

“HERE IS YOUR KING”

John 19:1-16a

Key Verse: 19:14

“It was the day of preparation of Passover Week, about the sixth hour. ‘Here is your king,’ Pilate said to the Jews.”

In this passage Pilate presents Jesus to the people of Israel as their king. On the surface, it seems to be a political ploy. Pilate looks strong, and Jesus looks like a victim. But in truth, Pilate was cowardly, while Jesus is the Son of God who bore injustice in our place—with the strength of God. Jesus is the king sent by God who is mighty to save. May God help each of us to accept Jesus as king and grow in his image.

First, Jesus was punished to take away our sin and shame (1-5).

Look at verse 1. “Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged.” As we have studied, Pilate knew that Jesus was not guilty of any crime (18:28). But when his ploy to set Jesus free by using the custom of the Passover failed, he was frustrated and became helpless. He had to watch Barabbas—a man guilty of rebellion—walk away free, while innocent Jesus remained standing there. It was an obvious miscarriage of justice, reminiscent of some high profile trials in America in recent years. Pilate felt driven to do something. So he did what he could do. He took Jesus and had him flogged.

Flogging was a painful torture given as punishment for serious crimes. The soldiers stripped the victim and tied his hands to a post. They used a whip made of thick leather strips, with pieces of bone and lead embedded near the ends. Two men usually did the flogging, one on each side of the victim. As they alternated whipping the victim, his flesh was quickly shredded, and blood flowed down his back and legs, covering the ground in a pool. Unlike the Jews, who limited flogging to forty stripes, the Romans would flog a prisoner indefinitely. Many victims went insane or even died.

The soldiers also tortured Jesus mentally and emotionally. They twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head, in mockery of his claim to be a king. Then they clothed him in a purple robe and went up to him again and again, saying, “Hail, king of the Jews!” And they struck him in the face. Cruel mockery of this sort does more harm than physical abuse. It can break a person’s spirit. It can damage his psyche with wounds that torment him for the rest of his life. Jesus was fully human. When Jesus was cruelly mocked, Jesus experienced shame, the full measure of shame, just like we would.

Jesus had been flogged and mocked by Roman soldiers somewhere in the palace dungeon, out of sight of the Jews. Now Pilate displayed Jesus before the religious leaders. Look at verses 4-5. “Once more Pilate came out and said to the Jews, ‘Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against him.’ When Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, ‘Here is the man!’” Jesus’ face was swollen from receiving many blows. Blood flowed from his head and back, and the purple robe clung to his lacerated flesh. By presenting him in this way, Pilate wanted to make Jesus seem harmless, and to perhaps evoke pity from the Jews. Still, it must have been with mixed emotion that Pilate said, “Here is the man!” In his heart, Pilate must have been amazed by Jesus’ courage. There was no hint of fear in Jesus. There was no groveling. There was no complaining. Jesus had borne unjust punishment silently, with the quiet courage of a true man.

Why was Jesus treated like this? Why? It was to bear the shame and punishment that we deserve because of our sins. Isaiah 50:1-11 explains this well. It is titled, “Israel’s sin and the servant’s obedience.” God explains that Israel was sent into exile because of her sins. The rebelliousness of Israel is contrasted with the obedience of God’s servant. The servant gets up early to listen to God through prayer. God tells the servant to take upon himself the punishment that sinners deserve. The servant accepts this willingly. In Isaiah 50:6 the servant says, “I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting.” Handel quoted this verse in “The Messiah,” saying, “He gave his back to the smiters....” Isaiah 53:5 says, “But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.” Jesus was flogged and cruelly mocked in our places. In this way, Jesus took up the shame and punishment that we deserve for our sins.

