

RUF Bible Study – John
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John 18 – Jesus is the King

We've been looking at Jesus' life throughout the book of John. We've been asking, "Who is this man? Who does he say he is?" And after that, "What does he have to do with me?" We've been seeing a lot of things, and hopefully some of those things surprise us.

In this chapter, Jesus shows himself as being the true king. That theme has been woven throughout the narrative, but it's been muted. King Jesus hasn't been at the fore of the text, and it certainly hasn't been what you would think a king would look like, talk like and act like.

When I think of kings, I naturally think of Henry VIII of England. Big, pompous, larger than life, breaking rules, attacking kingdoms and cutting off the heads of wives. Or even his daughter, Queen Elizabeth – again legendary, larger than life, promoting this piety and humility but willing to drop you, kill you or jail you in a second. I love reading about them, about their rises to power, about their struggles in office, about their moral quandaries and their lives ebbing away.

We have something different here in this true story. We have someone coming to claim his kingdom, but he does so in such a bizarre way with a head-scratching agenda. Here is a man born in the backwaters of his nation, who has lived in relative obscurity (he is no Prince Henry or Prince William). He has attracted a following of nobodies (he is no Barack Obama). He has spurned the advances of those in power (he is no Senator Clinton). And he's about to surrender himself to die.

How can he be a king and what rule could he have? Let's look at this text and see what John 18 can show us.

Jesus' Power

Jesus is in two situations in this chapter. The first is in the garden when he gets arrested. The second is in a room where he's put on trial before those who will render judgment for him to live or die. In both situations, he has and shows his power.

In garden, Jesus has been praying. He knows it's his last night. He knows Judas will betray him, and he's been praying and struggling with God over this. He loves his father, but knows the full wrath of God's justice is about to be poured out on him, a prospect he does not relish. So he prays, and he grieves. He shows his heart and love for God and for his people.

Then, the head out to the garden. Judas walks up to him. Behind Judas stands about 150-200 soldiers, some of the best trained troops in the world. They are ready for anything. Such a large detachment shows they were worried Jesus was a dangerous man, perhaps a terrorist. They didn't know what he was going to do, so they were prepared for the worst, ready to take him down and any who helped him.

Jesus steps forward. The text says he knew all that would happen to him. He seems oddly in control here. This would be the place where you would expect him to hide away. We've seen it many times. The soldiers don't want their general to die, so they scurry him to the back. The leader gets off in a bunker somewhere because he's just too valuable to lose. That makes sense.

But that's not what Jesus does. He steps out toward the soldiers, toward the danger. He is not scared. He's not hiding away in the bushes, hoping they'll pass by. He's giving himself up.

"Whom do you seek?" he asks.

"Jesus of Nazareth," they reply.

"I am he," he answers.

He actually only says, "I am." The "to be" verb. Ego eimi. I am. Does that sound familiar?

When God introduced himself and his name in Exodus 3, he said, I am who I am. Tell them I am sent you. This is the name of God. Jesus has been using this I am constructing throughout the book, saying I am the resurrection and the life, I am the bread of life, I am the living water, etc. In John 8, he said that before Abraham was I am.

Jesus is saying he is God. Jesus claims to be God. He's not just a guy out there walking around doing some teaching and attracting followers, though he does do that. He's not merely a good moral guru to follow. He's saying he is God himself. God come down. God made flesh.

Do you understand the importance of this claim? Jesus himself doesn't want you to follow him as a good teacher. He wants you to grapple with more than that. To stop there – Jesus as teacher – is to not listen to his own teachings. I think you

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Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: By Doug Serven, © Doug Serven, 2008, website: www.ouruf.org. For this series, I used commentaries on John from Boice, Skip Ryan, Gary Burge, D.A. Carson, Hughes, Wright, Calvin and Leon Morris and listened to sermons by as many people as I can find, especially Tim Keller, Ricky Jones, Fred Harrell and Scott Sherman. The reader should assume that none of the ideas expressed are original to me.

can trust this text. You can study it and substantiate the New Testament writings as being true and accurate representations of what happened because they were eyewitness accounts or based on eyewitness accounts. They weren't concoctions or legends. They were real.

Look here at this text. After the soldiers came up and arrested Jesus, Peter came to his defense. He cut off the ear of one of his attackers, and we find out the soldier's name was Malchus. Why do we get this information? If you read Jesus and the Eyewitnesses (and I've read most but not all of it), you start to realize that these information nuggets and names are there because these were real people. In fact, if you had been around when John was written, it would have been possible for you to look up Malchus or his family and ask him about this very incident. He would have told you it was true because he was there. If you didn't believe it, you could have gone and asked him.

These stories have this detail at times because these people really were there and it really did happen. Do you believe it?

