

John 18:28-40
“My Kingdom is Not of This World”
 Pastor Jason Van Bommel

28 Then they led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the governor's headquarters.^[1] It was early morning. They themselves did not enter the governor's headquarters, so that they would not be defiled, but could eat the Passover. 29 So Pilate went outside to them and said, “What accusation do you bring against this man?” 30 They answered him, “If this man were not doing evil, we would not have delivered him over to you.” 31 Pilate said to them, “Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law.” The Jews said to him, “It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death.” 32 This was to fulfill the word that Jesus had spoken to show by what kind of death he was going to die.

33 So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” 34 Jesus answered, “Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?” 35 Pilate answered, “Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?” 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.” 37 Then Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.” 38 Pilate said to him, “What is truth?”

After he had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, “I find no guilt in him. 39 But you have a custom that I should release one man for you at the Passover. So do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?” 40 They cried out again, “Not this man, but Barabbas!” Now Barabbas was a robber.

Introduction: A King Not from the World

From time-to-time, I enjoy the escape of a good superhero movie. One of my early childhood memories was my dad taking me to see Superman 2 in the theaters in 1980. I was six years old, and I was bouncing with excitement in the front seat of the car – bouncing so excitedly, in fact, that I hit my head on the windshield of our 1973 Oldsmobile Vista Cruiser station wagon. A great classic moment in many superhero movies comes when a mere mortal has an encounter with a superhero and realizes they're not dealing with a normal person. Someone punches Superman in the stomach and hurts their hand. The look on their face at that moment is great as they slowly realize they're in way over their head and don't know what to do.

Pilate kind of has this kind of encounter with Jesus. As he questions this rabbi from Galilee, it slowly dawns on him that this is no ordinary man, and he doesn't know what to do. Normally, he would have no problem executing an innocent man to appease the Jewish religious leaders. Keeping peace with the Jewish leadership was much more important than the life of one innocent man – at least, according to Pilate's political calculus. But here is a man unlike any other who has ever stood before Pilate, and Pilate knows it. So, what is he going to do?

Well, we know what Pilate is going to do. Today, let's look at what Jesus says to Pilate about Himself, what Jesus means by what He says, what this should have meant to Pilate, and what it must mean for us, if we're to hear the voice of Jesus and follow Him today.

In verse 36, Jesus tells Pilate, “*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.*” We can see clearly from this verse several things:

1. Jesus is a king.
2. Jesus is not a king like Caesar in Rome or like Herod in Galilee. His kingdom is fundamentally different. Jesus’ kingdom is different in its nature – It is not **OF** the world – that is, it is not worldly.
3. Jesus’ kingdom is different in its origin. It is not **FROM** the world.
4. The values of Jesus’ kingdom are different. If they weren’t different, then His followers would have been fighting to prevent His capture by the Jews. But when Peter swung His sword, Jesus told him to put it away, because the values of Jesus’ kingdom are different.

So, these four things are clear from Jesus’ words here in verse 36, although to flesh out what these four things mean, we’ll need to look in the rest of John’s Gospel. When we do, we find we can add another truth about Jesus’ kingdom: The glory of His kingdom is not temporal but eternal, not earthly and passing but heavenly and everlasting. We’re going to explore these aspects of Jesus’ kingdom and consider what Jesus’ kingdom means for us today, living in America in 2018.

I. Nature: Worldly vs. Heavenly - Jesus’ kingdom is not worldly. It is not **OF** the world. It has no geo-political boundaries. It has no capital city or worldwide headquarters, despite the attempts by some to establish such things. Jesus’ kingdom is of an entirely different nature.

This first point, the nature of the kingdom, is really fleshed out in the other aspects of His kingdom. But if we look all the way back at the beginning of John’s Gospel, we can see that this truth about Jesus’ kingdom has been a major theme of this book from the opening chapter:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴ In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸ He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

⁹ The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

Can you hear the stark contrast between the Word, who is eternal and full of the light of life and the true witness of John to the light vs. the darkness and rejection and fleshly nature of this fallen world? Jesus’ kingdom is light shining in the darkness. Jesus’ kingdom is life entering into a world of death. Jesus’ kingdom is the word of truth in a world of lies that is eager to reject the truth. Jesus’ kingdom is eternal, the kingdom of the Word, who

was in the beginning with God and who was God, coming into a world of time. Jesus' kingdom is a kingdom of faith, where all who believe have life in His name. It's hard to imagine a more stark and meaningful contrast, and of course Jesus continues to draw this contrast for us throughout His earthly ministry.

