

## **The Upside Down Kingdom of Christ**

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John: The Passion of Christ Series

John 19:1-22

One of the most difficult things for human beings to accept is that reality may be the opposite of the way things seem to be. For example, during the course of the day, we now know that it is not the sun that moves, but the earth that moves beneath our feet. But it doesn't seem that way, does it? Or when you look up at the sky and the sun or moon is near the horizon, it appears to be huge compared to when it is directly overhead. But the sun or moon is not actually growing. There are so many things that are counter-intuitive.

Do you remember those Chinese Finger Traps? You stick your fingers in at both ends and then try to pull your fingers out. What happens? The harder you pull, the tighter the trap is on your fingers. You actually get out of the trap by pushing into the trap as opposed to pulling out.

Lewis Carroll wrote a famous novel, *Through the Looking Glass*, and it is all about the adventures of Alice learning how to deal with a world in which everything is opposite of what she thinks it should be like. When she wants to get near to something, she actually has to walk away from it.

I read a story about a fighter pilot who was practicing high-speed maneuvers in a jet fighter plane. She turned the controls for what she thought was going to be a steep ascent, and she ended up flying straight into the ground. She was unaware that she was flying upside down.

Here's my point today. We human beings often judge things to be exactly opposite of what they are. We have everything upside down. We think certain decisions are going to improve our lives, and they end up actually flying us straight into the ground. We think certain things are going to set us free, and they actually get us more trapped. Nowhere is our upside down universe more apparent than when you read the New Testament. The whole gospel is a reversal of our common expectations about the way life really works.

I mean look at the people who Christ is impressed by in the New Testament. None of these people would be on the Fortune 500 list. None of them would end up in Sports Illustrated Magazine's swimsuit issue. The people who impressed Jesus in the New Testament are not folks who are playing on the beach over spring break, running around showing their hard bodies.

Who impresses Jesus? A widow who placed her two last coins in the offering plate. A blind beggar who cried out for healing. A healed Samaritan leper who

came back to say, “thank you.” A woman who had seven demons cast out of her. A dishonest short little tax collector, who climbed a tree to gain a better view of Christ.

The more you plunge into the world of Jesus, the more your own perceptions are turned entirely upside down. And then you begin to see life the way it really is.

A number of years ago I read a book by Paul Johnson titled “Intellectuals.” In it he describes the people who are celebrated in universities—people who are quoted by philosophy professors and English professors; folks who are emulated and celebrated, folks like Ernest Hemingway, Rousseau, Bertrand Russell, and Jean Paul Sartre. As you read the biographies of these men, who are often quoted and celebrated—people do their dissertations on these philosophers—you realize it would be difficult to ever put together a more broken, miserable, self-centered, abusive, misogynist group of people than Paul Johnson has put together in his book titled “Intellectuals.”

Let me read to you a statement by a contemporary journalist:

*My career as a journalist has afforded me opportunities to interview “stars” including NFL Football greats, movie actors, music performers, best-selling authors, politicians, and TV personalities. These are the people who dominate the media. We fawn over them, pouring over the minutia of their lives: the clothes they wear, the foods they eat, the aerobic routines they follow, the people they love, the toothpaste they use.*

*Yet I must tell you that in my limited experience, I have found Paul Johnson’s principle to hold true: our “idols” are as miserable a group of people as I have ever met. Most have troubled or broken marriages. Nearly all are incurably dependent upon psychotherapy.*

And where do you find some of the most well-balanced, healthy, loving and secure people? They are in Zambia doing relief work. They are working with inner-city kids in urban ghettos. They are handing out food in food pantries. It is not the rich and the famous whose weddings are covered in detail in People Magazine, who end up celebrating their Golden Anniversaries together. It is not movie stars that people look back on their lives and say, “here is a person who influenced me to become a better human being.”

Nowhere do we see the reversal of our common perceptions more than in the Passion of Jesus Christ. Over the last several weeks I’ve been doing a series leading up to Easter on the betrayal, the arrest, the trial, the beating and the crucifixion of Christ. Today as we plunge more deeply into the meaning of Christ’s sufferings, we are going to discover The Upside Down Kingdom of Jesus. That’s the title of today’s talk. Let’s pray.

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John 19:1-18

Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They clothed him in a purple robe and went up to him again and again, saying, "Hail, O king of the Jews!" And they struck him in the face.

