

### **Behold King Jesus as Sovereign Savior (John 19:14-19)**

John 19:14 *Now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover. It was about the sixth hour. He said to the Jews, "Behold your King!"*<sup>15</sup> *They cried out, "Away with him, away with him, crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar."*<sup>16</sup> *So he delivered him over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus,*<sup>17</sup> *and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha [Latin 'calvaria,' or Calvary].*<sup>18</sup> *There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them.*<sup>19</sup> *Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."*

On the Sabbath they worshipped the King of heaven, on Friday they denied any king but an earthly emperor. That's called apostasy and hypocrisy. Their daily *private* prayer literally said by tradition 'God...May you be our King, you alone' – but here they say the opposite *in public*: 'May Caesar be our King, he alone.' It's irony as v. 14 says this was Passover Preparation Day. The Passover prayer to God was, 'Reign over us, you alone.' All sang at the feast 'you are God, beside you we have no king...we have no king but you'<sup>1</sup> But the religious Jews tell this pagan Gentile 'we have no king *but Caesar!*'

Imagine leaders in our nation going to a 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebration, singing God Bless America, pledging allegiance to American flag, emphasizing the part 'one nation under God.' But that same day in a press conference, the leaders say 'we have no God for our nation except for secular government which is all supreme, and we pledge allegiance the United Nations, we renounce our independence and national security and sovereignty to the UN as our sole authority and governing body we submit to.' That would be shocking on any day but especially on a national holiday when celebrating the opposite!

Passover was Israel's independence day and many 1<sup>st</sup> century Jews resented the Romans occupying their land as much as 21<sup>st</sup> century Israelis resent the Palestinian Muslims. Imagine if Jewish Zionist leaders today said publically in Jerusalem in the midst of national Passover celebrations: 'we have no authority except the Palestinian authority. We recognize the rightful rule of Hamas. We claim no divine right to this land from the King of heaven, we say on behalf of our people, we have no higher power except Islamic law.' This is the depravity of sin, the insanity of sin man won't give up for Jesus.

In v. 18 it mentions there were two other men crucified with him and other gospel writers tell us even they joined in the rejection of Jesus, reviling Him. The men in v. 18 doing the actual crucifying of Jesus were Gentile Roman soldiers just doing what they're told like German Nazi soldiers, even if they have an order to kill an innocent Jew, they just follow orders, no questions asked. In v. 23-24 their callous depravity is seen by them gambling for the clothes of the prisoner as He's dying, playing games for their personal gain.

### **This shows us first: Man's Radical Sinful Guilt**

But it's not just sins of priests or Pilate or pagan soldiers that put Jesus on the cross here. My sin and yours is also part of what put Jesus on the cross. People today focus only on their own personal gain and even play games at the foot of the cross like the soldiers. Many are driven by self-preservation like Pilate. Many today just go along with the crowds, and many pray to and profess God as King in worship like the chief leaders but what they later say betrays that they have no King, or that their ultimate authority is not God. Some of you here today may not be vocally or outwardly rejecting Christ by your lips, but you are by your life or just inwardly for now. Maybe someone here thinks 'I won't have Jesus rule over me in what He says about my sin.' Or another says 'I won't have any man reign over me, I'm in charge of me.'

Maybe a young person here today is thinking 'I will have no king but what I want to do with my life, I resent and reject all authority the Lord claims my parents have, I don't respect authority except what I say or what my friends say ... when I agree with them.' Or maybe you're older here today, you've listened to sermons for decades, you think Jesus is your Savior, but if you honestly look at your life you have to conclude He's not your King, He's not your authority, you don't live as His servant from Monday-Saturday.

