

John 19:16-22, 30 Sermon

Read What He Has Written

- 1) For his death
- 2) For your life

Signs are pretty important and used for lots of reasons. They tell us what's going on, why it's happening, and clue you in on what's going to happen later. This past Monday I was hiking to the top of Mt. Wrightson in Madera Canyon. It wasn't all that easy, but if you follow the signs you're okay. They tell you where the trail goes and how long it is to the next checkpoint. They let you know how hard it's going to be so that you're not surprised that you can never catch your breath the whole 5 miles to the top. Or take the signs at the zoo. The anteater is one of the hallmarks of the zoo here in Tucson. And I have to say that I was impressed when I went. They were one of the few famous animals the Milwaukee County Zoo didn't have. It wasn't until I came to the zoo here that I realized how weird the anteater is and read the sign there. It told me to expect to see the anteater in the shade instead of the full sun due to the heat. It taught me how they don't have jaws like regular animals. If there wasn't a sign there, I would have been lost. I would have to spend hours watching the animal just to figure out what took me only a few minutes to read on the sign. If I were to hike Madera Canyon without any signs, I would probably need a helicopter to come rescue me because I gotten stuck trying to climb the exposed rock of Mt. Wrightson. Signs are important and useful.

In our Mountaintop Experience for today, we come across a sign that says more than what was printed on it. The sign is the one above Jesus' head on the cross that said **"Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."** While at first glance we may brush past it because of everything else going on at Mt. Calvary, there is much to be said from the sign Pilate wrote. It tells us what's going on, why Jesus is on the cross, and clues us in to what's going to happen later. Read what he has written on that sign! There is much we can learn from it.

If you were on Golgotha when Jesus was on the cross, the sign above his head probably wouldn't be the first thing you would notice. Instead you would probably focus on Jesus' surroundings or the painful steps Jesus took on his way to the Mount of Suffering. In the verses before our reading the apostle John records how desperately Pilate tried to clear Jesus' name. There was no reason why Jesus should die a common criminal's death! But the Jewish chief priests wanted Jesus' blood to flow from his lifeless body. So they appealed to the one charge they could stick to Jesus – that he was a king. If anyone besides Caesar claimed to be king, they were guilty of treason and could be put to death. Pilate asked Jesus if he was a king and Jesus responded truthfully. "I am a king, but **my kingdom is not of this world.**" Pilate knew that Jesus was no threat to Caesar, but he caved in to the chief priests' relentless demands. Pilate handed Jesus over to death on the trumped up treasonous charge that he was the king of the Jews.

So Jesus had to carry his cross to the Mount of his death – Golgotha. In English Golgotha means "the place of the Skull." Golgotha was the regular place for crucifixions and was right outside the city's gate. As the multitudes of people went in and out of Jerusalem, they would see Jesus hanging there on the cross in the middle of two other criminals. They would see the sign above Jesus' head that said **"Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."** Everyone could have read what Pilate had written. He wrote it in the major languages of Israel. We too read what he has written. If you look at the stained glass up here, you

see Jesus' face with the letters INRI over it. The INRI is the Latin abbreviation for **"Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews"**. You'll also see those letters on the stained glass near the ceiling of the 3 crosses. I invite you to look at them after the service and remember the sermon.

How did things get to this level? How did Jesus have a sign above him read **"Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews"**? How did Jesus end up on a cross on top of Golgotha to die the death of a common criminal? It wasn't just Pilate's fault. Yes he did put an innocent man to death because of regional politics and fear of the Jews. But there's more to it than that. It wasn't just the chief priests. Yes they were the ones who would held a mock trial and pestered Pilate until they got the death they wanted. But there's more to it than that. Jesus ended up beneath that sign on the cross because you and me. For all the times we wished evil on others because they got us irked and mad. For all the times we turned a blind eye on what we should have done because it was too hard or uncomfortable. Jesus chose to die by crucifixion for all the times we have refused to listen to him.