That isn't what shows Jesus' power though. When he says the very name of God for his declaration – I am – the soldiers are thrown to the ground. They all fall down. They can't stand in the presence of God. It is just too powerful.

In a sermon on this text, Tim Keller talks about how this is what happens to people when they truly encounter God. You are knocked over. You cannot stand in the presence of such greatness. You lose your footing. You are undone. This happens over and over in the Bible, and if you are ever in the presence of God, this will happen to you. You may not literally fall down and skin your knees, but you will metaphorically.

You'll see that your holiness is *nothing* compared to his holiness and it will shake you. Compared to his holiness and it will shake you. You'll understand that your goodness is *nothing* compared to his goodness, and you'll be "rent asunder." You'll see that your wisdom is *nothing* compared to his wisdom, and you will plead for him to help you.

Has that ever happened to you? Have you truly been in the presence of such greatness? Or have you managed to stay away from God in his true reality? Have you constructed a nice god who never contradicts you or challenges you or gets in your way? If you are never brought low, then I submit you are never really in the presence of God. He will shake you, even if you already are a Christian he will shake you.

Jesus shows his power when he says "I am" and the best trained soldiers in the world can't stand up. They are doomed before him, for when you lose your footing you will be defeated. Jesus steps up and gives himself up, but as he does so, he reveals that he could have opened up a can on them so they would have had no chance, none at all. All he did was speak, and they were knocked to the ground. What more could he have done? Much more.

Jesus also shows his power in the back room of a shady operation. After he is arrested, he's taken to the high priest and then to Pontius Pilate to be questioned. Neither of these are legitimate interrogations.

Jesus could have blown through this with either his true physical power, like knocking the soldiers to the ground. He easily could have mustered the strength to blow them out of the water. Or he could have shown his masterful debating skill. He's shown himself before to be a nimble, persuasive speaker, one who flummoxes the Pharisees and Sadducees. Here is where we might expect him to wriggle out of it, like a courtroom scene in a movie where there is an AHA! moment and the defendant goes free after all.

But he doesn't. He's calm, cool and collected. He's in control. He shows another type of power, the power of the moment. With the high priest, Jesus says (v. 20) that he has spoken everything out in the open, and nothing in secret. Caiaphus should go and ask what he's taught. It's well known. They strike Jesus, rebuking him for his answer. Jesus still remains calm: "If what I said is wrong, bear witness about the wrong, but if what I said is right, why do you strike me?"

The high priest sends him to Pilate, the governor of Jerusalem. By all accounts, Pilate was not a nice person. He gained control through bad means, and ruled with a bad heart. He loved the political power and dealings of his position, and he had a ton of it. He didn't really care about the Jews. He wanted peace and money. He didn't want the spotlight of the Roman empire to get turned to his neck of the woods. He wanted any disturbances quelled quickly. The Jews want Jesus killed, something they were not allowed to do themselves. That's why they take it to Pilate. They're accusing Jesus of leading an insurrection, of claiming to be king, of wanting to overthrow the Romans, of being a terrorist. This is ironic because it's just what they wanted Jesus to do, but since he wouldn't do it, they threw him under the bus and "got him" on those very same charges.

Pilate talks to Jesus, looking for an answer. Pilate doesn't seem to want to kill Jesus. He can't find anything wrong with him, but he's caught in the politics of it all. Jesus is strangely silent. He doesn't defend himself.

Pilate asks him if he's the king. Jesus says, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not of this world." And then, "You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose to come into the world – to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice."

Jesus is the king. Later it will be proclaimed above his cross, Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews. He handles this situation with grace and truth. He will not give in to Pilate or Caiaphus, because he knows that whatever they do, he must go to the cross and die for his people.

He shows his power here. He's not a sniveling mess. He's also not full of bravado and puffed up. He is doing what he set out to do. He's again in control of the situation.

Do you see Jesus' power?

Put yourself in his shoes. Do you think you could have acted like that? I know there are stories of tremendous bravery and sacrifice, and those I think point to this story. Here we have a man utterly in control, but not passive at all. He has all the power and might behind him. He has won the arms race, but yet he gives himself up. He could have tied them up in knots with his very words, but yet he is firm and gentle.

Do you think of Jesus as some sort of wimp? Someone who just got himself in a bad situation that he couldn't get out of?

I hope not. I hope you see how Jesus powerfully went to the cross, and how those who come into contact with him are in the presence of God himself, the Great I Am.

All of us needs Jesus' power. We feel so powerless, and helpless in our lives. We're scrambling for things. We feel cast out and thrown out. But our King of Kings has a true power. He is mighty to save.

Jesus' Protection

In the midst of this drama, Jesus does something else. He not only shows his power, but he also shows his protection for his people.

