

### **Providence, Presidents, and Prayer for Them**

John 19:19: *Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." <sup>20</sup> Many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Aramaic, in Latin, and in Greek. <sup>21</sup> So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but rather, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.' " <sup>22</sup> Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written." <sup>23</sup> When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom, <sup>24</sup> so they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be." This was to fulfill the Scripture which says, "They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots." So the soldiers did these things... [this is the word of our living sovereign God]*

In the original context, the 1st century Jewish government's conservative and liberal parties and their supreme court had ruled contrary to God's law in Jn 18 voting against Jesus. Their judicial system was founded on the 10 commandments but now they rejected their Lawgiver and Lord in Jn 18-19 and tried to do away with Christ and His Word through their secular govt.

In Jn 19, v. 12 and v. 15 we see Israel's religious right willing to say or do anything politically, while abandoning what should have been their hope spiritually. History tells us Pilate was a government leader elected by Rome but disliked by many he governed, a politician deficient in character and conviction, a leader who said and did unwise things and was untrustworthy (sound familiar?). But in Jn 19 we also see human government and God's sovereign governing of all things side-by-side. We see the secular state, represented by Caesar, a spiritual kingdom represented by the Savior, and how they intersect. We see sinful government at work in Jn 19 and we see a sovereign God at work, fulfilling His purposes, which should give us hope.

Herod's motive was he wanted to see a miracle, but Jesus did no works for Herod and had no words for him, so Herod sends back to Pilate. Israel's religious leaders had their own motive, to put an end to Jesus once and for all. The motive of the chief priests included saving a money-making temple business that Jesus overturned. The Pharisee's motive was saving face and their false religion and followers. Pilate's motive was political, his personal career. But through it all, there's a divine motive overriding and overruling everything else, Jesus sovereignly fulfills His plan for sinners by sinners.

**Notice with me first: The Lord's sovereignty over sinful government**

In v. 19 Pilate writes an inscription - the Greek word is *titlos* (title): *Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews*. Historical writings tell us criminals at times were paraded by Rome around with a sign on a placard, sometimes hanging around their neck, stating his crime (terrorist, treason, sedition, etc.). It was the government's way to publically shame and put on notice any others that crime doesn't pay, you pay for it. So when v. 17 says Jesus went out bearing his cross, He probably had that very sign parading before Him as He was led down the streets of Jerusalem, the Via Dolorosa, carrying a crossbeam to its horizontal base beam at Calvary. In v. 18 they crucify Jesus between 2 other criminals, whose placards might have said robber or insurrectionist or murderer. They're probably partners in crime to Barabbas who's supposed to be in the middle, but the crowd called for Jesus to take his place. So Jesus dies in the place of Barabbas, the King dies for and instead of the criminal.

It may be the sign they prepared for Barabbas' cross had to be swapped out. There was no crime on the sign above our Lord, Pilate declared Jesus 3x to be innocent of any crime, and even in what the pagan governor wrote, our sovereign King is seen to be the righteous dying as a substitute for sinners. We have a long list of crimes with our names. Our sins could never fit on a sign, the record of our trespassing God's law and legal demands hangs over our head, but for all who look in faith to King Jesus on the cross, Paul says in Col 2:14 God forgives *'us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.'* I love that picture: Jesus takes what we were guilty of and deserving death for, He takes what hangs over us and our obvious violations of God's law, and nails it to His cross so He dies for our crimes against God. The Nazarene King is sovereignly doing far more than Pontius Pilate meant.

We keep reading in v. 20 that many of the Jews read the sign over Jesus, as the place where He was crucified was near the city. Crucifixions were done often on major roads coming into a city, for all coming and going to see.

Notice v. 20 also adds that the title is written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek.

