

“ARE YOU A KING?”**JOHN 18:28-37**

Have you noticed how many Americans are totally fascinated by the British royal family? Two big events scheduled this spring are eagerly anticipated by royal family watchers: the birth of Prince William and Princess Kate’s third child in April and then the marriage of Prince Harry to American Megan Markle in May. It’s kind of ironic – this fascination with kings, queens, and royal families. Very few modern kings and queens have any real political power. Take Queen Elizabeth II herself for example. In reality, she’s a figurehead with a largely ceremonial role. Once a year she attends Parliament – not to share her plans on how Great Britain should be governed – but, instead, to read the official plans of the political party which happens to be in power at the time. For most of human history, a king or a queen was a person of almost absolute power and authority, but not so much anymore.

Was Jesus ever considered a king? When the wise men arrived to visit baby Jesus they asked, “Where is the newborn king of the Jews?” (Mt. 2:2 NLT) When Jesus miraculously fed 5,000 people with a few fish and pieces of bread, many in the crowd wanted to make him king. When Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem just a few days before His crucifixion and resurrection – what we call Palm Sunday – many in the crowd proclaimed Him king. In fact, it was the rumor that Jesus was a king that forced the Roman governor of Palestine at the time, Pontius Pilate, to take notice of Jesus.

Easter is April 1st this year. And every year in the weeks leading up to Easter Day we focus again on what Jesus has done for us through His crucifixion and resurrection. The four Gospels - Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John – each spent a very large section of Jesus’ story focused on just one week in His life – from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday or what we sometimes refer to as Holy Week. This year I want us to reflect on several questions different people asked Jesus which He answered during those tumultuous, incredible days that changed history and, more importantly, changed your eternal destiny and mine. What’s the question we consider today? “Are you a king?” Who asked it? Pontius Pilate. Let’s read about it now. Yes, Jesus was and is a king but not in the way Pilate ever understood. What did Jesus say here and what does the Bible say elsewhere that establishes that great truth?

THE REIGN OF KING JESUS IS REAL.

Kings reign. That’s just what kings do. Teachers teach, accountants account, preachers preach, engineers engineer, and kings reign. Jesus is most definitely a king and His reign is, most definitely, real, genuine, and true. It was very early on the day Jesus was crucified. Jesus stood before Pontius Pilate. The Jewish leaders had already condemned Jesus to death on the charge of blasphemy, but only the Roman governor had the legal authority and power to execute anyone. Pilate could have cared less about any blasphemy charges. But when the Jewish leaders told Pilate that Jesus admitted to being the Messiah, Pilate had to take notice. Most Jewish people back then believed the Messiah was someone who’d drive out the hated Romans and become the king of Israel. If Jesus claimed to be a king, that made Him the enemy of Rome. Pilate

got right to the point with Jesus, “Are you the king of the Jews?” (Jo. 18:33 NIV) Jesus was reluctant to use the word “king” because He didn’t want His mission to be misunderstood. His mission was not to run the Romans out of town and build a big palace for Himself in downtown Jerusalem. It was as if Jesus said, “Yes, I am a king, but my concept of kingship is very different than yours, Pilate. It’s so different, it’s almost meaningless to use the title of king. That’s your word, not mine.”

While Jesus never called Himself a king, His favorite topic was the Kingdom of God. He said things like “The time promised by God has come at last! The Kingdom of God is near! Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!” (Mk. 1:15 NLT) and “Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.” (Mt. 6:33 NLT) While Jesus never called Himself a king, He thought and acted like a king. When He forgave people’s sin, cast demons out of people, performed miraculous healings, and taught God’s truths with complete authority, He demonstrated He was a king and that His reign was real. In fact, Jesus was and is the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

You might say, “Where does Jesus reign? Who today thinks of or acknowledges Jesus as King?” On the game show “Family Feud” contestants were asked to guess how 100 people responded to various survey questions. Contestants had to provide the top answers to the following survey question: “When someone mentions ‘the King,’ to whom might he or she be referring?” Here were the four top answers: 81 people said “Elvis Presley.” Three people said “Martin Luther King, Jr.” Two people said “The Burger King.” Only seven people said “God or Jesus.” Today, it’s only those who make up the Church – all the people past, present, and future all over the world who worship, love, and call Jesus Savior, Lord, and King. But the Bible says one day everyone will recognize the absolute authority of the one, the only King Jesus. The Bible says, “God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord.” (Ph. 2:9-11 NLT) It also says, “The world has now become the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever.” (Rev. 11:15 NLT)

