

John 19:22

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Pilate answered, What I have written I have written.

Analysis

Pilate answered, What I have written I have written. Pilate's terse response—ὁ γέγραφα, γέγραφα (ho gegrapha, gegrapha)—uses the perfect tense twice, indicating completed action with ongoing results. What has been written stands written. This grammatical form conveys finality and immutability.

The chief priests had protested the inscription 'THE KING OF THE JEWS' (v.21), wanting it changed to 'He said, I am King of the Jews.' But Pilate refuses. Ironically, the Roman governor who condemned Jesus now becomes an unwitting instrument of divine proclamation. The cross's superscription, written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin—the religious, cultural, and political languages of the ancient world—declares Christ's universal kingship to all humanity.

Pilate's defiance of the Jewish authorities here stands in stark contrast to his earlier capitulation to their demands. Having surrendered Jesus to crucifixion against his own judgment (19:6, 12-16), he now asserts authority over this small matter. Yet even this petty power play serves God's sovereign purpose: the cross becomes Jesus's throne, and the accusation becomes proclamation. As Psalm 2 prophesied, earthly rulers plot in vain—God establishes His King despite their schemes.

Historical Context

Crucifixion victims typically had a titulus (inscription) stating their crime, carried before them to the execution site and then affixed to the cross. This served as

public warning against similar offenses. Pilate's inscription was trilingual because Jerusalem, especially during Passover, drew pilgrims from across the Roman Empire who spoke various languages. The Aramaic/Hebrew served the local Jewish population, Greek was the lingua franca of the eastern Mediterranean, and Latin was the official language of Roman administration.

The chief priests' objection reveals their fury—not at the execution itself, but at its theological implications. Having secured Jesus's death by crying 'We have no king but Caesar' (19:15), they now object to any suggestion that Jesus actually was their king. Their rejection is complete and public.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How does Pilate's unwitting proclamation of Christ's kingship demonstrate God's sovereignty over human affairs?
2. What does the trilingual inscription reveal about the universal scope of Christ's reign?
3. In what ways do our attempts to control or suppress truth ultimately serve to proclaim it more widely?

Interlinear Text

ἀπεκρίθη	ὁ	Πιλάτος	Ὃ	γέγραφα	γέγραφα
answered	G3588	Pilate	What	I have written	I have written
G611		G4091	G3739	G1125	G1125

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 76:10 (Parallel theme): Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.

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