*Aramaic* - language of the Hebrews, language of the Jewish religion

*Latin* - language of the Romans, language of the pagan government

*Greek* - language of the culture, commonly read and spoken by all

He said earlier: *so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world...* [3:16, Jn 12:32 adds] *I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.*

<sup>33</sup> *He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.*

Jesus was lifted up from earth on a cross to draw all nations, tribes, tongues. If you've never trusted Jesus as King and Savior, may He draw you today. Don't reject Him like the religious people did. Not everyone thought the sign was good. v. 21 says: *the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but rather, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.' "* <sup>22</sup> *Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written."*

Pilate probably said that for his own sinful motive of insulting Jewish priests who in v. 12 and v. 15 had had politically outplayed the politician of Rome, so his jab back is to say this guy *is* king of the Jews and these priests. Carson: 'Doubtless [Pilate's] own sense of powerlessness before their manipulation (v. 12) contributed to his unyielding insistence that the wording remain...his last revenge. And so he stands firm. Thus Pilate's firmness is not motivated by principle and strength of character, but by hurt obstinacy...determined to humiliate those who have humiliated him...But at a third level, Pilate's malice serves God's ends. The Lord Jesus is indeed the King... Caiaphas (11:49-52) and Pilate, are unwittingly furthering God's redemptive purposes, unwittingly serving as prophets of the King... The Crucified One is the true king...[who] turns an obscene instrument of torture [a cross] into a throne of glory...The theme of Christ "reigning from the tree" was much loved by second-century Christians...turned in part on ... Ps 96:10 "Say among the nations, 'The LORD reigned *from a tree*.'" <sup>1</sup>

Another Psalm says to the Lord *'the wrath of man shall praise you'* (76:10). And here in v. 23-24 another psalm is being fulfilled as government soldiers divide the clothing of the Messiah-King and for His garment they cast lots. In the midst of their own sin, gambling motivated by gain for self, the King is sovereignly fulfilling His purposes and prophecies even in little details.

The end of v. 24 quotes Ps 22, where the King says prophetically: *'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?... All who see me mock me; they... wag their heads...[then quotes very words Mt 27 says they said] all my bones are out of joint...they have pierced my hands and feet...they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots'* (Ps 22:1, 7-8, 14, 16, 18). But don't miss the last part of Ps 22: *'...the nations shall worship before you. For kingship belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations'* (v. 27-28). That's beginning to be fulfilled here as well, as the Lord to whom kingship belongs is presented as King in languages all nations there could read.

God's sovereign will is ruling and redeeming what they did to redeem worshippers from all nations, even from pagans or killers of innocent men. Mt 27:54 *When the centurion and those who were with him [the soldiers of Jn 19:23], keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!"* By sovereign grace a criminal on the cross next to Jesus saw it and killers at the foot of the cross saw in awe who He truly was. Gentile Roman say what Jewish religionists refuse to say, King Jesus truly is the Son of God. Lk 23 says the centurion *'began praising God'* (v. 47 NAS) or the NKJV says *'he glorified God, saying "Certainly this was a righteous Man!"* The sovereign grace of God is not overthrown by sinful governments, it overcomes sinners

Pilate and his soldiers show the Lord's sovereignty over sinful government. And they also show, point #2. **Your responsibility to sinful government**

We need to remember what sinful men vote for (like the Sanhedrin in Jn 18 voting to execute Jesus) and what sinful government leaders decide (Pilate in Jn 19) cannot thwart the sovereign rule of Jesus of Nazareth, the King. If He was ruling on this cross on earth, and He was, think of Him now sitting on heaven's throne. This election may tempt us to give up or give in to fear or loathing, but our King calls for faith and love. His kingdom is advancing - but in a different way than Rome's or America's - it's a different kind of government. Our response starts in Jn 18:36, where Jesus starts with Pilate.

In 18:36 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."*

King Jesus wants us to remember His kingdom is not a political or worldly one. His servants don't fight with worldly means or fleshly weapons. He has a spiritual kingdom that operates spiritually through gospel means, not by governmental machinery or manipulation. Christ's kingdom *does* impact and influence this world when people in government and society have Him as King over all of life through faith, and our King calls followers to be salt and light in all areas of society, including politics, but we need to remember the spiritual nature of His kingdom. Scripture says our struggle isn't against flesh-and-blood, and we're not to think of political opponents as our enemy, they're our mission field in need of Christ, not mere conservatism. Our warfare is spiritual, and when it seems earthly kingdoms are delivering over or doing away with Jesus and what He teaches, remember Jesus is still King

Jesus has all authority on earth and His Almighty promise is He will build His church and the gates of hell will not prevail against His sovereign will. Our hope can't be in our president, though we should vote. Even if we're not excited about either candidate as a person, there's many things to vote for besides who's at the top, and we shouldn't withdraw from exercising our rights and expressing righteousness as best we can in an unrighteous world.

