

In the bible, kings stood out for various reasons. King David exhibited great courage in leading Israel's battles against her enemies, whereas King Solomon was renowned for his vast wealth & uncanny wisdom.

In the time of Jesus on earth, then kings ruled people according to their own whims and wishes, and often in a dictatorial and autocratic manner. They could do what they wanted and were all-powerful.

Jesus, of course, was given the title, King of the Jews' at his crucifixion.

What was meant by this title? Did Jesus really come to serve the Jewish community as an earthly king or was his life's purpose and mission misunderstood?

Throughout the gospels, the descriptions of Jesus' life fail to indicate any sign of earthly kingship. He was born in a manger. He was the son of a Jewish carpenter and later took on his father's profession. Jesus had no permanent residence but lived a transient existence. In fact, nothing about him exuded royalty.

Then, for what reason did he receive the title 'King of the Jews'?

This is the question that Pilate, the Roman governor, has for Jesus in our gospel reading, John 18:33-37. In verse 33, Pilate directly asks Jesus concerning the validity of this Jewish kingship.

Of course, when Jesus is asked a question, he so often responds with a question of his own.

*'Is your own idea, or did others talk to you about me?'*

Pilate dismisses this question, as he is not a Jew, so can't be expected to understand Jewish ways.

Yet there must be a reason why Jesus is here, he must have done something wrong.

So Jesus agrees that yes, he does have a kingdom, but his kingdom is *'not from this world.'*

It is important to note that the NIV and other translations are not helpful when they translate Jesus' words as being, *'My kingdom is not of this world.'*

Because that implies that Jesus' kingdom is from another world – a spiritual, heavenly world that has nothing to do with this world at all.

Remember that Jesus has taught his disciples to pray for God's kingdom to come, *'on earth as in heaven.'*

No, what Jesus means is that his kingdom does not come from this world. How can it?

Because, as we have seen in John's Gospel, the world is the source of all evil, darkness and rebellion against God. Jesus is denying that his kingdom has a worldly origin or quality.

He is not denying that his kingdom is for this world, that his kingdom has a this-worldly destination.

His kingdom does not come from this world, but it is for this world.

If his kingdom was from this world, he points out to Pilate, then his followers would fight to stop him being arrested. They nearly did, of course, led by Peter in the garden grabbing a sword and Jesus had to stop them.

Peter, still needed to learn that lesson and would have to wait until after the resurrection.

But, he tells Pilate, that he is indeed a king.

Pilate, naturally seizes on this statement and retorts in verse 37, *'You are a king, then!'*

Jesus was, of course, speaking and bringing the truth.

As he states, when he responds to Pilate's retort – *'You say that I am a king. In fact the reason I was born and came into the world, was to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.'*

Here, in John 18, in front of Pilate, an earthly ruler, Jesus spells out his true identity to the world.

Pilate is baffled by Jesus making reference to truth.

After all, Pilate's understanding of truth is in the context of power, control and violence:-

My sword against your sword; my truth against your truth; my power against your weakness; my armed soldiers against you, Jesus; my cross to hang your tortured naked body on.

That's how Pilate understood truth.

But Jesus' kingdom is never advanced through violence (*thank God in the current situation of terror advanced through evil & the utter distortion of the truth*).

Jesus' kingdom will come on earth as it is in heaven because it is about truth.

Pilate, who doesn't know what truth is, doesn't know that there can be a kingdom without violence.

Because it is from God and the only weapons wielded within it are spiritual ones – prayer, faith, forbearance and compassion.

Those who live in it, seek not to dominate, but to liberate others, setting them free to love God and to love one another. Peace is the highest priority of the kingdom of Jesus, not just in the cessation of violence and war, but in the much more positive sense of nurturing and building creative life-enhancing relationships that enable all people to flourish.

No wonder then that Jesus & Pilate clashed. They stood for completely opposite views of life.

Pilate served an empire founded on violence and maintained by violence.

But violence achieves nothing worthwhile.

Against all of this, Jesus calls us to serve him: to take up our cross and accept all the difficulty, danger, distrust, and often disappointment & pain that comes from opposing the forces of invested power in our world. But how can we hope to persevere against such odds? Little you and me?

By remembering that despite appearances to the contrary, ultimately Jesus overcame all the evil, hatred, violence and sin of the world on the cross.

Because the message of the cross is that Jesus 'is let loose in all the world, where neither Jew nor Roman can hold him. And this is the source of courage and perseverance we need in the struggle to meet violence with love – knowing that Jesus is let loose in our world, standing with the victimised, comforting the broken-hearted, strengthening the weak, and upholding all those who witness to the truth of his way.

Endurance will also come from seeing others discover their true identity as God's children as they hear & respond to the good news of his unfailing love.

As Christians we are called to do 3 things:- to worship God together; to pray together; and to share the love of Jesus with everyone around us, so that they might come to know that love of Jesus for themselves.

It is God's love, which we believe through conquering death will finally transcend this world, and lead us to that glorious future when the Lamb will sit upon the throne, and we and all the believers will know complete fulfilment & peace.

The suffering of Jesus Christ on the cross has a purpose – this is the truth he is specifically referring to.

It is ultimately redemptive. It effectively removes the sins of the world – my sin and yours.

This is what the cross means. This is what truth is and does.

Truth is what Jesus is; and Jesus dies in place of Barabbas, for him, and for Israel and for the world.

And for you and me.

Today, we pray for Jesus' kingdom of mercy, truth, justice & peace to embrace the whole world.