

The Charge Against Him

Matthew 27:26-37

Lent 2, March 15, 2017

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

It is hard to know what to do with what the soldiers say about our Lord. It is hard to know how one should feel about it. It is hard to know whether or not in our hearts we should dispute what the soldiers are saying or whether we should endorse it and believe it with all of our hearts.

They do say it in mockery. There is no love here. There is no respect. They have flogged Him. They have woven together a crown of thorns and forced it onto His head. They have put Him in a scarlet robe which only kings would wear. Where they got this garment, I have no idea. They have put a reed into His hand like a scepter. But make no mistake. This is not out of respect. The crown is painful and deadly. The robe is mockery only. The reed is the instrument they use to beat Him.

The soldiers are only interested in asserting their own power. They are Romans. It is likely that they do not like being assigned to Judea as the Romans considered it a backward province. It was not wealthy and influential like other provinces and the Jews were hard to control. They would have liked nothing more than to torment a few Jews to entertain themselves while they waited for assignments elsewhere in the empire.

Jesus is a likely target. He has made claims that He does not back up. It would be easy to assume that He could not back them up. He is charged with trying to be royalty. The Romans were in charge and no king would reign without their permission. So here comes a seeming lunatic who claims to be the King of the Jews. That is how the Romans see it. And just to prove who is in charge they take this King of the Jews and flog, beat, strip, mock, and reclothe Him before ultimately crucifying Him.

Furthermore the Roman soldiers embrace the title King of the Jews. Jesus is not accused of being just any old king, but being king of the Jews. If that claim were believed by anybody what better way to assert Roman power than to take their so-called king and beat, torture, mock, spit on, and crucify Him. If this is the best you can do for your king, then we Romans will reign over you Jews forever. That was likely the idea in the Roman soldier's hearts.

Pilate had likely had Jesus executed for political reasons anyway. His sympathies would have been with the Romans soldiers. We have evidence in Roman records that Pilate was ambitious. He wanted Caesar to grant him a cushy position in Rome. He knew that in order to get that position, he would have to please Caesar with his service in Judea. There had been several riots under Pilate's administration of the province. Caesar desired public peace. Riots were not good for trade nor were they good for preserving the integrity of the empire. If one place riots and gets away with it, other places that may not care for Roman rule may try the same thing. But if Caesar could honestly tell the entire empire that it was living in peace, then he could make a case that their lives were better off under his rule. We have the record. Caesar had told Pilate that if there were any more riots in Judea that Pilate would lose his position and his ambitions. Pilate wanted peace above all else and if the unjust crucifixion of one Jew got him that peace, so be it. He washed his hands in public, but nevertheless turned our Lord over to be crucified.

Therefore when Pilate hangs the notice of the charge against Jesus which read, "This is Jesus, King of the Jews," he had it there for political reasons also. Along with the soldiers he was demonstrating to anyone else that if they tried to claim to be king of the Jews that a crucifixion was waiting for them also. It demonstrated Roman power and dominance. It demonstrated that even this usurper was caught

and punished. If you were thinking of rebelling against Rome, then you had better think again unless you wanted this to happen to you.

So neither the soldiers nor Pilate have pious reasons for calling Jesus the King of the Jews.

And yet the statement is true.

Pilate and the soldiers were not trying to speak truth. They were ridiculing and mocking Him. But in spite of the fact that they were ridiculing and mocking Him and in spite of the fact that they did not believe what they were saying, they nevertheless spoke truth. Jesus was the king of the Jews. Or perhaps better put, Jesus is the King of Israel. And when it comes to the Kings of Israel you should have expected them to suffer. There should be no surprise here in what the soldiers and Pilate do to our Lord.

There is an extended portion of 2Samuel that deals with what happened to David later in his kingship. His son, Absalom, mounts a rebellion against David. He deceives the hearts of the people of Israel by telling them that they would get justice faster for their cases if he were king. The people eventually believe Absalom. There is a growing sympathy for Absalom. Eventually Absalom has enough support that he makes his move and takes the throne of Israel.

David realizes that he has lost the support of the people and flees from Jerusalem. He goes across the Jordan and lives literally in exile from his own throne. He leaves with those people who are loyal to him. Absalom tries to reign in Jerusalem in place of his father.

David is the anointed king. And while you may say and be right that David suffered for what he did as a result of his sin against Uriah and Bathsheba, you would also have to point out that the Scriptures took the time to record it.

Outside of the Scriptures in the records of other ancient kings, no mention is made of their shortcomings or failures. Any loss of power is carefully edited out of the accounts. If you want to know if they lost power, you would have to read the records of their opponents who record the weaknesses of others, but not their own.

The Scriptures are more honest. They not only record David's sin, they also record David's sufferings. Israel has an anointed king, a Christ, who suffers. The kings of Israel suffer. So do not assume that just because Jesus is hanging there on the cross suffering that He is not the king of Israel. What the soldiers say in derision, you and I speak in devotion. What they say of Him in mocking, we say of Him in reverence, "Hail, King of the Jews."

They bow before him in order to try to teach Him a lesson. We bow before Him in order to learn His lessons.

And so Jesus is King. He is King not in spite of the crucifixion, but rather because of it. Here is where He takes His place among the kings of Israel. And since He suffered more than any of them, He is also greater than any of them.

While the soldiers and Pilate may believe that they were executing their own will, the king is in charge of His kingdom. Everything that they did to Him was His will that they should do it. He could have prevented it all with a single prayer. He did not. Therefore what they did to Him was what He wanted them to do to Him.

It was necessary according to God's creation of atonement and the nature of sin in the creation that His suffering be so. And so He suffered. He suffered for you. He suffered on the behalf of those who are members of His kingdom.

Usually the members of an earthly kingdom give their lives for their king, to save him or whatever. In the heavenly kingdom, the king gives His life for the members of the kingdom. You do not

ransom Him. He ransoms you. You do not save Him. He saves you. And He will not save Himself and you at the same time. He will save only you. He will suffer. This Jesus. This King of the Jews.

The voices of the passion, they say more than they know.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.