

“BEHOLD YOUR KING!”

John 18:1–19:42

Key Verse: 19:14b

“He said to the Jews, ‘Behold your King!’”

What do you like to look at most? Some gaze at a burning fireplace or a lovely landscape. Some stare at the rich and famous. Some check themselves in the mirror often. Some binge watch tv, or fixate on their phone screens, scrolling the hours away. Today’s passage has a key word: “behold” (19:5b,14b). “Behold” means, “get our attention, consider closely, really *contemplate*.” In a fast-paced world our attention span gets shorter. We think we always have to be doing something. It can make us run around like a chicken with its head cut off. Once in a while we all need to just stop and “behold.” But behold what? Behold Jesus. In not just a peaceful scene, but a disturbing one. Not just as a gracious shepherd in a field of sheep, but someone who’s been betrayed, arrested, humiliated, flogged, shamed, crucified, and pierced. Why do we need to spend our time beholding this Jesus? May God speak to us through his word.

It all begins with his betrayal and arrest (18:1–11). Look at verses 1–2. We notice two things about Jesus here. He’s the King who’s been making disciples. And he’s the King who’s had a regular prayer life. These two facts already make him quite an usual King. The betrayer Judas has come to fight him with human power and weapons (3). Look at verse 4. King Jesus is all-knowing. And he’s not cowardly; he’s a courageous King. Look at verses 5–6. With his repeated answer “I am he” he reveals that he’s not only Jesus of Nazareth; he’s God the Son. Before him, their mob spirit and weapons are useless. Look at verses 7–9. These people think they’re in control, but actually Jesus is. And our King Jesus is a real shepherd here. He’s not thinking about himself but about protecting his disciples. In contrast, Peter’s zeal is without knowledge (10; Rom.10:2), and misdirected. Read verse 11. Unlike Peter right now, our King Jesus is obedient to the Father’s will. He’s ready to suffer everything, because he loves the Father (14:31).

Next, John contrasts Jesus on trial and Peter in the courtyard (18:12–27). King Jesus surrenders to the abuse, though he did nothing wrong. Though he’s not officially in charge, they take him to the real “power behind the curtain,” Annas (12–13). In verses 15–16 God uses “another disciple,” probably John, to bring Peter into the courtyard. Despite his previous declaration that he would lay

down his life for Jesus, Peter quickly crumbles before a servant girl. Then he joins the others by the fire to warm himself (17–18). The focus shifts back to Jesus and Annas. Annas is looking for flaws in Jesus' teaching and a name list of his followers (19). Look at verses 20–21. Jesus protects his disciples' identity and changes the subject: basically he's asking for a legitimate trial, not this backroom interrogation. Look at verses 22–23. Our King Jesus endures even violent abuse, yet still speaks truth. He'll have to go through much the same with Caiaphas, with no search for truth (24). We see Peter one last time (25–27). While King Jesus suffers abuse and speaks truth, Peter protects himself and denies him two more times, just as Jesus said. Peter needs to discover who he really is and have a new foundation in following Jesus.

Then comes a conversation with Pilate (18:28–40). John begins by highlighting the hypocrisy of the Jewish leaders. They think they're keeping themselves clean by staying out of a Gentile's house, and they're so focused on the Passover ritual, when all the while they're out to crucify the Son of God (28). At Passover they're supposed to be repenting, but instead they're manipulating. Before Pilate, they can't articulate any specific charge against Jesus (29–30). They just want to put him to death. But under Roman rule they have no power to do it. Pilate gets pressured to take the case (31). Evil people are manipulating, but God is ruling over all to fulfill his plan to have his Son crucified, which is the Roman way of execution (32). God is going to make it happen at Passover, so that Jesus becomes the true Passover Lamb (1 Cor.5:7).

Look at verse 33. It's the first time the phrase "the King of the Jews" is used here. Where did Pilate get this idea? The Jewish leaders couldn't bring themselves even to utter it. But everybody has been wondering whether Jesus really is the promised Messiah, the Christ, the King of the Jews (7:31; 10:24). It's what the large crowd that had come to Jerusalem for the Passover Feast had shouted about Jesus as he rode in on a young donkey (12:12–15). Still, this title "King" could be misunderstood to mean rebellion against Caesar. In asking this, Pilate is trying to see if Jesus is out to rebel against Rome. How does Jesus answer? Look at verse 34. Jesus wants to know what Pilate himself thinks. He's not trying to defend himself; he wants to help even Pilate get to know him.¹ Though Jesus is probing, Pilate is evading (35).

¹ It's similar to those who came to investigate John the Baptist, in contrast to the first disciples who came to get to know Jesus (1:19–23,35–39).

