

The King testifies

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Date: 07 April 2019

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[0 : 00] Well, what do these world leaders share in common?

Trump, Putin, Kim Jong-un and Xi Jinping. Well, at one level, not very much at all, really. They're all in constant conflict. They're striving with one another. They're disagreeing with one another. But at another level, they share a fair bit in common.

Strength, power, force, injustice perhaps, lies. And in many ways, they're representative of the world's values.

For raw power, influence, authority, that is often what our world views as greatness. And things like truth and righteousness and love and peace, so often they are what our world disdains.

[1 : 12] We live in a world where corruption is normal. And power is used to advance self-interest. And oppression and mistrust are normal.

And are not those things self-evidently true? Not only out there in the world, but right here in Malaysia. This week, of course, we began the trial of our former prime minister, accused of graft and money laundering.

This week, of course, Suhakam's report on Pastor Raymond Coe was released. This week, of course, the conclusion, an enforced disappearance by the state, hidden by a web of lies.

Here in Malaysia, corruption, oppression, injustice. They are the norm. And so in every workplace and in every heart.

Well, the passage asked us this morning, What kind of leader will we choose? Will we look to a worldly king of power, of influence, of injustice?

[2 : 30] Or a heavenly king of peace, truth, and love? Well, in the lead-up to Easter, we're considering John's account of Jesus' death.

And we saw last week that Jesus was betrayed and arrested, condemned without a charge, in a sham midnight trial before the high priests Annas and Caiaphas.

As we resume this morning, Jesus is brought into the headquarters of the governor Pilate for execution. Here he stands before Pilate, beaten and bruised.

Here he doesn't look like a king. He doesn't sound like a king. And yet the topic of Jesus' trial is Jesus' kingship. Look again at the passage.

Verse 33. Pilate asks, Are you the king of the Jews? Or in verse 36, Three times Jesus speaks, My kingdom.

[3 : 33] Verse 37. Pilate says, So you are a king. Verse 38. Jesus says, You say that I am a king. Verse 39.

Pilate asks, Do you want me to release the king of the Jews? And this will continue on next week into chapter 19. As Jesus is dressed in a purple robe, the soldiers hail him, Hail king of the Jews. The crown of thorns is placed on his head. And finally, Pilate sends Jesus out, beaten and bruised, and declares, Behold, your king.

John wants us to consider this morning, What kind of a king is this that we worship? Well, let's begin on the outline.

Point one. With the nature of Christ's kingdom. The nature of Christ's kingdom. Verses 28 to 32. The Jews bring Jesus to Pilate.

[4 : 36] They don't have authority to put Jesus to death on their own. And so they accuse him before Pilate. And Pilate begins the questioning in verse 33.

He says to them, To Jesus, Are you the king? Of the Jews. Pilate's trying to work out, Is Jesus some kind of political threat?

Some kind of revolutionary? Who's inciting rebellion against the Romans? And Jesus refuses to answer him directly. Verse 34.

He says, Do you say this of your own accord? Or did others say this to you about me? Now, Jesus is subtly forcing Pilate to engage with his claims.

What does he think? Personally. Is Jesus a king? Pilate has none of it. He repeats verse 35.

[5 : 37] Am I a Jew? Your own nation and chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done? And Jesus' response here is like nothing that Pilate has ever heard.

Look again at verse 36. Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world. This time, Jesus answers more directly. Three times he says, My kingdom.

Let's not be mistaken. Jesus claims to be king. But it's very clear that the kind of kingdom he rules is not what Pilate is expecting.

He says twice here, My kingdom is not of this world. Jesus hasn't come into the world to set up a political empire.

[6 : 40] He didn't come into Jerusalem riding with an army of soldiers to lead an uprising. Jesus had no intention of propagating his kingdom by force.

And straight away, we are to see how different, how contradictory this is to what we see in Islam. And Jesus shows his rule is very different. When Jesus is arrested, he doesn't fight. Well, Peter tried to fight.

He cut off Malchus' ear. And then Jesus healed him. Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, not on a war horse.

Jesus could have called down a legion of angels to establish his rule. But he did not. He stood quietly before Pilate.

[7 : 40] He did not advance his kingdom by fighting, but by laying down his life in love for his people. And Jesus' kingdom is not of this world.