In his book, "Emerging Hope," Jimmy Long explains how serious the problem of shame is to postmodern young people. He says they are more concerned about shame than guilt, in contrast to their parents. They do not grieve over acts of sin, but because they are ashamed of who they are because of sin. This shame is real, and causes bizarre behavior. But there is one who can take away our shame. He is Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 2:24 says, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed." 1 Peter 2:6 says, "the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame." We can lose our shame in Jesus. All we must do is trust Jesus. Jesus is humble and gentle in dealing with our shameful sin problem. The Samaritan woman was covered with shame after going through five husbands. Her shame was so acute that she could not socialize with other women and became a public outcast. However, through one conversation with humble and gentle Jesus her sin problem was solved and her shame was taken away. She became so free and happy that she could tell all her townspeople what had happened. Jesus takes away our shame. Psalm 69:6,7 says, "May those who hope in you not be disgraced because of me, O Lord, the Lord Almighty; may those who seek you not be put to shame because of me, O God of Israel. For I endure scorn for your sake, and shame covers my face."

Second, "Here is your king" (6-16a).

Look at verse 6. "As soon as the chief priests and their officials saw him, they shouted, 'Crucify! Crucify!' But Pilate answered, 'You take him and crucify him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against him.'" The chief priests and their officials had no pity for the beaten Jesus. Instead, the sight of his tortured body inflamed their murderous spirits all the more. They demanded his crucifixion. They had lost all reason, compassion, and common humanity. They were slaves of hatred. And this hatred made them slaves of the devil. They were liars and murderers, just as Jesus had said (Jn 8:44). They should have been the shepherds of the nation. They should have been the conscience of the nation. But when they were enslaved by hatred, they became the devil's instruments and completely evil. We must take warning from them. The sin of hatred leads to irrational wickedness and demon possession. In responding to terrorism, we must guard against hatred. Otherwise, we can become just like the terrorists. Therefore, we must fight a spiritual battle in our own hearts to love and forgive those who hate us. We must pray for Muslim countries and send missionaries.

The hatred of the religious leaders was fierce. To combat this hatred, Pilate depended on the military might of Rome. When he said, "You take him and crucify him," he was taunting them, reminding them that only the Roman government could crucify people. Pilate wanted to put them in their place. Pilate was saying that enough was enough; he had done his best to placate them, but would go no further.

Look at verse 7. "The Jews insisted, 'We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God.'" When Pilate heard this, he was really afraid (8). He realized that the Jews were pushing for a death sentence and there would be no compromise. Either Jesus must die, or there would be a bloody street fight between Roman soldiers and Jewish zealots. The situation was spiraling out of control. Yet Pilate's fear was even deeper. The words rang in Pilate's ears, "he claimed to be the Son of God." Pilate knew that Jesus was different than any man he had ever met. Pilate felt that it was indeed possible that Jesus was the Son of God. Yet he had flogged Jesus. The fear in his heart began to overwhelm him. The things Pilate trusted in—his position, his political skill, and the Roman army—could not help him overcome the fear in his heart. The only remedy for fear is God's absolute word of truth. God's truth defeats the fear of the devil. In their first conversation, Jesus had tried to help Pilate stand on the side of truth (37). But Pilate did not. Now he was in big trouble.

A very nervous and desperate Pilate went back inside the palace and asked Jesus, "Where do you come from?" But Jesus gave him no answer. In the previous passage, Jesus had volunteered more than Pilate asked for (18:36,37). But now Jesus gave Pilate no answer. Jesus could have manipulated Pilate's fear in order to save himself. But Jesus was not interested in saving himself. Jesus remained silent because he had decided to sacrifice himself according to God's will. He would not say anything that would interfere with his divine destiny to die on the cross. Jesus' silence reveals his humble submission to the will of God. Jesus was courageous, peaceful, resolved.

When Pilate saw Jesus' sound countenance, he was upset. So Pilate blew up at Jesus. Look at verse 10. "'Do you refuse to speak to me?' Pilate said. 'Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?'" Pilate revealed an exalted view of his own power. He spoke of his power as though it stemmed from his person and could be exercised at random, according to his whim. This was an illusion. Pilate ignored the fact that as a governor he

was a man under authority and bound to uphold Roman law. Most of all, Pilate ignored the fact that there is a God in heaven who is almighty.

Jesus rebuked Pilate. Look at verse 11. “Jesus answered, ‘You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.’” God Almighty is the Creator of heaven and earth. God is the source of all power. Jesus was sure that God held this situation in his hand and was using Pilate for his own purpose. Amazingly, it was to crucify his one and only Son for the sin of the world. God is not like fallen man. Fallen man longs for power so he can crush others and exalt himself. But God is humble. Though he is the source of all authority and power, he uses it to save men from their sins. For this purpose, God raises leaders and deposes them. When Jesus rebuked Pilate he hoped to restore spiritual order in his heart. It was for his own good.