When all those soldiers came up, they were there to arrest Jesus and make sure he didn't do anything dangerous or crazy. And most assuredly, they were also there in such force because they were going to take the disciples and anyone else around Jesus. They were going to get Jesus' gang. Maybe they had playing cards with the twelve most wanted disciples on them, or a hit list of recognizable faces. This would have been, and still is, standard practice. You get the main guy and all those around him.

Just think if that would have happened. The disciples would have been put in jail and most assuredly killed. We would have never heard about them. We would most likely not have heard about Christianity!

Jesus didn't let that happen. When he moved toward the soldiers and gave himself up without a fight, the soldiers didn't think they needed to arrest everyone anymore. They let them go, and the disciples ran away to hide.

Jesus saved them by giving himself up for them. He gave himself up so they could go free.

Thus he fulfilled the word he had spoken "Of those whom you gave me I have lost not one." (v. 10) He had said that in 17:12, and he followed through.

Think about this. Jesus protected Peter.² Peter is a likeable guy, but it's mostly because he is such an idiot. He's always doing and saying the wrong thing. We hold him in high esteem, but he must have been rather difficult to deal with.

Peter has a great quality here, but he's got it all wrong. Jesus has been telling him over and over about how he was going to die. It's been a huge theme of what we've read, and we can only imagine he had told Peter more than that over the three years they've been together.

Now here they are going through just that very thing. Jesus has to die. I'm sure Peter didn't imagine it going down like this, and he's thrown off. So Peter tries to defend his friend and Savior. He grabs his sword and starts hacking. Peter is a fisherman, so he's probably not that accomplished with fighting. Scaling fish, yes. Cutting off fish heads, sure. Killing a man? No. Instead of rolling a head, he gets only an ear. Ouch, that's still a pretty good wound, but not what he had intended.

He's got to be scared out of his wits, but ready to give his life for Jesus. It's go time! Let's fight our way out of here, against all odds. Like in Thermopolay. Tap into our Inner Leonidas, Jesus! You and me! You do most of the work like with that cool I Am thing that knocked them down. Charge!!!

What Jesus does is encouraging, because of what he doesn't do. I don't think any of us would be that surprised if Jesus looked at Malchus and his ear, looked at Peter, and then sighed, pointed and said, "Take him."

In this very chapter Peter betrays Jesus three times. He wilts under pressure. He can't take the heat. On the one hand, he tries his hardest and does the bravest thing he can think of and Jesus completely reverses it and undoes it. On the other hand, all he has to do is say he is a disciple to a servant girl, and he doesn't do it.

Jesus loves and protects him. He doesn't write him off. Nor does he allow him to co-opt his agenda.

This should be so encouraging to us.

We do wrong things all the time. Even if we love Jesus, we don't get what he's doing. So we mess up. We get off his track. We try to do things we think would help, but they're all wrong. We don't understand his plan and purpose. And we deny him. With our words and our actions, we move away from him. We're embarrassed to be associated with him.

Yet he still stands with and protects us. He doesn't turn us in or give us over. He loves us so much. We are his sheep, and he is our Great Shepherd.

If you are a Christian, that should give you a great confidence. You should seek to make him smile, but know that you cannot lose his smile by your idiotic ways. That he will still stand up for you and love you. That is a great, great thing for you. That is good news for you today. Jesus not only has power, but he has protection. You should fly to him for safety.

All of us need protection. You may have grown up in a family where you were not protected. Perhaps your parents neglected you or even abused you. Or maybe your parents lived their lives vicariously through you, wanting you to achieve all

² I have in mind some of Keller's comments on this passage.

they never could achieve. Maybe they shuttled you around the city or town from activity to activity because they were too afraid of real relationship to you. Perhaps in their divorce their lives crowded out your own, and they became the center of attention in the family.

You didn't get protected. You are wounded by that, and you need to loving protection of the King to heal you. You need to see the love of God and the protection of Jesus in order to trust again. May he show himself as your Great Protector.

Jesus' Plan

We've seen Jesus' power and his protection, but let's also look at his plan. Simply put this is the plan of the gospel. Jesus has all this power. He is in control. He could call down angels and mess this up. He could be delivered in an instant. He could wipe out the Romans, the Jews, the high priest and Pilate.

But he uses his power and protection in a different way than what we think would be natural. Instead of gathering his power, he gives up his power. He gives over his life to save his power.

This is not what Caiaphus or Pilate have done. They have gotten to where they are in powerful positions in order to use it – for themselves.

This is so common. Tim Keller put me onto a great article by Vaclav Havel on the cusp of taking over as president for the new Czech Republic. He made a speech where he talked about how deep inside all of us is the desire to have power for its own sake. Yes, many of us want to use power to help others, and that's what we talk about. But all of us want it for ourselves, to make us more important or more noticed or more loved.