Jesus came to rule a heavenly kingdom, not an earthly one. His claim here is to be the king of kings, to be the lord of lords, to be the one to whom every knee will bow, every tongue will confess, the king of heaven, the king of Pilate himself, will one day need to bow before.

And we must understand these truths if we are to live rightly as God's people. You see, in our evangelism, we're not seeking to force or pressure people to become Christians.

We only seek to persuade them. And in our suffering, we don't retaliate. We entrust ourselves to God. And in our living, we don't set our hopes on the things of this world, but on heaven itself.

While Pilate understands Jesus' claim, he replies, verse 37, ah, so you are a king. And Jesus replies, verse 38, you say that I'm a king.

[9 : 12] For this purpose I was born. For this purpose I've come into the world to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.

And so again, Jesus presses Pilate with the force of his claims. He wants Pilate to acknowledge his kingship, to acknowledge the truth.

And what a remarkable claim Jesus makes here. For this purpose I was born. For this purpose I have come into the world. And the rest of John's gospel will make explicit what Jesus implies here. His existence didn't begin at Christmas time at his birth. Jesus came into the world. He came from heaven itself.

He was the eternal son of God. In the beginning with God. In the beginning who was God. Jesus came from heaven. And even more than that, Jesus claims here to be the source of truth itself.

[10 : 20] For this purpose I was born. And I've come into the world to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.

What a remarkable claim. If you want to know the truth about God. About the world. About yourself. Jesus says you must listen to me. You must submit to my rule as your king.

Jesus claims here to be the source of all truth. Indeed, the embodiment of truth itself. You remember Jesus said, I am the truth. John 14 verse 6.

And so Jesus' kingdom is a kingdom of truth. His people are those who side with the truth as they acknowledge the truth of Jesus' heavenly rule.

[11 : 28] How different to the religious leaders falsely accusing Jesus on trumped up charges. How different we will see to Pilate. And so if we will not acknowledge the kingship of Jesus, if we will not accept Jesus' diagnosis of the human heart, if we will not understand the world as Jesus sees it, we are not living in reality.

We've embraced deception or fake news, if you like. If we want to live in truth, we must listen to Jesus.

And isn't it beautiful how John illuminates this reality in the passage? I mean, we first read it, we think that Jesus is the one on trial, don't we?

But we very soon see that the reality is very different. Pilate's not the judge. Jesus is the judge. Pilate's not really in control, is he?

Jesus is in control. And it's almost comical in this passage. I mean, Pilate is meant to be this great Roman governor. And here he is going in and out of the palace between the Jews on the outside, Jesus on the inside.

[12:53] It's as if he's constantly torn in this battle between truth and lies, between good and evil. He's meant to be in control. But try as he may, he can't even release Jesus, even when he thinks he's innocent.

And now he finds himself on trial before Jesus. And Jesus is asking the questions. And Jesus is calling for a response from him. Will he submit to the truth?

Will he submit to Jesus' rule? Will he accept the truth of Jesus on the inside or the lies of those who accuse him outside?

Jesus says, everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice. Well, on that tragic day, though, we see only a rejection of the truth of Jesus' kingdom.

And we're now at point two. Jesus says, everyone who's of the truth listens to my voice. And Pilate responds in verse 38 with one of the most corrupt statements of political expediency we have seen in all human history.

[14:17] he was a politician indeed. What is truth? He cries out. I mean, it's a trial. Why does truth matter in a trial? And here we see his hatred of the truth.

His willingness to bend the truth when it will bring personal benefit. Three times in the following verses, Pilate will speak of the innocence of Jesus.

Look at verse 38. He says, I find no guilt in him. Look down at chapter 19, verse 4.

See, I'm bringing him out to you that you may know I find no guilt in him. Look at verse 6. Pilate said to them, take him yourself and crucify him for I find no guilt in him.

He knows Jesus Jesus is innocent. And yet Pilate will still send him to be flogged by the soldiers and ultimately crucified to save his own skin.

[15:26] What is truth? Pilate rejects the truth when it's not convenient for him. And of course we see that kind of wickedness every day in our world.

Our world is very good at bending the truth, isn't it? When it suits. People say all paths lead to God. All religions are the same.

