



In Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek

Pontius Pilate had it with the people of Jerusalem. They had bullied him into sentencing the Lord Jesus to death. He had wanted to let him go, but the Jews had said: "If you let him go then you are not Caesar's friend." If that were to have gotten to the ears of Caesar in Rome, it would not have gone very well for Pilate. And so he gave in and handed Jesus over to be crucified. But he got in one last jab.

It was customary in those days to put a sign on a person's cross which stated the charge. The sign might say: Murderer! Or: Thief! Or: This man led a revolt against Rome. The clear message to anyone who came by and saw the suffering wretch on the cross was: This is what we do to murderers. This is how we deal with thieves. If you have any notion of revolting against Rome, you'd better forget it, because this is where you'll end up. It was meant to keep the masses in submission. A rather effective deterrent.

Pilate took advantage of this custom to get revenge against those who had cowed him into sentencing Jesus. Earlier Pilate had brought the Lord out in front of the howling masses. He had pointed at Jesus and said, "*Behold your King!*" The people had shouted, "*Away with him; crucify him.*" Then Pilate had asked, "*Shall I crucify your King?*" To that they responded, "*We have no king but Caesar.*"

And so Pilate had given the order for Jesus to be crucified. He's in a foul mood. He's angry at the people for forcing his hand. He takes a parting shot. At the end of it all, he gets the last laugh. On the sign he writes, "*JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS.*"

"Here's your king, you wretched people." Pilate is at his most cynical, his most sarcastic. "You say that Caesar is your king. Forget it. This is your king. This broken wretch, bleeding and dying — this naked man stripped of his robes and his dignity — this is your king!"

The chief priests understood exactly what Pilate was doing here. They realized that he was insulting them. And so they went to him and said: "Do not write, '*The King of the Jews,*' but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews." Pilate refused. He answered them: "*What I have written, I have written.*"

Let's look at the sign for a moment. Pilate wrote it in three languages: Hebrew, Latin, and Greek. Three times he wrote: Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. First in Hebrew, then in Latin, then in Greek. You could say that the name and title of the Lord Jesus was written out in all the languages of the world.

We already see some irony here. He was called: *The king of the Jews*, but his name was written in the languages of the world. He is called the king of some little sect, but the title truly had universal significance.

Hebrew was the language of the Jews. This was all happening on the eve of the Jewish Passover festival. All the Jewish pilgrims coming to Jerusalem to celebrate the ceremony of the Passover lamb could read the sign and see the Lamb of God on the altar of the cross. Golgotha was just outside the city, on one of the roads entering the holy city.

Greek was the language of culture, of writing, of stage productions and philosophy. You were not truly civilized unless you knew Greek. The Greeks called any non-Greek speaking person a barbarian.

Latin was the language of law and order. It was the language of government and of the armies of Rome.

The sign was written in these three languages: Hebrew, Greek and Latin. The language of the land, of the world, of the law courts. Of Zion, of Athens, and of Rome. Pilate wrote the sign in the language of religion, of culture and of military might. The ancient east, the emerging west, and of the new world empire.

Pilate was being sarcastic. This man — a king? He presents Jesus of Nazareth as the unsuccessful dictator of a pathetic little group of people in some distant province of the Roman Empire. This man — a king?

Oh yes, Pilate. This man is a king.

King of the Jews? Well, yes, but of more than just the Jews. You wrote the sign in the languages of the world, didn't you Pilate? This man is not only the king of the Jews. He is the king of the world.

As the Lord himself said in John 12:32, "*When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to myself.*" He will draw to himself every tribe, every tongue, every people and nation.

What Pilate has written he has written. And, unwittingly, he has written truthfully. Pilate became a prophet. The Spirit of God spoke through him. The sign Pilate put on Jesus' cross fulfilled Psalm 96:10 — "*Say among the nations, 'The LORD reigns.'*" The one who gave himself as a sin offering on the altar of Golgotha is the King of the nations. King of the Jews! King of the world!

But the question is: Is he the king of your heart?

What is written on your heart? Is there a title etched deeply into your heart which says, "JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF MY HEART?"

The King reigns from the wood of the cross. Does he reign in your heart?

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K. Schilder, *Christ Crucified*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948, p. 191-198.