

John 18:33-37

³³Then Pilate entered the headquarters^[i] again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" ³⁴Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?" ³⁵Pilate 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?" ³⁶Jesus 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." ³⁷Pilate 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."

2 Samuel 23 Now these are the last words of David:

The oracle of David, son of Jesse,
the oracle of the man whom God exalted,^[a]
the anointed of the God of Jacob,
the favorite of the Strong One of Israel:

²The spirit of the LORD speaks through me,
his word is upon my tongue.

³The God of Israel has spoken,
the Rock of Israel has said to me:

One who rules over people justly,
ruling in the fear of God,

⁴is like the light of morning,
like the sun rising on a cloudless morning,
gleaming from the rain on the grassy land.

⁵Is not my house like this with God?
For he has made with me an everlasting covenant,
ordered in all things and secure.

Will he not cause to prosper
all my help and my desire?

⁶But the godless are^[b] all like thorns that are thrown away;
for they cannot be picked up with the hand;

⁷to touch them one uses an iron bar or the shaft of a spear.
And they are entirely consumed in fire on the spot.^[c]

Christ the King Sunday

November 25, 2018

John 18:33-37; 2 Samuel 23:1-7

“Not From Here”

Pilate asks: Are you the King of the Jews?

Jesus says: My Kingdom is not from this world.

Pilate asks: What exactly have you done to irritate the chief priests and your own nation?

Jesus says: My Kingdom is not from here.

Pilate asks: So you *are* a King?

Jesus says: You say I am a King, but I say this, that I was born into this world to testify to the truth.

This esoteric argument between Jesus and Pilate is very “John’s Gospel.”

This human Jesus has to measure up to the cosmic Christ, the one who was Word and Light before creation even came into being, the one who hears the heartbeat of the Father and is spiritually in tune enough to be called God’s only Son, holding it all together even as he faces off with this powerful ruler.

In the midst of this discourse, we overhear that the King of this Kingdom is not going to be nationalistic or militaristic. The King of this Kingdom cannot be too tied in to the powers of this world, nor will he be swayed by the tribalism of religion, his own or any other. The King of this

Kingdom may be tied to the Davidic throne, but he chooses to be “other” than the King of the Jews.

Jesus is the King of a Kingdom that can’t be found on any map, and has no measurable boundaries. What kind of Kingdom is that?

Well, as far as I can tell, when we Christians try to make sense of Jesus’ Kingdom from this text, we tend to fall into two, sometimes contradictory, camps:

- 1) That Jesus’ Kingdom is heavenly, not earthly. We can only know a Kingdom like his when we experience a resurrection like his, OR
- 2) That Jesus creates the Kingdom of God here on earth. When his followers continue to teach and preach and heal in his name and work for justice and peace, they are bringing about the Kingdom not “of this world.” We know this Kingdom when we know Jesus, and live out his mission.

I think it is probably some combination of both concepts of the Kingdom that helps us understand Jesus’ strange conversation with Pilate. Though this text is pretty clear on what the Kingdom is “not,” we don’t specifically get a handle on what the Kingdom “is.” All we know is that it’s: *Not from this world. Not from here. And not exclusively meant for a particular religion or people.*

When we seek to define this Kingdom that is not like other kingdoms:

We can and we do imagine being ushered into a heavenly Kingdom where love, peace, and joy are ours for eternity after our deaths.

We can and we do imagine being part of a mission and ministry here on earth where love, peace, and joy are our fundamental aspirations inspired by our call to follow Jesus.

Both concepts can be scripturally validated throughout the gospels.

And yet both are problematic.

The vision of a heavenly future ought to be our inspiration for doing the hard work here, but it is often viewed as a reward for the righteous who have concentrated on their own purity rather than focusing on their neighbor's well-being. The Kingdom yet to come can become too exclusive.

The vision of a Kingdom realized here on earth may cause us to reach out beyond our comfortable associations, but it's lack of apparent fruition often leaves folks frustrated by the world's endless pain and feeling like God isn't doing God's part to correct it. The Kingdom around us now can be too invisible.

This *now and not yet* Kingdom is strange to us because we are earthlings first and foremost, grounded by our own limitations or the limits of being able to influence the things we want to see change.

From the very beginning, we started with Adam, and the name Adam comes from a word play in the Hebrew meaning "the one from the ground."

We are most definitely from this world.

We are from here.

Grounded here.

We know the rules here.

We have experienced the kind of political or religious kingdoms that are identifiable on maps and have specific boundaries.

There can be good Kings and good kingdoms ruled by justice so that they are like the light of the morning.

But we also know about bad rulers and crushing systems of oppression, be they found in kingdoms, or democracies, or dictatorships.

To have the eyes to see the Kingdom as Jesus describes it takes looking at what we know from a very different angle and in a much different time frame.

The Kingdom Jesus describes refuses to compete in the same game as worldly kingdoms.

That's why it looks like the world often wins. Its because the world becomes consumed with winning.

Pilate, who is most certainly from this world, allows Jesus to be executed even when he doesn't know exactly why. Who knows why he does this – to appease the chief priests, to seem powerful, to get paid off? But it's so the system "wins."

In the very long, long, course of time though, the Kingdom of God endures, and lasts forever.

Love always wins.

Even when we cannot stand another bad news story,

Even when we mourn another casualty of the things human beings do to cause pain to one another,

The Kingdom is here, and it is yet to come.

Thus, Jesus taught us to pray: Thy Kingdom Come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

We continue to imagine the Kingdom that is just out of our reach, just beyond our own spiritual comprehension, because Jesus taught us that it was real. It is real.

The kingdom powers of this world will come and go, truly they will.

Leaders and heads of state, and lawmakers, and law enforcers will roll through good times and terrible times. Cultures will bend and sway under their influence.

They will make us joyful in one moment and horrified in the next.

But we are called to be part of an alternative Kingdom, a different layer of reality, one that Jesus tells us is a testimony to the truth, God's truth.