

What Kind of King Is This?

Text: John 18:28–40

What kind of King is Jesus?

When the high priest accused Jesus through the night, the Sanhedrin convicted him of blasphemy. But when these Jewish authorities then bring him before Pilate the next morning, the conversation shifts. Their best chance with Pilate can't be religious charges but to frame Jesus as a political rebel, someone trying to claim the throne. In Rome, there can only be one king and one lord, Caesar, and anyone claiming to be a king is a threat to Caesar and an enemy of Rome.

It's difficult to imagine that Pilate took these accusations seriously. ***“Are you the King of the Jews?”*** (v 33).

Jesus asks Pilate if he is really asking this of his own accord, or if he heard it from others. ***“Am I a Jew?” Pilate responds. “Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?”*** (v 35).

Jesus' answer explains to Pilate and to us how he is a King like no other, with a kingdom like no other. He first explains what his kingdom is not and then what his kingdom is.

“My kingdom is not of this world” (v 36a). Jesus is not an earthly king with an earthly kingdom. He does not have servants or soldiers to fight for him. He is not interested in overthrowing Caesar, or Pilate, or any other earthly king. That’s not how his kingdom works.

In fact, he is not interested in his own glory, success, or even his life. ***“If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered to the Jews”*** (v 36b). But Jesus had commanded Peter to put away his sword. He had gone willingly to the Sanhedrin. He submits to the Roman governor.

This is difficult. It was difficult for the disciples, who were waiting for Jesus to overthrow the Romans and set up his kingdom there in Jerusalem. And it is difficult for us, who are waiting for Jesus to fix things up for us in this life. We would love for Jesus to be our president, or our governor, or at least the mayor, to get things fixed up in the political realm, to bring some peace and order and a bit of justice for the oppressed, especially for his people. We would love for Jesus to make life easier with a little more direct political involvement. But he is not that kind of king with that kind of kingdom.

Now, we know that Jesus governs all things in this world, and specifically we rejoice that he rules all things for the sake of his Body, the Church, ***“And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.”***

(Ephesians 1:22–23).

But this rule is a hidden rule, and it is often hidden under suffering and the cross. Christians are not promised success, prosperity, health, and earthly peace. Quite the opposite. ***“In the world you will have tribulation.” That’s what Jesus says. But then he adds, “But take heart; I have overcome the world”*** (16:33).

When Jesus says to Pilate, ***“My kingdom is not of this world,”*** he trains our hearts not to look to this world for lasting peace and life but to set our hearts on his unworldly kingdom. His kingdom is different, without physical borders, without physical soldiers and armies and weapons, without earthly glory and pomp. What does his kingdom have?

Just what is his kingdom? Jesus answers this question when Pilate asks, ***“So you are a king?”***

Jesus answered, *“You say that 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.*

Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice” (v 37). This is what Jesus’ kingdom has: truth. This is what his kingdom is. Jesus’ kingdom is the kingdom of truth.

Pilate balks. *“What is truth?”* (v 38). But where this pagan governor is filled with scorn, we are filled with faith. We know this King, the One who is the way, the truth, and the life. His kingdom is not built on power but on truth. It does not conquer by war but by preaching. His sword is not of iron but of the Word. And we enter his kingdom not by submission but by faith in his truth.

Jesus does not come to conquer us but to die for us. He does not call us to take up arms and fight for him. Rather, he suffers for us, and in this suffering he defeats our enemies and forgives our sins.

His kingdom comes.

His kingdom comes with the truth of the Gospel.

His kingdom comes with the promise of sins forgiven.

His kingdom comes when the Holy Spirit presses into our ears and hearts the undeserved kindness of God.

His kingdom comes with the smile of the heavenly Father, with the friendship of our Lord Jesus, with the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

His kingdom comes when we are baptized, when we eat and drink his body and blood, when we hear the royal proclamation that our sins are pardoned.

What kind of King is this? The kind who came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for you. This kingdom, and this King, are not of this world. Jesus is the Heavenly King with a Heavenly Kingdom, and we are in It. We belong to him.

Amen