



Now is my kingdom not from hence: an easter homily  
john 18.36

Introduction

---

In preparation for the Easter season, I have, once more, been inspired by the Gospels' accounts of Jesus' life-changing ministry and world-changing life—particularly the events of his final agonizing hours on this benighted planet, and his glorious rise and ascension into a far, far superior existence.

I love the Book of Mormon. It served as an early tutor in my life. But, as I read and am inspired by the Gospels' most intimate accounts of the Savior's life, I marvel, again, at the Church's constant and sole encouragement of daily Book of Mormon reading. Why not read directly of the Savior's unparalleled life as found in the pages of the Gospels? How could the life of Nephi, or Alma (my personal favorite), or Moroni (either of them) be thought to compare in even the remotest and minutest way with that of Jesus of Nazareth—he whom Father sent to earth as the greatest of all witnesses to his glorious commitment to humanity? How about it? How about we read daily the Gospels' testimony concerning this most extraordinary life? Couldn't we "sacrifice" just one year; just one year in every, say, 5, 10, 20, 30 years—one in a lifetime—to reading of the most glorious life ever lived? Who knows what benefits might flow out of such a tiny, tiny investment of time and focus?

Be that as it may, it is Easter Season, a season when we spent a little more time examining the Gospels' accounts of Jesus' final days, his suffering, his death, his resurrection, and his

ascension into heaven—all testimonies to the Fathers deep and abiding commitment and fidelity to this planet and its inhabitants.

In the course of my devotional readings preparatory to Easter, I have read John’s account of the interaction between a majestic servant/king, Jesus, and a cynical and masterful politician, Pilate; a politician seemingly in possession of the power over life and death decisions.<sup>1</sup> There is much to learn from this encounter. In today’s homily, I will mention but one insight I take from the encounter between two very different powers—one a kingdom ruled by the prince of darkness, the other a Kingdom of Light, ruled by the King of kings and Lord of lords.

### Pilate v. Jesus

---

My insight will come as no surprise to those who have followed me on this site. It is consistent with the emphasis that is central to this site: principles upon which a just society is built and maintained. Anticipating that some may wonder how a message on “just society” could qualify as an “Easter Homily,” I will, toward the end of this homily, address the relationship between Easter, the resurrection, and just society.

But we begin our homily on an early spring morning at the Roman “hall of judgment.” After having conducted a “mock” trial of Jesus, a group of Jewish religious leaders lead Jesus to this hall for the real McCoy—a real trial that will, they hope, end in the real death of their hated adversary, Jesus. After a brief and impatient back and forth with this Jewish delegation, Pilate enters the bowels of the hall to interrogate the accused “malefactor.”

Based, apparently, on the delegation’s complaint, Pilate puts his first question to Jesus. The question gets right to Pilate’s central interest in the case brought before him. It reveals that Pilate’s real and sole interest, like that of most politicians, is political—political in the sense of caring about holding on to power.

---

<sup>1</sup> John 18.<sup>28-19.</sup><sup>15</sup>

“Art thou the King of the Jews?”<sup>2</sup>

Here, it seems, Pilate would expect either a defensive assertion of innocence or an admission of guilt. An assertion of innocence could be offered belligerently or pleadingly: “I didn’t do anything. The charge is false. I am not a king, nor am I conspiring to be king.” The tone of the defense would go a long way in helping Pilate understand the man standing before him and the situation he is being asked to adjudicate. On the other hand, any confession of guilt would likely be offered with the proud and rebellious justification of a zealot, an activist: “The charge is true. I, not Caesar, am the legitimate ruler of the Jews.” Such an admission would also inform Pilate’s response to the charges brought against Jesus.

So, how will Jesus respond to the interrogative? Will he offer a defense of innocence or an admission of “guilt”?

Rather than answering Pilate’s question directly, Jesus’ initial reaction, perhaps in an attempt to expose the narrowness of Pilate’s inquiry, is to ask Pilate about the catalyst of his question.

“Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me?”<sup>3</sup>

Finding Jesus’ response, perhaps, impertinent and, for his purposes, immaterial, Pilate, we are told, answered, “Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee unto me: what hast thou done?”<sup>4</sup>

Jesus, then, returns to Pilate’s original “political” question.

“My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.”<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> John 18.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>3</sup> John 18.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>4</sup> John 18.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>5</sup> John 18.<sup>36</sup>

What do you think: assertion of innocence or admission of “guilt”? Whatever you decide about Jesus’ reply, Pilate, at least, is unsure. It *sounds* like a confession, but it lacks the expected bravado. The reply could go either way. Some clarification is needed. A follow up is necessary.