Once more Pilate came out and said to the Jews, "look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against him." When Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, "Here is the man!"

As soon as the chief priests and their officials saw him, they shouted, "Crucify! Crucify!" But Pilate answered, "You take him and crucify him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against him."

The Jews insisted, "We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God." When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid, and he went back inside the palace. "Where do you come from?" Pilate said. "Don't you realize I have the power either to free you or to crucify you?"

Jesus answered, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin."

From then on, Pilate tried to set Jesus free, but the Jews kept shouting, "If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar." When Pilate heard this, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge's seat at the palace known as The Stone Pavement (which in Aramaic is Gabbatha). It was the day of Preparation of Passover Week, about the sixth hour.

"Here is your king," Pilate said to the Jews. But they shouted, "Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!"

"Shall I crucify your king?" Pilate asked. "We have no king but Caesar," the chief priests answered. Finally, Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified. So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. Carrying his own cross, he went out to The Place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). Here they crucified him, and with him two others—one on each side and Jesus in the middle.

Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.

Before we begin looking at today's theme of the great reversal of perceptions that takes place in the passion of Christ, I think it is important for us to note how prominent the theme of fulfilled prophecy is particularly as we move towards the cross. I've mentioned this on a number of occasions as I have taught through the gospel of John. John is certainly, along with Matthew, the most Jewish of the gospel writers.

We know we're going to encounter themes from the Hebrew Bible, what we Christians call the Old Testament, when we read the first three words of the gospel of John. How does the gospel of John start? It starts with the words, "In the beginning..." It is a deliberate echo of the first words of the Old Testament, "In the beginning..." John is going to write a book not about creation. John is going to write a book about the new creation that has come about in Messiah Jesus.

And we see everywhere John telling us that Jesus is the fulfillment of all that the Old Testament pointed to. We saw that he was the fulfillment of all the Jewish holidays. For example, in John 5 Jesus is seen as the fulfillment of the Sabbath. In John 6 Jesus is the fulfillment of the Passover. In John 7 and 8 Jesus is the fulfillment of the Feast of Tabernacles, Sukkot. In John 10 Jesus is the fulfillment of Hanukkah. All of the symbols of the Old Testament, all of the types and shadows find their meaning and substance in Christ.

John portrays Jesus as the true Temple of God. He is the meeting place for people with God any place on earth now. Jesus is the Temple. Jesus is the Serpent that Moses lifted up in the wilderness. According to John 3, it is by looking to Jesus that people are saved from the deadly effects of sin. Jesus is the manna that God gave in the wilderness. He is the true bread. He is the Passover wine.

And so we see fulfilled prophecy throughout the gospel of John. But it seems to reach a crescendo in the story of Jesus' trial and crucifixion. I want you to see this for a moment, because it is important for you to see that the whole Bible fits together in one grand story, the major theme of which is Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah, sent by God. It's not like the Old Testament is about one thing and the New Testament is about something else. The Bible is the story of God's saving activity in human history. The whole trajectory of the Old Testament is a gigantic pointer to Christ.

For example in John 19:1-3 we read,

SLIDE

Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They clothed him in a purple robe and went up to him again and again, saying, "Hail O king of the Jews!" And they struck him in the face.

But you see, the beating of Messiah was prophesied seven centuries before by the prophet Isaiah when he wrote in Isaiah 50:5-6,

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The Sovereign Lord has opened my ears and I have not been rebellious. I have not drawn back. I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting.

And then in Isaiah 52:14, Isaiah said,

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Just as there were many who were appalled at him, his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man, and his form marred beyond human likeness. The rejection of Messiah was prophesied about by Isaiah in Is. 53:3,

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He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces. He was despised, and we esteemed him not.

We read in John 19:8-9,

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When Pilate heard this he was even more afraid, and he went back inside the palace. "Where do you come from?" he asked Jesus. But Jesus gave him no answer. "Do you refuse to speak to me?" Pilate said. "Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you."

Isaiah prophesied about the silence of Messiah when Isaiah wrote in Is. 53:7,

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He was oppressed and afflicted; yet he did not open his mouth. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter and as the sheep before her shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

John speaks of the crucifixion of Jesus in these words, Jn. 19:17-18,

SLIDE

Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). Here they crucified him.

500 years before this, Zechariah the prophet writes these words, Zech. 12:10,

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And I will pour on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a first-born son.