II. Origin: Natural vs. From Above

A kingdom that is not OF the world does not have its origins in the world, and those who belong to this kingdom don't enter it by fleshly birth into it either. Jesus tried explaining this to Nicodemus in John 3, when Nicodemus came to see Jesus in the middle of the night. Jesus told him, "*Unless you are born again, you cannot see the kingdom of God.*" (John 3:3)

Nicodemus, of course, was confused. He asked,

*"How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"*⁵ Jesus answered, "*Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' ⁸ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.*"

I have a US passport. It states that I was born in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. I'm a US citizen because I was born here, and the 14th Amendment to the US Constitution says, "*All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the state wherein they reside.*" All of my children were born in the State of Maryland, and so they are native-born Americans and native-born Marylanders, as is Beth.

But becoming a citizen of Jesus' kingdom requires having the same origin as Jesus' kingdom itself. Jesus' kingdom comes from above into the world, and so those who truly belong to His kingdom eternally must be born from above, born again by the Spirit.

How do you know if you've been born again by the Spirit? The answer in both John 1 and John 3 is the same: Do you believe in Jesus? Have you received Him as your Lord and Savior and are you resting in Him alone for salvation?

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God – John 1:12-13, ESV

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. – John 3:14-18, ESV

For Pontius Pilate interrogating Jesus, he needed to know that Jesus' kingdom was coming from heaven, sent by God. Thus, Jesus would not use worldly means to establish His kingdom, like leading an armed rebellion against Rome. On the other hand, because Jesus' kingdom is from above, Pilate was powerless to stop it from coming. Earthly power – physical force – is powerless against the heaven-sent kingdom of Jesus.

For those of us who know that we are born again from above and are citizens of Jesus' heavenly kingdom, we need to be reminded that we cannot advance Jesus' kingdom by the normal means by which kingdoms are established and advanced. In the past, Christians thought they could advance the kingdom of God on earth by force. Charlemagne, or Charles the Great, the first Holy Roman Emperor, crowned with this title by the Pope on Christmas Day in the year 800, did many great things – establishing schools, reforming the ministry of the priests, etc. But he thought he could advance the kingdom of God by the means most familiar to him, the sword. His grandfather, Charles Martel, or Charles the Hammer, had repulsed the Muslim invasion of Europe at the Battle of Tours in 732. So, Charlemagne figured that what worked for his grandfather could work for him, too. He conquered the Saxons, a brutal barbaric tribe in northern Germany, and forced them to convert to Christianity at the point of the sword. Then, he later invaded Spain, hoping to overthrow the Moorish Muslim rule, but he was defeated.

Today, few Christians are tempted to advance the kingdom of God by violent means. Instead, we choose the worldly means most familiar to us – marketing, advertising, seeker-driven worship services. In place of the covenantal worship of God's people, many churches have embraced a model that basically looks like a half-hour sing-along rock concert, complete with smoke and lights and lasers, followed by a slick motivational speaker giving practical advice on how to have a better life. But God's kingdom comes from above, sent from heaven by God through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Consider what the Apostle Paul said about the advance of the kingdom of God in I Corinthians 1:18-25 –

For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written,

*“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”*

Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

III. Values: Power vs. Truth

But the reason why we need to be careful to avoid worldly ways of seeking to advance God's kingdom is not just because the origin of Jesus' kingdom is from above and not from the world. After all, God clearly can and does use human means to advance His kingdom. While the kingdom comes to human hearts through the Holy

Spirit, who causes people to be born again, Christ is pleased to send human beings as His ambassadors and the Holy Spirit is pleased to use these ambassadors as His instruments to save His own.

A key reason why we need to stay away from reliance on clever human tactics for advancing Jesus' kingdom is the stark difference between the values of the kingdom of God and the kingdoms of men. Earthly rulers like Pontius Pilate understand and value power, the ability to accomplish your agenda. Earthly power-brokers know that power can be more effectively gained and advanced through persuasion – even manipulative persuasion – and see the use of brutal force as a last-option alternative. Salesmanship and diplomacy and the right use of monetary funds are all well-known and highly-prized means of gaining power in the world's value system.

But in Jesus' kingdom, truth is much more valuable than earthly power. Speaking the truth in love, faithfully testifying to what God has revealed, is so much more important than being able to accomplish what you want to accomplish, advancing your human agenda. Thus, eleven of the twelve Apostles were killed for their faith, and John – the last living Apostle – was exiled to the Island of Patmos. From a human perspective, this initial group of leaders in Jesus' kingdom looked like absolute failures. Yet by being faithful to Christ and to speaking His truth, they accomplished much more than any subsequent generation of Christian leaders, taking the Gospel to India in the East, Ethiopia in the South, Spain in the West, and to the inner circles of Caesar's household in Rome, even to the imperial guard itself. It was not their agenda but the Great Commission Jesus had given them which drove them

This is what had confused Pontius Pilate so deeply: He wanted to know what Jesus' real agenda was, and Jesus responded by talking about truth. People in positions of worldly power use information as a tool to advance their cause, their agenda. Seeing themselves as living in service to the truth is so backward and upside down that they can't comprehend it.