You have that. You want to gain a position or an office. You want to be your sorority president or treasurer. You want to be on the RUF leadership team. You want to be a top ten junior. You want to be homecoming queen. Something in there – and you say you want to because you want to change things for good. But deep deep inside is a desire just to have it for yourself. To have the power and the honor so you will be better than others.

I was tipped off today to a commercial I do vaguely remember.³ There is a Volkswagen Passat commercial where a man and his wife are driving through town and passing other cars. In each non-Passat car, the driver is holding up a bull horn to his or her lips yelling out things like, "Because I make more money than you." A guy in a flashy yellow sports car yells over and over, "Because I'm making up for my personal shortcomings." Another says: "Because Daddy never hugged me." A blonde woman in a red convertible says, "Because the more guys notice me, the more I love myself." In the commercial, the Passat owners throw their bullhorn out the window. I'm not sure what that means, perhaps they understand the gospel and aren't going to play that game anymore now (because they have a Passat?).

Only good leaders admit that part and deal with that awful part of their hearts, whether it is from buying things or obtaining positions in order to have some sort of status and power. If you ignore that, it will turn in on you and you'll be corrupted by it. But if you admit it, you can defeat it and be used in your office for true good.

Jesus shows us the way because he gave up his power. He had it all and could have had it all, but he offered it up for his people in a way unlike any other. He was and is the King of the Universe. He had and has all the power of God. That is power!

He says this when he says to Peter, "Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?"

He is telling Peter that he is going to die. He is going to drink the wrath of God poured out for him. He has protected these people, even Peter, so that he could die for them. He is going forward to be taken so his people could go free.

This is all the more picture for us at the end of the chapter when Barabbas goes free. Barabbas was criminal. Barabbas was guilty of terrible crimes. Barabbas most likely was an actual terrorist. Barabbas stands in for all of us. Son of a father is what Barabbas' name means. That's all of us. We're all children of fathers. We're all in rebellion against God. We're all accused and guilty and await the punishment due for our sins – death.

Barabbas was released because another man took his place. Barabbas was guilty, but he went free because Jesus was free and gave himself to be made guilty. Barabbas should have died on the cross as a criminal. Instead the perfect son of God took his place, and Barabbas walked out the door to the cheers of the crowd.

That was Jesus' plan. That's how Jesus used his power. He gave it up for others. He substituted for others.

If we are walking with Jesus that makes a difference to us. That changes us and gives us a freedom and love. It is the gospel story in our lives, so we can understand forgiveness and reconciliation with our God. It is the answer for why you don't have to die in your own sins, or your own doubt or your own unfaithfulness even to your own standards. There is new life in the son. If this is true, it's mindboggling! It's tremendous. If Jesus really did come and do these things, you must stand up and take notice. You must listen and respond. You can't just sit back and nod and be passive about it. It has to change you, to mold and make you different than you are.

And it makes a difference in our world. It tells us that we don't need to be gathering power for our own selves. Jesus gives us power. He uses his power for us. So we can get and use power for others. We shouldn't be seeking offices just for our

³ David Jones, RUF Stanford, has this in his notes on this passage.

own sakes. Neither should we shirk them because we're too afraid. We should embrace what God brings our way, acknowledging the possibility of idolatry in our lives because of the depth of sin, but giving away our power like Jesus did, because Jesus did, as Jesus did for us.

The Son of the Father took the place of the son of a father. Jesus died for his children. He protects and loves his sheep. He's king unlike any other. He's the true king who loves his people so much he would die for them. The darkest hour becomes the hour of glory for his people. Religion like Caiaphus' won't save. Politics like Pilates won't save. Power like the soldiers' won't save.

Jesus saves. What is truth? He is truth. Trust in him.

In his sermon, Tim Keller uses this illustration, and it's the best one I can find. It is from the movie *Last of the Mohicans*.

This takes place in the French and Indian war. Duncan and Hawkeye both loved Korah, but Korah only loved Hawkeye. They were taken prisoner by the Hurons tribe of Indians, and the chief decides that Korah must die for the sins of her family and to restore the honor of his people. They take her away to kill her.

Hawkeye realizes what is going on, and he tells Duncan to translate into French – "ME. ME. Me for her." Duncan tells chief something in French, which Hawkeye cannot understand because he doesn't speak the language. The Indians bring Korah back, and they give her to Hawkeye. They take Duncan. He had said, "Take Me. Take me for her." But he didn't mean Hawkeye, he meant himself.

Duncan is strapped up and thrown into the fire. His hands are outstretched, almost like a crucifix. Duncan gave himself for someone he loves, and for someone who didn't even love him. He offered himself in her place as a substitute, as an offering, as an atonement.

Don't look at Duncan to save you. Look at the picture of substitutionary atonement. Look at the one who dies for another. Look to Jesus, to whom this picture points.

What wondrous love is this? Jesus has done this for his people. He has the power to save and protect his people according to the plan of his father from the beginning of the world.