“Art thou a king then?”

“Jesus answered, ‘Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.’”<sup>6</sup>

After dismissively confessing his skepticism about one’s inability to discern truth, Pilate returns to the crowd to announce his decision: “I find in him no fault at all.” Pilate is assured that Jesus poses no threat to him or mighty Roman power (Later Christians—think, especially of the Revelator—would conclude that Pilate was wrong. Jesus was and is, in fact, a definite threat to the Roman Empire and every Roman Empire wannabe. But that is a subject for another time). From that time onward, in fits and starts and reversals Pilate alternates between defending Jesus and cynically using him to manipulate Jesus’ accusers. So skilled is his cynical and manipulative performance, that he finally extracts an oath of loyalty to Caesar from the Jewish religious leaders!

“We have no king but Caesar.”

Indeed. It is almost universal. When faced with the decision between allegiance to the Kingdom of God or allegiance to the Kingdoms of this world, nearly all choose the latter. The King of the former kingdom simply asks too much personal sacrifice for an uncertain future. The latter Kings offer immediate and guilt-free self-gratification.

Having extracted this unbelievable pledge of allegiance—an extraordinary coup—Pilate “delivers” the innocent victim over to the executioners for crucifixion. Even here—with his posting of the title, “JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS”—Pilate continues his masterful political manipulation.

---

<sup>6</sup> John 18.<sup>37</sup>

Having very, very briefly reviewed the sordid affair between Pilate and the Jewish religious leaders, with the innocent Jesus in the middle as political pawn, I would now like to return to something Jesus said and examine it more closely. This entire narrative, it turns out, should also be seen as a trial against and conviction of the Kingdoms of this world. Here, then, are Jesus' words.

“My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.”

Now, a narrow reading might understand Jesus' announcement concerning his kingdom as one of “time and space,” as if Jesus meant to say, “My kingdom is not *in* this world.”

“You have nothing to fear from me, Pilate. My kingdom will not be located on this planet or during this era. Roman power is safe. My kingdom is agnostic about it. My kingdom belongs to a different realm in a far distant future.”

But this is certainly too narrow a reading. More likely, it is a wrong reading. Jesus' is doing more than contrast the “here and now” kingdoms of this world with the “then and there” of his coming. It is a matter of “kind”—the kind, the nature, the quality of his kingdom as contrasted with that of the world's Kingdoms. His is of a completely different nature than that of Rome, or any other kingdom that ever existed, before or after.

Let's have a closer look at Jesus' testimony and the case that he brings against the kingdoms of this world, and the hope he offers through his kingdom.

“My kingdom is not of this world...”

First, we can say that, already, Jesus' assertion has informed us that something is seriously amiss with the kingdoms “of this world.” Second, if this were a statement concerning “time

and space,” we should expect a clarification concerning “location.” “My kingdom is not of this world... but is located in another world, heaven.”

But this is not how he follows up his “My kingdom is not of this world.” Rather, his follow up is:

“If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight...”

You see! Jesus statement is one of “kind.”

At all times and in all places, the kingdoms of this world have been in frequent, in fact, continual conflict. However, they have been in full agreement about one thing: a kingdom, with all its “ministers,” indeed its citizenry, always establishes and maintains itself through force—diplomatic when convenient, military when it perceives any threat—real or imagined—to its existential survival. This is the standard, orthodox doctrine of this world’s kingdoms—secular and theocratic alike.

But, citizens of his kingdom do not take up the sword to establish or propagate his kingdom. No kingdom, sacred or secular, could ever claim that their taking up the sword was for the establishment or advancement of the Kingdom of God.<sup>7</sup> Any such claim would not be “truth,” but a “lie”—one of the greatest of all lies. One may, under very, very strict rules of engagement, take up the sword to defend a kingdom of this world, but not the Kingdom of God.

Early Latter-day Saints were taught this lesson amid serious persecution—persecution that tried their patience and tempted them to take up the sword in defense.

“Satan putteth it into their hearts to anger against you, and to the shedding of blood.

