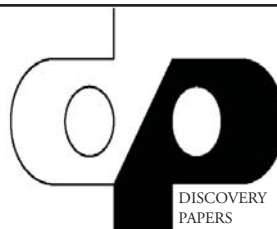




## “HAIL, KING OF THE JEWS”



Catalog No. 20140511  
John 19:1-22  
36th Message  
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May 11, 2014

When Jesus was born, Herod sought to protect his throne from the newborn son of David by sending troops to murder infants and toddlers. Thirty-three years later, having been arrested by Pontius Pilate, Jesus was once again threatened by Roman soldiers. However on this occasion we do not see violence that leads to anguish and tears. Rather, the expected outcomes are turned upside down. On this day death leads to life, attempts at ridicule confer honor instead, and the prisoner is unveiled as king.

Recall the insight of the apostle Paul: *We impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory.* <sup>8</sup>*None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory* (1 Corinthians 2:7-8).

Worldly rulers, then and now, measure power by the capacity to intimidate, humiliate, avenge, and deny. The strong are those who bend what is straight. Authority is measured by force not freedom. And the man on the throne must always watch his back. Jesus' reign is completely different from the 'rulers of this age.'

Our text is John 19. As we shall see, the priests, the people, and the guards are going to succeed in crucifying Jesus. He is alone, stripped, savagely beaten, and held up to public shame; yet, he commands every moment. Those who seek his humiliation are brought low, and the rulers of the age are rendered inconsequential.

We will divide this passage by considering five declarations. The first is spoken by soldiers, *Hail, King of the Jews!* The second by Pilate in public. *Behold the man!* The third is spoken by Pilate to Jesus alone, *Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?* The fourth is a cry of the crowd, *We have no King but Caesar.* And finally, Pilate refuses an objection by Jewish leaders declaring, *What I have written I have written.*

John 19:1-7—

**Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged him. <sup>2</sup>And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns**

**and put it on his head and arrayed him in a purple robe. <sup>3</sup>They came up to him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” and struck him with their hands. <sup>4</sup>Pilate went out again and said to them, “See, I am bringing him out to you that you may know that I find no guilt in him.” <sup>5</sup>So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, “Behold the man!” <sup>6</sup>When the chief priests and the officers saw him, they cried out, “Crucify him, crucify him!” Pilate said to them, “Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no guilt in him.” <sup>7</sup>The Jews answered him, “We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has made himself the Son of God.”**

The Romans were experts at inflicting pain—the flogging administered to Jesus was gruesome. The soldiers attempted to increase the Lord's suffering with play-acting and with verbal ridicule, *Hail King of the Jews!* Yet, these verses do not make us turn away in horror. This scene has been remembered, contemplated, and rendered in art and worship by Christians in every generation. The crown of thorns is second only to the cross as an object that brings honor to the Lord.

What then do we see, gazing at the events depicted here? Clearly no one is impressed with the soldiers' violent swagger or their clever wit. Though our hearts break as we see him suffer, no thoughtful person considers Jesus to be a victim. We are not moved to feel sorry for him. This scene is not 'a terrible tragedy that should never have happened.'

Though he suffers and bleeds, Jesus has chosen this fate and he is master of these events. Love fills the room—love of the Son for his Father whom he obeys; love of the Savior for the soldiers whom he forgives; love for us all who will die in our sins if he does not die in our place.

The soldiers' voices are our voices, and their attempt at humiliation is transformed. What began as ridicule—*Hail, King of the Jews!*—becomes true worship. He is king and we fall before him.

Consider some familiar hymns:

*See from His head, His hands, His feet,  
Sorrow and love flow mingled down!  
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,  
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?  
(When I survey the Wondrous Cross)*

*What wondrous love is this that caused the Lord of bliss  
To bear the dreadful curse for my soul,  
(What Wondrous Love is This?)*

*Why should I gain from His reward  
I cannot give an answer  
But this I know with all my heart  
His wounds have paid my ransom.  
(How Deep the Father's Love)*

*Amazing love! How can it be,  
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?  
(And Can it be That I Should Gain?)*

*Hail, King of the Jews.* It was spoken derisively at first and spoken in every generation afterward as praise.

The second statement we will consider is uttered by the governor to the crowd. *Behold the man!* Because he was trying to reduce the passion of the crowd we should assume that Pilate originally meant something like, "Observe the loser, beaten and bleeding, wrapped in ridicule—he's a nobody." Pilate was trying to make the case that if you look carefully ('behold') Jesus is not worth trouble of executing.

