

# “Royal Purpose”

John 18.33–38

<sup>33</sup>Therefore Pilate entered again into the Praetorium, and summoned Jesus and said to Him, “Are You the King of the Jews?” <sup>34</sup>Jesus answered, “Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about Me?” <sup>35</sup>Pilate answered, “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You to me; what have You done?” <sup>36</sup>Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then 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.” <sup>37</sup>Therefore Pilate said to Him, “So You are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.” <sup>38</sup>Pilate said to Him, “What is truth?” And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews and said to them, “I find no guilt in Him.” [NASB]

HOPE  
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## I. Hearing

Somebody told Andrew and Andrew heard. “Behold the Lamb of God!”<sup>1.36</sup> Somebody told John and John heard. Somebody told Simon Peter and Simon Peter heard. Somebody told Philip and somebody told Nathanael and Philip and Nathanael heard. When they heard, Jesus told them to examine their hearts, to investigate Him, and to receive Him. They did.

Somebody told Pilate and Pilate heard. “Are You the King of the Jews?”<sup>18.33</sup> Jesus told Pilate to examine his heart, to investigate Christ, and to receive Him. He didn’t.

The Jews in charge of the Jews could find no charge, so they lamely resorted to saying Jesus was an evildoer. They did not persuade Pilate, the Roman governor in charge of Judea. So Pilate went back into his Roman residence, the Praetorium, to hold conference with Jesus. “Are You the King of the Jews?” With his spite for the Jews did Pilate mock Jesus? Did Pilate respect Jesus? Did Pilate fear Jesus? Perhaps Pilate himself did not know... perhaps Pilate did not know himself. We do know that Pilate had heard *about* Jesus, and now Pilate thought he wanted to hear *Jesus*.

Do you want to hear Jesus? It has appeared throughout this Gospel according to John that if you want to hear Jesus, He will lead you to examine what you really want; He will help you to investigate Him, and He will give Himself that you might receive Him. Pilate had heard the Jesus was a King.

## II. Examining

But Jesus does not let us settle with mere hearsay. <sup>34</sup> Jesus answered, “Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about Me?” Jesus knew something about Pilate. Jesus could see inside Pilate’s heart, and knew that something was fluttering there. Pilate had *not* rubber-stamped the Jews’ plans to have Christ crucified. Pilate had forced their hand rather than let them twist his. Yet. Pilate had demanded an accusation. Pilate was stalling. And Jesus was probing. “Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about Me?”

Are you saying that I am a King, or are you just parroting the people? Are you in charge of your conclusions or are they? Examine your heart, Pilate. What do you want? Popularity, or peace? Can a parrot ever be at peace, Pilate? Now the people hail a king... and now “crucify” is all they sing? Repeat one thing one minute and its contradiction the next? Don’t you see, Pilate? The parrot screeches one person’s claim and another’s contradiction, with equal conviction!

Why are you asking if I am a King? You know something about kings, Pilate! You are one yourself. You know the difference between governing the people and being governed by them. You know the difference between protecting the people and seeking protection from them. You know the difference between setting the standard for the people and letting the people set the standard for you. Examine your heart, Pilate. What do you want?

Will you be happy being a parrot, Pilate? Will you be satisfied being a puppet? Does your question come from *you, yourself*, Pilate? Will you accept the answer? Right now, Pilate, you are beginning to recognize that you are not the king. Either the people are your king, or I AM. Can you face that, Pilate? Only a *real* king can face that dilemma. Only a *real* king can face the truth that he himself has a king... and it is either the people... or it is the King of kings.

Hard place for Pilate! Rocks through which he must navigate! Peril on every side! Safety only in a straight and narrow course! Stormy morning is this, and the waves are growing. Pilate does not parrot now, but he does *parry*. Pilate sees Jesus as the wind stirring the waters in his heart... and throws up a wall, a breakwater between himself and the King of kings. A wall

between his kingdom and Christ’s kingdom. <sup>35</sup>Pilate answered, “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You to me; what have You done?”

A wall: “I am not a Jew, am I?” No he wasn’t but... were not the Jews under Pilate’s dominion? A wall: “*Your* people... *Your* priests.” Not his, perhaps but... were not these people and these priests under Pilate’s jurisdiction? Pilate doesn’t parrot, not yet, but he does parry. Like the disciples did in ch1; “Rabbi, where are you staying?”<sup>1.38</sup> Like the woman of Samaria did in ch4; <sup>Jn4.20</sup>“Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.” Jesus probes and they all parry, try to fend off His penetrating questions. Pilate parries and puts up a wall.

