

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Pastor Mark Gartner  
Sermon for Fourth Midweek Lenten Service -- March 28<sup>th</sup>, 2012

### **John 18:36,37**

**Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place.” “You are a king, then!” said Pilate.**

**Jesus answered, “You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.”**

Dear Followers of our Lord and Savior,

Pilate was an official of imperial Rome. Jesus stood before him as an accused traitor—a king, the Jews said, opposed to Caesar and the power of Rome. Pilate had a responsibility to question Jesus and assess whether or not he was a threat to the empire. If Jesus was a king leading a rebellion, the Romans would oppose him and his followers with the force of Roman legions. The empire was built on Roman military power, and Romans did not tolerate opposition to their power. But Pilate’s interview revealed that Jesus was not a threat. As a matter of fact, Pilate would conclude, “I find no basis for a charge against him” (Jn 18:38). Yet he issued the order for this king of the Jews to be crucified. As we listen to Jesus’ response to Pilate, we are encouraged to see the cross of this King.

### **Theme: Our King Is Crucified!**

- 1. He has conquered by his cross.**
- 2. His kingdom extends to eternity.**

#### **1. He has conquered by his cross.**

The questions about whether Jesus was a king or not apparently stuck in Pilate’s memory. When Jesus was led out of Jerusalem and then crucified, the soldiers had received orders to place a notice on the cross of Jesus: “JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS.” For Pilate, it was perhaps his little joke, and he wanted everyone to know it. The notice was written in Aramaic, Latin, and Greek; everyone could understand one of those languages. A helpless victim without an army, who offered no resistance at all, was crucified. Pilate must have thought that Jesus was the ironic symbol of Jewish resistance to Rome. From Pilate’s perspective, the Jews were just as helpless to resist the power of Roman rule as Jesus appeared to be. Of course, the Jews were not happy with Pilate’s little joke. They complained, “Do not write ‘The King of the Jews,’ but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews” (Jn 19:21). Pilate did not change his mind.

Yet Jesus is indeed a king, the King, and his cross is the battleground on which he achieved his great victory. He was not fighting against soldiers arrayed in battle formations and marching to subdue an opposing army. He took on forces far greater: sin, death itself, and the legions of hell. Those forces had enslaved all people of the world. Everyone born of human parents was conceived and born in an unbroken cycle of sin and death—trapped with no escape possible. We are by nature like all others—dead in our transgressions and sin (Eph 2:1). By nature we, like all others, are separated from God and his blessings. We fall far short of his glory. No matter what any human might do there is no deliverance from sin and its consequences.

Jesus our King has come to set us free. He loved sinners enough to come here to earth. He was born to be our King and fight this battle for us. He assumed responsibility for our sins—for all of them—and for the sins of all people of all time. By his victory on the cross, we are declared free of sin—justified before God. He has paid our ransom with his precious blood. Therefore we are at peace with God.

With his death on the cross, he has also vanquished death itself. This King brings life by his death. That’s what he has promised. Jesus had said that he would give his flesh “for the life of the world” (Jn 6:51). His resurrection, only three days after his crucifixion, is the dramatic and powerful proclamation that he has

overcome death and so will all his believers. He promised such victory and life more than once. To Nicodemus he said, “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (Jn 3:16). He also made the same promise to his precious sheep: “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (Jn 10:10). “I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand” (10:28).

In addition, hell no longer has power over those precious sheep. Jesus has freed humanity from the chains of guilt and the inevitable fate of eternity with the demons of hell. No longer do humans need to fear descending into eternal torment. Through faith in Jesus, we are forgiven; we have life; we have salvation. We have a King who has achieved a great victory. This victory came with a casualty of only one—Jesus on the cross. During Lent we do not study the lives of victorious generals and the strategies of famous battles. We do not read the stories of diplomatic breakthroughs that have led to peace treaties. Instead, we learn again of a King crucified for sinners—for you and for me.

