

Clashing Kingdoms

by Mike Sharrett

The sermon explores the clash between the kingdom of Jesus and the kingdoms of self-righteous religion, self-confidence, and cynicism, inviting believers to embrace the truth of Christ's kingdom.

Duration: 34:58

Scripture: Zechariah 13:7, Matthew 6:33, John 18:19-24, Acts 13:38-39

Topics: "Jesus Arrest"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the clash between different kingdoms and how Jesus invites people into his glorious kingdom. The preacher identifies three alternate kingdoms: the pride of self-righteous religion represented by Annas the High Priest, the fear of the self-confident individual represented by Peter, and the power of a cynical and unbelieving world represented by Pilate. The preacher highlights the irony of Jesus being struck in the mouth, despite his compassionate acts of healing and restoration. The sermon emphasizes the importance of firmly placing one's life in the unshakable and glorious kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Transcript

This is John 18, and, um, beloved, this is very holy ground we tread onto this morning. This is very holy ground. So the Roman cohort and the commander and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound him.

Led him to Annas first, for he was father-in-law of Caiaphas who was the high priest that year. Now Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was expedient for one man to die on behalf of the people. And Simon Peter was following Jesus and so was another disciple.

Now that disciple was known to the high priest and he entered with Jesus into the court of the high priest. But Peter was standing at the door outside. So the other disciple who was known to the high priest went out and spoke to the doorkeeper and brought in Peter.

The slave girl, therefore, who kept the door said to Peter, You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you? He said, I am not. Now the slaves and the officers were standing there having made a charcoal fire for it was cold. And they were warming themselves and Peter also was with them standing warming himself.

The high priest therefore questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching. Jesus answered, I have spoken openly to the world. I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple where all the Jews come together.

And I spoke nothing in secret. Why do you question me? Question those who have heard what I spoke to them. Behold, these know what I have said.

And when he had said this, one of the officers standing by gave Jesus a blow. Saying, is that the way you answer the high priest? Jesus answered him, if I have spoken wrongly, bear witness of the wrong. But if rightly, why do you strike me? And it's therefore sent him bound to Caiaphas, the high priest.

Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They said, therefore, to him, you are not also one of his disciples, are you? He denied it and said, I am not. One of the slaves of the high priest, being a relative of the one whose ear Peter cut off, said, did I not see you in the garden with him? Peter therefore denied it again and immediately a cockroach.

They led Jesus, therefore, from Caiaphas into the praetorium. And it was early and they presented, they themselves did not enter into the praetorium in order that they might not be defiled, but might eat the Passover. Pilate therefore went out to them and said, what accusation do you bring against this man? They answered and said to him, if this man were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered him up to you.

Pilate therefore said to them, take him yourselves and judge him according to your law. And the Jews said to him, we're not permitted to put anyone to death, that the word of Jesus might be fulfilled which he spoke, signifying by what kind of death he was about to die. Pilate therefore entered again into the praetorium and summoned Jesus and said to him, you are king of the Jews? Jesus answered, are you saying this on your own initiative or did others tell you about me? Pilate answered, I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and chief priests delivered you up to me.

What have you done? Jesus answered, my kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, then my servants would be fighting, that I might not be delivered up to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not of this realm.

Pilate therefore said to him, so you are a king? Jesus answered, you say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born and for this I came into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice.

Pilate said to him, what is truth? And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews and said to them, I find no guilt in him, but you have a custom that I should release someone for you at the Passover. Do you wish then that I release for you the king of the Jews? Therefore they cried out again saying, not this man, but Barabbas. Now Barabbas was a robber.

Well, did you notice there's a lot of friction in Jerusalem? The sparks are flying. Why? Why? Because kingdoms are clashing. Kingdoms are clashing.

And while it looks like to us that Jesus is getting a raw deal, the fact is this text is a revelation of God to you about the glory of his kingdom. Jesus is inviting you into his kingdom. Jesus is challenging the foundation for the kingdom of your life.

And what we see here is juxtaposed the glory of the kingdom of Jesus Christ compared to three alternate kingdoms. Three kingdoms you find among humanity. We're going to see that Annas the high priest represents the pride of self-righteous religion.

