

# The King on Trial

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, I don't know how well any of you might know London. It's a long way from Aberdeen, but it's where I grew up, and I'm pretty sure that I took it for granted while I was there.

But one of the things that you will see plenty of if you walk around London is statues. One of the places you'll see lots of statues is Trafalgar Square.

There are four plinths, huge stone blocks, and most of these plinths are great, huge, larger-than-life statues of kings from the past.

And these kings kind of dominate the square. Their heads lifted high, looking over and above the crowds beneath who kind of crane their necks to see them. But one of the plinths is empty, the fourth plinth.

But for a time around the year 2000, it held a very different kind of statue. It was a statue of a king, but a very different kind of king.

[ 1 : 07 ] Instead of being superhuman, larger than life, he was life-size. Instead of being clothed in armor and robes, he was nearly naked.

And instead of being crowned with a royal crown, he was crowned with a crown of thorns. And the statue was called Ece Homo, which is Latin for the words we've just read, Behold the Man.

Behold the Man. It was made to capture the scene that we've just read out of John's Gospel. Jesus steps out in front of the baying mob, and Pilate the governor says, Here is the man.

And the effect of it is extraordinary. I've got a picture here for us to see. On a plinth that you can see, it's very clearly made to hold a much grander and larger than life figure, stands the man.

A king. But not nearly the same kind of king. And that statue was later moved, actually to the stairs outside St. Paul's Cathedral.

[ 2 : 18 ] And the effect of that is really startling, I think, because it captures what it may have looked like, I suppose, to see Jesus standing outside Pilate's palace, waiting to be condemned.

And the true king was put on trial. But in a great twist, we see that in his trial, Jesus is vindicated. He is seen to be who he is, God's true king.

And the question that John would put to us this morning is, do we see it? Do we see it? Past the interrogation, past the shouting of the crowds, past the crown of thorns, do we see the true king sent from God?

How do we respond to him as we see him? And to help us answer that question, those questions, we're going to think and see why John thinks that Jesus is the true king.

So our first point then, simply, is Jesus king? Is he king? Now that's the question that we find at the heart of his trial. We see that in verse 33.

[ 3 : 31 ] Pilate went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, are you the king of the Jews? So this whole scene, this whole interrogation, centers on who Jesus is, his identity.

And that is basic to our faith, isn't it? If we don't know who he is, if we don't see him clearly, how can we possibly know him, or follow him?

So is Jesus the king from God? We'll notice that Jesus himself doesn't answer straight away with a simple yes or no. Instead he asks a question of his own.

Is that your own idea, Jesus asked, or did others talk to ye about me? Now if he is the king, perhaps we're wondering, why not just come out and say so?

This whole conversation can feel frustratingly cryptic, can't it? Why so many twists and turns before we settle on an answer? Because first, they need to agree what kind of king it is that they're talking about.

[ 4 : 41 ] You've probably been part of a conversation like this, where people are using the same words, but talking about two totally different things. And you can go on like that for ages, can't you?

Talking past each other and thinking, this person is just not getting what I'm saying. It's kind of classic misunderstanding. And that's what Jesus is wanting to avoid when he asks this question. Is that your idea? Or has someone told you? Because throughout this gospel, we've seen that people have fundamentally misunderstood what Jesus has meant when he has claimed to be king. What they have wanted from him is not what he has come to give. They wanted him to meet only their physical needs. And when he did that, when he fed the 5,000, for example, miraculously with bread, well, instead of following that sign to where it pointed to his identity as the son of God, well, they kept coming back to him for more food to fill their tummies like a McDonald's drive-thru. You're looking for me, he said, not because you saw the signs I performed, but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. They only wanted another meal, another sign, but they didn't want the real Jesus.

[ 6 : 10 ] They didn't want the person that the sign pointed to. What is it that they should have come to Jesus for? What is it he came to give? Don't work for the food that spoils, he said, but for the food that endures to eternal life that the Son of Man will give you.

