The King of the Jews

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[0:00] Will you turn with me please to John's Gospel chapter 19 and I want to consider with you this evening verse 19. John 19 verse 19.

And Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross and the writing was Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. Now you would find it would be a very interesting, enlightening and rewarding thing to take the four Gospels and the record that they have of the trial of Jesus and harmonize them and seek to understand the sequence of events that they relate.
And when you do that you'll find that one thing sticks out particularly clearly in the trials of Jesus, or yes the trials of Jesus, the trials that he had under Pilate, under Ananias and under Cephas and Herod.
Or Caiaphas and Herod. You'll find that of all the trials that these trials that he underwent were the most unjust.
We find Christ being bound and beaten before any evidence is heard, before any verdict is passed. In other words Christ has been bound and treated as a guilty man before he is even examined.
[1:47] Now you recollect that even Paul the Apostle, when he was bound by the centurion and when he was about to be beaten he could say, is it right for you to beat a Roman citizen?

And he was released because he at least had the dignity of a fair trial. But here Christ is unjustly taken, bound like a common criminal and beaten as though he were already sentenced.
But not only was the trial of Christ an unjust trial, but you'll see also that it was a malicious trial. We find that those who brought Christ to be judged had only one aim and view, crucify him.
Nothing else would do. They wanted no imprisonment. They weren't content with the beating even that Pilate gave this Christ. You remember how we read he brings out the Christ after he had been roughly used and beaten by the soldiers.
He comes out, doubtless a pitiful spectacle in front of this crowd. Surely the spectacle of a man beaten and broken like that, or so it would appear, would have moved these men's hearts to pity.
[3:05] But no, we find that these men want nothing less than that Christ be crucified. It's malicious. That's all they have in their minds.

We see again that it is a hasty trial. These men are not content to wait until daybreak. They take Christ and they triumph through the night so that he stands before Pilate the following day, having had no sleep, having had no opportunity for defense.
He stands as a man brought with undue haste into the courts of justice. And we see that all in all, the trial of Christ was a complete travesty of justice by the men who claimed to be the upright judges of the land.
The Sanhedrin, the malicious men who were out for his blood. And Pilate, the representative of the Roman state.
We find that these men combined brought this trial into ignominy. And it was as a result of this trial, this mockery of a trial we might say, that Pilate eventually comes to the point where he writes this title, this placard, this accusation that is to be placed above the cross of Jesus Christ.
[4:34] It was customary when the Romans sentenced a man that he bore either to his place of crucifixion or at least it was nailed upon his place of crucifixion, a placard that intimated the charge for which he was being crucified.

And this was in order that the public might see that there had been fairness in the proceedings. And that's what I want to consider tonight.
I want to consider the title above the cross of Christ. Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. And the first thing I want you to notice is that this title, it's called elsewhere a superscription.

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It's called elsewhere an accusation. Here John refers to it as a title. This title was intended to be a charge against Christ.
This was intended to denote the crime that Christ had committed. That at least was its formal use. It was in order that all men passing by the foot of that cross, they could look at one and say, he's a thief.
[5:52] And they could look at the other and say, he's a thief. And they could look at the one in the middle and say, he's a traitor to Caesar. That was the intention at least. The Sanhedrin's intention was that they wanted to bring a capital charge against Christ.

They wanted something that would result in his crucifixion. You see, at this time under the Roman occupation, the Jews had no right to execute a man.
They had to seek special permission. And we see the overriding providence of God. Because had not Psalm 22 prophesied that Christ would be crucified.
Had not it spoken of a death that was unfamiliar to the Jews in the sense that the normal way of execution that the Jews would use would be stoning for blasphemy.
But here we see God overruling. These people are unable to pass a capital sentence. They're brought to Pilate because he alone had the right judicially to pass that sentence.
[7:03] Now we're told, if you read through the scriptures, if you read through the gospel narratives, that Pilate knew that these men who brought Christ were motivated by envy.

They were jealous of Christ. They were jealous of the authority Christ had. This man spake as one having authority, not as the scribes and Pharisees. Another time we're told the whole world seems to have gone after this man.
No man spake like this man. These leaders of the people, the Sanhedrin, the Jews, the Pharisees, the scribes, These men had so held the people in bondage up to this point, that when Christ comes along and proclaims captivity to those who are bound by their traditions, they're jealous.
They're envious of them. Not simply an envy that wishes he was out of the way, but an envy that goes as far as to take him out of the way.
You see, the real purpose the Jews had brought Christ to Pilate for was not treason, but was for blasphemy.
[8:16] He made himself the Son of God, and there's no doubt about that. Jesus Christ did claim to be the Son of God. Anyone reading the Gospels can see that.