Still Jesus gives him some of the most profound words in the Bible. Read verse 36. Jesus is the spiritual King of a spiritual kingdom; he's not at all worldly. He's no threat to governments or personal positions. As he invited Nicodemus earlier, Jesus is inviting Pilate to get interested in his spiritual kingdom. Read verse 37. Jesus is also a King who refuses to claim a kingship; he just wants to fulfill his life's purpose to testify to the truth. He's the King of truth. When we believe and obey him, he gives us the Spirit of truth to guide us into all the truth (16:13). He wants members of his kingdom to be committed to truth, not political systems or human leaders. Jesus offers even Pilate to listen to him and side with truth. He's inviting us, too. What is truth? We can't make it up, spin it, or evade it; we can't keep listening to lies of the world that promise happiness. We need to listen to the voice of the King of truth, even as he challenges our worldview and lifestyle. His truth calls us out of the kingdom of Satan and into the kingdom of God. Pilate is again evasive, yet he realizes Jesus is innocent, not a political threat (38). He tries to use a custom at Passover to get Jesus released. But people prefer the political terrorist Barabbas to the spiritual King Jesus (39–40).

Next is the mockery of Jesus and the pressure to crucify him (19:1–14). Look at 19:1. Though he knows Jesus is innocent, Pilate does this to calm things down. Our King Jesus is stripped and tied to a post, then beaten with leather whips interspersed with pieces of iron, bone, or spikes, leaving pieces of his skin hanging. It would scar a person for life, and sometimes kill him. Look at verse 2. The soldiers then mock him with a crown of thorns on his head and a purple robe around him. Look at verse 3. They also verbally mock his kingship and strike him with their hands. Jesus quietly suffers it all. He's the One who had glory with the Father before the world began (17:5). But the only kingly honor the world would give him is this mockery. Look at verse 4. Pilate thinks this visible punishment and humiliation will appease the enemies of Jesus and elicit sympathy from his people. Read verse 5. It's both a mockery and a staged attempt to release Jesus. But who is it, really? The bloodied man standing before them is the Eternal Word who became flesh and dwelt among us (1:1–2, 14a). Though he's been so humiliated, he's God's eternal Son, the Holy One of God (6:69), come into this world in the flesh to save us.

What happens? The chief priests and officers are yelling for his crucifixion (6). Pilate is initially unwilling, because Jesus has violated no Roman law. But the

religious leaders think that by crucifying Jesus, they can crush the idea that he's the divine Son of God (7). Pilate has already been scared by the truth Jesus speaks. Now he's even more afraid (8). It's not about politics anymore; Pilate is wondering if Jesus really is from God (9). This time Jesus doesn't answer, because Pilate hasn't followed the truth. Pilate resorts to threat and intimidation (10). Look at verse 11. Human leaders are under God's control. And Jesus is saying the most guilty one here is not Pilate but Annas. Though he had him flogged and mocked, Jesus is so gracious, trying to help Pilate repent. Look at verse 12a. Pilate tries harder to release Jesus. But the pressure is just too great. Look at verse 12b. The Jewish leaders are shrewd politicians; they find that the best way to manipulate Pilate is to threaten his job security. Pilate brings Jesus out and sits down on the judgment seat at a place called "The Stone Pavement" (13). He's holding onto his position instead of the truth. It's the day of Preparation of the Passover, about 12 noon (14a). Many are there in Jerusalem.

Read verse 14b. "He said to the Jews, 'Behold your King!'" It's more mockery. But ironically, these words are God's invitation to all sinful people. At this Passover our King Jesus becomes our Lamb. Isaiah's prophecy urged people to "behold" the coming suffering servant King.² And John's Gospel begins with the bold words of John the Baptist: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (1:29) Behold, keep looking, really *looking*, at him.

Who is Jesus? He's the righteous King God promised to send.³ He's the sinless Son of God. Yet, as the Lamb of God, he's ready to take away in his own body all the sins of the whole world.⁴ Isaiah saw this glory of Jesus and spoke about him (John 12:41). Our King Jesus is innocent, as silent as a lamb, and yet he's rejected and hated (19:6,9b). Isaiah explains: "But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed" (Isa.53:5). Peter quoted this verse and wrote: "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed" (1 Pet.2:24). As we behold how much Jesus suffered on the cross, we start to see how serious sin is. As we behold his wounds, we begin to understand that he suffered so intensely because he loves us so much (John 3:16). His

² Isa.25:9; 28:16; 32:1a; 33:17a; 40:9–11; 42:1; 52:13; 60:2.

³ Isa.9:7; Jer.23:5.

⁴ 1:29; 1 John 2:2.

grace touches our souls, and “by his wounds we are healed.” Inner wounds can run deep. They’re psychological, emotional, and spiritual. If we’re never healed of these wounds, we’ll inevitably turn and wound others. We can get help for our psychological or emotional wounds. But no one can heal us of the wounds of our sins except Jesus. We need to keep beholding him until he heals us fully. In him we find forgiveness for our own sins, and the forgiveness we need to give others.

