

John 19:1-27 Powerless Saviour

Introduction

Superman is arguably one of the most if not the most powerful super hero in comic books.

As an alien living on earth, he is granted almost limitless strength, speed and endurance.

This makes him the ideal candidate to be the saviour whenever the earth is threatened from enemies within and without.

When superman files in, you know you are safe because you know how strong and capable he is.

If you had to bet your life on anyone, you know that superman will not let you down.

But what if superman was merely Clark Kent.

The fumbling, shy reporter from the original movie series in the 1980s.

What if instead of the powerful Superman, mild mannered Clark Kent came on the scene to rescue you.

What would you say about the chances of your survival?

If it was Superman, you would say your chances are nearly 100%.

But with Clark Kent, it depends on what you need saving from.

This is because a normal, everyday journalist like Clark Kent does not have the power or ability to save anyone.

But Superman can save anyone because of his super powers.

So when we come to the climax of the story of Jesus, what do we expect to see?

We are expecting a Saviour, the Messiah to come forward in the story.

We are expecting a king like the kings of old.

The one who wields an iron sceptre and who will crush all his enemies and establish his kingdom forever.

But what do we see?

What did we see for the last few weeks in the Gospel of John?

We saw a man from Galilee, led from one court to another.

A man who didn't say word in his defence.

But like a lamb to the slaughter, Jesus remained silent and accepting of whatever was done to him.

So is this the saviour we have been promised?

Think back to John 3:16.

Jesus was supposed to be the Son of God who will give eternal life to all who believe in him.

He is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.

The David like king who was supposed to crush his enemies.

How could such a king be so powerless?

And if he is so powerless to defeat a Roman governor, what hope does he have to defeat Caesar the Roman Emperor?

In all aspects, Jesus falls short of the mighty saviour promised in the Gospel of John.

All the words he spoke and the miracles he performed has not helped him one bit.
He was still arrested, charged and sentenced to death.
He was still powerless against the authority of the Jewish leaders and the Roman governor.
He looked less like a king and more like the two criminals he was crucified with.
So is this the king we were expecting, is this the saviour that was foretold by the prophets?
And the answer as we have seen all along is a resounding yes.
He is the king we were expecting.
He is the saviour that was prophesied in the past.
He is the one who will give eternal life.
But he will not do that as the world or we expected.
Jesus will save in a way that shows that our priority is not like God's priority.
And our perception of crisis is not the same as God's.
When we know what kind of Saviour Jesus is, then we will see how we must align our priorities to him and not the other way round.
For that was the mistake the Jewish leaders, Pilate and the soldiers had in dealing with Jesus.
Their perception of the situation was tainted by their own priorities and needs rather than what God laid out in his Word.

Tainted Priorities of the world

For the Jewish leaders, their priorities was maintaining their own little world.
Even if that world only exists at the pleasure of the Roman Emperor.
Like a dog who will not share his bone, the Jewish leaders did not want to share what little power they had in Judea.
They knew that they were on borrowed authority.
What authority they had was given to them by the Romans.
So perhaps in their mind, having Jesus killed by the Romans is like killing two birds with one stone.
On the one hand they get rid of a thorn in their side.
And on the other they hand over a potential insurrectionist so that the Roman anger will not fall on Judea.
We can see their thinking in their insistence in having Jesus killed by crucifixion.
As I have said before, crucifixion was reserved for the worst of criminals.
Especially for an insurrectionist.
So to ask Pilate to crucify Jesus means that they wanted Rome to treat Jesus as a rebel against the Roman Empire.
Not only that, but what they thought of Jesus is also evident in their statement in verse 7.
They refer to their law against blasphemy in saying Jesus deserves to die.
It doesn't matter that Pilate cannot find Jesus guilty of breaking any Roman law, let alone deserving of death.
They insist he deserves to die because he claimed to be the Son of God.

Here we can see that the Jewish leaders could not accept Jesus was a prophet let alone the Messiah.

They denied Jesus came from God, and that he was blaspheming by making himself out to be God.

We can see even more clearly what they thought of Jesus in their response to Pilate wanting to free Jesus.

When Pilate brought Jesus out and said "Here is your king", the Jewish leaders cried out in opposition.

They rejected Jesus and demanded crucifixion.

And when Pilate mocked the Jews by asking, "Shall I crucify your king?"

They reply in verse 15: "We have no king but Caesar".

What a shocking statement to make by the Jewish leaders.

Especially the chief priests.

How can a priest of God claim they have no king but Caesar?

What has God been to his people all throughout the Old Testament?

To say that only Caesar is their king is to blaspheme against God the king of Israel.

To reject the kingship of God to make a political point against Jesus shows how corrupt and compromised they were.

They didn't care for God or his salvation plan.

All they cared for was their own power and authority.

In this it is hard to imagine that the Jewish leaders were even waiting for the Messiah to come.

Now Pilate is not much better in this regard.

While we might point to his numerous attempt to release Jesus and that he correctly found no guilt worthy of death in Jesus.

We can also see that Pilate is not motivated by a sense of justice or even duty.

For the priority of Pilate is to maintain the status quo.

To maintain the Roman rule over Judea without much problem.

Which is why we read in verse that Pilate had Jesus flogged by his soldiers.

Now flogging was usual before any crucifixion.