Jesus came to give us not a bit more of the same life, not another few years on this earth, but new and everlasting and eternal life.

And I guess under their physical needs, maybe we could put political needs because the people have showed that same misunderstanding of him when John writes they intended to come and make him king by force.

You stick a crown on his head, put him over them, but Jesus, again, withdrew from them. Why? Because he is not a worldly or political ruler or do-gooder.

He says he is the king come from God to give eternal life. And that basic misunderstanding then about what kind of king the Lord Jesus is is run all the way through this gospel, but now the time has come for us to get our wires uncrossed once and for all.

[ 7 : 40 ] And so, Pilate, when you ask whether I'm a king, says Jesus, what exactly are you asking? Is it your idea of a king or is it their idea of a king or is it my idea of a king?

Verse 36 gives us Jesus' definition of himself as king. It's different from these other ideas. Jesus said, my kingdom is not of this world.

If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest, but now my kingdom is from another place. It is not a worldly kingdom with visible kind of power or physical force.

He is not the kind of king that we can put on the throne to meet our physical or political needs in this world because his kingdom is not of this world. It's something totally different.

So, you are a king then, says Pilate. Well, says Jesus, you're calling me that. See, he's just resisting, isn't he? Any attempt to define him in any terms other than his own.

[ 8 : 53 ] He's not willing for us to slap our own opinions on him, to kind of squeeze him into our own set of categories. I'm only here, he says, to tell the truth.

And this is really important if you just glance at the end of verse 37 where he says, everyone on the side of truth listens to me. We need to listen to Jesus to understand who he is, what kind of king.

So, is Jesus king? Well, John wants us to see the answer is yes, but. Yes, Jesus is king.

He says he is. He has a kingdom. But, but he is not the kind of king that we often mistake him to be. A king like the nations have.

A king like the kind of rulers we see around us in our world. He is not a king who came to sort out our lives, to take us out of danger.

[ 10 : 06 ] A king who passes laws or who defends us with force or who comforts, provides comfort for us. There are two ways, aren't there, to get Jesus wrong.

I suppose to think on the one hand, you know, he doesn't look much like a king. He doesn't dominate, he's not superhuman, not clothed with power and riches, and so to write him off completely, you say he cannot be God's king.

And it's possible you're here today, you do feel like that, but more likely if we're here, we can get Jesus wrong in quite a different way, because we can also get Jesus wrong by saying, yes, he is a king, but then fill that word with our own ideas, and so call him a king, and yet still not truly know him.

And maybe that is us too. But I would suggest that in the end, the only difference between those who kind of write him off and those who call him king but don't fully understand what that means, those who write him off don't suffer disappointment, whereas those who trust in him to be

something he isn't will at some point be deeply disillusioned by Jesus, because they're trusting in him to be something that he never said he would be, promised to be.

And friends, this morning, Jesus would not have us make either of those mistakes. He doesn't want us to be in that confusion. Both mistakes lead away from him, but by different paths.

[ 11 : 47 ] One is the longer way around, but it still ends in the same place, and that is unbelief. So yes, Jesus is king, but his kingdom is not of this world.

And so to see him as he is, we need to put away our own ideas of what a king should be, should do, should say, and instead come to Jesus and listen carefully to him.

You know, nobody claims not to want to know the truth, do they? And so if we want to know the truth about Jesus, well, Jesus says we need to listen to him. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me, he says.

It's an incredible thing to say, isn't it? You're only someone from God, who is God, could claim to be the sole source of truth. truth. So we need to listen to him.

And there's one unlikely person in this chapter who does exactly that. I think John shows us this, so that we can see someone. He wants the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, and listens to Jesus.

[ 13 : 01 ] So this is our second point, and Pilate is convinced. Pilate is convinced. Now it's quite rare, isn't it, to watch someone change their mind.

Normally because it takes a long time. Often that change doesn't come in an instant. But usually also because we don't like to be seen, to change our views.

