

John 19:16-22
Midweek Lenten service
March 24, 2010

John 19:16-22 (New International Version)

¹⁶Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified.

The Crucifixion

So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. ¹⁷Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). ¹⁸Here they crucified him, and with him two others—one on each side and Jesus in the middle.

¹⁹Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: |sc JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS.

²⁰Many 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. ²¹The 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."

²²Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written."

**THE SIGN OF THE CROSS!
(Iesus Nazarenus Rex Iudaeorum)
I. A condemnation for the guilty.
II. A confession unto salvation!**

Did you ever stop to think of how important signs are in life? How difficult and embarrassing life would be if there weren't signs on the door telling what was the boys or girls rest rooms. Or think of the confusion and danger if there were no speed limit signs. Did you ever stop to think how your home address is also a sign letting people know where you live. How could we know whose house was whose without those number signs?

One of my favorite kinds of signs are those of a religious nature. Some foolishly demonstrate the false theology of a church when you read them. Others are clever and make you think. For example I recall seeing the sign that asked the question "What's missing in chch?" The answer was "ur." Just the other day I saw a sign that stated "Worry is the dark room in which negatives are developed." Other religious signs are just so simple and yet profound because they simply state a Bible truth which saves. How often don't we see signs like, "Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life," or "Believe on the Lord Jesus and you shall be saved."

Today we consider another sign that is the next piece of the cross. It's the sign that was placed on Jesus' cross. The signs we have contain the letters "I," "N," "R," "I." It's an abbreviation of the Latin words for "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." In Latin there is no letter "J" so the "I" was used. The word for king in Latin is "Rex." And of course, the town from which Jesus came was Nazareth. So in Latin the sign would have read "Iesus Nazarenus Rex Iudaeorum." As we are told in the Bible those words were written not only in Latin but also in Aramaic which the Jews spoke and Greek which many of the visitors to Jerusalem would also have spoken.

Why was there a sign on Jesus' cross? When one researches the historical data about the Roman execution by crucifixion one learns that the condemned would have to carry his cross to the place of execution. Usually it was a very prominent place or road outside the city walls so that it would get maximum exposure to those passing by. As the condemned slowly made his way to the place of execution under the weight of the cross and ridicule of the crowd, they would have a sign hung around the neck stating the crime for which he was being executed. Sometimes that sign would stay hanging around the neck during the entire crucifixion. Other times they would nail it to the top of the cross.

None of the gospel writers state that Jesus had the sign of his "crimes" hanging around his neck while he made his way to Golgatha. But we are told that Pilate did have the sign fastened to Jesus' cross. We are also told that many of the Jews protested to Pilate "Do not write 'King of the Jews,' but that he said he was king of the Jews." Finally, when it was really too late, Pilate showed some backbone and said, "What I have written, I have written."

Let's go back to my introduction. Recall that I said there that there are a lot of religious signs hanging around. Some good, some not so good. If ever there was a religious sign the world ought to take note of, it is this one. For in this sign we see condemnation and a confession.

What do I mean that this sign above Jesus' cross was a condemnation for the guilty? Let's recall what had already happened. Jesus had been arrested and falsely tried and accused before the religious council of the Jews. They then turned him over to Pilate because they had no authority to put anyone to death, and that's what they wanted. They wanted Jesus dead. So Pilate questioned Jesus. Let's hear again what John recorded. **33**Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?"**34**"Is that your own idea," Jesus asked, "or did others talk to you about me?"**35**"Am I a Jew?" Pilate replied. "It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me. What is it you have done?"**36**Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place."**37**"You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."**38**"What is truth?"

By the grace of God we know the answer to Pilate's question. The truth about Jesus is that he is a King. In fact, that's what God said down through the centuries and through many of his prophets of old. God said that the Savior would be of royal descent, a Son of David and that through him God would establish David's throne forever. God said that this king would rule with justice and equity and that he would be the righteousness his people needed. And all the while God said these things he was giving signs. To King Ahaz he gave the sign that the Savior would be born of a virgin. To the shepherds the angels said, "This shall be a sign for, you will find the baby wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in the manger." To his enemies who kept demanding a sign, Jesus gave them the sign of Jonah, "As Jonah was in the belly of fish for three days and three nights, so the Son of man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." All the signs were there. Jesus is the promised Messiah, the king of righteousness who was to come!

And now we come to the sign on Jesus' cross that stated "Jesus of Nazareth, king of the Jews." That sign stood not only as a testimony to the truth but also as condemnation of the guilty. Who were the guilty ones that it condemned? All those who rejected Jesus. Although the Jews protested to Pilate about the sign it stayed there condemning them for putting to death the very Son of God. Don't think that for a moment we don't deserve the same condemnation! If we are truly honest with ourselves, there are times when we don't want Jesus to be our king either. "How dare he tell me how to run my life, or whether or not I can get a divorce, or live with my girlfriend. How dare he tell me how long I should live or what I should do with my money! Don't call Jesus my king. I'm the master of my fate, the captain of my soul." That sign on the cross condemns us as guilty too. We have put the king of the Jews to death with our rebellion too!

But that's what Jesus wanted. It was his Father's plan that he die this way. How did he die? He died with our guilt and our sin. Although he was the innocent victim here and the sinless Son of God, he died with the guilt of the entire world's sins on his shoulders. That sign which said, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews," was screaming this amazing truth, "God made him, who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God!" Yes, it was our sins too that condemned him to death, the guiltless for the guilty! So dear friends as we read that sign we do so with shame and grief, because that condemnation of guilt was really ours. But Jesus bore it for us. Why? Because he loved you and me that much and so that we, the guilty could go free. In that way, this sign then also becomes a confession of faith by the saved unto salvation.

What do I mean by that? Remember Jesus' words, "You are right in saying that I am a king. For this reason I was born to testify to the truth. Every one on the side of truth listens to me." In other words, when God the Holy Spirit brings us to believe the truth that Jesus is the king of salvation and that only in his death do we have forgiveness of sins, peace

with God, and eternal life in heaven, only then do we become members of his kingdom. By faith all believers in Christ are the real Jews, the real descendants of Abraham. What was written on that cross is the confession of faith unto salvation for all who believe it. Jesus said as much when he told the Jews on one occasion when they had claimed to be Abraham's children. Jesus said, "If you were Abraham's children, then you would do the things Abraham did...He rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad." Paul echoes that same truth throughout the New Testament. In Romans 9 we read, "For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children...it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring." In Galatians he also wrote, "Understand then, that those who believe are children of Abraham."

Do you get the point? Pilate wrote that sign to indicate the reason why Jesus was dying. He was dying because of guilt, not his but ours. All who believe that are saved! Therefore, dear friends, let's not just put that sign of the cross on our Lenten display as a display. Let's impress that truth on our hearts as a confession unto salvation. "Jesus is the King of the Jews!"