We're going to see that Peter represents the fear of the self-confident individual. And then thirdly, Pilate represents the power of a cynical and unbelieving world. These kingdoms are clashing with the kingdom of our glorious Lord Jesus Christ.

And God wants to show you the results to invite you to firmly set the feet of your life upon his unshakable and glorious kingdom. So let's unpack it that way. Number one, the pride of self-righteous religion.

One thing is very clear in the Bible. When God wants to communicate profound truth, he often uses irony. Quite often uses irony.

And this text as you're going to see is oozing with irony. You're going to get tired of hearing me use the word ironic and irony. But I can't help it because this text is chock full of irony.

What is irony? Irony is when one thing is intended yet the opposite is true. Irony is the disconnect between what you would expect and what actually occurs. So for example, standing back and look at the big picture.

The big picture is full of irony. In the big picture, what do we have here? The only innocent man in history is being condemned as a criminal. That's ironic.

Humanity's rejected one is ironically God's accepted one. The Jews are viewing this death as a fitting execution. While Jesus ironically is viewing his death as a loving life-giving sacrifice, a fragrant aroma to God.

Sinners think they're getting God off their hands. And ironically, God is doing this to get his hands on helpless sinners in order to heal them. Jesus will no doubt suffer unspeakable indignities while never losing his dignity.

Jesus is not some unwilling victim resigned to death. He's compelled by his love and obedience to go to the cross. Jesus' tormentors meant it for evil.

God meant it for good. Ironic. That's the big picture.

Let's look at some of the irony in the details of the text. We're told in verse 12 that Jesus was arrested and bound. Bound? Didn't the people binding him just witness two miracles? Everyone falling on the ground at the sound of his name.

And the healing of the ear of Malchus, the high priest slave, supernaturally restored on the spot. This does not seem like a dangerous man given to fight or to flight. Why are you binding him? You bind people who are dangerous.

Ironically, Jesus Christ is the safest man in the universe because to be hidden in Jesus by faith is to be sure that at the final judgment you will never face the wrath of God. He's the safest man in the universe. They bound him and he surrendered defenselessly because his love would compel him to go to the cross.

He was bound that though in his ministry he was always unshackling people from the torments of sickness, hunger, demons, psychological pain, being socially outcast. That was his ministry, unshackling people. They've got him now bound.

And ironically, through his binding, being nailed to the cross, we are freed from that which we could not free ourselves, the demands and penalty of the law. When Peter preached Jesus at Pisidian Antioch in the synagogue in Acts 13, he said this, Let it be known to you, therefore brothers, that through this man, through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you and by him everyone who believes, everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses. Translated by trying to be a good person, you can never free yourself from the power of sin.

By trying to do the right thing, you can never free yourself from the guilt of doing the wrong things. Jesus has come, they've bound him, but he came to set people free. What does Jesus actually threaten? The proud, the self-righteous, their corrupt way of relating to God.

So it's ironic that the high priest predicts that it would be expedient for one man to die for the nation. Little did he know the profundity of what he said. And in Jesus' death, not just for the nation, but salvation comes to the entire world.

It's ironic that Jesus allows himself to be judged by these people knowing one day they'll all stand before his judgment seat. He tolerates it and their final judgment will be intolerable. And the very laws they ought to be using faithfully in the process, he himself gave Israel as a gift.

Do we see any irony in the high priest's interrogation from verses 19 to 24? Well it says in verse 19, they asked him about his disciples and about his teaching. Jesus says nothing about his disciples. Maybe he's protecting them.

Maybe he knows if they were there, they weren't fit to say anything, couldn't speak for themselves. But after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at the day of Pentecost, oh, they'd speak for Jesus. And when they did, all they would do is repeat what? Whatever Jesus had taught them.

They had nothing new to invent. In fact, when Paul was preaching in Acts 26 before King Agrippa, showing that the Christian religion was nothing new, that it was simply all predicted in the Old Testament, Paul, did I say Peter? I meant Paul said this to King Agrippa, I stand here testifying today saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass. That the Christ must suffer and that by reason of the resurrection he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.

Nothing new here, King Agrippa. And Jesus could have said that to the Jewish leaders. Nothing new.

I am what your own Bible said was coming to pass. What about his teaching? They want to question him about his teaching. It's ironic, isn't it, that the incarnate word of God, the true prophet, is on trial for being a false prophet.