So, will we value the truth more than power? In our world, we are saturated with information, which bombards us all the time. We are naturally prone to confirmation bias, giving credibility to those pieces of information which agree with the conclusions we have already drawn or the agenda we're already pursuing, and we tend to be blind to that which challenges our assumptions and would upset our agenda. God is calling us to faithfully testify to the truth, His truth, the eternal and unchanging and life-changing truth of Jesus and His kingdom.

In order to really do this faithfully, we need to not only value truth more than power, but we need to change how we view other people and what we see as the goal of our lives.

IV. Others: Victory vs. Love

In the world's framework, other people are either allies or enemies. The goal is victory, and other people are either working with us to achieve victory or else they are standing in our way and we need to defeat them.

Jesus challenges the world's way of viewing other people. Now, Jesus did say things like, "*Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.*" (Matthew 12:30) But He also told us to love our enemies, bless those who curse us, and pray for those who persecute us. Jesus had compassion on the crowds, and His compassion moved Him to teach them the truth and to heal and feed them. He never returned hatred for hatred, but He always overcame evil with good and loved His enemies to the end. Even on the cross in

agony, Jesus prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” The first martyr, Stephen, imitated Christ as he was being stoned, praying, “Lord, don’t hold this sin against them.”

The Bible tells us that all people are made in the image of God, and that we are called to love everyone – our enemies, our neighbors, and our brothers and sisters in the kingdom of God. The world is always dividing people up into camps of “us” vs. “them” – sometimes in fun, like Ravens fans vs Steelers fans, but at other times in violent and angry opposition because of social, cultural, and political differences.

It is not an accident that Jesus’ twelve disciples included Matthew, a Roman tax collector, and Simon the Zealot, or Simon the Canaanite, who was part of the radical Jewish independence movement. These two men were at opposite ends of the political spectrum, but Jesus called them both to follow Him, lay aside their earthly political priorities, love each other, and proclaim the Gospel. Ironically, Matthew, the Roman tax collector, ends up writing the most Jewish of the four Gospels.

In the early church in Antioch, the leadership team looked like this: “Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.” – Acts 13:1 This was an ethnically and politically diverse group of leaders – a former Pharisee, a lifelong friend of Herod, who had just killed James, a black man, a North African, and Banabas, who was from Cyprus. This is a leadership team only the Holy Spirit could put together.

V. Glory: Temporal vs. Eternal

How could such a diverse group of men work together effectively to lead the church? It’s because they all had the same goal. These men were not seeking earthly, temporary glory. They were striving after the heavenly glory of Christ.

Paul expressed this powerfully in Philippians 3:2-14

Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. ³ For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh— ⁴ though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. ⁷ But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— ¹⁰ that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

¹² Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³ Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Is that our goal? We cannot aim for anything less.

Conclusion: Only One Master, Only One Glory

So, Jesus' kingdom is not of this world. It is different in every way. Its nature and origin are from heaven, it values truth over power, loves other people as made in God's image, and seeks heavenly and eternal glory and not earthly, temporary glory.

As believers, we do live with a foot in each realm, the earthly and the heavenly. We are Americans and we are Christians. We are creatures shaped by our culture and believers redeemed by Christ. Yet while we live with one foot in each realm, our heart must not be so divided. We do need to pay our taxes, honor our leaders, participate in our culture, and seek the common good of our neighbors and our community. But we do so as those who belong body and soul in life and in death to our faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. We are His while we are here, until we are home with Him forever.

For the Apostle Paul, he could quote great Greek poets to the Greek philosophers on Mars Hill in Athens. He could also appeal to his rights as a Roman citizen when he was being beaten unjustly or his life was threatened. For John, he could use his connection to the High Priest's family to gain access for himself and Peter to the courtyard of the palace complex where Jesus was on trial. Luke used his skills as a historian to conduct interviews and his education as a doctor to craft highly detailed accounts in his Gospel and in Acts. These men did not deny their backgrounds, education, citizenship, or cultural context.

But when push comes to shove, and it often does, we can live ultimately for only one kingdom. We can serve only one Master. So who will it be? What kingdom will rule our hearts?

When Paul, the Roman citizen, wrote to Philippi, a Roman colony whose citizens prized themselves on their Roman citizenship, he made it clear what they all, as Roman citizens, needed to value most –

*But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.
(Philippians 3:20)*

Will we embrace the same perspective?