

“Are you looking in the right place for God’s Kingdom?”

## John 18:33-38 NIV

You probably recognize that our text is part of a conversation between Roman Governor Pilate and Jesus.

**It took place at Pilate’s residence after Jesus’ late night arrest on Olive Mountain.**

**Jewish authorities brought Jesus to Pilate trying to convince him that Jesus’ had committed high crimes.**

**In order to have Jesus executed, they needed the governor’s approval.**

Based on his own questioning, Pilate tried to establish the truth.

“Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, ‘Are you the king of the Jews?’

‘Is that your own idea,’ Jesus asked, ‘or did others talk to you about me?’

‘Am I a Jew?’ Pilate replied. ‘It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me. What is it you have done?’

**“Jesus said, ‘My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place.’”**

“‘You are a king, then!’ said Pilate. Jesus answered, “You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.’”

**Jesus said to the Roman governor, who alone had authority to execute him:**

**“My kingdom is not of this world.”**

**To 21<sup>st</sup> century people, the word kingdom suggests Disney’s Magic Kingdoms.**

**“Kingdom” calls children’s books to mind and fairy tales: “Once upon a time there was a beautiful princess and an ugly frog.”**

Millions, if not billions of folks, play cards with pictures of kings and queens.

I hear that if you have a pair of them in your hands, as you play, you are not doing badly.

## We read about kings and queens for a day at nursing homes and care centers.

The few remaining actual kingdoms are in the Middle-East, where the leaders do not dress as the kings in our fairy tales.

**Bottom line: it is hard now relating to the term kingdom.**



**Is Jesus out of date?**

**Was he talking an idea we moderns can’t grasp or that no longer means anything?**

**When Jesus said: “My kingdom is not of this world,” what did he mean?**

**Is it clear to you what it means to be a member of God’s kingdom?**

**In kingdoms, rulers have absolute power. The Bible says this about Babylon’s King Nebuchadnezzar: “All the peoples and nations and men of every language dreaded and feared him. Those the king wanted to put to death, he put to death; those he wanted to spare, he spared; those he**

**wanted to promote, he promoted; and those he wanted to humble, he humbled.”<sup>1</sup>**

No member of Neb’s kingdom could challenge his authority

**Daniel 2** tells of dream King Neb had one night.

The king was sure his dream was meaningful, but he could not remember its details.

He commanded his advisors to tell him his dream and then to interpret the dream.

**His advisers said, “Tell us the dream and we shall tell you what the dream meant.”**

The other morning I told Norma that I had a crazy-serious dream the night before.

“What did you dream?” she asked.

“I can’t remember what it was,” I said.

I was not ashamed to tell her; I just could not recall that silly-serious dream.

The matter ended then—I think.

**But King Neb recognized that his dream was a heavy-duty matter and he persisted.**

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel 5:19 NIV

**He thought his advisors were giving him the run-around and he demanded they tell him the meaning of his dream.**

**They tried reasoning with him:**

**“No one in this world can interpret a dream without knowing what the dream was.”**

**“That’s only logical,” they were saying.**

**Even many animals have ability to reason.**

I read that the ancient Greek mathematician Thales had his mule carrying a heavy load of salt. While the mule was carrying that burden of salt, it accidentally fell into a river. The salt dissolved.

Reasoning that the water made its salt burden considerably lighter, the mule repeated the deed. As soon as salt was reloaded on the mule, it fell into the water again.

**Do you know how Thales cured the insolent, logical mule?**

On the return journey, the great mathematician loaded that “reasoning” beast with sponges.<sup>2</sup>

Nebuchadnezzar was not interested in logic or reasoning; he, the king, was adamant.

**“If you don’t tell me the meaning of the dream, which I cannot remember, I’m going to have you hacked up into little pieces, and I’ll destroy your homes.”**

Kings answered to no one.

**Why would Jesus use a term like kingdom?**

**Though many think otherwise, be certain that when Jesus said his kingdom is not of this world, he clearly meant that it has no connection with any government or politician.**

Many churches try to change the world using economic, political, and even military force.

**God’s Kingdom members do not use economic, military, or political pressure.**

**“My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place.”**

**Jesus used no human force to further his kingdom.**

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<sup>2</sup> Thales (c. 640 B.C. - 546 B.C.)  
Greek philosopher

When Peter drew his sword and tried to defend him in the Garden, Jesus rebuked him.<sup>3</sup>

**What did Jesus teach us about our relationships with governments?**

**God’s people have dual citizenship.**

Jesus refused to follow human religious traditions, but he broke none of God’s laws.

He paid taxes and was an obedient citizen.

During the lives of Jesus and the Apostles, the Caesars were dictators.

**Yet Jesus taught:** “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.”<sup>4</sup>

**Paul echoed that in Romans:**

“It is necessary to be in subjection (to governments), not only because of wrath, but also for conscience’ sake. 6 For because of this you also pay taxes, for *rulers* are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. 7 Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax *is*

*due*; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.”<sup>5</sup>

**This does not sound like what many preachers teach, does it?**

The Lord wants us to be respectful and loyal to whatever government we live under.

