

John 18:(28-32) 33-38

[Then they took Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate's headquarters. It was early in the morning. They themselves did not enter the headquarters, so as to avoid ritual defilement and to be able to eat the Passover. So Pilate went out to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?" They answered, "If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you." Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law." The Jews replied, "We are not permitted to put anyone to death." (This was to fulfill what Jesus had said when he indicated the kind of death he was to die.)]

33 Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?" Pilate replied, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?" Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here." Pilate asked him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." Pilate asked him, "What is truth?" After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, "I find no case against him.

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"What's going on? Who is this man? It appears to me that you've roughed him up thoroughly enough. What's he done?"

"We would hardly have brought him to you if he were not a criminal. We're not like you Romans. We aren't in the habit of beating people up just for sport, or for no reason, or sending them into an arena to watch them kill each other."

"If you're so opposed to killing people, why did you bring him *here*? Why did you drag me out of bed when you could have taken care of this business in your own courts? Do we have to do everything for you?"

"In this case we're afraid you must. Unfortunately this man has committed a crime that is so heinous, we can determine only one punishment that is suitable. We want you to crucify him. We want him to die and we want his dying to take a long time."

"So much for not beating people for sport or for no reason. Perhaps you are more like us than you would like to admit."

"We don't believe that we're anything like you godless Gentiles. Did I say godless? That's ridiculous. I apologize. You Romans have a god or goddess for everything, don't you? For sneezing and belching, for hair loss, and for rubbing out wine stains"

"You come here and insult me with your silly superstitions and still want me to do something for you that I do not have to do? You want me to do you a favor and you talk to me this way? I'm going to ask you again. What has he done to make you hate him so much that you come to this praetorium seeking a favor from your-- uh-- beloved representative from Roma?"

"Being an unbeliever, you wouldn't begin to understand; but I'll give it a try. His

misguided followers claim he's the Son of God, and we have heard reports from reliable sources that he has made this claim personally to his inner circle. We have heard that he is the King of the Jews. As far as we can tell, and we have investigated this, this fellow has no claim to the throne. He has no relationship to any of the sons of Herod. He claims to be of the tribe of Judah and a descendant of our great King David, but while many can make that claim, they do not. The reason they do not is because such a claim speaks to treason and sedition not only within Herod's rule, but also we are afraid it could stir rebellion and cause strife between us and the great Tiberius. Maybe you would understand it better if you identified that which is most valuable to you and watched it dragged it through the mud. Perhaps if someone were to call your mother a whore, or your father a thief and a liar. Wouldn't you want justice under those circumstances?"

"I'd really enjoy chatting with you awhile longer, but I have a busy day, full schedule and all. I don't care what you do with him personally. As far as I am concerned he's just another Jew like you. Hah! A Jew like you, has a kind of poetic ring to it, doesn't it? But we Romans do have a finely honed sense of justice which demand far more skill to explain to you than your sad attempt at using my beloved parents to help me understand your extremism.

I'd like to talk to him privately, so bring him over here and step back. By the way, what's his name?"

"Jesus bar Joseph, a Galilean."

"Galilean. I should have known he would be even *more* a barbarian than you people, if that is possible."

"Just remember one thing sir, I don't know what you hope to get from Jesus, but there is only one answer we want from you, and we strongly recommend an official 'yes'."

(Jews withdraw, Jesus is brought to Pilate.)

"All I want to know is this: are you who you say you are?"

"Who do you say that I am?"

"Don't play games with me you Galilean hick. One word and your day-- that has already begun rather badly-- will soon become much worse. Answer me! Are you, or are you not the King of the Jews?"

Are you asking me because you want to know or have others put you up to it?

"Why in the world would I ask you on my own-- as you say. Am I a Jew? Do I even care if you are or if you a king or not? Because whether you are King of the Jews or not, I've met quite a few kings in my day, and you don't look much like any of them.

Plus its more than ironic, don't you think, that your fellow Jews would escort you here so that you could participate in a high level diplomatic conversation with me.

Just explain to me please, what have you done?"

"My kingdom, well you can't really see it. I mean to say that it's not suspended across a few generations or centuries like most kingdoms I've heard about. It has no definite boundaries. Nobody collects any taxes. There is no army or navy. If my kingdom were like the ones you have known, there would be fighting right now. The streets would be awash in blood. My followers would fight to keep me from the Jews. The fact that they are not clearly demonstrates that my kingdom is different."

"Yes I can see how your kingdom could be considered different. Guess that makes you the king of this invisible kingdom? This kingdom that has no army or navy, collects no taxes, and has no boundaries?"

"Well, that's one way to put it. But you're right, my kingdom is not something you can see. It's sort of "out there" but it's not really, out there. And I want to add even though I was born for this, I am not happy about this turn of events. You say I am a king, and I really am.

**I am king of love and joy.
I am king of light and truth.
I am king of compassion and justice.
I am king of sorrow and pain.
I am king of mercy and salvation.**

And now maybe you understand how I can say that my kingdom is not of this world although it is so clearly present.

"I believe I can."

"I was born for this-- for all that has happened and especially for today, for now, and all that will happen, I was born. The time I have used since I was born, I have used to bear witness to the truth. Did you know that everyone who belongs to the truth listens to me?"

"Well, er, Jesus, that's all very good, but, and maybe you could explain to me, what actually is truth?"

(Some say that Pilate appeared pale, shaken and out of sorts when he turned from Jesus and addressed the crowd saying, "I find no case against him.)

After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, "I find no case against him..." And it did not matter that Pilate could find no case against him and in saying those words, strongly hinted that if the Jews would only come to their senses and let Jesus go might be a good idea.

But Pilate was not as powerful as he thought he was.

And Jesus? Well, he said it himself:

I am king of love and joy.
I am king of light and truth.
I am king of compassion and justice.
I am king of sorrow and pain.

And now maybe you understand how I can say that my kingdom is not of this world although it is so clearly present.

And that is the truth.