Beholding Jesus the Lamb of God and accepting him as King changes us: it makes us want to be like him. Jesus said earlier, “Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him” (12:25–26). In Jesus, instead of loving sin or the world, we begin to hate it. We have a new, holy desire to honor and serve our King Jesus. As we behold the glory of our Lord Jesus, especially his sufferings on the cross, we’re being transformed into his image (2 Cor.3:17); we become his servants willing to suffer like him to save the most sinful people.

In the next section Jesus is crucified (19:15–30). Pilate said, “Behold your King!” but the Jews just keep shouting “Away with him, away with him, crucify him!” (15a). They don’t want this humble, suffering King of truth who has only a spiritual kingdom. Pilate asks, “Shall I crucify your King?” The chief priests, at the height of hypocrisy, say, “We have no king but Caesar” (15b). It’s shameful. God is supposed to be their King, but they’ve sold out to keep their positions. So Pilate delivers him over to them to be crucified (16a). Pilate gets to keep his job, the religious leaders get to keep their positions, while Jesus goes to the cross.

Look at verses 16b–17. John emphasizes that Jesus is bearing his own cross.⁵ Our King Jesus doesn’t ask others to bear it for him. He bears his own cross as his mission from God. Look at verse 18. They’re trying to make Jesus look guilty. The inscription above him says, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews” (19). But the chief priests try to force Pilate to change it, to deny his kingship (21). Pilate says, “What I have written, I have written” (22). Only John tells us that the inscription is written in Aramaic, in Latin and in Greek. It’s so that all the Passover pilgrims will know what this man has done. But really it’s saying that Jesus the Lamb of God on the cross is the spiritual King for all people. As

⁵ To do this, John omits the story of Simon of Cyrene in the Synoptic Gospels (Matt.27:32; Mark 15:21; Luke 23:26), to keep the focus on Jesus.

Jesus had said earlier, “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself” (12:32–33). One day we will behold a great multitude from every nation worshipping before the throne and before the Lamb (Rev.7:9).

Next, the soldiers cast lots for the seamless tunic (23–24). It’s expensive, so they’re all trying to get it. At the foot of the cross where the Son of God is dying, this is all they can think of. Sin still makes people so blind and petty. But God uses even this to fulfill prophecy. In the midst of human evil, God is still ruling and working out his own good purposes today. In contrast to the soldiers is Jesus. Look at verses 25–27. Even in such pain and suffering, his heart is still tender toward his loved ones. He helps his mother and beloved disciple. He’s not self-absorbed, but so mindful. Our King Jesus still understands our deepest sorrows and truly comforts us as we behold him.

John now describes the final moments of Jesus’ life. Jesus says, “I thirst.” It’s not really to get a drink, but to fulfill Psalm 69:21, “...and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink” (28–29). Jesus has been through so much until now: the flogging, the beating, the nailing, the hanging on a cross and bleeding in the heat of the day. Now he’s just asking for a little water before he passes. But in yet more mockery they instead offer him sour wine. They’re evil to him to the end. Read verse 30. Jesus finishes his life. He finishes fulfilling all the prophecies. He finishes his mission from the Father to become the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. When we really behold him who gave his life for us, our slavery to sin also finishes. We begin giving our lives for the work God gives us.

In the next section the body of Jesus is pierced and buried (19:31–42). By breaking the men’s legs the Jews want them to die quicker so their bodies can be taken away before the Sabbath sundown (31). The two on either side of Jesus get their legs broken, but they skip Jesus because he’s already dead (32–33). Then one soldier just wants to make sure. Look at verse 34. Even after he’s dead, Jesus gets pierced in his side. The blood and water coming from his pierced side is more evidence that Jesus really was God in the flesh. It’s such a crucial truth because only in the flesh could he redeem us. John himself saw the blood and water coming from his side and bears witness to it, to help us believe (35). And again, God uses evil actions to continue to fulfill Scripture. Read verses 36–37. (cf. Ps.34:21; Zech.12:10). Later in his prophecy John writes, “Behold, he

is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen” (Rev.1:7). As we behold him, we realize he was pierced because of my sin. The wounds he bears into eternity become beautiful markers of God’s grace to me.

In the last section, through his suffering and death, our King Jesus draws fearful men into the light (19:38–42). While Jesus was alive, both Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had been too fearful to identify as his disciples. But after witnessing his horrible death on a cross, they both come forward. Joseph gains courage to go to Pilate to ask for Jesus’ body, though it probably means he’ll lose everything. Nicodemus joins him, bringing about 75 pounds of myrrh and aloes. The two of them serve Jesus in his death by taking his body down from the cross, binding it with linen cloths and the spices, and laying it in a brand new tomb nearby. It’s stunning that these two men of such high standing serve so humbly. Tombs nearby are only for the wealthy. God moves these men to bury Jesus who suffered and died on a cross with the dignity fit for a king.

Read 19:14b again. Behold this Jesus, the Lamb of God, flogged, mocked and beaten, nailed to a cross and hung to die. Is he my King? This Easter, may we slow down to contemplate the humiliation, the suffering, and the wounds of our King Jesus, so that he can draw us into his light.