

The Gospel of John

The King of the Jews

John 19:18-22

INTRODUCTION:

This morning we are continuing in the Gospel of John. Pilate placed an inscription above the head of Jesus that said "**JESUS THE NAZARENE, THE KING OF THE JEWS**". This morning I would like to look at what is meant by the phrase "King of the Jews".

Stand and Read Scripture

John 19:18-22 (NASB)

¹⁹ Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It was written, "JESUS THE NAZARENE, THE KING OF THE JEWS." ²⁰ Therefore many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, Latin *and* in Greek. ²¹ So the chief priests of the Jews were saying to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews'; but that He said, 'I am King of the Jews.'" ²² Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written."

Prayer

There are 20 verses in the Gospels that use "King of the Jews". This exact phrase is never used in the Old Testament.

- From the Magi from the East at His birth.
- Before Pilate as he was questioning Jesus.
- Before the soldiers who placed the crown of thorns on His head and mocked Him.
- Pilate asking the crowd and chief priests if they would want to release Jesus or Barabbas.
- The charge placed above His head on the cross "THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS".
- The soldiers mocking Him at the cross. "If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself!"

Messiah is a Hebrew word that means "anointed one" or "chosen one." The Greek equivalent in English is Christ. The name "Jesus Christ" is the same as "Jesus the Messiah." In biblical times, anointing someone with oil was a sign that God was consecrating or setting apart that person for a particular role. Thus, an "anointed one" was someone with a special, God-ordained purpose.

In the Old Testament, people were anointed for the positions of prophet, priest, and king. God told Elijah to anoint Elisha to succeed him as Israel's prophet. Aaron was anointed as the first high priest of Israel. Samuel anointed both Saul and David as kings of Israel.

All of these men held “anointed” positions. But the Old Testament predicted a coming Deliverer, chosen by God to redeem Israel.

Isaiah 42:1 (NASB)

42 “Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold;
My chosen one *in whom* My soul delights.
I have put My Spirit upon Him;
He will bring forth justice to the nations.

This Deliverer the Jews called the Messiah.

As we discovered a couple of weeks ago, Jesus fulfilled all of the Old Testament prophecies concerning Him and performed miracles to prove that what He was teaching was from God. The ultimate evidence that Jesus is indeed the promised Messiah, the Anointed One, is His resurrection from the dead.

The Jews of Jesus’ day expected the Messiah to redeem Israel by overthrowing the rule of the Romans and establishing an earthly kingdom. It wasn’t until after Jesus’ resurrection that His disciples finally began to understand what the prophecies in the Old Testament really meant concerning the Messiah. The Messiah would not deliver His people physically with an earthly kingdom as they expected but He was to deliver His people spiritually. He was sent to redeem them from sin. He accomplished this salvation through His death and resurrection.

BODY:

I. WHAT DOES IT MEAN THAT THE JEWS ARE GOD’S CHOSEN PEOPLE?

God’s Word affirms that the Jews are God’s chosen people:

Deuteronomy 7:6 (NASB)

⁶ For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for His personal possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.

From eternity past God knew that He would need to be born into the human race in order to save us from our spiritually dead condition. God had planned from the beginning to establish a nation or race of people called the Jews. The Old Testament tells the story of how God set about creating, distinguishing, and preserving that race.

The ultimate goal of God’s choice of the Jews as His chosen people was to produce the Messiah, Jesus Christ through their lineage, who would be the Savior of the world. Jesus had to come from some nation or people, and God chose Israel. God first promised the Savior/Messiah after Adam and Eve sinned. Later, God specified that the Messiah would come from the line of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Later still, He narrowed the Messiah’s ancestry to the line of David. Throughout their history, the people of Israel were aware of their “chosen” status before God.

II. WHAT DOES IT MEAN THAT JESUS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS?

Jesus is referred to as the King of the Jews only in the New Testament. It is interesting that only non-Jews used this specific title to describe Jesus, underscoring the truth of John 1:11, which says

John 1:11 (NASB)

¹¹ He came to His own, and His own people did not accept Him.