We don't want to be seen to be wrong. And so we tend not to show people that we've kind of changed our point of view. We're proud and we don't like admitting that we have been wrong.

And that pride can, of course, be a barrier for people to stop them coming to Jesus. But it's important that we do see Pilate's mind changing through this section, from a disbelieving cynic to someone who genuinely recognizes Jesus as God's king.

So follow this change then with me. It starts with his famous question there in verse 38. What is truth? What is truth?

[ 14 : 11 ] So this point at the start, he just has zero interest in listening to Jesus. He has no desire to find out in any way who he is. But that begins to change.

See, three times Pilate comes and says to the crowd, I find no basis for any charge against him. He says that in verse 38. And verse 4 and verse 6.

Now bear in mind, Pilate's the equivalent of a supreme court judge who have taken Jesus to the local sheriff court where he's been tried by the chief priest, the religious rulers, but they don't have authority to pass a death sentence.

So now they've taken their case to the next highest court, if you like, to have it settled by the Roman governor, by this guy Pontius Pilate. So when he says, I find no basis for any charge against him, he's not just giving his personal opinion, he's giving a legal verdict, legally clearing Jesus, any wrongdoing.

Notice that he's not saying, I've tried him and found him innocent. He's saying there's actually nothing in him that even merits a trial, let alone a verdict.

[ 15 : 31 ] I find no basis for any charge that stands against him. He is clean, and he says it three times. Now the first time, Pilate doesn't seem overly fussed about what comes of Jesus.

He falls back on a custom in which he might release a prisoner to the crowd at the Passover, but when the crowd says no, we read verse 1 that he took Jesus and had him flogged.

Now if nothing else, that just shows Pilate's contempt for Jesus. He's not trying very hard, is he, with this case? It's possible that the flogging is an attempt to keep the crowd happy, kind of satisfy their anger so that he wouldn't have to do anything worse.

The fact that Pilate himself, so reluctant to have Jesus crucified, suggests that he hopes that this kind of simple beating and humiliation will be enough to settle the issue.

So he was just flexing his muscles, trying to show who is who's in control. But it quickly becomes clear that Pilate is not in control.

[ 16 : 43 ] What he wants, after all, verse 4, is to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against him. Seeing Jesus brought out, dressed as a king, the situation quickly unravels.

at first, the crowd smelled blood in the water, and they go in for the kill. As soon as the chief priests and officials saw him, they shouted, crucify, crucify.

So, Pilate's whole plan has backfired, hasn't it? Instead of caving at this point, interesting that it's then that Pilate begins to see what is at stake, who this is.

We have a law, says the crowd, and according to that law, he must die, because he claims to be the son of God. And, verse 8, when Pilate heard it, he was even more afraid.

The penny begins to drop. More afraid. He was afraid of the crowd. Now he is afraid of someone else, which brings him back inside the palace with a new question for Jesus.

[ 17 : 51 ] Where do you come from? He's beginning to twig that this might not just be a troublemaker dressed as a king, but perhaps could be someone from God.

Jesus says, you would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. And I think this is what turns the tide for Pilate.

Because when he asks Jesus straight, who are you, where do you come from? And he listens to Jesus' answer, he realizes that he's speaking with somebody who can talk authoritatively about things above, from a higher throne, about God himself.

Pilate thinks that he is the boss holding all the power, but the way that Jesus answers, or doesn't answer, gives him the strange sense that he is not in control, and that he's actually in the presence of a higher authority, and a true king from God.

Because from then on, verse 12, Pilate tried to set Jesus free. And at the climax of his recognition, it's there in verse 14, what does he say?

[ 19 : 11 ] He sits in the throne of judgment to give his final legal verdict, and says, here is your king. not simply here is the man, here is your king.

That is his verdict on Jesus. He's gone from someone who mocks the idea of truth to someone who comes out with the truth, that Jesus is the true king from God.