What should the reign of King Jesus mean for you and me? It means Jesus has the absolute right to govern your life. He should be calling the shots! He has every right to be in control of your life. It means you have the joy and privilege to serve King Jesus. How does that happen? When you bring your attitudes and behavior each and every day into submission to Jesus, you serve Him. When you live every day asking, “How would Jesus deal with this situation, treat this person, or approach this problem?” and then depend on the Holy Spirit’s power to do it in you, you serve Him. It also means recognizing every day that, first and foremost, you are a citizen of another country. Yes, be proud to be an American and love your country. But a follower of Jesus is, first and foremost, a citizen of the Kingdom of God where King Jesus rules and reigns. That’s your first, primary, and most important allegiance. Here’s a second truth to consider.

THE REIGN OF KING JESUS HAS A REALM.

Queen Elizabeth II has a realm. It's Great Britain (England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland) and, to a lesser extent, 48 other countries which used to be British colonies but are now known as the Commonwealth. That's her realm – her sphere of influence and power. King Jesus also has a realm. It's His sphere of influence and power. When He answered Pilate's question, Jesus said, "My Kingdom is not an earthly kingdom. If it were, my followers would fight to keep me from being handed over to the Jewish leaders. But my Kingdom is not of this world." (Jo 18:36 NLT) Jesus rejected the false ideas associated with the title "king." But that doesn't mean He rejected being a king! Pontius Pilate's and the Jewish leaders' understanding of what it meant to be a king was so petty and limited as to be useless to Jesus. Jesus' kingship is too big for this world, not too little. Jesus resisted being called a king not because it was too grandiose, but because it was too small. He didn't lead a revolt against Rome because He was unable to do so, but simply because it was irrelevant. The realm of King Jesus' reign far exceeded Palestine, Rome, or even this physical world.

King Jesus has a realm. It's in this world, but not of this world. In other words, the source or the origin of His reign comes from another place – the throne room of Heaven itself. Because Jesus' kingdom isn't of this world, however, doesn't mean Jesus' power is absent in this world. Far from it! His reign permeates the entire planet through you and me – His followers. His authority transcends the need for any legislature, any constitution, or any court. So how does Jesus' Kingdom conquer or exert its power? Through elections? Through sophisticated weapon systems? Through slick political maneuvering? No. Always and only through love. God's love is the power behind Jesus' reign and God's love reigns supreme throughout the realm of King Jesus.

Pity poor Pontius Pilate! He never understood Jesus. The realm of Jesus' reign is the hearts and minds of His people. Jesus' kingly realm is bigger than the universe and yet as small as your heart and mine. As our lives are transformed by the love of our King living in us through His Spirit, we spread the message and the power of the Kingdom of God like someone planting seeds. You spread the seeds of the Kingdom wherever you live, work, or go to school. Our church spreads the seeds of the Kingdom to the Northland community through our ministries on Sundays and throughout the week. I think of some of the missionaries our church supports as other examples. Emerson and Ivy Wu are planting seeds of the Kingdom in Hong Kong, mainland China, and in Chinese communities around the world. Kim Brown is planting seeds of the Kingdom in Thailand. Brian and Jenny Metzger are planting seeds of the Kingdom on college campuses in northeast Ohio. Michelle Prindle is planting seeds of the Kingdom among international students at Ohio State. The seed of the Kingdom of God is being planted every day. Yes, often it happens in very hidden, small, unnoticed, ignored ways, but one day all those seeds will bear fruit for the only kingdom – the only realm that will ever last forever – the Kingdom of God. Here's a final truth to consider.

THE REIGN OF KING JESUS DEMANDS A RESPONSE.