Wherefore, the land of Zion shall not be obtained but by purchase or by blood, otherwise there is none inheritance for you. And if by purchase, behold you are blessed; and if by

---

<sup>7</sup> To be sure, many have believed their violence was god-inspired. Joshua of Old Testament Fame and Constantine come immediately to mind.

blood, as you are forbidden to shed blood, lo, your enemies are upon you, and ye shall be scourged from city to city, and from synagogue to synagogue, and but few shall stand to receive an inheritance.”<sup>8</sup>

Indeed, one of the principle reasons for the establishment of Zion, or the Kingdom of God on earth, is to provide a refuge from the sword. God has “decreed [predicted] wars upon the face of the earth, and the wicked shall slay the wicked.”<sup>9</sup> The nations of the earth “will take up the sword one against another, and they will kill one another,” the Lord warns the saints.<sup>10</sup> War is to be “poured out upon all nations.”<sup>11</sup> However, God has planned for the inevitable, perpetual, and spiraling human occupation. He has imagined a far different existence for his disciples.

“And it shall come to pass among the wicked, that every man that will not take his sword against his neighbor must needs flee unto Zion for safety. And there shall be gathered unto it out of every nation under heaven; and it shall be the only people that shall not be at war one with another.”<sup>12</sup>

We can think of any number of reasons why Jesus forbids his disciples to take up the sword. We will mention just two. The first comes from God’s perfect understanding of human nature. It is the dickens to keep human violence in check. It gets out of hand very quickly. It is contagious.

In fact, Jesus has been under the necessity of teaching his disciples concerning the contagious nature of violence just hours before standing before Pilate to disavow all use of violence by or within his kingdom. While Jesus was in a garden named Gethsemane, Judas approached him with “a great multitude with swords and staves” which “laid hands on Jesus, and took him.”<sup>13</sup> But Peter<sup>14</sup> was having none of it.

---

<sup>8</sup> DC 63.<sup>28-31</sup>

<sup>9</sup> DC 63.<sup>33</sup> Since only the “wicked” “slay,” then, by definition, the wicked slay the wicked.

<sup>10</sup> DC 45.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>11</sup> DC 87.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>12</sup> DC45.<sup>68-69</sup>

<sup>13</sup> See Matthew 26.<sup>47, 50</sup>

<sup>14</sup> According to the Gospel of John.

“One of them which were with Jesus stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and struck a servant of the high priest’s, and smote off his ear.”<sup>15</sup>

Talk about a teaching moment! Jesus did not let it go to waste.

“Then said Jesus unto him, ‘Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.’”<sup>16</sup>

So, Jesus’ prohibition against violence in the name of God is an attempt to stop the contagion. Violence begets violence. The prohibition serves as a protection for his disciples. They need not suffer the consequences of their own violence. There are some things worse than death. One of them is killing.<sup>17</sup>

Now, in addition to perfectly understanding the nature of human beings and their propensity for violence, Jesus understands their need to know of God and his true character. This knowledge of God can, itself, serve as a break upon human violence. The fact is, God does not need their help or protection. Having taught Peter about the human contagion of violence, Jesus teaches him about the sufficiency of God, and the false doctrine that would have God dependent upon humans.

“Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more

---

<sup>15</sup> Matthew 26.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Matthew 26.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>17</sup> “At least since the Civil War, it had been known that in combat some soldiers would not fire their weapons at the enemy, even at the risk of being overrun. But the army was astonished to be told definitively, at the close of World War II, that most of its soldiers would not fire or would not fire persistently even in close-quarter fighting.... He [S. L. A. Marshall] later reported to astonished War Department brass that ‘on average not more than 15 percent of the men had actually fired at the enemy positions or personnel with rifles, carbines, grenades, bazookas, BARs [Browning automatic rifles] or machine guns during the course of an entire engagement.’ He later wrote, in his classic 1947 account, *Men Against Fire*, that, overall, 75 percent of American troops would not fire or persist in firing at the enemy. ‘These men may face the danger,’ he wrote, ‘but they will not fight’...

“The fear of killing, rather than the fear of being killed, was the most common cause of battle failure in the individual” (From *What have We Done? The Moral Injury of our Longest Wars*, Chapter 8, by David Wood).



than twelve legions of angels?”<sup>18</sup>

Such human hubris! Perhaps Peter should have called to mind the Psalmist’s testimony concerning the majesty of God.

“The LORD is high above all nations,  
and his glory above the heavens.  
Who is like unto the LORD our God,  
who dwelleth on high,  
Who humbleth himself  
to behold the things that are in heaven,  
and in the earth!”<sup>19</sup>

So, we return to Jesus’ declaration made in the presence of the world’s great superpower at the time.

“My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews...”

“but now is my kingdom not from hence.”