Look at this amazing prophecy written 500 years before Jesus. God is speaking and he says, "They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for a first-born son." How could God be the one who was pierced? And yet they mourned for him, the first-born Son. How do you put these things together?

David, 900 years before Messiah, was crucified writes these words in Ps. 22:16-17

#### SLIDE

Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men have encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me.

John writes in 19:18,

#### SLIDE

Here they crucified him and with him two others—one on each side and Jesus in the middle.

Jesus was crucified between two criminals, two rebels against the Roman government. Isaiah also prophesied this in 53:12,

#### SLIDE

Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong because he poured out his life onto death and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sins of many and made intercession for the transgressors.

He not only was numbered among criminals, but he prayed for sinners. Here's the last one. There are so many fulfilled prophecies; I could go on and on. But the last one I want to note is the division of Jesus' clothing. John writes in 19:23,

#### SLIDE

When the soldiers crucified Jesus they took his clothes dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. "Let's not tear it," they said to one another, "Let's decide by lot who will get it."

Again, King David, 900 years before Jesus writes these words of the crucified Messiah, Ps. 22:18,

## SLIDE

They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.

It was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy that convinced me, as a conservative Jew, that Jesus was the promised Messiah prophesied about in the Old Testament. If you are interested in this subject of fulfilled prophecy, I don't know a book that has handled the subject any better than the third volume of Michael Brown's Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus. Michael Brown has his Ph.D. from New York University in Semitic Languages. He is a great biblical scholar. Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus, Volume 3 on Fulfilled Prophecy.

Where do we see the upside down kingdom of Jesus, where our original perceptions of things are absolutely opposite from the way they really are. We see it in the beating, the mocking, and what you may call the coronation of Jesus. Verses 1-3,

## SLIDE

Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They clothed him in a purple robe and went up to him again and again, saying, "Hail, O king of the Jews!" And they struck him in the face.

Historians tell us that under Roman law there were three types of flogging. There was a low level of flogging reserved for troublemakers who needed to be punished and warned. Then there was the highest level of flogging that accompanied a death sentence. Many commentators believe that John 19:1-3 represents the lowest level of flogging, a mild beating. And it was after Pilate pronounced the death sentence that Jesus was beaten again in the most severe way. The beating referred to here in John 19:1-3 is probably not that horrible beating that those of you who watched the movie, The Passion, got to see. That happened after the death sentence was pronounced.

But we see in this beating a number of things. We see the amazing self-restraint of God. Have you ever looked at a situation in this world and wondered and marveled about why God was not stepping in to absolutely wipe out certain people? The extraordinary self-restraint of God – God just doesn't step in and blast people who lure children to pornographic Internet sites by using names of popular children's toys. I mean, I think of the wickedness and perversity of folks. I saw a news report in which apparently purveyors of pornography draw little children to Internet sites by using popular toys in their web addresses. They even misspell the toys the way a child might misspell them.

I think of the self-restraint of God in not immediately wiping out someone who abuses a child or who defrauds an elderly person. The person who makes off with an elderly widow's life savings. I think of the self-restraint of God in allowing a Hitler, or a Stalin, or a bin Laden, or some other terrorist to live.

But you know, mostly I marvel at the self-restraint of God concerning me. There are times when I am so painfully aware of my own sin and failure that I pronounce a death sentence over myself. And I think, “God, why do you continue to allow me to live? But even more than that, why do you continue to show me kindness and grace?”

Have you ever been amazed by the self-restraint of God concerning you? If you haven't, then you do not really understand the Christian doctrine of grace. Until you are dumbfounded by God's self-restraint and even more his kindness concerning you, you don't understand the Christian doctrine of grace.

But I will tell you nowhere is the self-restraint of God more evident than here at the trial, and beating, and crucifixion of the Son of God. Here is an absolutely innocent person being mocked and ridiculed, beaten and kicked, spit at. Have you ever tried to bear up under mocking and ridicule without retaliating, especially when you are being criticized or mocked concerning something that you did not do? It is hard for us to completely grasp the horror of the ridicule of Jesus. But let me share with you a modern analogy.

Pierre Van Paassen writes in his memoirs about the humiliation of a Jewish rabbi by some Nazi thugs during WWII. These Nazi storm troopers grabbed a Jewish rabbi and dragged him to their headquarters. In the far end of the same room two other Nazi storm troopers were beating another Jew to death. The rabbi could hear this other man screaming while he was being beaten to death.