And friends, John wants us to see that kind of change in Pilate, from one thing to the other, because that is what happens when we listen to Jesus. We come face to face with a king from God, who's not like anyone that we have ever met, whose very being and way that he speaks and what he says impresses on us the truthfulness of what he says, who he is.

And all of that should make us ask ourselves, I guess, are we kind of prepared to go through that change of heart, that change of mind? Are we prepared to come face to face with Jesus and listen to him?

Are we prepared to see Jesus as he wants us to see him? And see him as he is? That change is possible. That's what Pilate shows us.

[ 20 : 36 ] The unlikeliest person in the scene proves it is possible. It should be the crowd, shouldn't it, who recognizes their king, but they don't. Instead, it is the governor. The Roman governor who changes his mind.

More than that, he is the judge who uncovers the truth. His official finding, his legal verdict, is that Jesus is blameless, spotless, pure.

There's nothing on him, for he is their true king. king. Now, that is costly for Pilate. He has the most to lose from seeing Jesus as he is.

And indeed, he doesn't actually cash in, does he? In the end, he does give him over to be crucified. But his verdict stands, and that truth doesn't change, that through his trial, Jesus is found to be the righteous king from God by the unlikeliest person who is likely to recognize him.

And that recognition flips this whole scene, doesn't it? Jesus has been put on trial, but if he is their king, well then, you would expect for him to be trying them.

[ 21 : 52 ] And that is the next thing John wants us to see. Thirdly, that the crowd is condemned. The crowd is condemned. See, there's no kind of neutral point of view in the scene.

Pilate tried to stand back from the issue. He failed because he couldn't before Jesus. But even the crowd can't pretend to be neutral spectators.

They want Jesus executed. There's no getting around that, is there? It was verse 30. Pilate asks, what charges are you bringing against him?

Well, there are no charges. If he were not a criminal, they replied, we wouldn't have brought him. We've arrested him, so he must be guilty. It's senseless. The most revealing things that they say here in verses 7 and 15 of chapter 19.

Firstly, verse 7, they confess that the real reason they want Jesus dead is because he claims to be the Son of God. Pilate sits on the throne of judgment, tells them with full weight of his office that Jesus is their king.

[ 23 : 04 ] He said he was their king. How interested are they in that claim? Well, they are not. It's a tragic moment. It's a tragic thing to see, but it's what John has been building up to from the beginning, that he came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

And this is where ultimately that curtain is drawn back across the hearts of his people for us to see that they would rather crucify the Son of God than to recognize him or submit to him or worship him. And if that sounds harsh on them, well, verse 15 is a bit of a reality check, isn't it? Pilate says, shall I crucify your king? And they reply, the chief priests, we have no king but Caesar.

So the religious rulers would rather have a worldly king, a Caesar, than the king from God. And those words bring us full circle, don't they?

Because this is exactly what God's people had always said from the beginning of God's kingdom. It's what we heard earlier in our service. We want a king like the nations, said Israel.

[ 24 : 21 ] With the result, says God, that they have rejected me as their king. Here we see that just nothing has changed. Nothing has changed in their hearts.

They still reject God as their king in favor of a worldly Caesar. When the Son of God was held out to them, they chose a rebel and put the Son of God on the cross.

God is condemned by this trial, but the crowd who was put on trial by Jesus. I wonder how would we have come out of that trial on that day?

Perhaps for some of us, we have that same kind of trade-off going on in our hearts. Perhaps you have decided quietly even that Jesus is not your kind of king.

Perhaps he's okay for a Sunday, but not on a Monday. On a Monday, I would rather have Caesar, the Caesar perhaps of my work, my boyfriend or girlfriend, of my family, of followers online, of my politics.

[ 25 : 38 ] I'd rather have those things rule my life and my choices and my heart than Jesus. While we'd love to think those things could kind of power share with Christ, when we're beholding the king, face to face with him, and face with the choice of whether we would have him rule us, or put him on the cross, well, what do we do?