“My kingdom is not *from hence*.” What does that mean, “from hence”? Not from this earth? As if he were speaking spatially again? I don’t think so. “From hence” signifies that Jesus’ kingdom does not find its origins or maintenance in the kind of violence that the kingdoms of this world find their origins and maintenance. The kingdom of God is not dependent upon its “servants,” its citizenry fighting either for its establishment, its development, or its expansion.

---

<sup>18</sup> Matthew 26.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Psalm 113.<sup>4-6</sup>

“How,” one might ask, “on God’s green earth is this an Easter message?”

Certainly, Easter Season’s celebration most often focuses on the physical resurrection of the body, its reunification with the spirit, and its entrance into eternal glory and perfection—all of this through Jesus’ suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension. However, Paul reminds us that resurrection also impacts the life we live in the here and now.

“Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so *we also should walk in newness of life*. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that *henceforth we should not serve sin*.”<sup>20</sup>

Jesus’ resurrection not only gives hope for a new life in the hereafter, but creates “a newness of life” in the here and now. It bears witness to the sinner’s reconnection with God during his or her earthly sojourn, and each individual’s reconnection with his or her fellowman during mortality. Jesus’ resurrection bears witness to our ability to be born into a life that is godlier, more consistent with the kind of life that God lives; a life more consistent with that required of a citizen of God’s kingdom.

This new, holier life is, in part, a life that is devoid of violence. This is more than the absence of personal violence against another, however. Part of the Easter message is that through Jesus’ resurrection, we can grow stronger and stronger in our resistance to temptation, not least the temptation to imagine a kingdom of God that can be established, entered, and maintained through the sword—by violent means. His resurrection empowers us to enter that kingdom, a kingdom completely different than any kingdom that ever has been or is today.

---

<sup>20</sup> Romans 6. 4-6; emphasis added.

## Conclusion

---

The principles that we can appreciate, learn, and apply from the Easter Season and its sacred scripture narratives are limitless. When considering the principles learned from Jesus' final hours on earth, we often look, principally, to the garden found at Gethsemane and the hill called Golgotha. In today's homily, we have tried to suggest that Pilate's political focused interrogation of Jesus, and Jesus' answers to that interrogation conducted in the Roman "hall of Judgement" contain their own significant lessons for modern application. We have focused on but one. It is indeed a message appropriate to the season of resurrection and renewal.

Jesus is a king. He possesses a kingdom. His kingdom is not like any other kingdom—past, present, or future. While Pilate concluded that Jesus and his kingdom posed no threat to the might of Rome, he did conclude that he could use Jesus as a pawn to manipulate his Jewish audience into pledging allegiance to Roman might. But Jesus' kingdom stands in stark contrast and opposition to the kingdoms of this world. Later Christians—think, especially of the Revelator—would conclude that Pilate was wrong. Jesus and his kingdom were and are, in fact, a definite threat to the Roman Empire and every Roman Empire wannabe—though that threat would take a very different form than that of sword.

If Jesus' kingdom is unlike and opposed to every other kingdom, it stands to reason that its citizenry is unlike the citizenry of any other kingdom. The kingdom is in no need of violent defense. Its citizenry never yields to the temptation to create or propagate a kingdom of God through the sword. The kingdom of God can never be from hence, have violence as its genesis.

Such a non-violent constitution is unprecedented in world history. It is a challenge to believe. It is an even bigger challenge to live. To believe and to live this non-violent constitution requires the very sort of renewal to which the Easter Season and the resurrection in particular points. We know what "the world" has chosen. They have chosen allegiance to the violent kingdoms of this world over the peaceful kingdom of God. This does not greatly surprise.

But there is a surprise to be had. Unfortunately, when faced with the decision between allegiance to the non-violent kingdom of God or allegiance to the violent kingdoms of this

world, Christians have almost universally chosen the latter. They have often done so with gusto. In so doing, they have remained an old man dying. They have remained “dead in their sins”—un-resurrected. Rather than be risen to the new life that rejects the blasphemy of violence, the latest “Christians” on the world stage, American “Christians” have willfully continued the rebellion against the non-violent kingdom of God—boastfully declaring their nation with its army, navy, and air force as the only world superpower. In doing so, they have crucified Jesus, the one and only true superpower. This they have done, crucifying him anew, over, and over, and over again.

Let’s make Easter of 2019 a true season of renewal. Let us celebrate the resurrection for real. Let’s live the miracle of resurrection by crucifying the old man of sin and entering into a new life and a new kingdom—the non-violent kingdom of God.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!