But the captors of the rabbi decided before they put him to death to humiliate the rabbi. So they stripped him naked and made him stand before all these storm troopers. They demanded that he preach the sermon that he was going to preach in synagogue on the coming Sabbath. The rabbi asked if he could have his yarmulke. The Nazis thought it was really funny, so they gave his yarmulke, which was the only thing the rabbi was wearing. It just added to the Nazis joke. The rabbi preached his sermon to the Nazis about what it meant to walk humbly before God, all the while being spit at and kicked and laughed at; hearing the cries of a fellow Jew at the other end of the room.

All the while when I read the story of the trial of Jesus, I think of that naked rabbi being humiliated, and mocked by his captors. And yet when we look below the surface of the beating and the cursing, we see this great reversal taking place – the upside down kingdom of Jesus. The one who is being cursed is himself destroying the curse that rests on all of creation.

What is the crown of thorns about? All the gospel writers refer to it. John 19:2 says,



## SLIDE

The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head.

I believe the soldiers in their mocking did more than they knew. They were putting the symbol of creation's curse on the head of Jesus. Those of you who know your bibles, do you remember what happened after our first parents, Adam and Eve, sinned in the garden? God cursed the serpent and God cursed the woman and God cursed the man in his work, and God cursed creation. What was the symbol of creation's curse, but thorns growing up from the earth?

The way salvation worked in the Old Testament was that the priest put his hands on the head of an animal. By putting his hands on the head of the animal, he symbolically transferred guilt from a sinning person onto that animal. And then the animal was killed. Here is Jesus, the sacrificial Lamb of God. And what is placed on his head, but the symbol of the curse that is on creation.

That is a great reversal. The one who is being cursed himself is destroying the curse that rests on creation. The great reversal – the one who is wearing a crown of thorns will give to people who used to mock him, a crown of glory.

And then we see another reversal, that of the nature of true manhood. John 19:4-6,

## SLIDE

Once more Pilate came out and said to the Jews, "Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against him." When Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, "Here is the man!"

The old KJV has it "Behold the man!" The famous Latin phrase is "Ecce Homo." Behold the man. I like that so much better than the NIV's "Here is the man." Perhaps Pilate intended to mock Jesus. Here is your accused. Or perhaps it was designed as mockery toward the Jewish leaders, "Here's the man that you are so afraid of. Look at him. He's beaten, bleeding, defeated."

But Pilate, like many of the people in John's gospel, is speaking more than he knew. He said, "Behold the man" and even though he intended some sort of mockery, he is actually speaking the truth. Jesus is man the way God intended man to be.

In the ancient world, conquerors would put images of themselves around the conquered land so that people could look at the image and say, "We are under the reign of this particular conqueror." When God created men and women in his image, his intention was that creation could look at men and women and say, "Ah...we are under the reign of God."

The problem is, as a result of our sin, we display a distorted image of God. Looking at us one would not necessarily understand who God is. Behold the man. You know, in contemporary society there are so many distorted images of manhood. All you have to do is watch a Coors Light commercial. If you haven't seen it visually, there is this montage of party images – guys who are way overweight punching each other and throwing food around. There are these really, really scantily clad cheerleaders, who I guess are supposed to be “The Twins.” The guys are swigging beer to this heavy metal band playing in the background as the vocalist sings these words, “Love playing two-hand touch, eating way too much, watching my team win—with the Twins.”

You see, that's what manhood is – just a bunch of vulgar, beer-swilling guys wasting their money on Coors Light, which is nothing other than beer-flavored water, waiting for the Twins to come jiggling out.

I read an article recently called “Eight Traits of a Real Man.” Here's an actual statement from this article:

*Trait #2 – A real man focuses on power, money, and family. He doesn't focus on sex. Sex comes as a result of having power, money and a wife. And if she doesn't satisfy you, there are plenty of other women who will, especially if you are powerful and rich.*

Can you imagine anyone writing that?

Behold the man – man the way God intended him to be. Let's be honest with each other. Can you look at even the vast majority of Christian men and say, “That's what God intended manhood to be.” Many Christian men struggle with complete passivity, abdicating responsibility, utterly lacking in spiritual initiative. Or you find the swaggering arrogant, bullying Christian man whose approach to his wife is essentially, “Your role is to submit to me. It's my way or the highway.”