The title "King of the Jews" had both messianic and political implications. Kings in Israel were anointed with oil as a sign of God's choosing. And remember, the meaning of Messiah is "Anointed One." As the Son of David, the Messiah was chosen by God to fulfill a promise made to David that the Messiah would come from his lineage and the tribe of Judah and would establish a kingdom that would endure forever. When the wise men came to Jerusalem seeking the King of the Jews, they most likely had in mind a future political leader, much to King Herod's chagrin. But the Jews in Jerusalem, hearing the wise men's question, would have thought of the long-awaited Messiah.

During the trial of Jesus, Pilate had asked Him, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

John 18:36-37 (NASB)

³⁶ Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm." ³⁷ Therefore Pilate said to Him, "So You are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say *correctly* that I am a king. For this *purpose* I have been born, and for this I have come into the world: to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to My voice."

The modern day Jews who reject Jesus still interpret the Old Testament prophecies as foretelling an earthly king for Israel. But we understand Jesus to be that King. God had bigger plans than just an earthly kingdom.

III. WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PLACARD ABOVE THE HEAD OF JESUS?

It was customary when someone was to be crucified that they were paraded through town either dragging their own instrument of execution, their own cross; and in front of the person would be a man with a sign, a placard, that would identify the crime; and this was to put fear in the hearts of all the people about violating any Roman law. So Jesus essentially was taken through the city.

The sign itself brings glory to Christ; it's fascinating. Look at verse 19:

John 19:19 (NASB)

¹⁹ Now Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It was written: "JESUS THE NAZARENE, THE KING OF THE JEWS."

There is no crime. Pilate six times said, "I find no fault in this man." He officially declared Him not guilty six separate times. Why is he doing this execution then? Because he has been blackmailed by the Jews. On a number of occasions in his earlier history with them, he did some radically foolish things, irritated them, created riots, reports went back to Rome that he was less than competent as a leader representing Rome. He was afraid that if he made one more big mistake and caused a big riot with the Jews, he would lose his position, and maybe his own life.

Remember! The Jews threatened Him with that back in verse 12:

John 19:12 (NASB)

¹² As a result of this, Pilate made efforts to release Him; but the Jews shouted, saying, "If you release this Man, you are not a friend of Caesar; everyone who makes himself *out to be* a king opposes Caesar!"

So he's blackmailed to do what he knew was wrong. There was no crime, he knew that. He couldn't put a **crime** on the sign, so instead he put on the sign, "**Jesus the Nazarene, the King of the Jews,**" and nailed it over His head on the cross.

It is, first of all, a declaration of our Lord's innocence; there was no crime. But more than that, I don't think Pilate was nearly as concerned about Jesus as he was about the Jewish leaders who really were critical to him being able to maintain a career as a Roman governor. But he had reached a point where he was so infuriated with them that he sought vengeance; and this is his vengeance. He writes, "**Jesus the Nazarene, the King of the Jews.**"

Now he knows that the Jews hate Jesus. They have screamed, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" That was all basically perpetrated and led by the chief priests. This is his moment of vengeance. "**OK! You say He's a king! You say He's a threat to Caesar!**" Then I will put a sign above Him that sarcastically says He is your king! "**Jesus the Nazarene, the King of the Jews.**"

They had even said, "We have no king but Caesar," which was, of course, a hypocritical lie. They refused Jesus as their king, but Pilate is going to identify Him that way: "Jesus the Nazarene." Why does he say that? Because Nazareth was an utterly unimportant, insignificant town above the Sea of Galilee.

Early in the gospel of John, chapter 1, the question came up, "**Can anything good, anything good come out of Nazareth?**" So this Jesus from absolutely nowhere, this weakling, this butchered man.....this is your king.

Pilate's little moment of vengeance infuriated them because everyone could read it.

John 19:20 (NASB)

²⁰ Therefore many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, Latin, *and* in Greek.

So Pilate put it in triplicate:

But in his folly he declares the absolute truth, because this **is** "Jesus the Nazarene, the King of the Jews." He is the Messiah. He is the Anointed One. When He was born, the angel came and declared to His mother Mary that she would have a child who would be a king, who would reign on a throne over an eternal kingdom; and in His infancy wise men came from the east searching for Him as God's King. In fact the people proclaimed Him as King at the beginning of this very week in which He was crucified at His triumphal entry.