The hearts of fallen man do not want Jesus to reign over their life and would rather have a sinful master and think they're free than behold King Jesus in the Bible telling them what they must do. If you present a sovereign Christ who commands what is sin and what is not, a King who demands our heart and life, sinful man thinks 'away with that, we'll have no ruler but the kind of ruler we want. What our society says is king.' We need to see but for the grace of God this would be us, too. But for sovereign grace there goes us all

Go back to chapter 1 where Jesus gives the theological background for this. Jesus came as the light of the world, a world of darkness, the darkness of sin

**1:5** *The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it* [your translation may say 'did not comprehend/has not understood']... <sup>9</sup> *The true light* [Jesus is the light], *which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world ...* <sup>11</sup> *He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.*

Why didn't the Jewish people receive Jesus and come to the light He offered to the world? Go to Jn 3:19 where it explains why people didn't then or now **3:19** *And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.*

The word for love here in Greek is *agape*, a strong love of commitment and sacrifice and putting first who/what you love. Sinners in darkness love their evil with *agape* love, they're committed to the darkness above all, they put their sin first because of their great love of darkness, and they're willing to sacrifice anything to keep their beloved sin. That's man's radical sinful guilt.

<sup>20</sup> *For everyone who does wicked things* [i.e. every sinner in darkness] *hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.*

Why didn't the people in Jn 19 come to the light of who Christ is? It's not that they had no light, they hated it and didn't want it to shine on their sin. It's not that they have no choice; they choose sin instead of coming to Jesus

Look at Jn 5:40 also where Jesus again highlights their guilty responsibility. He says to the Jewish leaders in Jn **5:40** *'you refuse to come to me that you may have life.'* Fallen man has no life spiritually. 6:53 says *'you have no life in you,'* but this deadness involves their responsible refusal to come for life. The NKJV has *'you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.'* Again, He doesn't say they have no choice or will, He says they're unwilling to come to Christ, and left to their sinful selves they choose to reject Christ. Their freely will to stay in sin, they responsibly refuse to come to the light.

Look at chapter 8, v. 34, where Jesus explains more. In Jn **8:34** Jesus says *Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.* Every sinner is slave to sin. A slave may have some degree of freedom of choice within the boundaries of his master's domain, and sinners have a degree of 'free will' within the boundaries of sin, to choose this sin instead of that sin, but a slave can't choose to free himself or change his status by willpower.

<sup>43</sup> *Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word.* <sup>44</sup> *You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires.* [NKJV *'you are not able to listen to My word...the*

*desires of your father you want to do*']. Jesus explains this isn't a slavery where you're forced to do things you don't want, this is a willing slavery, you want to do sin. That's what total depravity or radical sinfulness means.

It means sin affects us totally, including our will and desires. Total doesn't mean as bad as possible, it means the total person, the mind, v. 43 says, the unsaved lacks desire to listen. Sinners will not hear what they cannot bear. Jesus is speaking to the unsaved. v. 47: *Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.*

[NIV '*He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God*']. In Jn 10:26 He tells them '*you do not believe because you are not my sheep.*' Look at Jn 9:40. If this language of not hearing or believing because they don't belong to God or His chosen sheep, or because they're slaves that aren't set free, if that seems unfair that sinners would be held responsible by God for what's 'not their fault,' Jesus clarifies John **9:40** *Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, "Are we also blind?"*<sup>41</sup> *Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains.*

In other words, it isn't a natural disability or inability as a physically blind man who wants to see. Sinners are guilty and responsible for rejecting what they see and what they refuse to see and what their sin blinds them to. But that doesn't mean they had no light, as Jn 1 says the light shone to the world but Jn 3 says the world of sinners refuse to come to the light in their love for sin. It's a sin-infected self-inflicted moral incapability, a judicial blindness.<sup>2</sup> Jesus says in 15:5 at the end of the verse '*apart from me you can do nothing*' then in the end of v. 22 of Jn 15 He adds '*they have no excuse for their sin.*' If God says it, that settles it. Man can't do anything spiritually or anything to save Himself apart from Christ and sinful man has no excuse. The hope?

## 2. God's Rescuing Sovereign Grace

Back in Jn 19, v. 19 what Pilate writes about Jesus of Nazareth on the cross is the hope for man's radical sinful guilt: Jesus of Nazareth is the King. And as the sovereign, that's part of what the word 'king' means, He has almighty power over hard-hearted sinners like them or like us. Depraved Pilate wasn't trying to, but in v. 19 by Christ's sovereignty the 1st gospel tract was written

What do I mean? v. 18 mentions sinners crucified on both sides of the King.