And there were only two possible ways of dealing with that. Either what Christ said was the most awful blasphemy that ever a man uttered, or else it was true.
You remember how it was at the raising of Lazarus. There were men there who saw Lazarus come forth from the grave. Some of them were awestruck.
They were overwhelmed by the power of Jesus Christ thus manifested. But others, we're told, went off and reported these things to the Jews.
You see, the point was that these people had come so close to this Christ. They had seen so many miraculous works.
[9:15] From his lips and from his life, they had seen adequate testimony to the fact that this man was not a blasphemer, but that this man was the Son of God.

But there was reaction, and there was rejection on their part. And therefore they delivered him to Pilate to be killed. And therefore they trumped up a charge.
You see, Pilate wouldn't have anything to do with this charge of blasphemy against Christ. That was outside his jurisdiction, not his domain. And so we find that they trump up a charge to make sure that Pilate gives nothing less than the death sentence.
The charge was that he stirred up the people. He perverts the nation, we're told. We're told again that they also said that he denied that it was right to pay taxes to Caesar.
And yet the Gospels clearly report that that was false. But the one that they thought they had got him on was this, that he claims to be a king, thereby setting himself in opposition to Caesar.
[10:27] In other words, Christ is on trial before Pilate for treason. But you notice, not only was it the Sanhedrin's intention that this charge be made against Christ, but we see that Pilate used this title basically because he needed a charge, and also because he wanted revenge.

He needed a charge firstly, because it was unlawful for him to condemn a man without a charge. And we see that he is ready to release Christ and put him away until they bring forward this claim that he was a king, and immediately he takes him back in.

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You read the 18th chapter of John. You see that he brings Christ back into his presence. Here's something he wants to investigate.
But in that investigation, Jesus makes it quite clear that the kingdom that he has is not of this world. It's not an earthly kingdom. It's a kingdom that has to do with truth.
It's a kingdom that has to do with faith in him. It is the kingdom of God. And Pilate, even in his pagan ignorance, can see that whatever he is claiming, he is not claiming to be standing in opposition to the earthly kingdom of Caesar as an earthly kingdom.
[11:58] He stands therefore before Pilate as one who is innocent. Again, if you look through the gospel narratives, you will see time and time again that Pilate declares, this man is not guilty.

I find no fault in this man. And he brings him out to the Jews, hoping to have him released. But you notice, you see in verse 12 of chapter 19, And from thenceforth, from thenceforth, Pilate sought to release him.
But the Jews cried out saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend. Whosoever maketh himself a king, speaketh against Caesar. And then you see, when Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought forth Jesus and sat down in the judgment seat.
That comment that was made by these Jews, If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend, turned the tables.
It was from that point on that Pilate agrees to condemn this man. This man that he had shown was innocent. This man that he had examined and could find no fault in.
[13:16] Now why was it that this man was so swayed in his outlook by that one comment, If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend.

Well if you read through the scriptures, and if you read secular history, you will know the reason why. Pilate was in fear of Caesar. Pilate had already been rebuked by Caesar because of his hardness towards the Jews.
Pilate was, as it were, on probation. And these Jews, at various times in the past, had manipulated Pilate.
When the Roman soldiers came into Jerusalem, so fanatical were the Jews that they would not allow any of the Roman insignia into the city because it reminded them of the worship of the Romans of Caesar.
But we find that one night when Pilate came to Jerusalem, he brought the insignia in and he put them in a tower where all could see.
[14:28] And he antagonised the Jews. And they came and they pleaded with him to remove it. And they even followed him around day after day, begging that he would take them away.

Indeed, so long did this happen that eventually he surrounded these people who were following him with his soldiers and threatened to cut them down if they didn't disperse and go home.
But the Jews appealed to Caesar and Pilate was rebuked and ordered to take down those insignia.
And there were various other occasions where the hardness of Pilate so antagonised the Jews that they rose up against him and in each time they won the day and Pilate had to back down.
You remember that reference about the blood that Pilate mingled with the sacrifices. There's an indication of the kind of man. A hard man, a cruel man.
And what they were basically saying was this, Pilate, if you let this man go we're going to cause such a stir we'll clipe on you. We'll tell Caesar that you're not his friend.
[15:44] All the undercurrents there. You're really a traitor, Pilate. You really don't have Caesar's best interests at heart. And so you see here is this man and he's in a corner.