Are you planting any seed for the Kingdom of God? Are you actively serving King Jesus? Are you seeking the Kingdom of God and above all else? How does that get demonstrated in your life? In your message notes today are five concentric circles that represent five areas of life in which all of us can respond. The fifth and largest circle represents my community and my world. This might be the city, the state, or the nation you live in. One way you can respond to the claims of King Jesus might be by being involved in issues like promoting life, fighting racial bigotry and injustice, addressing hunger, or alleviating poverty. All of life belongs to King Jesus. There might be a separation of church and state in our government, but there isn't any division in the Kingdom of God. There's no area that's exempt from His power and influence. We're called to be salt and light anywhere and everywhere.

The fourth circle represents my work, school, or neighborhood. It's whatever place you spend the major part of your waking hours. Do you see your place of work or the career you pursue as a primary place to serve King Jesus? If you say, "No, it's just a place to earn money to live," that's the wrong answer! It's a place to plant seeds for the Kingdom of God. You can honor King Jesus by how you work. You can get into appropriate faith conversations with people from work who are curious about King Jesus. School can be a place to plant seeds for the Kingdom of God. How can King Jesus turn up at school? Through you! When you love unlovely people, when you show kindness to those who are hurting, or when you maintain your moral purity you honor Jesus. Maybe you spend a lot of time around your home. Are there any lonely, empty, hurting people living a door or two away? Has God dropped you into a ready-made mission field? Yes. When you extend hospitality, offer prayer in life crises, and point neighbors to Jesus through faith conversations you plant seeds for the Kingdom.

The third circle represents my church. Two kinds of Christians attend church every Sundays. One asks, "I wonder how this church will my needs today?" The other one asks, "I wonder what needs God can help me meet in someone else's life today?" What kind of Christian are you? Are you content to a believer, but not a disciple? Content to be a consumer, but not a contributor? Are you content to be a pew potato, or do you want to get busy serving King Jesus and His Kingdom? This church, any church, is a key place to plant seeds that build the Kingdom of God.

The second circle represents my family. Mom and Dad, are you planting Kingdom seeds in the lives of your kids? Statistics reveal that if a person hasn't put his or her faith in Jesus by age 21 chances are he or she never will. Of course, you can't force your kids to have faith in Jesus. But as long as they live under your roof you can insist on worshipping together and taking advantage of spiritual growth opportunities like a church school or a youth group. You might be the only follower of Jesus in your immediate family. What an incredibly strategic role King Jesus has given to you! You're a missionary to your own family. There's no higher, nobler calling. Yes, it may take many years to see fruit, but keep planting Kingdom seeds in the soil of your family.

The first, smallest, and final circle represents me. That's the single most important and foundational response any of us can ever make. Me. When by faith I become a subject

of King Jesus personally, only then can I truly serve King Jesus in my family, my church, and those other circles we discussed. This response makes all the other responses possible. Jesus said you and I come before Him like a little child humbly asking for forgiveness of our sins, trusting in His death and resurrection for a new, eternal relationship with God, and cooperating with the Holy Spirit to follow Jesus as His subject, His disciple. Have you ever invited King Jesus to reign in and over your life?

Years ago, Clint Eastwood played Secret Service Frank Horrigan in a hit movie called "In the Line of Fire." Horrigan had protected the life of several Presidents for more than three decades, but he was haunted by a very painful memory. He'd been a young agent assigned to President Kennedy on that terrible day in Dallas in 1963. When he heard the assassin's shot, Horrigan froze in shock. For the next thirty years he wrestled with the ultimate question for a Secret Service agent: Can I take a bullet for the President? In the movie's climax, Frank Horrigan was able to do what he'd been unable to do in Dallas. He threw himself into the path of an assassin's bullet and saved the President. Secret Service agents are willing to do such a thing because they believe the President is so valuable to our country and to the world that he's worth dying for. Obviously, they wouldn't take a bullet for just anyone.

But at the cross the situation was reversed. The President of the Universe – or the King – actually took a bullet, so to speak, for you and for me. Imagine President Trump – or any President – taking a bullet for you. No, you'd be expected to take a bullet for him, not the other way around. But Jesus – the King of the Universe – died in our place. Our commitment to King Jesus is the result of His commitment to you and me demonstrated at the cross and the empty tomb. Pilate asked Jesus, "Are you a king?" The answer is, "Yes!" But here's the question: Is Jesus your King?