All beliefs are valid unless you believe in Jesus. Jesus. Our world no longer cares for truth and no longer cares for examining the evidence, considering the claims of Jesus.

We just dismiss them, close one eye and pretend all this never happened. But if we simply looked outside at the created world, we could see the majesty and power of God.

I mean, atheism claims that the world just popped into existence. How totally absurd. Everything they believe is cause and effect but it had no beginning.

[16:38] Look at the complexity of the human body. Look at the fine tuning of the universe. Look at the miracle of life itself. And humanity will suppress the truth.

Then there are the claims of Jesus. despite all the historical evidence for his life, his teaching, his miracles, his death, even his resurrection, still many people fail to even acknowledge that he was a real person, let alone examine his claims.

And so they toss out the truth and worship something else instead. But it's not just Pilate who rejects the truth.

There's also the hypocrisy of the religious leaders, isn't it? And look again at verse 28. They led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the governor's headquarters.

It was early morning. They themselves did not enter the governor's quarters so that they would not be defiled but could eat the Passover. Passover. And so at the very same time that the Jewish leaders are plotting the unlawful, unjust murder of an innocent man condemned on false charges, they are meticulously concerned with their ceremonial purity.

[18:08] They will refuse to enter Pilate's headquarters. What hypocrisy! Look at Pilate's response, verse 29.

He goes outside, what accusation do you bring against this man? They answered him, if this man were not doing evil, we would not have delivered him over to you. There's no charges. There's no expectation of a fair trial before Pilate. They just declare the sentence. They demand the punishment. What hypocrisy!

And again in verses 39 and 40, having examined Jesus and found him innocent, Pilate returns outside to the Jews. He delivers his verdict. I find no guilt in him.

He offers them a way out. You have a custom, I should release to you one man at the Passover. Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews? You've got it wrong.

[19 : 08] I'll give you another chance, a way out. And in another moment of tragic hypocrisy, they cry out again, not this man, but Barabbas.

And Barabbas, we're told, was a robber. Again, so ironic, so hypocritical. They've turned over Jesus to Pilate on the false charges of leading a rebellion.

And yet, it's not innocent Jesus they want sent free, but Barabbas, a robber, and according to Mark's gospel, an insurrectionist, and a murderer, someone who was actually guilty of the things they falsely accused Jesus.

And so, also in this passage, John wants to unveil for us the wickedness of humanity that would put King Jesus on the cross.

Herod, who would kill an innocent man for political gain, the religious hypocrisy of the Jews, claiming to follow God, but in reality they want to kill him.

[20 : 24] all the show, all the stuff on the outside just masking a heart that hates God and does not want him to be king of their lives.

Actually, they want a political king who will yield to their demands just like Pilate. They want to rule for themselves.

They don't want a king of truth like Jesus, who will expose them for what they really are. And so God lifts the curtain on the reality of our world.

No matter how religious it seems, if we will not acknowledge Jesus as the rightful king of our lives, our hearts are in fact in darkness.

darkness. We are rebels against the king of kings. We are living a lie, thinking we are really in charge of our own lives.

[21 : 34] It's a wonder, isn't it, that God just doesn't dissolve our world right here and now and send fire down from heaven. And yet wonderfully, we see in this passage that God has other plans.

us. John wants us to see, it's not Pilate in control here. It's not even really the Jewish leaders who are in control here. Jesus is in control, carrying out his plan.

Look again at verse 30. We read that, so verse 32, we read, this was to fulfill the word that Jesus had spoken to show what kind of death he was going to die.

See, Jesus, John wants us to see here, Jesus is totally in control. It's going exactly as planned. And in verses 39 and 40, John gives us a marvellous picture of that plan, of what Jesus' death would achieve.

We see Jesus, the innocent one, who comes to die in the place of the wicked. We should have at this point ringing in our ears the words of Caiaphas from chapter 11.

[22 : 54] He said, it is better for you that one man should die for the people than that the whole nation should perish. That was the plan of God.

One would die for many. The innocent one would die that the guilty may go free. And John doesn't want us to miss the point. Twice here he tells us that all this happens at Passover.

Passover, you remember, was that day each year when Israel remembered how God had saved his people out of Egypt through the sacrifice of a perfect lamb.