He hates these Jews and yet he knows that they are manipulating him. And he knows also that if he is going to condemn this man to death there must be an accusation.
And we see the accusation he makes. Jesus of Nazareth the king of the Jews. And as you read through chapters 18 and 19 you'll see that Pilate treats the Jews with utmost contempt and scorn.
He brings out this man and he says here's your king. Look at him. That arrival to Caesar, that broken man, that beaten man, you're saying that that is the king of the Jews.
Is that the best the Jewish nation can do? And you want to crucify this man? And therefore when he eventually writes the title and has it posted above the cross he intentionally doesn't write this man said he was the king of the Jews.
[16:57] But in order to retaliate for the manipulation that the Jews had worked upon him he puts this is the king of the Jews.

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And in reality what ought to have been a charge, a crime was no charge at all. It is simply a statement and you see how it incensed the Jews.
They came to him you could just imagine it as Christ was raised on the cross and as that sign was nailed upon the horror in the hearts of these upright pharisaical men as they saw the king of the Jews being crucified and at their instigation.
And so they go off hot foot to Pilate don't write that that's not the truth we want you to write he said he was the king of the Jews but Pilate is adamant what is written is written and so it is that although this was intended to be a charge in actual fact from Pilate's point of view it was an insult and revenge against those Jews who had so manipulated him as to bring him to that situation where he had been party to the crucifixion of a man that he knew to be innocent.
But I want you to notice in the second place that this title was not only intended to be a charge but it indicated a rejection of Jesus.
[18:34] It indicated a rejection of Jesus that's not surprising when we consider that the Old Testament speaks of Christ as being despised and rejected of men.

But I want you to notice that it indicated the rejection of Jesus firstly by the religious world. You see what we have is the religious men of the day crying out we have no king but Caesar.
Now this wasn't the common rabble in Jerusalem it was the high priest and the servants of the high priest we have no king but Caesar.
What we have there is an apostate church a church that has turned away its sight from the promise of Israel. Had God not promised to this Jewish nation a coming deliverer?
Had God not promised Messiah? Had God not promised that from the seed or the root of David they would rise up the Christ? And yet we hear these religious leaders the men who should have known better crying out we denounce the hope we have in God we have no hope we have no desire to have God as our king we will have no king but Caesar.
[20:06] Now what is the application of that rejection to us? Well I'm sure it's plain for us to see as we look around us today we see a great deal of religiosity and yet we also see that which is the Christian church that which takes the name of the Christian church renouncing the hope of Israel men deny the virgin birth of Christ men deny the reality of Christ men deny the incarnation of Christ the resurrection of Christ men deny that Christ was God in the flesh and what are they doing but denouncing the hope of Israel and where is it coming from?

Where is the greatest attack on the Christian faith coming from? It's from within the church it's not the pagan and the atheist who seeks to tear down the true doctrines of scripture it's not the atheist who seeks to undermine the veracity of scripture it is men from within the bounds within the fold of the external Christian church in other words what they're saying is this Christ is not the Christ we want we don't want a Christ that leads to self effacement we don't want a Christ that leads to self sacrifice we don't want a Christ that leads to humiliation we want a Christ of prestige we want a Christ that's socially acceptable we want a Christ that's easy to obtain what we have in this title is nothing short of the rejection of Jesus
Christ by the church well what's it to be with you and I what kind of Christ do we want as we sit here gathered in a church are we accepting this Christ or are we saying with the Pharisees oh yes in a much more dignified way crucify him we don't want this Christ I will not have this man to rule over me a rejection of Jesus Christ by the religious world of his day you see when Christ came on the scene he made religious people incredibly uncomfortable because he cut right through the religiosity the sham of it the emptiness of it he showed that a man could be ever so moral and ever so upright a man could have all the trappings and paraphernalia of religion and yet be ignorant of the saving grace of God the church of Christ rejecting the Christ of the church but notice that there is a rejection implied here also by the political world you see
Pilate is the representative in his day of the most powerful political empire he stands in Palestine as Caesar's representative and you'll see how time and again John is emphasizing this confrontation between Pilate and between Christ here is the greatest world empire being brought face to face with Jesus Christ and what's the outcome it's crucifixion it's rejection it's opposition now we know that Pilate was aware of the innocence of this man we know that Pilate was manipulated by the mob and that speaks to us so clearly of how the political world reacts to
Christ today you see what counts in political realms is not truth but expediency it's not expedient that Pilate should let this man go he's going to have a riot on his hands what can he do he'll only get into trouble with Caesar anyway he'll take the course of least resistance let's get rid of this man he's