John 12:13 (NASB)

¹³ they took the branches of the palm trees and went out to meet Him, and *began* shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, **indeed, the King of Israel!**"

Back in chapter 18 when Pilate asked Jesus if He was a king and Jesus explained that He was a king but of a kingdom not of this world, it went over Pilate's head.

Jesus was a king. He was the King of Israel. He was the King of kings and Lord of lords, the one and only King.

Pilate witlessly, stupidly, and ignorantly has spoken the truth, very much like Caiaphas back in chapter 11 when he was talking about killing Jesus.

John 11:50-53 (NASB)

⁵⁰ nor are you taking into account that it is in your best interest that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation not perish *instead*.” ⁵¹ Now he did not say this on his own, but as he was high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation; ⁵² and not for the nation only, but in order that He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. ⁵³ So from that day on they planned together to kill Him.

What Caiaphas meant by that was that “We need to kill Him to save our nation.” But when he said it, it was a declaration of the meaning of the death of Christ. This is again how God will use the wrath of men to accomplish His will.

John 19:21 (NASB)

²¹ So the chief priests of the Jews were saying to Pilate, “Do not write, ‘The King of the Jews’; rather, *write* that He said, ‘I am King of the Jews.’”

They wanted Pilate to change the wording so that Christ would appear to be an imposter. But Pilate, no doubt relishing their displeasure bluntly refused.

John 19:22 (NASB)

²² Pilate answered, “What I have written, I have written.”

Pilate was more than happy to stick the knife in and turn it for his own momentary vengeance. He unknowingly said the truth, so that the whole world would know for all of human history that “This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” God’s Messiah.

Everyone involved were all ignorant. Pilate didn’t know what he was doing. Jewish rulers didn’t know what they were doing. Peter and John healed a lame beggar which amazed the Jews. Then Peter preached a second sermon to them indicating that he knew that they did not know what they had done.

Acts 3:13-18 (NASB)

¹³ The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus, *the one* whom you handed over and disowned in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release *Him*. ¹⁴ **But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One**, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, ¹⁵ **but put to death the Prince of life**, whom God raised from the dead, *a fact* to which we are witnesses. ¹⁶ And on the basis of faith in His name, *it is* the name of Jesus which has strengthened this man whom you see and know; and the faith which *comes* through Him has given him this perfect health in the presence of you all.

¹⁷ “And now, brothers, **I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers also did.** ¹⁸ But the things which God previously announced by the mouths of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He has fulfilled in this way.

Everybody was ignorant and they all rejected Christ. It came down to a placard above Jesus' head. The sign proclaimed the truth. Here again is an example of God using sinful men to accomplish His sovereign purposes. God was controlling the events to fulfill prophecy laid down in Scripture. God even controlled the making of the sign so that it ended up speaking the truth.

History does not record a crucified Savior with a list of crimes over His head, it records a crucified Savior with the truth over His head: King of the Jews. He is the King not only of Israel, but of all creation who will ultimately declare Him King.

Philippians 2:8-11 (NASB)

⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death: death on a cross. ⁹ For this reason also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and *that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

CONCLUSION:

The Jews are God's chosen people but their physical lineage does not save them.

John 14:6 (NASB)

⁶ Jesus *said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me.

That "no one" includes Jews and Gentiles. For a Jew to be saved, he or she must come to God the Father through faith in Jesus the Messiah. Jesus' death on the cross was for all mankind.

Paul explains that now that Jesus has died for all physical heritage has no value.

Romans 2:28-29 (NASB)

²⁸ For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. ²⁹ But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from people, but from God.

So, being of Jewish descent does not make heaven one's home. Being physically circumcised does not guarantee a place in the kingdom. Only the grace of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, can save.

Yes, the Jews are God's chosen people, and through them came the Jewish Messiah to bless all the nations of the earth. But it is only through Jesus that Jews—or anyone else—can find God's forgiveness.

He is Lord!