Even popular Christian books on manhood don't really have an essentially biblical core to them. They may be satisfying psychologically. People have given me these different books and I've read them. I find most of them, and I say this with all affection, really drippy.

When I want to think about what God intended real manhood to be, I look at Jesus. Behold the man. Here is the upside down kingdom of Jesus. God intended manhood to be strength employed in service to others. Guys, you are functioning as real men when you employ your strength to lift up and serve someone else. Not when you use your strength to put someone down, or to get your own way, or to improve your own position. You are a man when you use your strength to serve, to lift up, or to bless someone else.

Jesus said,

SLIDE

"The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."

That's the meaning of manhood – to serve.

The apostle Paul says,

SLIDE

"Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her."

Guys, nothing is more manly than serving your wife and family with all your strength. Single guys, nothing is more manly than using your strength to lift up another guy or lift up a woman.

So let me ask you a personal question, guys. Are you a real man?

And then in verse 7 we read these words,

SLIDE

The Jews [that is the Jewish leaders] insisted, "We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God." [They are talking about blasphemy here.] When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid, and he went back inside the palace. "Where do you come from," he asked Jesus. But Jesus gave him no answer. "Do you refuse to speak to me?" Pilate said. "Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?" Jesus answered, "You have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin."

He's probably talking about Caiaphas, who sinned against the light. He didn't sin in ignorance. Pilate is talking about power. He said, "Don't you realize I have power?"

You know, it is not always obvious who has power. It sometimes seems that the wealthy businessman who sits on all the boards, who has connections with the local newspaper, and who pulls the strings of not-for-profit corporations that has the power. Or the politician who has the incredible ability of never seeing a microphone or a camera that he or she didn't like. It seems like that politician has the power. Or the beautiful actress or wealthy hip hop artist, the loud-mouth athlete with attitude – it seems like all these people have the power. But in the upside down kingdom of Jesus, he reminds us that all power in heaven and on earth has been given to Christ. And that we need to really go below the surface when we consider power and recognize that real power is wherever God is.

But you know, even we Christians miss where God is? We always think that God is with the movers and shakers in suburbs. He's probably not in the inner city. God is in the winner's locker room where they are saying, "Jesus made us win." God is not with the losers. In the upside down kingdom of Jesus you are going to find the power of God most often in places of weaknesses, failure, and shame – in the losers' locker room, with the mourners in a funeral home.

Listen, do you want to know where you are going to experience God? You will experience God when you are painted into a corner, when your life is falling apart and you are desperate and you cry out for him. That's when you will experience God. You will experience God when you are in a hospital bed and all your social circle has been pulled away and you have no other place to turn except to God and you cry out to him. You will experience God in places of real shame and failure, when you have blown it – you've blown yourself up. That's where you will experience the power of God, if you let him into those places of shame and failure.

When did the prodigal begin his journey back to God? It wasn't when he had money and was partying and had all the women he wanted. The prodigal began his journey back to God when he was in the pigpen and lost everything. In the upside down kingdom of Jesus, the power of God is found not on the mountaintop, but way down in the valley. Have you discovered this truth in your life?

We read in Jn. 19:12,

#### SLIDE

From then on, Pilate tried to set Jesus free, but the Jews kept shouting, "If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar. When Pilate heard this, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge's seat at a place known as The Stone Pavement (which in Aramaic is Gabbatha). It was the day of Preparation of Passover Week, about the sixth hour.

It is unclear what the Aramaic word "Gabbatha" means. It definitely does not mean "Stone Pavement." There are lots of disputes about the term. But what is of most interest is that it says that Pilate sat down on the judge's seat. The Greek word is "bema." Anyone reading the Greek New Testament would immediately be reminded that this word "bema" is used most often to refer to the Judgment Seat of God, or the Judgment Seat of Christ.

It appears that Pilate is the judge. But in the upside down kingdom of Jesus appearances and perceptions are misleading because the one who is judged is actually the Supreme Judge before whom all of us are going to have to give account.

Do you know something? One of the places that human sinfulness is most obviously expressed is in the area of our judgments. We make incredible excuses for ourselves, why we did what we did –

- We were under stress, under pressure.
- We did that was because it was a bad time in our lives.
- We were so young when we got married.
- We were in a bad marriage. My husband never understood me.
- We never would have done that except for our ADD.
- We had too much to drink.
- It was our father.
- It was our mother.
- It was a reaction to sugar.

