read,
v.3

“They slapped him,” we could perhaps translate. Yet you would do right to imagine the most barbaric, more violent striking of this man already so brutally beaten.

It seems that Pilate's intention in inflicting this punishment was in the hope that the severity of the beating would satisfy the Jewish leaders, that after seeing Jesus beaten, bleeding, and torn with rods, they would be content to let him go free. Indeed, he told the Jews, according to,

Luke 23:16 “I will therefore chastise Him and release Him.”

Of course, the Jewish leaders were not satisfied. The crowds were not satisfied. They would have him dead, not just beaten. And so it would be.

Now, why all that detail? My intention is not merely to convince you that evil men act wickedly. I don't describe the details given to us in Scripture merely for the effect, but to teach the valuable lesson so clearly prophesied by Isaiah,

Is. 53:3 “He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. 4 Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. 5 But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”

By those stripes, we are healed. That's what it took for a holy and righteous God to satisfy his justice, and at the same time, give to his people the free gift of salvation and the forgiveness of sins.

Isaiah continues,

Is. 53:11 “He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, For He shall bear their iniquities. 12 Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, And He shall divide the spoil with the strong, Because He poured out His soul unto death, And He was numbered with the transgressors, And He bore the sin of many, And made intercession for the transgressors.”

And with NT explanation,

Heb. 9:22 “And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission...24 For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; 25 not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another-- 26 He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now,

once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.”

My friends, THAT is truth. That is spiritual truth. That is the truth which shall set you free. That is the truth which you must believe to come to God the Father and be accepted by him. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved.

Back to our text, and more of the rejection of Jesus.
v.5

I don't believe there is sarcasm or ridicule in Pilate's announcement. I believe he is still, at this point, wanting to convince the Jews to let Jesus go. And so he presents Jesus to the crowd, really as a great man, hoping that they would show pity. But they didn't, and as those Jewish leaders rejected Jesus, they were,

II. REJECTING A GREAT MAN.

A great man.

A real man. A man of flesh and blood, in that way just like you and me. But thoroughly reviled and despised. We see that,

A. Jesus was was rejected with wicked cruelty.

v.6

The cries of the mob were so wicked, so bloodthirsty. Crucify him. “I don't care if he is innocent, crucify him.”

And when Pilate tried to hand him back over to the Jews,

B. Jesus was rejected with blasphemous unbelief.

I say blasphemous because it was a denial of the very identify

of Jesus as the Son of God.

v.7

They accused Jesus of blasphemy because he claimed to be God! And their own words will be used at the day of final judgment for their own eternal condemnation.

There WAS a law.

Lev. 24:16 “And whoever blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall certainly stone him, the stranger as well as him who is born in the land. When he blasphemes the name of the LORD, he shall be put to death.”

But that law would not be used to condemn Jesus, for it wasn't Jesus who blasphemed the name of the Lord! It was they who blasphemed! And it continues to be blasphemy for people to deny the deity of Jesus Christ. Blasphemy which shall be the grounds for a man to receive an eternal condemnation to the pains of hell forever. Blasphemy in the form of denying that Jesus Christ is the son of God.

And then we we see that,

C. Jesus was rejected with hardened rebellion.

There was terrible hardening going on in this very occasion. Notice how severe the Jews respond to Pilate's offer to let Jesus go.

v.12

That was the turning point for Pilate, that was the one thing that would convince him that Jesus had to die, for his own reputation and authority would be at stake if it became known that he allowed a challenge to Caesar to go unchecked.

Notice, though, that these Jews are using a secular argument. They are aligning themselves with Caesar, and are concerning themselves with Caesar's honor and glory, at Jesus' expense. Surely the hardening of their hearts has begun.

And it continues.
v.13-15

There it is--the inevitable consequence of defending Caesar's honor. In their hardened hearts, they would come to give Caesar all authority. They would fully and completely deny the rightful authority of Jesus Christ.

"We have no king but Caesar."

That is a cry of people who deny God. And it is the cry of many today! It is the descriptive theme of the atheistic and agnostic religion of humanism which is all too often imposed upon us by our government and governmental institutions. There is no god but Caesar. There is no eternal and absolute God in heaven. There is no higher law. There is no accountability and judgment before God. Therefore in our day, in our own country, each one does what is right in his own eyes. And those who believe in the ultimate and absolute authority of God are put out on the fringe and despised if they ever seek to speak of their convictions.

Because in our land, as a whole, there is no god but Caesar. But let me tell you the truth. There is a God.

Heb. 9:27 "And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment."

So so I say to all who think they can reject the rule and authority of God over their lives,

1 Peter 4:5 "They will give an account to Him who is ready to

judge the living and the dead."

Indeed,

Heb. 4:13 "And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account."

Heb. 10:29 "Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? 30 For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. And again, "The LORD will judge His people." 31 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

Don't be among those who reject Jesus Christ, for he is the only mediator between a holy God and you, a sinful creature. Thus for those who reject Jesus, they are,

III. REJECTING THE POWER OF A DIVINE MAN.

The only mediator between God and men is the MAN Christ Jesus. But he is a divine man. A man with a divine nature. Fully and completely man. And fully and completely God. He was the Messiah, the anointed one. The divine Messiah. With divine power.

What power he had.
v.8-11

Make no mistake about it, in that encounter between the king of the earthly city and the king of the heavenly city, Jesus was the one with higher authority. And that is precisely the point he made so well to Pilate.

Pilate was already afraid.

v.8

And he was already frustrated because he couldn't get any incriminating statements from Jesus.

v.9

Jesus remained silent.

A. The divine Messiah remained passive in silence.

He wouldn't even defend himself. Again,

Is. 53:7 "He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth."

Pilate had forfeited his right to gain any more information from Jesus, because he had already revealed the desires and intentions of his soul. He didn't care for justice, nor was he interested in obtaining more evidence of Jesus' innocence. He wanted to find out something in his own perverted conscience to justify putting Jesus to death.

Jesus the innocent said nothing. He was also silent because he was submissive.

B. The divine Messiah remained passive in submission.

v.10-11

Why does Jesus refuse to exercise his power? What did he submit to Pilate's wicked abuse of authority? What did he refuse to defend himself with all the legions of angels of heaven? Why did he silently act as if Pilate really did have power over him?

Because it was his father's will!

Jesus would show perfect submission to his father's will. He is submissive to the cup which he knew full well was his to drink. Submissive in obedience, even unto death. That submission to his father is what is so clearly seen in his answer to Pilate's foolish boast of power.

You really have to wonder what Pilate was thinking at this point, and perhaps the best guess is that he concluded that Jesus was a lunatic, that he had gone out of his mind, sincerely thinking himself to possess the power of God. Nonetheless, under Roman law, still innocent of capital offense. A little crazy perhaps, but not a guilty criminal. Therefore,

v.12a

Nonetheless, the eternal plan of God would be fulfilled. Just as he decreed before the creation of the world. Jesus his son would be put to death upon a cross as the atoning sacrifice for the sins of his people. And by means of wicked and sinful men, that is exactly what took place.

v.16

So what shall we say of all this? What shall we think? Just this. Think of Jesus as a King. And don't reject him nor the power of his kingdom. Instead, worship the king, who, by the working of his father's mighty power, has been raised from the dead and seated with Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.

And worship him. Even as we sang earlier, "O worship the King all-glorious above, O gratefully sing his power and his love; our shield and defender, the ancient of days, pavilioned in splendour and girded with praise."