Both men on the crosses verbally abused Jesus for a time, but Lk 23 tells us one of the men had a change of heart and said to Jesus '*Lord, remember me when you come into Your kingdom*' (v. 42 NKJV). Jesus assures him he will be with Him that day in His kingdom of heaven, in paradise. How did that man get the idea Jesus was a King with a kingdom? *Jesus, King of the Jews*. Pilate unwittingly wrote a big gospel tract on who Jesus was, a placard to be precise. The King sovereignly used that to change the heart of a sinner next to Him who saw Jesus as King and begged Him for pardon in His kingdom. Jesus as naked and weak didn't look kingly, but God opened a sinner's eyes.

Why did that sinner on the cross turn from rejecting Christ? Was it his will or natural disposition? No, he initially mocked with the rest! Was he better at making choices, he just made a smarter decision than the other criminal on the other side? No, this thief on the cross lived a life of bad decisions! Is it that he was more spiritually in tune than the Jews who spent their lives in the study of scripture? No, that man crucified next to Jesus was likely the least spiritual or religious and might have seemed the least likely to believe.

If you think there was something in that criminal's heart, some inclination in him or his will that explains his conversion, you don't understand sovereign grace that has to rescue man from his will and choices and heart inclination. If you read Jn 1-18 before Jn 19 you know grace alone saves any in Jn 19.

Go back to Jn 1 and let's see sovereign grace as we retrace these chapters. Jn 1, v. 12 says '*to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, <sup>13</sup> who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God*'. He's talking about becoming a born-again believer or child of God and it's not a natural thing. This is a new birth and it says it not caused by the will of flesh or the will of man, or some translations say 'not human decision' or 'human desire'

If you go to Jn 3 Jesus explains this more to Nicodemus, who's named in Jn 19. Jesus helps us see why many didn't see Jesus as King, why many didn't see the things of His kingdom like the thief on the cross die. Jesus says in Jn **3:3**: '*truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.*' Jesus would say in other places '*the kingdom is among you,*' and '*seek first His kingdom*' (Mt 6:33), but man can't see much less seek it unless he's first given new birth, new life with new eyes to see. ESV footnote on v. 3 says born *again* can also mean born '*from above ... and can mean both*'

<sup>7</sup> *Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'* <sup>8</sup> *The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.*” So the Spirit’s work in our spiritual rebirth is like the wind, blowing where and when it wills, it’s not based on man’s will. Man hears the wind after it blows and sees the effect wind has, but nothing man does or decides causes what the wind does. The wind isn’t subject to man’s permission or predictions, neither is the Spirit. I don’t know where the wind comes from or where it goes, or why the Spirit blows on one person and not another, or where and when the Spirit will work, but I can hear and see it after God’s Spirit has come on people. God’s Spirit blows where and when He wishes.

In Jn 6:63 He says *'It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all.'* If you have life spiritually, nothing in you or your flesh helped that at all. Look at Jn **5:21** where it's not just the Spirit who must give life, the Son, too <sup>21</sup> *For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will.* So God the Son gives life to whom the Son wills.

It's not based on the will of the dead, the corpse isn't exercising its will and then Jesus gives life in response. No the Son gives life to whom he will and when the dead have life, they respond. v. 24 makes clear this is the spiritual dead being given spiritual life that hears and believes: <sup>24</sup> *Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.*

So the Spirit gives life as He blows where He will, and v. 24 says the Son is involved in giving life to whom He wills so they'll pass from spiritual death to spiritual life. If you hear and believe the Word of Christ, He gave you life <sup>25</sup> *Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.* The only other time He says *'an hour is coming, and is now here,'* it has to do with the time when people will worship in Spirit and truth (4:23). This is how they become worshippers, the dead are made to hear His voice and live

What kind of 'dead' is He talking about? The verse right before says death is our state before salvation, before we pass to life when given life spiritually. Paul says it was when we were dead in our sins that God in Christ made us alive and raised us up to spiritual life -- by grace you've been saved through faith, but even that is not of yourselves, it's all the gift of God, not of what you do, so no one can boast (Eph 2:5-9). It's all of grace, life-giving grace.

