

Connecting Minds

"These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31)

The Gospel of John

Chapter 19:15,16

"But they cried out, 'Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him!' Pilate said to them, 'Shall I crucify your King?' The chief priests answered, 'We have no king but Caesar!' Then he delivered Him to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus and led Him away."

"Shall I crucify your King...?" Pilate is still attempting to release Jesus even as he sits on the Judgment Seat. Caiaphas and the leaders certainly must have sensed this and they became desperate. You can see their growing desperation in what they say next to Pilate – "We have no king but Caesar..." You can almost see jaws dropping... if it weren't for the inflamed rage of the crowd.

Why would the leaders make such a statement? Clearly they did not believe it in their official words and actions, but they made this statement to Pilate at this time. Why? It was meant to put the ultimate pressure upon Pilate. Pilate was meant to hear these exact words as being what the Jewish leaders would carry to Tiberius Caesar in accusation against him - "We have no king but you Caesar. And when someone came along to claim to be a king, we brought him to Pilate, and he refused to deal with the rival."

"We have no king but Caesar..." Even knowing the reason they said these words, they are still so astonishing. Bruce Milne writes "The retort is a fateful utterance on the part of these official representatives of the Jewish theocracy, for it represents nothing less than the rending of the sacred covenant with God."¹ James Boice adds "One would think they would have choked on it as they said it."²

Jesus spoke of this occurrence in a parable He told in Luke 19:12-14. In the parable, a nobleman goes into a far country to receive a kingdom. His servants,

¹ The Bible Speaks Today: The Message of John, Bruce Milne, pg. 273

² An Expositional Commentary: The Gospel of John, vol. 5, James Montgomery Boice, pg. 1492

while he is away, saying "We will not have this man to reign over us..." (12:14). It was a prophecy of what would happen on this day of His crucifixion.

Compare these two declarations by the leaders. In Mark 14:64 they say during Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin, "'You have heard the blasphemy! What do you think?' And they all condemned [Jesus] to be deserving of death..." In John 19:15 these same leaders say "We have no king by Caesar..." They accused and condemned Jesus for blasphemy against the Name of God - for Jesus claimed to be God. But now they are saying "We have no king but Caesar..." They are denying the same God who they earlier claimed to be defending. In fact, they are condemning themselves to be "deserving of death..."

Ultimately the leaders of Israel really want to be king themselves. In Matthew 23:1-7 Jesus says "They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues..." They want to be king. They have no regard for Caesar, nor for God. They only make this statement before Pilate for their own self-interests.

The trial is now over. Pilate hands Jesus over to the soldiers to be taken away for crucifixion. It is a shameful move on the part of Pilate, for he has now enacted the murder of the Son of God. And yes, Jesus' death is a murder because three times Pilate declared Jesus innocent. And even up to the moment that he delivered Him to death, Pilate never condemned Jesus with any crime.

"So they took Jesus and led Him away..." This echoes Isaiah's prophecy, "He was led as a lamb to the slaughter" (53:7).

TableTalk

"We have no king by Caesar..." Something similar to this happened before in Israel, that they have rejected their King. Read 1 Samuel 8:4-7. What does God say of the people's desire?

Every one of us has to stop and think about this. To change the phrasing a little, what does it mean to say "We have no King but God"?