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only one man he's going to save the lives of many if he's put away there'll be no riot expediency we find today that those in political power when faced with the truth of the word of God when faced with the Christ of the word of God we'll choose the path of expediency now the word clearly says that righteousness exalts a nation the righteousness that comes from God through Jesus Christ and when a nation turns as a nation to Christ then there will be exaltation for that nation but we're also told that sinners are reproached to any people and when we look around the world today what do we see we see nation after nation after nation reproached why because when confronted with the claims of

[25:37] Christ it means too much for them to change you imagine for example if the whole of our government was to be converted overnight imagine imagine what that would mean imagine the laws that would have to be changed imagine the practices that would have to be stopped imagine the practices that would have to be started imagine the confessions that would be made the exposure of all the secret and hidden things it's too much too big a price to pay all we want is to keep the people quiet and keep the people happy and the way to do that said Pilate was to crucify this innocent man so as we see that title on the cross above Christ it reminds us of the confrontation between Christ and the political world and of the rejection of the political world of Christ for expediency sake but we see again that it is a rejection by the cultured by that class of society who could be called the cultured now there are two ways of seeing that in this title the first is to realize that amongst those who are rejecting

Christ are the Sadducees they were the culturally advanced of the day they were those who were the most Hellenized those who were most into the Greek things Greek was the sort of cultured culture to be following if you wanted to be in you spoke Greek if you wanted to be in you dressed like a Greek if you wanted to be in you believed like a Greek if you wanted to be in you went where the Greeks went and the result of this culture was that they denied the resurrection they denied the existence of angels they denied all sorts of things but this was culturally advanced you see and here we see these men and they too are at the foot of the cross and they too have had a hand in the in the condemnation of Jesus Christ and perhaps it's to them that the words in

Greek speak so pertinently this is the king of the Jews written in Aramaic so that the common people might understand written in Greek so that the cultured might understand and written in Latin so that those of the Roman state those who represented the law might understand Christ confronted culture confronted the Sadducees exposed the shallowness and emptiness of what they had as their possession and he condemned them and what was the result was it a humiliation before the Christ was it a self searching in the light of the word of God and coming to God and repentance no it was rejection of Christ away with this man crucifying and we have to be aware of the fact that the message of the gospel is not attractive to the cultured some people may find that they get queasy when you speak of the blood of Christ some people may not like the concept of humiliation in Christ they may hate the very idea of the wrath of

God against sinners because after all they don't see themselves as sinners they're quite nice people really I've never murdered anybody I've never done this I've never done that I'm quite a nice person why should that man say that I'm uncultured that I'm a sinner and so when you come with the gospel of Jesus Christ to the cultured society don't expect a warm reception don't expect them to be waiting with open arms because here we see in this title that the cultured rejected the Christ on the cross but I want to finish this section by looking at the fact that the title also is an indication that Christ was rejected by the common people they had joined in the condemnation you could just imagine that forecourt before the pavement or

Gabbatha there's Pilate sitting up in an elevated position beside him stands this battered Christ and in amongst mingling with the common people there are the high priests and when Pilate says what do you want me to do with this man the high priest and his entourage start crying out crucify him crucify him and remember what had been said that if any man attached themselves to this Christ he was going to be put out of the synagogue well there's the lines clearly drawn if you're with the high priest then you want this man crucified if you're against the high priest then you're with this Christ then you're out of the synagogue and so these people who joined in unison with the high priest that great mob who cried out crucify him crucify him don't forget only days before had been crying out Hosanna blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord there's the indication of the fickleness of the common man but also of the fear of the common man fear of those who were supposed to be their religious leaders and they were unwilling or unable to face the facts themselves unwilling to

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contemplate whether this man was indeed guilty or not unwilling and indifferent to the fact whether this man deserved to be crucified and so we see them crying out crucify him crucify him and for the benefit of all that common mob there was written in
[32:21] Aramaic the words Jesus of Nazareth the king of the Jews and so we see that this title was meant to be a charge an accusation but was no charge it was an indication of rejection by the religious world the social world the political world but I want you to notice and with this we close that this title was also a declaration of the truth God had providentially overridden what Pilate did now I'm not suggesting for one moment that Pilate believed that Jesus Christ was the king of the Jews in any meaningful sense I believe that he acted the way he did because of the scorn and vindictiveness and hatred he had toward the Jews but in all this we see