We read of it in Exodus chapter 12. As the angel of death passes through Egypt, God's people escape as they trust in the blood of a spotless lamb whose blood is painted on their houses.

Isaiah 53 looks forward to that day when that Passover meal would be perfectly fulfilled, when a suffering servant would come who, though perfectly innocent, would die in the place of his people.

[24 : 09] Isaiah writes, he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities, upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, with his wounds we are healed, all we like sheep have gone astray, we've turned everyone to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, like a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.

And so in verses 39 to 40, innocent Jesus is condemned, and guilty Barabbas goes free.

Jesus the innocent dies in the place of the guilty. Jesus the sinless takes on himself the sins of the world.

Jesus will be the lamb of God, the perfect Passover lamb who will die to save his people. And this is the amazing news of the gospel.

[25 : 35] It should have been us on that cross. We are the ones who suppress the truth. We are religious hypocrites who do not always live out our faith.

We are the ones who day after day resist Jesus' rule and give in to the sin of our hearts. And yet innocent Jesus comes down from heaven that he might stand in your place, that he might die for the very ones who would put him on the cross and invite them to his heavenly kingdom.

There on that cross Jesus took your sins and mine. He took the punishment that we deserve. He dies that we might go free.

And that great truth is underlined by Barabbas' name. Do you know what his name means? Son of the Father.

Jesus is the true son of the Father and the true son is condemned that the guilty sons may go free.

[27 : 05] How different is Jesus to the kings of this world? No lies, no force, no oppression, no corruption, a king of truth, a king of righteousness, a king of self-sacrificial love.

And the question of our passage this morning is will we accept the truth? Will we face up to the fact that Jesus is the king of kings and the lord of lords?

And so listen to his voice and submit our lives under his rule. Have you accepted the truth?

It might be today you're here as a non-Christian and you're investigating the Christian faith. It is so good that you are here today. can I urge you don't dismiss Jesus like Pilate because his rule is not convenient for your life.

And don't reject Jesus because his rule will mean you'll have to give up living for yourself. And don't do away with Jesus because you know that following him you'll have to leave your old religion behind.

[28 : 47] Face up to the truth. Jesus is king. Listen to his voice. Find life in him.

And for those of us who are Christian this morning, will you see in Jesus' meekness his majesty? will you see in Jesus' rejection his rule?

Will you see in Jesus' condemnation your life? He speaks the truth. Will you listen to his voice?

Will you put yourself under his righteous rule when he calls you to evangelism? when he calls you to holiness? When he calls you to purity?

When he calls you to marry a Christian and bring up your children in the knowledge of the Lord?

Will you listen to his voice? When he calls you to take up your cross and follow him?

[30 : 01] To not store up treasures on earth but treasures in heaven? When he calls you to serve him as he did in sacrificial service? will you listen to his voice?

When he calls you to forgive? When he calls you to love your enemies and love your neighbor as yourself? Will you listen to his voice?

Or do we just have the mask of religious hypocrisy? people of the truth?

Will we tell the truth? Who will love the truth? In a world of lies? Christ? And will we proclaim the truth as we come up to Easter?

Let us not accept the lie that all paths are the same. It doesn't matter. Jesus tells us the truth. If people do not submit to his kingship and do not trust in his death, they will one day face his judgment.

[31 : 21] will you proclaim the truth of Jesus rule? What kind of leader will you have for your life?

Let's pray. Lord, Heavenly Father, we praise you for King Jesus, full of truth and love, meekness and majesty.

Father, we thank you that though he was the King of kings, and the Lord of lords, that he would willingly lay down his life for his enemies.

Father, we thank you that he took our place on that cross and that he rose again as our Lord and King. And Lord, we pray that we would indeed be those who listen to his voice, who submit to his rule, who treasure the truth.

And Lord, we pray in this world of lies in which we live, that you would send us out to proclaim the truth. Lord, we pray that this Easter, many around us, would come to acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ as their King and their Saviour.

[33 : 22] And we pray that you would give us the courage to speak for him. And Lord, we pray that you would help us not to set our sights on this world, but on his heavenly kingdom to come, when he will return, and we will see him in all his glory, and we will worship him forever.

Lord, we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.