And how the people on earth that ought to recognize truth in him are the very ones who fail to see it. They act as if Jesus has some subversive plan. Well, he is subverting their awful religion.

But he moves the trial along in 20 and 21. He says, look, convict me of something. Go talk to the people.

Ask them what I said. I've never had any secrets. I've preached everything out in the open.

Nothing to hide here. Their supposed interest in the truth is a farce. And their rush to judgment on Jesus, do you realize this trial is taking place probably at 2 and 3 a.m. in the morning? There are gobs of laws of their own judicial system they are violating in this trial.

It is a serious miscarriage of justice, ironically. Even worse, Jesus is struck in the mouth. Verse 22, perhaps fulfilling Zechariah 13, strike the shepherd and the flock will be scattered.

I find it ironic that they would strike in the mouth someone so compassionately acquainted with people's faces. How many times did he touch the eye to give sight to the blind, unstop the ear to give hearing to the deaf, breathe life into the dead so that their nostrils had the breath of life again, open the mouths of the mute they could speak, fed the mouths of the hungry, healed the skin of the leper so they had clean skin, cast demons to flight from the minds of people tormented. Oh, this Jesus so acquainted with faces is ironically struck in his.

Can you feel the kingdom of pretentious pride and falsehood and injustice crumble under the weight of Jesus' humility and truth? Theirs was a religion based on performance and therefore produced pride and a feeling of superiority to others and yet their arrogance reeks in the presence of a man so humbly submitting to such unjust treatment not to mention his willingness to forgive them from the cross hours later that day. Have you been drawn to his humility? Has it melted your pride? Has it made you forbearing with others? Move to prayer for the disdainful and the wretched people that you know or do you continue to sit in judgment scornfully feeling superior to them? If so, you haven't known his humility. Are people drawn to your humility? What is your pull? Are you controlling, wanting to be liked, needing to look like the expert, wanting to be competent? Would the people melt under our humility? That's the first kingdom that's causing sparks to fly here this night in Jerusalem.

It's the kingdom of the self-righteous, proud religious. The second is the fear of self-confident Peter. Now the Bible, as you probably know, is very honest about the clay feet of its heroes.

In fact, the Bible does not go to great lengths to show how great and strong its heroes are, but rather what God does through them in spite of them. Peter is a clean-up batter. He's one of the three of the inner circle.

No attempt has made him to look larger than life, to cover up his weakness. In fact, the opposite. The point here, ironically, is Peter's self-confidence is his downfall.

See, think back a few hours. Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane dismissed Peter. He said to the arresters, if I'm the one you're looking for, let these men go.

Peter has been dismissed, and yet he has a plan. He's still hanging around. He may be thinking something like this, that you and I think.

I have something to prove to myself and to God that I can do this. I have good news for you. You don't need to prove anything to God.

God knows you can do nothing on your own. God knows if you and I are ever going to do anything that's ultimately of any value, we do it because he gives us the grace. You're free from that burden.

Peter wasn't. And yet there was a bravado in the Garden of Gethsemane that gave Peter the confidence, apparent courage, I'm not sure it was courage, to draw the sword. And I think he did so thinking, now that

Jesus is here, I can get away with this because Jesus is going to deliver me.

He'd seen many deliverances at the hand of Jesus. He started falling into the water. Jesus saved him.

He saw Jesus calm the sea. He saw Jesus cast out demons. He saw Jesus feed the hungry.

I think he had confidence in the presence of Jesus that Jesus would deliver him. Now Jesus is being interrogated. And what happens to Peter? He crumbles.

He crumbles. Not under the Roman waterboarding experts, but under a mere slave girl. A mere slave girl.

The lowliest of the lowly. He denies Jesus. Why? His self-confidence is his downfall.

See, I think on the surface of our bravado, of people who look like they have it all together, and you know, this wears many different faces. Some people, it's shy. Some people, it's the class clown.

Some people, it's the tough guy. Some people, it's the expert, the mister know-it-all. On the surface of all that bravado, however it wears itself on our faces, there is lingering in us a profound insecurity and fear.

And that is this. Even though we might not acknowledge it consciously, we know the thing we trust in is untrustworthy. Maybe it's your children.