God's overriding providential hand that he does not write I say I am the king of the Jews but he merely writes the declaration Jesus of Nazareth the king of the Jews and thereby unwittingly placards the truth of the identity of Jesus Christ before all those who passed by and remember that it is at the time of the Passover there are great multitudes in Jerusalem at this time men from all corners of the globe brought to see this sign Jesus of Nazareth the king of the Jews it was a declaration of the truth because Jesus was a rightful heir of David if you turn to Matthew's gospel and the first chapter you see there that Matthew shows that Jesus is a descendant of David the king if there had been a rightful throne in
Jerusalem in Israel in Christ's day Christ would have been a king he was a rightful heir to the throne but he was a rightful heir in a much more important way you remember how Christ had scorned the idea of accepting a political kingship but here we see him as the son of David the promised one the one of whom he speaks in Psalm 110 he is the one who is enthroned on the throne of David and yet enthroned where enthroned via the cross so that Christ goes to the cross he hangs under this title and as he does so he is bringing to pass the truth that he is Jesus the king of the Jews but
I want you to notice also that it was the declaration of the truth that he had a kingdom and a kingdom not of this world as you read through the scriptures read through the parallel passages you read of an incredible incident he's crucified between two thieves to begin with they both mocked and deriled or derived this man but after a period of time one of them turns and rebukes the other because he sees that this Christ has done nothing amiss and then he utters those most incredible words Lord remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom now that's incredible that when all others had forsaken Christ and fled when the world had rejected this Christ indeed when God the father is on the very verge of rejecting this
Christ we see that one man is given faith to penetrate that impenetrable darkness to be able to say that this Christ is a king and that this Christ is a kingdom and that this kingdom is nothing to do with this world in the sense that it's not an earthly kingdom but it's a kingdom that he will enter into through his death on the cross Lord remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom but I want you to notice also that this title and its very nature was a declaration that the kingdom of Jesus Christ embraced more than simply the Jews it's written in Aramaic it's written in Greek it's written in Latin it's written in the language that was common in the world so that whoever came and read could read that this is
[37:37] Jesus of Nazareth the king of the Jews now I grant you that we're not taught directly from this title that the gospel of Jesus Christ and his kingdom was to extend over all the world but I think it's significant that it's not simply written in Latin but is written in these languages and that the gospel sounds forth from that cross to every corner of the world Jesus Christ the king Jesus Christ the king of the Jew first but also of the Gentile is it not true that we who know the Lord Jesus bow to him as Lord Jesus we acknowledge him as king of kings and lord of lords Christ the king upon the cross at that very lowest ebb where his glory is most veiled there is this clear declaration that

Christ is no traitor that Christ is no blasphemer but that Christ is king now I want to apply these three points just very briefly I open by speaking about the injustice of the trial of Jesus Christ and I would remind you of this that there is a day coming when God will try the thoughts and hearts of all men and there will be no injustice there he will be fair he will be equitable he will take into consideration all the evidence there will be no maliciousness on God's part he will judge you with without any hateful vengeance in his heart and it won't be a hasty thing he will give time for the evidence to be brought he will give time for us to make appeals as it were in the sense that when we appear before the judgment seat of

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Christ all that we have done in the body will be made known it will not be hasty there will be no lack of evidence and it will be no travesty of justice and we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ that being the case how will we fare the second thing I want to do is challenge the Lord's people in the second point and that is the rejection of Jesus Christ by all these levels of society and I would ask this has the rejection that you have encountered thus far as a Christian in these levels of society caused you to back off and weakened your witness in those areas are you afraid when you're amongst religious people to speak the truth concerning Christ are you afraid when you're in the midst of those who are your social superiors to speak the truth concerning
Christ in other words do you shut your mouth in the presence of those around you when you ought to be opening it now you may say but what's the point of going to be rejected anyway the message is going to be rejected well that's none of your business your business is to be speaking and witnessing for Jesus Christ and you can bet your boots you will be rejected and you can be sure that men won't listen but God can open hearts and God can break proud spirits and God can humble men and women so that the word spoken by you becomes effective so that men and women by what you say can be brought to Christ and I say what you say as you witness in accordance with the word of
God but I want to close with this consideration we say the title declares the truth and each of us this night as it were stands before this title here it is Jesus of Nazareth the King now there were some who stood by and they mocked and they shouted this man said he trusted in God well let God deliver him now there were others who stood by weeping like Mary and John weeping because of what Christ was going through but weeping also I believe because of their unfaithfulness well you and I have to come and look at the crucified Christ and read that title above the cross
[43:10] Jesus the King well what's your response tonight is Jesus your king have you submitted to him have you come to him in faith you see if Jesus isn't your king to defend and protect you he will be God's king to destroy you we're going to be singing in Psalm 2 where it says kiss ye the sun lest in his ire or his anger ye perish from the way and what God is saying in that Old Testament Psalm is get right with Jesus Christ because if you're not right with him the day will come when you have to face him

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