Man doesn't respond and then get resurrected, he's resurrected and then he responds, like Lazarus after Christ's voice called him to come forth. This is what theologians call an effectual call, or regenerating or resurrecting grace. Look at the next chapter, Jn 6:44, for the Father's part in effectually drawing

**6:44** *No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.* That's the Greek word for drawing with strength to where things don't naturally go. He uses the same word for Peter drawing his sword and drawing a net with 153 large fish to shore against the natural will of those fish (18:10, 21:11). Swords don't draw themselves and fish don't of their own accord want to be caught, but the Father draws and captures sinners by grace in such a way they can and will come to Christ.

v. 65 says in one translation *'He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him."* [other versions says *'unless it is granted him by the Father'*]. The Father grants or gives this enabling grace as He draws us so we come to Christ, the Son gives life to all as He wills so they'll hear His voice call them from their spiritual deadness, and the Spirit gives life as He blows as He wills, so we can see the kingdom and its King in faith. It takes the whole Trinity to overcome man's rebellion. Father, Son, and Spirit give life, sight, ears to hear, and even a 'freed will,' a will freed from the bondage of the will to sin, a heart free from sin's slavery.

In Jn 8:36 right after Jesus says everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin, PTL Jesus says in v. 36: *So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.* You're not truly free unless or until Jesus frees you. You can't set yourself free, the Son must set you free. A slave has a degree of freedom of choice within the boundaries of his master's domain, and sinners have a degree of 'free will' within the boundaries of sin, to choose this sin instead of that sin, but a slave can't just choose to free himself, he needs another to set him free

Long my imprisoned spirit lay, Fast bound in sin and nature's night;  
[God] diffused a quickening [life-giving] ray—I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;  
My chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.<sup>3</sup>

We've seen man's radical sinful guilt and God's rescuing sovereign grace...

**Our response: sing gratefully** [if you're a believer, sing gratefully to God]

Amazing love! how can it be, That Thou, my God should die for me?

That's what makes love so amazing, that God the Son found out me.

To unable sinners, saving grace is unexplainable and unattainable by us or anything in us, that's why grace is amazing. That thief on the cross was a depraved slave to sin, but God set a captive free, truly free, freed to believe, liberated from trusting self to see the kingdom of God and Jesus as his King

He saw in Jesus what the rest didn't. That criminal's natural heart loved sin so much the Romans had to execute him for it, but God gives a new heart that desires the Savior over sin. The thief on the cross was unwilling to trust Jesus as much as the rest in Jn 5, but he was made willing to believe by the power of the cross. It wasn't his own natural willpower. He had refused to hear the truth as much as the rest in Jn 10, but God knows His sheep and who is of God and by sovereign grace enables hearts to fear and ears to hear

It's amazing grace that 'taught my heart to fear and grace my fears relieved  
How precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed [all of grace]...  
Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me  
I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see<sup>4</sup>

That's what makes grace amazing, it makes the spiritually blind to see King Jesus and His kingdom as precious. We didn't make ourselves see and we didn't find our way when we were lost, it took amazing grace to find us who were hopelessly lost in our sins. My heart wouldn't fear God unless grace taught my heart to fear, and taught my ears to hear grace as sweet-sounding.

If you had been in heaven that day and the thief on the cross showed up and you were to ask him how he got there, he would say 'it was all grace, I don't know how to describe it, but it wasn't me--I was abusing Jesus verbally--but all of a sudden, and it was all of grace, it was as if God removed blinders I'd had my whole life and I saw my great sin and I saw Jesus as a great Savior. A song by an Acapella group imagines what he'd say as they gather around

When they call my name to defend my reputation there's only one thing I can say  
"I'm a wretch I'm a worm, I'm a no good sinner." But Christ said, "I'll save you anyway."  
...Well, He said I'd live in Paradise and he's taken care of the cost.  
Hallelujah! I'm saved like the criminal on the cross.<sup>5</sup>

If not for God's grace, we would still reject Him. As we sing, 'if you had not loved me first, I would refuse you still...you looked upon my helpless state and led me to the cross.'<sup>6</sup> We were hell-bound and indifferent, too, *but God*.



Was there hope for Jewish religious leaders in Jn 19 who rejected Jesus? In Jn 19:15 Jewish priests deny faith in the Lord as King, but sovereign grace would prevail: in Acts 6 *'many of the priests became obedient to the faith.'*

In the next chapter, Acts 7, the same leaders kill Stephen, and the Pharisee ringleader trained under the top Jerusalem rabbi, probably one of the Jn 19 crowd, Saul of Tarsus was rescued by sovereign grace. It came on his way to kill Christians. God didn't wait for Saul to take the first step and come to Jesus of his own free will, God rescued Saul from what Saul's will wanted to do. God's gracious choice interrupted the life choices of Saul. God's grace intervened and intercepted Saul, all of grace and God's will prevailing over a sinner to make him a singer of sovereign grace named Paul the Apostle.