Maybe it's your marriage. Maybe it's your job. Maybe it's your finances.

Maybe it's some ability you have. Maybe it's your government. We know in our heart of hearts every one of those things can let us down because they're all subject to change, and we can't control them.

There is a fear lingering deep down, just like in Peter. And all it took was the separation from Jesus and a few questions from a slave girl for him to go, I don't know him, I don't know him, I don't know him. It's interesting, isn't it, that Peter warms himself by the fire as his heart is growing colder and colder.

Do you know that the more freedom you have in a society, the more you have of its creature comforts, the greater danger you are of your heart growing colder spiritually. Do you know that? So that if God is pleased to give you many of these good things, you are on a very slippery slope towards your heart growing cold spiritually. The thing to do is not eschew all those things, but to stay vigilant over your heart, lest we find ourselves warming up our hands by the charcoal fire in the courtyard while our hearts are being drained of life.

Should we be confident? Yes. What is the word confident? It's a compound, confide. It means with faith.

And of course, your faith is only as good as the object it's in. And so if you have faith in a big, powerful, loving, good God, you should be confident. John Knox, the great Scottish reformer, was asked on the occasion of coming before kings and queens, are you intimidated? He said, why should I be? I spent time before the king of the universe this morning.

He argued from the greater to the lesser. I think Peter got it too. After the day of Pentecost, and Peter was a man filled with the Holy Spirit, and they started preaching Jesus in this same Jerusalem, and this same council brought the disciples in under threat and penalty.

They said, stop preaching in this name. They said to the leaders, whether or not it is right in the sight of man or God to keep preaching, you be the judge. We can't stop speaking of what we've heard.

We can't stop speaking. Why? Peter was a man who became under the control of a different spirit, the Spirit of Christ. And you and I need daily to come under the Spirit of Christ to seek to ask to be filled with the Spirit.

And then you'll be guilty by association. You'll be known as one of those people who hung out with this Jesus because this DNA is rubbing all over your heart, producing in you love and joy and peace and humility and a drawing of sinners to yourself. Wouldn't it be great if whenever someone drove by this church they said, oh, that's the church where the people inside really believe they're helpless apart from Christ.

That's the church where everybody goes and those people think, you know, we'd be worse than everybody else, but for the grace we've been given, that's the kind of church the Spirit of God produces. Okay, that's the second one. The second kingdom teetering under the glory of Jesus Christ.

The third is the power of the cynical, unbelieving world. And this is represented by Pilate. Ironically, Pilate goes out to meet the Jews because they won't come into his praetorium for fear of being made unclean for the Passover.

And yet they were getting ready to kill the Passover lamb themselves and there's nothing in Jewish law that said they couldn't do that. So right now the scene becomes Pilate interacting with the Jews and he asks the right question in verse 29. What accusation do you bring against this man? He needs to know so that supposedly he can do the right thing.

Ironically, he fails to do the right thing, ultimately cowering to political pressure. Notice that their answer is no answer. They say, if this man were not an evildoer, we wouldn't have delivered him up to you.

It's not an answer. What they're saying is, trust us. Don't meddle in our affairs.

We have this whole thing under control. Why would we do this if it wasn't right? The truth is they won't tell Pilate what the reason is because they know Pilate would have nothing to do with it. They are condemning Jesus for distinctly religious reasons.

He claimed to be the son of God. Okay, you deserve death. But in Jewish law, that would have been done by stoning.

They want Jesus crucified on a Roman cross. They can't do it, so they want Pilate to do it. Pilate doesn't give a rip about their religious views.

He's a religious relativist. He doesn't care if this man claimed to be the son of God. So they have to trump up the charges to insurrection.

No, Pilate, he claimed to be a king. You better be concerned. And ironically, Pilate had it right.

Judge him by your own laws. So then the focus shifts to Pilate and Jesus in verse 33. You are the king of the Jews? The question reveals he doesn't believe it for a second.

Pilate is concerned about insurrections. During Passover, a bunch of bozos periodically would try to do insurrections against the Romans in Jerusalem. He isn't in Jerusalem for no reason.

His main palace is up in Caesarea Maritime along the beautiful Mediterranean coast. He has to be here in case there's an insurrection. But he takes one look at Jesus and he goes, Are you kidding me? This isn't a threat to my kingdom.