But it may be that at this point, the flogging wasn't the sever lashing we read in other Gospels.

And it probably wasn't like the lashing we see depicted in the movie Passion of the Christ.

But what is important here is that Pilate had him flogged to appease the Jewish leaders.

He wasn't interested in justice, he just wanted the problem go away.

He really had no time for the rants of the Jewish leaders.

We can see this clearly in his sarcastic exchanges with the Jews in today's chapter.

He mocked their claims against Jesus by continuing to call Jesus as the king of the Jews.

Pilate didn't really believe he was the king of the Jews, but he took pleasure in seeing the Jews squirm.

So he continued to call Jesus the king of the Jews.

Even the inscription on the cross read the king of the Jews.

But the Jews were relentless in their pursuit of killing Jesus.

And Pilate finally relented and handed Jesus over to the soldiers to be crucified.

What a contrast the priorities of the Jewish leaders against Pilate the Roman governor.

It seemed like the Jewish leaders were more interested in keeping the Roman rule than the governor himself!

But what is common to them is that Jesus was nothing in their eyes.

His life or death was determined by their decision, because they saw him as powerless.

Unable to save himself let alone the nation of Israel.

Our priorities

When we look at how the Jewish leaders and Pilate treated Jesus, we might be excused in thinking that we are nothing like them.

Their self-centred priorities are clear for everyone to see.

Especially in their treatment of Jesus.

But we are different, aren't we?

Don't we acknowledge that Jesus is our king?

Don't we acknowledge that he is the Saviour God promised?

Don't we believe he truly came from God?

Yet what does our own priorities say about what we believe and acknowledge?

Do we really follow Jesus as our king?

Or do we only turn to him to solve our problems?

Do we only turn to Jesus to rescue us from the dark times that surrounds us?

The question we really have to ask ourselves is, who is the king of our life?

The Jewish leaders and Pilate saw Jesus as weak because he couldn't save himself from their grasp.

But as we know and will see, Jesus is far from powerless.

As Jesus says in verse 11, Pilate has no power over Jesus except what is given to him from God.

His status in life.

His authority is not his own but given to him by God.

And the same goes for the Jewish leaders.

And we also have to acknowledge the same for our own lives.

God is in charge of every aspect of our lives.

He is the one who sets his plan and priorities before us.

We don't make God conform to our will, God conforms us to his will.

That is why Jesus is such an impossible person to figure out by our wisdom.

We want a powerful king, a powerful saviour to rule our lives.

We want this powerful king to take away all our problems and pain.

We want him to protect us and give us blessings in this life.

So we make plans and we implement our plans and expect Jesus to confirm and bless those plans.

We want Jesus to be the king we want him to be.

And in this we are no different to the Jewish leaders and Pilate in how they treated Jesus.

God's priorities

Yet, Jesus is different to the Jewish leaders, Pilate and even to us.

For his priority is not in being a powerful king that will establish a kingdom by force.

His priority was not in overthrowing the Roman Empire, nor clean out the temple of false priests.

Jesus' priority was in fulfilling God's plan of salvation.

To fulfill what God promised from long ago, Jesus remained silent.

He did not retaliate, even when the soldiers mocked him with a crown of thorns and a purple robe.

Even when they slapped him and flogged him, Jesus remained silent.

For he had to endure all of this, even the cross so that God's plan of salvation will be fulfilled in his death.

This is the priority of Jesus, that he must die so that many will live.

We know Jesus is powerful.

Because his miracles prove that he is God.

We know Jesus knows everything.

He even knew how he must die.

It wasn't because he was powerless that he died on the cross.

Jesus died on the cross, because that was his priority.

To rescue us from our sins.

To give us eternal life through his death.

Conclusion

Jesus doesn't fit the narrative of a powerful saviour.

If he couldn't save himself from death, how could he do anything for us?

We might as well pray to the air for rescue.

But Jesus didn't die because he couldn't save himself.

He gave himself on our behalf so that we can live.

You see, no one but Jesus could take on God's anger in our place.

No one could drink the cup of God's wrath except Jesus.

It is because he was the only one powerful enough that Jesus died on the cross.

This leaves us with a question about our own priorities.

If Jesus loved us so much that he willingly died to take our sins.

Then what should be our priority in life?

Should we live for our happiness, satisfaction and peace?

Should we desire to live long and prosper in this life?

And should we expect Jesus to give us all those things because he loves us?

No, by his death, Jesus showed us what our priorities should be.

Just as he died to rescue us from our sin, Jesus calls on us to take up our own cross and follow him.

In his death, Jesus doesn't offer to make our life easier.

He doesn't promise to make our dreams come true.

Jesus promises us forgiveness and eternal life with him.

In this life we may suffer and be poor.

We may not prosper like the rest of the world.

But that is not Jesus' priority for us.

His priority is that we follow in his footsteps.

If we believe Jesus is God.

If we believe he is our Lord and Saviour.

Then we must live in accordance to his priority.

And his priority is to see more people come into his kingdom.

For more disciples to be made all across the world.

He may give us prosperity or poverty.

That's his will as God.

But he will give us everything we need to witness to the world that Jesus died for our sins.

So will you live in accordance to your own priority like the Jewish leaders and Pilate?

Or will you live in accordance to the priority of Jesus?

As Joshua famously said in Joshua 24:15, this is my prayer for you:

"But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."