### III. Investigating

And now before Him, the God-man Jesus beholds the man... the man who is afraid to be a man. So that’s it. Pilate would rather be a parrot than a man. But Pilate does not even know it yet. From here on Pilate’s path will lead into the cage of a bird. He who could have been free to soar has caged himself inside a wall. It would have been well for him had Jesus remained silent. Jesus does not remain silent. Jesus speaks words that will judge Pilate for being a parrot rather than a king. Pilate will chaff restlessly under these next words for the rest of his life and for the eternity of his death.

For Jesus does not permit Pilate the luxury of ignoring investigation. Pilate is a king. It is unbecoming a king to turn away from knowledge. Every king has a purpose, you see. Every king has the purpose to gather, to govern, to protect, to provide. It is the duty of a king to seek knowledge and wisdom, that he might fulfill his purpose. Jesus examined Pilate’s heart and found it wanting a will to know. Pilate was curious in his mind. Pilate was philosophical in his spirit. But Pilate was wanting in his will.

So Jesus sets before Pilate a path that Pilate will refuse to navigate. Jesus sets before Pilate a path of investigation. Jesus will not tell Pilate much, for Pilate has no will to understand. But the path of investigation will forever taunt Pilate. Had Pilate willingly followed, he would have known pardon and peace. Easily. Quickly. Right there in the Praetorium.

<sup>36</sup>Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then 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.” Do you see what Jesus does here? Jesus declares the difference between His kingdom and Pilate’s kingdom. And there are three differences.

#### A. *Not of this world*

Firstly, Jesus says His kingdom is not of this *world*. His kingdom is not a nationalistic conglomeration of people, land, and resources. His kingdom does not have boundaries, it has no borders to protect with battalions or horses or chariots or tanks or battleships or fighter jets or bombers. His kingdom does not depend upon wealth or economic power. His kingdom does not depend upon greed and it does not depend upon political savvy. His Kingdom does not depend on election... not the kind at the polls, anyway. His kingdom does not even depend upon life... not upon life in this world, anyhow. His Kingdom depends entirely upon Him alone.

#### B. *Not of this place and time*

Secondly, Jesus says His kingdom is not of this *realm*. Not of this *here and now*. Not of this place and time. Quite clearly Jesus is in no hurry to get placed upon a throne. The place and time of His kingdom is not specified. Its very ambiguity lends it transcendence above and beyond the kingdoms of this place and time. Christ’s kingdom is beyond time, making it timeless.

His Kingdom may not always or everywhere be very evident in this place and time... but the day is coming when there shall be no mistaking the splendor of the glorious King and His glorified Kingdom. And there shall be no confusion of realms, of authorities, of principalities, of powers between His Kingdom and the kingdom of this current place and time.

### **C. Not of this principle**

And thirdly, Jesus says His kingdom is not of this *principle*. His servants do not strive or fight to keep their King from being given over to those intent on terminating Him. How can this be? How can His servants not agonize to keep Jesus from being given over to those He came to save—those who have come to kill Him?

The servants of any other beloved king would die to save their ruler. Jesus’ choice of words is striking. Luke records Jesus in Gethsemane “being in *agony* He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground.”<sup>Lk22.44</sup> Earlier Jesus had told His disciples, <sup>Lk13.24</sup>“Strive [agonize] to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.”

The Apostle Paul says he strives, *agonizes* according to Christ’s power which mightily works in him, to present every man complete in Christ. That is, Paul *agonizes* for you to be transformed to *Christ in you, the hope of glory*.<sup>Col1.27ff</sup> He *agonizes* until Christ is formed in you.<sup>Gal4.19</sup> Paul exhorts Timothy to *agonize* the good *agony* of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called.<sup>1Ti6.12</sup>

So now you see what the servants of King Jesus strive for, what they *agonize* for. They do NOT strive or agonize to save their King. His servants were not in a war against Pilate or against the Jews. They were at war against GOD! They were in a war against themselves, against the world *in themselves*, against the sin, rebellion, and treason *in themselves*.