Moreover, God’s sovereign reign did not excuse Pilate’s action. Jesus clearly exposed Pilate’s act as sin. When Pilate had the Son of God flogged, knowing that there was no valid charge against him, Pilate betrayed justice, abused his authority and sinned against God. In fact, Pilate was a coward. Pilate knew what was right. Pilate was in the position to carry out justice. But he failed to do so because he gave in to fear. The sin of cowardice that leads to compromise is a great sin against God. Many people want to sympathize with Pilate because he was in such a difficult situation. But Jesus clearly exposed his sin. Later, when the Apostle’s Creed was formulated, the words “suffered under Pontius Pilate,” were included. The early Christians did not sympathize with Pilate. Pilate’s sin of cowardice led to the most grievous act of crucifying the Son of God.

On the other hand, we can see in Jesus the strength of character of a true king. Jesus was innocent. Jesus had lived a pure and holy life from beginning to end. Jesus had spent his time and effort to heal the sick, drive out evil spirits, and preach the kingdom of God. Jesus had done only good for Israel. Yet now Jesus was standing in the place of a criminal, bearing the shame and punishment that sinners deserve. It was for us, for each one of us. Though Jesus suffered so much, he did not falter at all. Jesus was sure that he was fulfilling God’s will for world salvation through his suffering. Jesus’ unwavering faith in God is well revealed in verse 11. Jesus is the true king and mighty to save.

Look at verse 12a. “From then on, Pilate tried to set Jesus free....” Pilate was not upset with Jesus for rebuking him. Instead, Pilate tried to act on the basis of his conscience to set Jesus free. Look at verse 12b. “...but the Jews kept shouting, ‘If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar.’” The clever religious leaders threatened to report Pilate to Caesar for siding with an opposing king. This was a threat to Pilate’s position, his job, and his career. This seems to have shaken Pilate more than anything else that the Jews said. Pilate’s problem was that he never took a stand on the side of truth. When he listened to Jesus, he thought Jesus was right, and he wanted to set Jesus free. But when he listened to the religious leaders, the agents of Satan, he was overcome by their words and gave in to their pressure.

Pilate brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge’s seat. It was the day of Preparation of Passover Week, about the sixth hour. It was the time to prepare the Passover lamb. The religious leaders should have been faithfully carrying out this sacred duty. Instead, they were doing everything they could to condemn an innocent person to death. But God was faithful to his world salvation plan. God was fulfilling his own will and purpose. God was offering Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Romans 3:25 says, “God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood.”

Pilate said to the Jews, “Here is your king.” There was more truth in these words than Pilate realized. Jesus really is the king of the Jews. Jesus is in very nature God. But he came down from heaven and took on human flesh to live among us. While on earth, Jesus performed many miraculous signs that only the Messiah could do. Jesus gave sight to a man born blind. Jesus raised a man from the dead. And now, Jesus was standing in the place of sinners, bearing the shame and punishment that we deserve. It was the only way to rescue us from sin, death and the devil. Jesus is the mighty king who saves. This King Jesus will destroy all unrighteousness and restore the spiritual order of God’s world. Jesus will establish the kingdom of God and reign forever in peace and love.

“Here is your king.” This is God’s invitation to each one of us today. When we accept Jesus as our king, he comes into our hearts to reign. Jesus helps us grow in his image. We can become strong in the grace and truth of Jesus. We can become courageous shepherds who are willing to save others though we suffer loss. Let’s remember that Jesus is

our King. It is proper for us to serve him with full allegiance and absolute obedience, and with a joyful and grateful heart.

Some people, like the Jews in this passage, reject Jesus as king. They may seem to be free. But in reality they are all slaves of the power of sin, like the religious leaders who were slaves of hatred, and like Pilate, who was a slave of fear. Only Jesus can set us free from the power of sin. Let's accept Jesus in our hearts as the king who takes away our sin and shame and give us eternal life.