

The Sign of the Cross

John 19:17-30

Introduction

Tonight, I want to call your attention to the sign on the top of Jesus' cross. You've probably seen pictures with these letters on it: INRI. These are the first letter for the four words in the phrase "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" in Latin (*Iesvs Nazarens Rex Iudaeorum*).

The Reason for the Sign

The Romans usually put a sign over the condemned criminal to identify who he is and why he's being executed, the crime for which he is being punished. If we look at all the Gospel narratives of the trial of Jesus before Pilate, we see that the Jews accused Him of claiming to be a king. This was a charge of treason against Rome. But when Jesus is before Pilate, He says that His kingdom is not of this world. He is saying that He's no threat to Rome. That's why Pilate can find no fault in Him. He doesn't see Jesus as a threat, maybe a religious radical, but not a threat to Rome. When Pilate had written, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews", it was a last jab at the Jewish leaders. In wording it this way, he was saying that the Jewish people were following Him and that made Him a threat to Rome.

More than the King of the Jews

Pilate had the message on the sign written in Aramaic, Greek, and Latin. This was so everyone who was in Jerusalem for the Passover would know why Jesus was being crucified. Every visitor would know at least one of these languages. It's like when we have signs written in English and Spanish. AUGUSTINE gives us this take on the sign: *These three languages were conspicuous in that place beyond all others: the Hebrew because of the Jews who gloried in the Law of God; the Greek, because of the wise people among the Gentiles; and the Latin, because of the Romans who at that time were exercising sovereign power over many, in fact, over almost all countries.*

King Over All

Culture and Creativity

The sign was written in Greek, the language of culture. At times, the church has acted in disdain toward culture and things creative. But when we bring our creativity to the King, He will bless it and ennoble it for His use.

Law, Politics, and Business

Latin was the language of law, politics, and business. Sometimes the church seems marginalized in these areas, or reluctant to try to be involved in them. They are "worldly things." But the King wants us, as His subjects, to be salt and light to the public arena.

Religion

Hebrew is the language of religion. In today's world, that means a plethora of different spiritualities and worldviews. But in the middle of this maze of religions, the King stands alone as the

Truth. He calls the lost millions to bow before Him as He is “exalted” on the cross. His words ring true today, *“And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself” (John 12:32)*.

Return to the King of the Cross

As we talk about returning to the cross, we see that the One we are to return to is the King of the cross. We see from the sign of the cross that the King calling us is the King of our culture and creativity, the King of the public arena of life, and the King of religion and spirituality. The King of all calls us to **RETURN TO THE CROSS**, to **RETURN TO THE KING**.

*And the Peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
