

So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe.
Pilate said to them, “Here is the man!” John 19:5

Jesus Sentenced to be Crucified

JOHN 19:1–16a ¹Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. ²And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe. ³They kept coming up to him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” and striking him on the face. ⁴Pilate went out again and said to them, “Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no case against him.” ⁵So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, “Here is the man!” ⁶When the chief priests and the police saw him, they shouted, “Crucify him! Crucify him!” Pilate said to them, “Take him yourselves and crucify him; I find no case against him.” ⁷The Jews answered him, “We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God.”

⁸Now when Pilate heard this, he was more afraid than ever. ⁹He entered his headquarters again and asked Jesus, “Where are you from?” But Jesus gave him no answer. ¹⁰Pilate therefore said to him, “Do you refuse to speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?” ¹¹Jesus answered him, “You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.” ¹²From then on Pilate tried to release him, but the Jews cried out, “If you

release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor.”

¹³When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside and sat on the judge’s bench at a place called *The Stone Pavement*, or in Hebrew *Gabbatha*.

¹⁴Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about noon. He said to the Jews, “Here is your King!” ¹⁵They cried out, “Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!” Pilate asked them, “Shall I crucify your King?” The chief priests answered, “We have no king but the emperor.” ¹⁶Then he handed him over to them to be crucified.

Because Pilate’s condemnation of Jesus was under coercion and against his better judgment, he tries to minimize the significance of Jesus with mockery. The kingship of Jesus is displayed here with dramatic irony: the crown of thorns, the purple cloak, and the acclamations of royalty, “Hail, King of the Jews!” Pilate solemnly displays Jesus to his opponents outside with the words, “Here is the man,” presenting him as a pitiful and broken man who should not be taken seriously (verse 5). Yet the reader knows that Jesus is the suffering Son of Man on his way to glory (12:23).

Vulnerable and suffering, the true kingship of Jesus was never more clearly displayed. Through this starkly memorable scene, it becomes clear that the most powerful people in the world are not the power brokers of politics, religion, and industry, but the humble, often obscure people who are true disciples of Jesus and make his presence known in the world.

Neither the Roman political authority nor the Jewish religious authority is able to recognize the truth that stands before them. Because they cannot recognize genuine royal power in the pathetic figure of Jesus, they seek to destroy what they cannot understand. Pilate proclaims his own power, the power to release Jesus or to crucify him (verse 10); the chief priests and temple police shout, “Crucify him” (verse 6).

Those who rely on the political or religious power of strength and intimidation believe to the end that such power solves problems. They weigh human life on the scales of convenience. But Jesus shows that genuine power comes from God (verse 11) and is to be used to serve people. His power is exercised in love, a love that gives his life for others. As Jesus has said, “I have power to lay it down and power to take it up again” (10:18).

Pilate repeatedly states, “I find no case against him” (verses 4, 6). But when he tries to use his authority to release Jesus, the religious leaders play their trump card. “If you release this man you are no friend of the emperor” (verse 12), they shout. Because anyone who claims to be king opposes the emperor, by setting Jesus free, Pilate would risk his honorary status as “friend of Caesar” as well as his position as Roman procurator. Now “more afraid than ever” (verse 8), Pilate ironically proclaims the truth about Jesus while presenting him to the authorities outside, “Here is your king!” (verse 14).

The gospel notes that Pilate hands Jesus over to be crucified at about noon on “the day of Preparation for the Passover.” This is the very hour that the Passover lambs began to be ritually slaughtered in the temple. While thousands of lambs were being put to death in preparation for the great feast of liberation, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (1:29) is offered up on the cross. When the incredulous Pilate asks if he should crucify their king, the chief priests respond, “We have no king but the emperor” (verse 15). These shocking and cynical words express their choice of the worldly emperor over the Messianic king and the kingdom of God. With that, Pilate concedes and hands Jesus over to the soldiers for execution on the cross.

Reflection and discussion

- In what ways does Pilate’s mockery of Jesus as king ironically proclaim the truth about him?

- When the pressure of the authorities outside increased, Pilate became “more afraid than ever” (verse 8). In what ways do fears paralyze people today?

- How is the power of Jesus a stark contrast to worldly power? What are characteristics of the power of Jesus’ realm?

- Who are the most powerful people I know? What is the source of their power? What power have I been given from God?

Prayer

King of heaven and earth, the source of your power is divine truth manifested in love. Help me to claim the power you have given me, and help me use that power for your glory.