So Jesus asks him in verse 34, Have you seen me publicly as a threat? It's ironic that Jesus now is leading the investigation, himself asking for evidence and testimony. And of course, Pilate's indignant in verse 35. He has no stake in the pretentious claims of a Jew.

And ironically, Pilate, who hates and distrusts the Jews, is forced to take their position. So we have a reality check in verse 36. And ironically, it seems Jesus has more to say to Pilate than he does to the Jews.

Here's the gist of what Jesus has to say to Pilate. I am not a threat to your political kingdom. I am a threat to their religious order.

I am a king, but my subjects don't bear arms. We don't kill people. We love our enemies.

In my otherworldly kingdom, conceived only by God, the king first dies as an act of sacrifice and is raised to life for the benefit of his subjects. This king doesn't lord himself over other people. He wins their affection by love.

So King Jesus produces subjects who, due to their zeal for his glory and not their own, those who will not embrace the spirit of the world's arrogance and selfishness and justice, but who under the control of God's spirit produce love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control, not to mention humility, self-sacrifice, other-centeredness, a concern for the weak, for the destitute, and are always praying that their presence will make the city in which they live a better place. Well, that's a real threat to someone's government. The irony.

This is the only kingdom of universal appeal and has no pretension to the throne of Pilate whatsoever. So here's the irony. This king put Pilate on his throne.

If Pilate understood Jesus' kingdom, he'd want every one of his followers to be a Jesus lover. If Pilate knew it was Jesus who held Pilate in his hand, he'd worship him. And so we get to the crux of the issue in verse 37.

Jesus said, Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice. What's the greatest weapon in the hand of this king? It is the truth. That his kingdom is a kingdom that can make any political kingdom any good because the sword never sways the heart.

Only the grace of this king subdues hearts to do the right thing for the right reason. And Pilate, unfortunately, bows to the mantra of the progressives. I will be my own arbiter of the truth.

When Pilate says, What is truth? He has no interest in truth. He's really intellectually dishonest. He fails to engage in a thoughtful discussion of the real issues.

What is truth? He's a relativist. Ironically, though he finds no guilt in Jesus, he falsely capitulates to the Jews' wishes and gives in. This king's master is expediency.

Why? He hates the Jews, and he fears being reported by them. In fact, three years later, the Jews reported him to the emperor because he slaughtered a bunch of people in Samaria at a revolt. He was

removed from his post and spent the rest of his life in some cold climate in northern Europe.

Mediterranean Sea, northern Europe. How ironic. Both systems of government, beloved, the Roman and the Jewish, failed.

And ironically, they did not condemn the Christ of this world. They condemned the kingdom of man. They showed that it is cursed, that it cannot give life, and it is only through the kingdom of Jesus Christ that life comes.

One last irony. One last irony, and we're done. Man apparently prefers a murderer to the Lord of Life, the Prince of Peace, and the King of Truth.

Give us Barabbas. They would exchange and kill a life giver and let a killer have life. Do you see any good in that? Barabbas' name means Bar, Son, Abba, Father.

His name literally means Son of the Father. How ironic. That one, the Son of the Father, is exchanged complete innocence and righteousness to bear the sin and penalty of another Son of the Father, Barabbas.

That through the sacrifice of Jesus, this Son of the Father would go free. Jesus came to do the same for you. To make you a son or a daughter of the Father.

How ironic. That though we don't deserve it, such glory is won through His inglorious treatment. And yet, the world's treatment of Jesus is nothing else but what His Father has gladly ordained for your salvation and mine.

Let's pray. Jesus, we confess that we build kingdoms for ourselves that fail. Whether it is self-righteous religion, self-confidence, cynical unbelief.

Thank you that in the gospel we see the crushing humility and truth of Jesus Christ submitting to such injustice. Tearing apart these faulty foundations so that our lives will be built on the foundation Barabbas, Son of the Father, Daughter of the Father. Set us free, Jesus, as you have come to do from that which shackles us, unbelief, fear.

Set us free to give you total reign in our hearts. For your grace is better than life. And it's better than anything we can muster ourselves.

So send us grace, and we will glory in our Redeemer. In Jesus' name, amen.

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