Praise the Lord, sing Hallelujah! Children of God's gracious choice...  
 Till the song of his salvation Makes his broken world rejoice!  
 Man's imprisoning night is shattered At the impact of his Word;  
 Where that mighty voice is heard...Souls rise up in glad rebirth...  
 Praise the Lord, sing hallelujah! Sound his sovereign grace abroad,  
 Till His Word is loved and honoured Everywhere man's feet have trod;

**2nd response: Speak graciously.** Paul wrote we should be always *'singing with grace'* and *'let your speech always be with grace'* (Col 3:16, 4:6 NKJV) Saul's voice may have been in that crowd of Jn 19:15 saying *'away with him, away with him, crucify him, crucify him!'* But the voice of a sovereign Savior called him away, and did away with old Saul, and made a new man, Paul who saw Christ and Him crucified as what he and the church need above all (1 Cor 2:2). All Paul's writings begin with *'grace to you'* as he speaks, and he says things like *'by the grace of God I am what I am,'* and *'by the grace given to me given to me I say...'* and in whatever you say, make sure it *'is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear'* (1 Cor 15:10, Rom 12:3, Eph 4:29). So speak graciously, remembering as you interact with sinners, but for the grace of God you're just as bad or worse, and remembering it's only by the grace of God you are what you are, anything good you have is all of grace, anything bad is all you

### **3rd response: Seek grace daily**

If you're an unbeliever, you need to start by seeing Jesus as King as Jn 19 calls Him, seeking first His kingdom like the man on the cross next to Him, beholding your King and begging Him to remember you with grace in His kingdom. Don't reject your King as so many did in Jn 19. Seek the grace of your King like Esther coming before the king and it will be like Esther 2:17

'The king loved Esther...she obtained grace and favor in his sight...' There is love, grace and favor offered and obtained in the sight of the King of heaven by those who come like Ziba, the former enemy who came to King David and said, 'I humbly beseech thee that I may find grace in thy sight, my lord, O king' (2 Sam 16:4 KJV). King Jesus says '*the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the gospel*' (Mk 1:15). Christ free offer is '*whoever comes to me I will never cast out*' (Jn 6:37). I know there's deep truths in John's gospel for believers about the sovereignty of God in salvation, but for unbelievers grace is offered to *whoever believes*

And believers also are to seek grace daily. John's gospel begins saying Jesus is '*full of grace*' and believers continually receive in Him '*grace upon grace*' (1:14, 16). '*Grace to you*' is our continual need, as the NT letters begin, and often end, so a very practical way to seek grace daily is to read from those letters daily, most NT chapters take just 5 minutes to read. Colossians exalts Jesus and His grace, ex: 3:1 '*seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.*' Behold your King, see Him on His throne.

Rejoice the Lord is King! Your Lord and King adore!  
 Rejoice give thanks and sing and triumph evermore...  
 Jesus the savior reigns, the God of truth and love;  
 When He had purged our stains He took His set above:  
 Lift up your heart, lift up your voice! Rejoice, again I say rejoice!<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Andreas Kostenberger, *John*, p. 539; citing 'the eleventh of the ancient Eighteen Benedictions'...citing *b. Pesah*. 118a) add that the Jews concluded the Greater Hallel in the Passover Haggadah with the prayer "From everlasting to everlasting, you are God; beside you we have no king, redeemer, or savior; no liberator, deliverer, provider...We have no King but you."

<sup>2</sup> Compare John 9:39, 12:35-40 and 1 John 2:11.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Wesley, "And Can It Be?"

<sup>4</sup> John Newton, "Amazing Grace."

<sup>5</sup> Acapella, "Criminal on the Cross," Sweet Fellowship Album, 1988.

<sup>6</sup> Jordan Kauflin, "All I Have is Christ."

<sup>7</sup> Charles Wesley, "Rejoice--The Lord is King!"