

Each Gospel gives us the word-for-word exchange between Pilate and Jesus, Pilate's question hearing the accusation from the priests, "**Are you the king of the Jews?**" and the Lord's answer, "**You have said so.**" Where the Lord gave a clear and direct affirmation to the chief priest's question if He was the Messiah, here, the Lord gives a qualified answer. It is not the simple, forthright "I am" which He said before the leaders of the Jews.

Nor is it, however, a denial. It is clear from the Scriptures that He is a king. James and John, by their question, imply that He is a king, will be seated in glory. He is repeatedly hailed as the Son of David, a title of kingship for David is the foremost of Israel's kings. Much closer to His birth, the magi seek Jesus as the newborn King of the Jews. His entry into Jerusalem fulfills Zechariah's prophecy of Jerusalem's king coming to her. And Jesus has spoken of Himself as the king on the throne judging all men.

But Pilate is a Roman authority who only thinks of kingship and rule as a Roman would. If even the Lord's own brethren in Israel are confused about what it means that their King has come, how much more will a pagan governor not understand what it means that Jesus is the King? The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke all tell us that Jesus answered no more after this. And yet today, and again next week, we are given further exchange between Jesus and Pilate, some of the most powerful teachings of our Lord about Himself. So which is right? Did Jesus remain silent before Pilate, or did He speak the words which St. John records for us?

It's not an either/or. This apparent contradiction is easy to solve. When it is matters of false charges, Jesus makes no effort to defend Himself. As we heard last week, He makes no address to the slander that He forbids paying taxes to Caesar or stirs up rebellion among the people. It is similar to how He makes no answer to the false charges before the Sanhedrin, does not point out what is patently obvious, that their false witnesses against Him contradict one another. Because it is patently obvious, well known, that these charges are baseless. By every measure of justice and due process, both from Scriptures own laws about legal charges and prosecution as well as secular, pagan law, as Pilate himself testifies repeatedly, the man is innocent, there is no guilt in Him.

But what John records for us is that Jesus will testify to the truth. He will speak clearly about His kingdom, and so again and again, three times in verse 36, He confesses that while He is indeed King, His "**kingdom is not of this world.**" He rules not in a way understood or seen by man. He has spoken of giving water to drink, and bread to eat, things well known and spoken of in human experience so that they are misunderstood. Jesus comes to give living water welling up to eternal life, living bread that if anyone eats of it he shall not die. Jesus speaks of water and bread not of this earth, but of God, given freely in Jesus Himself.

Jesus' kingdom is not of the world. It is no earthly rival to Caesar, because it is not established by man but by God. It is not a kingdom that causes no strife, however. Already God's reign is being rejected by the chief priests and scribes. Acts records the ongoing division the Lord spoke of, "**Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother. . . . And a person's enemies will be those of his own household**" (Matt 10:34 – 35a, 36).

The kingdom does not come without turmoil, rebellion. But this is not by a sword or overthrowing rulers. God's kingdom, His reign, is not made more sure by taking out opposition through strategic strikes, war, or kidnapping. Hands, body, and possessions are to be subject to the governing authority. It is hearts that are to be overthrown and made captive to God by the faith wrought by the Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus has come that hearts would be divided from clinging to all other things than the God who saves.

This is what Jesus means when He says “**Indeed, I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world – to bear witness to the truth.**” That He, almighty and eternal God has come into this world is nothing other than a preaching, a giving witness to the fact that no one is saved by anything other than this Lord. If we could have been saved by anything of our own, it would not be necessary for God to send His Son. But since God had to send His Son, it follows without doubt that we cannot be saved by our own efforts or doings.

This is what Christ preaches: to believe and trust in Him, to place oneself under the gracious rule of the One who reigns from the cross, to have no other voice in the conscience and heart than the true King who came not to seize triumphant laurels or kingly crowns, but to take up a crown of thorns, to establish forever God's kingdom in His own blood. Pilate asks disbelievingly of this, “**What is truth?**” In his judgment Jesus is no criminal, no rebel, but He is speaking nonsense. Pilate does not come across as a profound philosophical questioner, asking the nature and meaning of truth, he, though more noble than Herod, is still a worldling, like so many today, who will get uncomfortable at any assertion of objective truth. The soldiers will soon show their failure to hear and recognize. Getting word of a king being handed over to them, can only judge with their eyes, see their time with Jesus as an opportunity for mocking entertainment, for this man looks like no king.

Those of the truth, those who believe this, hear the Lord Jesus and understand. They see their glorious king according to His Word. They see a lowly man, yet hear the Word which shows Him to be God. They recognize God come to suffer and die for them. They hear the voice of their Shepherd King, the One who comes to lay down His life for the sheep, to be the rest for all who are weary.