But what Jesus says to the governor here reminds us that man's government is not the same as Christ's kingdom and we need to think in spiritual terms, and gospel terms, and look above and beyond earthly government authority.

Look at Jn 19:11 where Jesus explains something else to Pilate: *'You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above.'*

Jesus recognizes Pilate as a governing leader had legitimate authority, even as an ungodly governor in the pagan Roman Empire that a wicked emperor appointed. And any ungodly government leaders appointed after Tuesday of this week have a God-given authority from above and responsibility to Him. As believers we need to remember Christ's kingdom is over all and human kingdoms and governments do have authority from God and accountability to God and a responsibility to God for their governing that we're subject to.

Paul wrote to Christians in Rome, in the heart of pagan government, Rom 13:1 *Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.* <sup>2</sup> *Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.* Paul goes on to make clear he's talking about government authorities who bear the sword (v. 4), law enforcement and judicial authority, and the government agents we pay taxes to and should respect and honor for their position even if we disagree with their practice or policies (v. 6-7). Paul said Caesar, sinful Senators in Rome, and all who serve the government on down are instituted by God and appointed by God, and are not to be resisted, the exception to submission being if they command us to disobey God (Acts 5). Whatever governmental authorities exist after Tuesday aren't just appointed by voters, God appoints and institutes them and they are accountable to God and in need of prayer.

*"Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever ... He sets up kings and deposes them ... the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone He wishes."* (Daniel 2:21, 4:32 NIV). Turn to 1 Timothy 6 to see how the NT applies how to see Pilate and Jesus.

In Jn 18 Jesus confessed Himself as King before Pontius Pilate. Now notice what Paul writes to Timothy in light of that very event, 6:13 *I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony **before Pontius Pilate made the good confession,***<sup>14</sup> *to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ,*<sup>15</sup> *which he will display at the proper time—he who is the blessed and **only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords***

Pilates and presidents aren't sovereign, only the King of kings is. But part of His commandment to us, is to remember your government leaders in prayer. 2:1 *First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people,*<sup>2</sup> *for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.*<sup>3</sup> *This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved...*[even politicians, president candidates]

In v. 2 '*kings and all who are in high positions*' certainly includes presidents and our prayers should include them and those in positions under them, that we would be good citizens, marked by peaceful quiet godly dignity in every way. Is that what Christians are known for in politics? We need to pray this. v. 1 says our prayers for government leaders need to include giving thanks. Have you given God thanks lately for those He's put in place and will you on Wednesday and in the days ahead? v. 8 calls men of God to lead the way

<sup>8</sup> *I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling...* Instead of quarreling about Donald or Hillary or venting anger or wringing hands of it, God's Word commands us to lift up holy hands without anger or dissension, and to pray to the only sovereign King of kings and Lord of lords. Pray for His gospel purposes as v. 4-7 says

Let me close with Acts 4, a very practical example of praying in light of the events of Jn 19. Acts 4:24 says *And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, '**Sovereign Lord...*** [then quoted scripture, v. 26 says]... *kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed [Christ]'*<sup>27</sup> *for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and **Pontius Pilate,** along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel,*<sup>28</sup> ***to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.***<sup>29</sup> *And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness ...*

They understood things weren't ultimately in the hands of sinful politicians, they were in the hand of a predestining sovereign Lord. And His plan and His will would be done. The kingdom of Christ wasn't subject to Herod and it won't be to Hilary or whoever our next administration is. We need to look beyond who will ride in Air Force One to the sovereign King who rides on the clouds as His kingdom comes and His will is done. In His hand are the hearts of kings *and candidates* and He can turn them wherever He wills. So let's keep our focus on Him as we pray and let's stay engaged with the world as we speak with boldness with Word of the King as servants of the King.

May God grant us to speak far more about His gospel than our government. May God help His servants to look beyond the bad news to lift up the good news of a God who works all things together for good. Look past political ugliness to the beautiful Savior who truly reigns over all. Behold your King!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9K80pozOfrU>

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<sup>1</sup> Carson, *John*, p. 611, citing a gloss on the LXX text of Ps 96:10.