We have a thousand reasons why we shouldn't be held responsible. The guards at the death camps in Nazi Germany, the husband who cheats on his wife, the executive who pads his accounts, and the physician who allows an elderly patient to die – everyone has an excuse.

- I was just obeying orders.
- I have needs that are not satisfied by my wife.
- Everybody does it in the company.
- This person was suffering and I was doing something merciful.

Name the sin and we have an excuse for it. The amazing thing is that even though we let ourselves off the hook all the time in our sinfulness, we constantly pretend that we can be the judge of God. It is not enough that we slam the door in God's face and refuse to obey him, we actually set ourselves up as Pilate, as the judge of Christ.

- You are guilty, Jesus, you didn't heal my child.
- You are guilty of being unjust.
- You didn't answer this prayer.
- You are guilty of being unloving.

One reason many people do not accept Christ as their Lord is they are too busy judging him. You know, one of the healthiest things a human being can do is get the issue of judgment right and stop judging Christ and recognize that one day you are going to have to stand before him and give an account concerning how you related to him and people and to the world he created and the responsibilities he gave you. It is not always obvious who the judge is. Sometimes we think we are the judge. God will judge you and me regarding how we used the talents and the opportunities he gave us.

And in the upside down kingdom of Jesus, it is not always obvious what was going on at the cross. We read in verse 17,

#### SLIDE

Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha).

In Latin it is called Calvary. There is Jesus bearing the wood of the cross just as Isaac in the Old Testament carried the wood for him to be sacrificed on in Genesis 22.

#### SLIDE

Here they crucified him and with two others—one on each side and Jesus in the middle. Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened on to the cross. It read: Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. Many of the Jews read this sign for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek. The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, “Do not write ‘The King of the Jews,’ but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews.” Pilate answered, “What I have written, I have written.”

You know, one of the things that can happen to people as they watch a movie like *The Passion* is that they can come away feeling that a great tragedy has been done to Jesus. They can look at the cross and see it as a great tragedy to an innocent man. And yet in the upside down kingdom of Jesus the tragedy is not what’s happening to Christ, but what is happening to all the people around Christ who rejected him as Messiah and Savior. Who’s the tragic figure? We are tragic today if we close our hearts to Christ. Whenever we slam the door in Christ’s face, we become tragic. The tragic figure is the people rejecting Jesus, not Jesus himself. John refers to the cross, not as a tragedy, but as a lifting up of Christ. It is the means by which Jesus is glorified.

The Romans wrote the crime that the condemned man was guilty of over their heads so that everyone could look and say, “That’s something that can get me crucified.” They would write over someone’s head, “robber” or “thief” or “murderer” or “political rebel.” Ironically, what did they write over the head of Jesus? “The King of the Jews.” And it is in Aramaic, the language of the Jewish people at the time. It is in Greek, the language of the philosophers and intellectual culture, and it is in Latin, the language of Roman government and power. The cross becomes a means of proclaiming Jesus’ kingship in every realm of life. He is the King of religion. No religion is higher than the religion centered on Jesus. It’s in Aramaic. He is the King of the philosophers. No philosophy, no intellectual organization is greater than Jesus. It is written in Latin, the language of the world conquerors. Jesus reigns over every government. The cross is a means of glory.

And do you know, friends, the cross is a means of your glory? You don't become the best you can be through self-assertion, by grabbing, by demanding, by manipulating. You become the best you can be by self-denial, by allowing your self-will and selfishness to be crossed out. The cross is not a place of tragedy. The cross is a place of glory.

Friend, when you go to the cross and you find Jesus, and when you pick up a cross and decide that it is time in a major area of your life for God's will to be done and not yours, that's not a tragedy. That is glory. This is the upside down kingdom of Jesus. Let's pray.

## **The Upside Down Kingdom of Christ**

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Rich Nathan

March 27-28, 2004

John: The Passion of Christ Series

John 19:1-22

### **I. The Contradiction Of Perceptions**

### **II. The Fulfillment Of Prophecy**

### **III. The Reversal Of Expectations**

- A. The Cursed One Destroys The Curse (Jn. 19:1-3)
- B. The Suffering Servant Displays True Manhood (Jn. 19:4-6)
- C. The Weak One Has All The Power (Jn. 19:8-11)
- D. The Condemned One Is The Judge (Jn. 19:12-14)
- E. The Cross Is The Means Of Glory (Jn. 19:17-22)