

A Kingdom Not of This World

November 21, 2021 Sermon by Stephen Portner

John 18:33-38

33 Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?”

34 “Is that your own idea,” Jesus asked, “or did others talk to you about me?”

35 “Am I a Jew?” Pilate replied. “Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What is it you have done?”

36 Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.”

37 “You are a king, then!” said Pilate.

Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.”

38 “What is truth?” retorted Pilate. With this he went out again to the Jews gathered there and said, “I find no basis for a charge against him.

When we bought our last car, Christine wanted something a little out of the ordinary. We settled on a bright red Honda CRV. The official color of the car is “Molten Lava.” Sounds pretty awesome, huh? We have a habit of naming our cars. I know, that’s a bit quirky, but my Civic’s name is “Meep,” named after the pitiful sound the horn makes when someone cuts you off on the highway. Meep, meep. It doesn’t seem to intimidate many cars much. Now that Christine is a grandmother, our grandchild calls her Mimi. So, now our molten lava red CRV is called “the Screamin’ Mimi,” thanks to the name given it by one of our sons. Doesn’t Christine look like someone who would be driving around a car named “Screamin’ Mimi”? At any rate, we got the car primarily because we wanted something a little out of the ordinary. But you know what? Everywhere we look now there is a molten lava Honda CRV! Where did all those cars come from all of a sudden? Actually, that is not the case, is it? Those cars have always been around. We just weren’t looking for them before.

The kingdom of God is something like that. The kingdom of God is taking place all around us. It’s just that we don’t see it because we are not looking for it. John Piper is famous for saying, “God is always doing 10,000 things in your life, and you may be aware of three of them.”¹ J.R. Briggs puts it like this:

¹ <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/god-is-always-doing-10000-things-in-your-life>

God is often hidden in plain sight. I've heard it countless times: Christians praying that God would be with us. But God has already promised his presence—he *is* with us. He promised that he would never leave us. His name is *Emmanuel*. Instead, we should pray for an *awareness of his presence in our lives* and thus the courage to respond faithfully.²

The kingdom of God is wherever the king is. Jesus is the king. So, therefore, the kingdom is with us. The kingdom is in us. And Jesus is not the king of the things of this world. He is the king of God's kingdom. When you understand that Jesus is the king, and that the kingdom of God is wherever he is, then you get the inside information that makes this dialogue that Pilate has with Jesus in today's Scripture sound so absurd.

Pilate ...summoned Jesus and asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" This was the accusation the Jews had against Jesus, that he was claiming to be the king of the Jews. The Jews, at least the religious leaders of the Sanhedrin who represented them, did not want Jesus as their king. They wanted to do away with Jesus. But they did not have the authority to have Jesus killed. Only Pilate or some other official in the Roman Empire had the authority to do that. So, the religious leaders wanted Pilate to do their dirty work for them. If Pilate could be convinced that Jesus was trying to lead an insurrection against the Roman Empire by proclaiming himself king, then that would justify Jesus' death, as far as the religious leaders and the Roman Empire were concerned.

"Is that your own idea," Jesus asked, "or did others talk to you about me?" Notice how Jesus turns the question around so that he is not the focus, but that Pilate is. Perhaps here is an opportunity to bring Pilate into a saving knowledge of who—and what—Jesus really is. Is Pilate asking this question out of his own curiosity, or because that is what others had told him about Jesus? Even Pilate was given the opportunity to inquire more about Jesus if he was willing to take it. But, no, Pilate allowed the opportunity to pass him by.

"Am I a Jew?" Pilate replied. "Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What is it you have done?" Pilate didn't want to deal with his own understanding of who Jesus was. He passed the buck to Jesus' own people, the Jews. They are the ones who handed Jesus over to Pilate. So, what is it Jesus had done to deserve this accusation? Pilate was either giving Jesus a reason to incriminate himself or to recuse himself by making clear to Pilate what he had, or had not, done.

Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place." Jesus' kingdom is "in" the world, but it is not "of" the world. Jesus' kingdom is anywhere where king Jesus is. Where two or three are gathered in his name, he is there in the midst of them (Matthew 18:20). Jesus could have called the angels at any time to

²² J. R. Briggs, from *Ministry Mantras* by J.R. Briggs and Bob Hyatt, Intervarsity Press, 2016, p. 123. Italics original with author.

wreak vengeance upon those who were persecuting him, yet he stayed his hand, because Jesus knew he needed to go through with his mission to go to the cross. Jesus' kingdom is from another place, God's heavenly realm.