And the ONLY way for them to win that war is for their King to be given over to the Jewish leaders... not withheld from their murderous intent. The ONLY way for Jesus to gather His people and govern them, to protect and provide for them, was to give Himself as a sacrifice on the cross. A sacrifice to satisfy the eternal threat of God’s condemnation against their sins. If our King Jesus does not die on the cross in our place, then perish in our place we must.

So His servants did NOT shout, “God Save the King!” No. They did NOT curse those whom God had chosen to carry out His purposes. No. Rather, like the criminal on the cross next to Jesus, they said to their King, “Jesus, remember me when You come into Your Kingdom.” And He has remembered.

You see then, Jesus’ kingdom was not of this world, not of this time and place, not of this worlds’ principle.

### **IV. Receiving**

Pilate’s vessel is already crashing on the rocks. He will make some half-hearted attempts to save his soul, but to no avail. He is sinking fast. We follow Pilate’s wake through this very dark channel. We sense his impending doom; we sense the impending clash and it is portrayed in the next two statements of the two kings in the Praetorium. Jesus knows that Pilate knows that Jesus is a King. Pilate can’t pinpoint why or how he knows, but know he does.<sup>37</sup>“So You are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.”

We may think of many reasons Jesus has come into the world. He came to seek and to save the lost. He came to destroy the works of the enemy. He came to bring division between citizens of the Kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of hell. He came to give abundant life. He came to do His Father’s will. He came to make His bride, the Church, holy and blameless. But here is the statement beneath all these purposes: He came to bear witness to the Truth.

What is the Truth? The truth is reality the way God sees things. And the way God sees things, is that God promised to His Son Jesus Christ, from all eternity, to give Him an inheritance. And that inheritance consists of every soul for whose sins Christ shed His blood on the cross of the King’s crucifixion, to satisfy God’s holy and righteous Law. Every soul to whom Christ gave His own account of perfect obedience to every smallest dot of God’s holy and righteous Law.

How then, did Christ bear witness to the Truth? Christ bore witness to the Truth of God’s righteousness, justice, and faithful mercy by doing exactly what pleased God, perfectly upholding justice and paying for *all* of our sins and iniquities, and loving us enough to die for us even when we were still His enemies. Jesus testified to the Truth by doing exactly what was needed in order for God to keep His promise of life, blessed eternal life, to all who trust in Christ alone to deliver us from death into life. Jesus testified to the Truth by uniting Himself to... and forming Himself within... all who hear, understand, and embrace the Words of His voice.

What then, was the battle, the demise of Pilate? <sup>38</sup>Pilate said to Him, “What is truth?” And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews and said to them, “I find no guilt in Him.” The Governor judged Jesus guiltless. But he had no foundation for his judgment, because he acknowledged no foundation for truth. “What is truth?” It is a completely reasonable question rhetorically declaring truth itself... assuming there is no God Who tells us how He sees things.

Whether Pilate was biting with sarcasm, plagued with vain philosophies, or just despairing of the lofty knowledge he would have easily attained were he willing to hear Jesus, we don’t know. But here stood a man afraid to be a man, and a Savior Who freely offers the only way for us to be a whole man or a whole woman.

Now do you see why this valley is so dark? Pilate finds himself getting lost in no-man’s land. It is a dangerous place, here in these final hours. Nothing is right. The precarious foundationlessness of all we experience in this world rattles us with this passage. It leads us to read quickly through these sections as we do our Bible laps. We don’t really want to feel how tenuously the world hangs on, as to a spider web over a growing fire.

This is where two kingdoms meet head to head: the kingdom that bears witness to the Truth and the kingdom that turns away saying “What is Truth.” All hope lies in the former; all despair lies in the latter. Pilate acquits and advocates Christ in his mind one moment. But because he has no will governed by the Truth, he will condemn Christ in the next.

There is only one way not to end up like Pilate. And that is, be willing to seek honestly, until you are confident that you are seeing things the way God sees them. Do you see that <sup>Ps25.10</sup>“All the paths of the LORD are lovingkindness and truth to those who keep His covenant and His testimonies”? Do you see that Christ must die for your sins or you must die for your sins? Do you see that quickly despairing of perplexities in life is despairing of Christ’s intent to make all the crooked places of life straight and bring all the insurmountable barriers low?

Take your time. Don’t rush to conclusions. Don’t throw your hands up in despairing perplexity. God will give you as much time as you need. He *is* Truth. And through all your seeking, He is there... with you.