Sometimes we refuse to listen as the chief priests did. Jesus told them he was the Son of God, the promised Messiah from long ago. But they refused to listen to Jesus truthful claims about his divinity. Whenever we doubt if God's promises are true or we misuse Jesus' name, we downgrade Jesus' divinity. We sin as the chief priests did. Other times we refuse to listen to Jesus as Pilate did. Jesus told Pilate that his kingdom was of another world, but Pilate refused to listen because he couldn't see the beaten Jesus as a mighty king. Whenever we lash out in anger or frustration how the Lord hasn't answered our prayers in this world, we sin as Pilate did. We catch ourselves thinking that Jesus has to act as a king as we want him to. Instead realize that Jesus' kingdom is both here and in heaven. He will make all of our dreams and desires true when we go up to meet him in that heavenly bliss. It is with all these sins and those of Pilate and the chief priests that Jesus had to die on the cross.

When the chief priests complained to Pilate about the sign he had written, they were upset. The way Pilate had written the sign implied that the Jews recognized Jesus as their king. But they didn't. Instead the chief priests wanted the sign to say **"this man claimed to be king of the Jews."** But Pilate had enough of the chief priests' unreasonable demands. Resolute in his decision he said, **"What I have written, I have written."** Nothing was going to change. The death that Jesus was sentenced to die was going to happen. But what Pilate had written was more than for the death of Jesus. It was written for our life.

Because when Jesus died that Good Friday on Golgotha, it was a death the world has never seen before and will not see again. Jesus was not just another criminal who lost his life on Golgotha. Jesus was not simply the victim of petty politics between the Jews and the Romans. Jesus was not just a good guy who happened to get executed. No, he is the Son of God. He is the only person who lived a life free from sin and kept every law of the state and of God. He is the Son of Man who never let his temper get the best of him. He is the only one in the history of the world who should have never died at all. And yet he died on the cross under the sign Pilate had written.

Why? Why did Jesus choose to go through all that shame, suffering, and pain on Golgotha? It is because of his love for you and me. There was no other way to satisfy God's righteous anger over sin. The only payment God would accept for sin is that person's death. And that is what Jesus gave for us. He took all of our sins upon himself and paid for them all with his perfect life and innocent death.

As Jesus languished under the sign Pilate had written, he finished his drink of wine vinegar. He took a deep breath, opened his mouth, and proudly said **"It is finished."** Then he bowed his head, willingly gave up his spirit, and died. But what did Jesus mean when he said **"It is finished"**? It wasn't the peaceful release Jesus would find in death. It was the completion of God's plan for salvation. The perfect substitute died the death we deserved. Our sins were paid for with every drop of Jesus' blood. There is nothing left we have to do than receive with believing hearts the forgiveness our Savior earned for us.

When you look at the stained glass windows later today, read what Pilate wrote on them – **Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews**. This was the condemning charge that brought Jesus to the cross. It is proof that your debt to God has been paid in full. Read what Pilate has written because it is for your eternal life in heaven. And do not be ashamed to call Jesus your Savior.

Listen to what your Savior tells you in his Word. Jesus is the Son of God and has all the powers of God because he is God. Believe in his promises and stake your heart on them. He fulfilled the ancient promise of a Savior and will continue to do so every day. His kingdom is not of this world because his blessings will follow us into heaven. Trust in the good news that Jesus' death brings to you – your sins have been paid for. Trust in the good news that Jesus' resurrection brings to you – you will rise from the dead to eternal life in heaven through faith in Jesus. Read what Pilate has written and know that you are at peace with God. And tell this news to others so they may have the joy you have right now.

The sign above Jesus' head on the cross means more than what Pilate wrote on it. Yes it was the official reason why Jesus was put to death. But it happened only because of the severity of sin before God. The punishment God demands for sin is death and that is what Jesus willingly did for us. He endured what we should have suffered and satisfied God's anger over sin. Jesus fulfilled the plan of salvation and cried out **"It is finished"** so that the whole world could receive the forgiveness he earned on the cross. Now when we read what Pilate has written, we cannot help but be overwhelmed by the love that drove our Savior to die under that sign. We cannot help but praise Jesus for what he did for us on the Mount of death. Read what he has written and receive the life Christ won for you. Amen.