“You are a king, then!” said Pilate. Pilate had his confession, then. Or so he believed. Jesus admitted to being a king. For Pilate that was sufficient evidence to put Jesus to death for insurrection.

Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.” No, this was not about Jesus admitting he is a king. It was about Pilate admitting Jesus is king. Just as it is all about whether or not we admit that Jesus is king. And, if we do admit that Jesus is king, do we act like Jesus is our king? This might be a stretch for those of us who live in America, because we have no earthly king to relate Jesus' words to. But what Jesus is speaking about is, do we accept Jesus as Lord of our lives? Do we surrender the control of our lives to the One and only One Person who should have control over our lives? Do we just say that Jesus is Lord of our lives, or do we live that way? Everyone on the side of truth listens to Jesus.

“What is truth?” retorted Pilate. With this he went out again to the Jews gathered there and said, “I find no basis for a charge against him. Pilate mocked Jesus' answer. Which was tragic on his part because the irony of it is, the One who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life was standing right in front of him and Pilate was oblivious of that fact. Or, at the very least, he chose not to address the questions directed to him by Jesus which were prompting Pilate to ask who Jesus really is.

Some people think the kingdom of God is experienced only when you die and go to heaven. Yet the kingdom of God is right here, right now, all around us – like Molten Lava Honda CRVs – if only we have the eyes to see it. You may be asking yourself, where is the kingdom of God? I don't see it. Well, that's something like not recognizing that a lot of people have the same kind of car you do and that you just didn't notice it until you get the car. J. R. Briggs put it like this:

If my eyes and heart are tuned to see him, I can recognize his presence in the world.

- God is in the smile of the little child at the park.
- He is in the interruption in my day by a friend who is hurting and in need of a listening ear.
- He's in the small interaction with the lady behind me in the line at the post office.
- He's with me when I'm stuck in traffic.
- And he's with me on Sunday mornings in our church.

...Can we see the miracle in the midst of the mundane without dozing off or getting bored and moving on to the next thing? We look for God on Sundays and in the

sensational, but can we see him at work Monday through Saturday in the subtle as well?³

I want to close this morning by sharing with you an encounter I had earlier this week. I was meeting a friend at a restaurant and he had not arrived yet, so I was waiting in the reception area. One of the waitresses came out to the counter area and started lamenting that she just couldn't seem to get anything right that day. A customer had just gotten angry with her because the restaurant policy was not to have a discount for AARP, AAA, or for a discount for truck drivers. It's why the restaurant has a 55 and over section on the menu. But that didn't matter to the customer. He reamed her out anyway. And it was obvious that the restaurant was understaffed, like many restaurants are today. I could not help myself. I guess I'm getting more bold in my old age, because we introverts tend to keep to ourselves. But I said to her, "I just wanted to say thank you for being here today. If it was not for people like you, showing up to work, when so many others are not, then we would not have the privilege of dining out today. So, again, I just wanted to express my thanks and appreciation for all that you are doing." The waitress and the person behind the counter looked shocked. It took them a moment before they responded with a, "Thank you. Not many people have kind words to say."

With that my friend walked into the restaurant and the flustered waitress ushered us to our seats. Before I sat down I extended an invitation. I told her that we were both pastors and would be willing to have a prayer for her if she would like. She seemed surprised again, looked grateful, but declined my invitation. But, I thought, that was all right. I did not want her to feel uncomfortable, I just wanted her to know that someone cared and appreciated her efforts. Any more, a word of encouragement is all people need to realize that you belong to a different kingdom than the kingdom of this world. And, who knows, a word of encouragement might lead to another person being led to Christ as their King and Savior.

I have heard that "it takes about twenty-five different witnesses before a real encounter with God takes place. If you are numbers one through twenty-four, you are just as important as number twenty-five. Until you give your witness, the next person can't give theirs. Let God be concerned with the results. Our job is simply to tell the story."⁴

³ J. R. Briggs, from *Ministry Mantras* by J.R. Briggs and Bob Hyatt, Intervarsity Press, 2016, pp. 122-123.

⁴ Carolyn Moore, *Supernatural*, p. 45, quoting her friend Bob Tuttle. Seedbed Publishing, 2020.