This is the truth we have come to believe—truth Jesus came to speak for our comfort. We are on his side, the side of truth, because we have been awakened from our spiritual captivity to listen to the voice of this King. We acclaim him as our King and Lord of all. Consider what we all confess: “[Jesus] has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver but with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death. All this he did that I should be his own, and live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as he has risen from death and lives and rules eternally.”

We are freed to serve this gracious and loving King. By his death on the cross, we are motivated to serve him. And we are happy to tell others about our King. By faith, we know we have victory over sin, death, and hell; and we are not ashamed of the gospel. In fact, we share it with our families, our friends, our church family, and anyone else who will listen. We sing his praises here in this house of God, together with our brothers and sisters in faith. We no longer serve pleasure, money, sin, and Satan. Instead, we desire to live as our King wishes.

## **2. His kingdom extends to eternity.**

Pilate knew what it was to serve. He had been appointed by Emperor Tiberius and served at Caesar’s discretion. He found advantages in his service—power, prestige, perhaps wealth. All those advantages were temporary. Pilate is dead, as are millions before him and after him. Some of the dead remain in unmarked graves covered by the debris of history. Others lie in marked graves, even under impressive monuments. Caesar, as powerful as he might have been, could not change the reality of death’s relentless march through history. Pilate’s and Caesar’s kingdoms are nothing but ruins. But we see a different King, crucified for us. His rule extends to eternity.

We should not be deceived by what we see in Pilate’s judgment hall. Jesus stood before Pilate and appeared as a weak, helpless accused traitor. The Jews milling around in front of Pilate’s judgment hall shouted, “Crucify him.” After Pilate gave the order, Jesus was scourged and crucified. Pilate washed his hands of the entire episode. Like the Jews outside, Pilate thought that once Jesus was dead, no one would ever hear about him again.

But it was not to be as they imagined. Jesus is not just another victim of injustice. His cross is not a simple symbol of torture. It marks the great victory over sin and death. It is more than a monument to mark some great battle. Jesus is the eternal King, who reigns now and forever. The truth of Jesus—the gospel of salvation—continues to call humans from their bondage into forgiveness and life. That truth continues to build his church here almost two thousand years after those events with Pilate and on Calvary. The message of the cross, as Paul reminds us, is the power of God (1 Co 1:18). We preach Christ crucified because it is the power and wisdom of God. Our eternal King continues to touch hearts and change them by that gospel. He preserves us by the power of that gospel in Word and sacraments.

He promises to continue to care for us as his disciples. Even before we were born and entered this world, he ruled all things. He still exercises his almighty power, as he guides and directs nations, history, and

the course of this world. That reality is important to us because he continues to care for us by that power. He promises to work in all things for our good in this world (Ro 8:28). He encourages us to come with our concerns and cares and promises to respond. “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you” (1 Pe 5:7). He encourages the weary to come and find rest in him (Mt 11:28). This is not a dead king who is unable to do anything but stir our memories and hopes. This King is alive, eternal, and powerful. He daily works in this world. He controls and guides all things by his power and love.

Sometimes we wonder. In our pains and struggles, we think that he is perhaps sleeping or not paying attention to us. Some even blame him for life’s tragedies and injustices. But we need to see clearly his cross in our dark moments. He loved you and me enough to come to rescue us. He shed his blood because he loves us. Since he loves us so much, he will work even through those difficult and painful times when all seems darkest. “If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?” (Ro 8:31,32). We only wonder because we don’t always understand. But he does.

When we see the world around us heading for disaster, bloodshed, cruelty, and turmoil, we can remember that our King is eternal. Even the catastrophic judgment that is to come on the Last Day is part of his plan. See all these things through the cross and his love. Jesus will not judge you on the basis of your sins but on the basis of his cross.

In our short time here, he prepares us for his eternal kingdom. When it is time for us to leave this life, he will take us home. He has taken generation upon generation before us to the mansions of heaven. He will take our generation home, and he will take the generations after us home. We are in his kingdom and under his care. Our hope is not on the things of this world. “Here we do not have an enduring city” (Heb 13:14). We look for something better, and it waits for us because Jesus was crucified. He is our eternal King. See his cross and look toward eternity with hope and confidence. Amen.