When our hearts are open before him, our desires exposed, do we find ourselves crying, crown him, or crucify? And before we answer that question too quickly, notice that no one in the scene, no one, not the crowd, not Pilate, not Jesus' disciples, no one chooses to crown him king.

So, brothers and sisters, would we have done any differently? Well, nothing here gives us any reason to think that we would have. It reminds us that it was not someone else's sin that sent Jesus to the cross.

It was all our sin, it was yours, it was mine. This is why Jesus was crucified, because we all once rejected him. God and that is the biggest twist of all here, isn't it?

Jesus is found to be the king from God, Pilate is convinced of his innocence, the crowd is condemned, and yet for all of that, Jesus is still crucified. Why is he crucified?

[ 27 : 13 ] Well, we see because he had to be. This is our final point. Jesus is crucified. Why? If he was innocent, of all charges brought against him, why if he was cleared of any wrongdoing, does Jesus still go to the cross?

On the one hand, it is the most unjust and evil thing that has ever happened. People killed God's king in cold blood, and yet on the other hand, you need to reflect on the fact that it is still the greatest and best thing that has ever happened.

Why? Because Jesus died as our true king. Who he is is so key to what he did, because he died not as simply a man, but as God's king, as our representative.

He died a legal death. That's what John means there in verse 32 of chapter 18. You have no right to execute anyone, they objected. John says this took place to fulfill what Jesus had said about the kind of death he was going to die.

What kind of death? Well, an execution, a legal condemnation, a legal death for crimes that he did not commit. And he did so as our representative, our king.

[ 28 : 40 ] The king stands for his people. That is ultimately how our wrongs, our sins, could be counted against him, that he could take the penalty instead of us, because as our king, he can stand before God and represent us, his people.

See, at what point does Jesus' death become a legal inevitability in this trial, when he's brought out dressed in a purple robe and with a crown of thorns and presented to his people as their king?

It was at that point that his death becomes a foregone conclusion as they cry out, crucify. His robe and his crown are a mockery of him, and yet they reveal, don't they, the truth about him, that he would go to his death not simply a man, but the king.

And not only as the king, but as a suffering king, a suffering servant. It's not hard for us to see Jesus at this very point beaten and humiliated and despised and rejected.

The one who was promised so long ago in Isaiah, chapter 53. We had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we would desire him.

[ 30 : 08 ] He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering and familiar with pain. Surely he took up our pain, bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him and afflicted.

But he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was on him and by his wounds we are healed.

We all, like sheep, have gone astray. Each of us turned to his own way and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

A suffering servant, a royal representative, a crucified king. The death he died, he died as a punishment, yet not for sins that he had committed or wrongs he had done, but for the sins of his people and the wrongs that we have done.

And so John invites us today to see then in him, your rightful king, and to rightly respond to him, to crown King Jesus in your heart, to bow before him, to look at him and stand in awe of him, to put your trust in him.

[ 31 : 36 ] You today make him your king, let him be your representative, your rescuer from the penalty for your sins. For he took the death that we all deserve before God as our one true king.

That is why he came, and that is why he died. Let's worship him now as we pray together. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray.

Let's pray. Let's pray. God, our Father, how we thank you for Jesus.

How we thank you that he stood silently before his accusers. How we thank you that when he was brought out, robed and crowned as king, it was a crown of thorns, and that the robe disguised his wounds.

Lord, inflicted for our wrongs. How we thank you that he did not resist, but went willingly to the cross to die the death that we each deserve for our sins.

[ 32 : 53 ] Father, how we thank you that he is the king that he is. And we pray, our Father, that you by your spirit would help us to see him as he is. Lord, not to think of him as our personal self-designed king.

Lord, who we think he is, who we believe he is, or who we want him to be, but who he truly is. The king who saves. And Lord, seeing him as he is, help us to put our trust in him today.

Lord, how we thank you for him, that he died and rose again, and that he lives forever to make intercession for those who draw near to ye through him. And so we do, Father, this morning, draw near to ye through him, through his death, and pray, Lord, that ye would forgive.

For we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.