Yet, in John's gospel, an ordinary statement often grows to mean more than it did at first. As we behold Jesus we see what has never been seen before: humanity as it was intended to be, a beautiful display of the image of God.

We observe Jesus with 'eyes to see' and draw conclusions about what it means to be human. The claims of atheistic naturalism are false. Men and women are not the product of time, chance, and natural processes alone. We are created by God and intended for intimacy with him.

'Beholding' Jesus has implications on the personal level as well. The Lord had no worldly titles, no adoring entourage, no crippling inhibitions, no hypocrisy, no guilty past or fear of the future. In his name we can give up shallow bases for measuring our own worth or that of others. Wealth, status, and fame are short lived. Jewelry, gadgets, and acclimation by an 'in-crowd' are nothing compared to

knowing that all children of Adam are equally the focus of divine love with an invitation to become children of God. We are offered the opportunity to become what we behold in the man, Jesus. We can live lives that glorify God.

We worship the Lord and become more like him. *Behold the man!*

John 19:7-13—

**The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has made himself the Son of God." <sup>8</sup>When Pilate heard this statement [regarding Jesus as the Son of God], he was even more afraid. <sup>9</sup>He entered his headquarters again and said to Jesus, "Where are you from?" But Jesus gave him no answer. <sup>10</sup>So Pilate said to him, "You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?" <sup>11</sup>Jesus answered him, "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin."**

**<sup>12</sup>From then on Pilate sought to release him, but the Jews cried out, "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar." <sup>13</sup>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.**

The third statement for our consideration is found in verse 10—*Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?* Pilate could not have uttered a greater misrepresentation of the facts. By now it is clear that Pilate is powerless at every turn. He desires to release Jesus but cannot. He attempts to command Jesus and fails. Flogging and ridicule only ennoble the prisoner. Jesus' relationship to God is mentioned (verse 7) and Pilate's fears and inadequacies are more than ever on display. He can neither pass his predicament to someone else (having washed his hands, Matthew 27:24) or steer the choice of the crowd.

And then Jesus speaks with firm command. He renders judgment (verse 11)—recognizing guilty parties and apportioning responsibility (measuring who has the greater sin). Pilate must play the role assigned to him from above.

Jesus displayed true authority as a prisoner, bound and bleeding, on his way to die. Breathtaking.

John 19:14-16—

**Now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover. It was about the sixth hour. He said to the Jews, “Behold your King!”<sup>15</sup> 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.”<sup>16</sup> So he delivered him over to them to be crucified.**

In these verses, Pilate speaks the truth, *Behold your king*, to no avail. The fourth sentence for our consideration follows this last appeal. It is a word of heart-rending blasphemy. Israel had no existence apart from the reign of Yahweh and yet the people cry aloud, in Jerusalem at the time of the Passover, *We have no king but Caesar*.

The Jewish crowd, led by ‘chief priests and officers,’ knew the chink in the governor’s armor and knew how to force his hand. If you release this man, you are not Caesar’s friend (verse 12). However, Pilate’s status with Caesar was of little significance. Israel had claimed their own preference for Caesar and thereby denied they were the people of God.

John 19:16-22—

**So they took Jesus,<sup>17</sup> and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha.<sup>18</sup> There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them.<sup>19</sup> Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.”<sup>20</sup> Many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Aramaic, in Latin, and in Greek.<sup>21</sup> So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, “Do not write, ‘The King of the Jews,’ but rather, ‘This man said, I am King of the Jews.’”<sup>22</sup> Pilate answered, “What I have written I have written.”**

The final statement for our consideration in this study is, *What I have written I have written*. John does not describe Jesus’ crucifixion (we find more detail in the other gospels). However, he does give significant information about the inscription placed by Pilate on the cross—the first written proclamation of the gospel (note John 20:31). The declaration that Jesus is king of the Jews is unambiguous and, written in three languages, applies to everyone. Pilate’s dismissal of the high priest’s objection was likely for reasons of personal aggravation. But if so, the statement testifies beyond itself. Jesus IS king. In fact, he is Lord of heaven and earth. No objection by anyone will alter this reality.

In conclusion we can re-read and remember:

*Hail, King of the Jews!*

*Behold the man!*

*Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?*

*We have no King but Caesar.*

*What I have written I have written.*

*Amazing love! How can it be,*

*That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?*

*(And Can it be That I Should Gain?)*