**Our loyalty to government ends only when it forbids us to worship God or interferes with our loyalty to God.**

**The Book of Acts gives many examples.**

In early years of the Church, the local officials were hostile to Christians.

**They ordered the Apostles not to preach in Jesus’ name.**

**They forbade them to assemble and to preach Jesus’ resurrection from the dead.**

**A leader with political clout tried to annihilate the church.**

**He did his best to wipe it out.**

**The church did not hire an attorney or send a delegation to Caesar demanding an end to unfair persecution.**

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<sup>3</sup> See John 18: 1-11

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 22:21 NIV

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<sup>5</sup> Romans 13:5-7 NASB

**The church assembled, prayed, asked for boldness, and kept preaching Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection.<sup>6</sup>**

A ruling agent beheaded the apostle James.

A religious mob killed a leading preacher named Stephen.

**Most Christians had to leave Jerusalem.**

**All except the apostles were scattered.**

**But no church leader or member protested.**

**No member retaliated against the government.**

Many Christians lost their homes; others died.

**How did church leaders deal with these terrible injustices?**

**The church kept assembling, praying, asking for boldness, and preaching Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection.**

They warned individuals to repent and to submit to God; they advised all individuals that they were accountable to God.<sup>7</sup>

But no church leader pressured the government.

**After a few years of this, an amazing thing happened.**

**The most vehement opponent of Christ changed and became a believer.**

From being violent tormentor, he became the church’s chief proponent.

**You know him as Paul.**

**What if Christians had protested in the early years of the church?**

**The outcome would have been far different.**

**Paul likely would not have converted.**

Watching Christians die for their faith in Christ worked on Paul’s conscience.

When Jesus appeared to Paul on the Damascus road, Paul’s heart was already changing.

Persecuted Christians reacted with forgiveness.

**Remember Jesus’ reference to the goats?<sup>8</sup>**

**Those martyrs didn’t wag their fingers or intimate revenge, they died forgiving.**

**Protesting and joining causes might result in making living conditions easier for some.**

**I doubt these tactics win any one to Jesus.**

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<sup>6</sup> See Acts 4:23-35

<sup>7</sup> See Paul’s to leading citizens of Athens in Acts 17:24-31

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<sup>8</sup> See Acts 26:14

In fact, they likely harden unbelieving hearts.

**What should Christians do about governmental or political decisions that affect them or that affect morality?**

**Isn’t it right that they should help create a better moral climate and organize to bring it about?**

**Shouldn’t they help to develop better moral standards?**

**How should kingdom people act?**

**Human efforts to build God’ kingdom on earth have been dismal failures.**

**John Calvin’s (1509-1564) teachings powerfully affect a majority of Protestant churches today.**

Many of his present adherents still attempt to influence governments and to achieve God’s reign on earth.

**They do this despite the fact that Jesus said his Kingdom is not of this world.**

On two different occasions, city fathers of Geneva, Switzerland, turned administration of the city over to Calvin.

**Calvin taught that governments should protect the church, enforce sound doctrine, and create civil righteousness.**

He was probably well intended but he failed to distinguish between the theocracy God established for Israel in the Law of Moses and the separate realms of Caesar and God.

**In our text, Jesus explained them to Pilate and Paul outlined them in Romans 13 as we noted.<sup>9</sup>**

Calvin’s efforts failed as miserably as all attempts have been to teach pigs to sing.

**We lack the wisdom, insight or the fairness to judge the actions of others.**

**That’s why Jesus said: “Leave correcting and judging to God.”**

**God’s kingdom exists where God rules.**

**What do members of God’s kingdom do?**

- **First, they honor the king.**

**How many times did you glorify God last week either privately or publicly?**

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<sup>9</sup> See the *Great Omission*, pp 135, 135.

- **Second, kingdom people obey the king. We obey the laws of our government, but we distinguish between societal standards and the standards in God’s word.**

It is popular right now to assume that God’s principles are old-fashioned and out of date.

People who do that only increase their misery and hopelessness.

**Are you spending time applying God’s word to your personal life?**

**Does God’s word manage your daily decisions or do you practice self-rule?**

- **Third, we are not the king’s police his judges, or his enforcers; only servants.**

As his servants we tell others God’s good news in Christ, but we do not force others to accept it; they must account to God.<sup>10</sup>

**“Who are you to judge someone else’s servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand.”<sup>11</sup>**

<sup>10</sup> See Ezekiel 33 for this principle. A watchman is responsible for warning others of danger. Those warned must accept the message and act on it. If they do not their blood is on their own heads. See Acts 20: 25-27

<sup>11</sup> Romans 14:4 NIV

**“For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living . . . So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God.”<sup>12</sup>**

**Let me share what I have discovered:**

**The more I allow God to control my life, the more powerful wise, and loving, I find that he is.**

**My life is not in the hands of a weak, helpless image, but rather an all-powerful, loving being, who does wondrous things.**

**“Taste and see that the Lord is good.”**

Bob Blair [www.robertblairbooks.com](http://www.robertblairbooks.com)

PO Box 176  
Cleghorn, IA 51014



<sup>12</sup> Romans 14:7-9 & 12