

## John 19:19

Lent 5 Midweek + April 10, 2019  
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church + Boise, Idaho  
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INRI

The Word of the Lord from John 19[:19]: "Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, 'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.'" This is the Word of the Lord.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

What do you want on your tombstone? How would you like to be remembered? Stroll through a cemetery, and there are lots of options out there: famous quotes, Bible verses, odes to sports or the outdoors, even some funny one-liners along the way.

What *don't* you want on your tombstone? How don't you want to be remembered? I'm pretty sure that you don't want to be remembered for your greatest sin, your worst transgression. No one wants to be remembered for failure and disgrace, for guilt and shame.

Those crucified on Calvary don't have a choice. The final words about them are posted on signs above their heads; and as common criminals are often headed to an anonymous burial, this is how they will be remembered. The inscription is part of the Roman system of justice: it lists their name, hometown, and reason for their execution. It's a deterrent: they are to read the crimes of those crucified, shudder in horror at the sight, and make sure they don't follow. It's also part of the punishment, the shame that comes with a cross. The criminals are stripped bare, raised up above ground and left to die with their crimes listed above their heads. The last sounds they hear while dying are often the jeers of the crowds who can't wait for them to be gone.

So above the heads of the men on the left and right, the signs say their names and something like "robbery" or "insurrection." But the sign in the middle is a strange explanation for a gruesome death. It says, "Jesus Nazarenus, Rex Iudaeorum," often abbreviated INRI. In English, the name and the charge are, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews."

Now, if the Man on that cross claimed a throne to rebel against Caesar, that would be a different matter: He'd be guilty of treason, and crucifixion would be no surprise. But ask around the crowd there, and you'll find out soon enough that Pilate had that inscription made in bitter irony, that he sentenced this Man to death after declaring Him innocent multiple times. Keep listening, and you'll discover that those who want Him dead the most will also say the accusation is false! His accusers say He is not king!

You might as well write on the sign, "Innocent." "Not guilty." "Shouldn't be here." Something like that. But it says, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." What's more, what it says is true.

He is Jesus, which means "Yahweh saves." He is the Savior, promised by Yahweh throughout the Old Testament. In fact, He is Yahweh Himself, come to do the saving. He's also from Nazareth: Yahweh has a home address up north because He's become flesh. He's fully God and fully man.

He is the King of the Jews. As prophesied in the Old Testament, a descendant of King David would come to rule over His people forever – not just Jews, but Gentiles too. As John began His Gospel, he wrote, "He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him" (John 1:11).

Now He hangs on a cross, crucified for being exactly who He is: Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.

Look closely, and you see signs of His office. He might still be wearing His crown, although it's made of thorns. Then you realize that finally, right there on Calvary, that cross is His throne where He's lifted up to draw all nations to Himself.

In fact, what is the Savior doing on the cross? He's saving. He is taking your place. He is suffering God's judgment for your sin. He is suffering hell in your place so that you do not have to. He is forsaken by His Father so that you need not be. The accusation above His head is no reason at all for His death: He is, in fact, an innocent man – more innocent than you and I can fathom. He is not just innocent of capital crimes, but He is innocent and holy and guiltless of any sin at all. The death He is dying is not supposed to be His. It is supposed to be yours, but He has taken your place, and the LORD has laid on Jesus the iniquity of us all. That is the Gospel.

So think for a moment about what you don't want written on your tombstone:

Fornicator.  
Congregational gossip.  
Cheater.  
Slanderer.  
Promise-breaker.  
Traitor.  
Thief.  
Liar.  
Abuser.  
Angry shouter.  
Hater.  
Fake.  
Parental failure.  
Bad spouse.  
Slacker.  
Addict.  
Porn fiend.  
User.  
Deceiver.  
Hypocrite.  
Coward.  
Murderer.

That is not how you want to be known or remembered – not by people. Certainly not by God.

And you will not be so remembered – not by God, anyway, because your sins are on Him. They're on the Savior, on the cross: the LORD has laid on Jesus the iniquity of us all. If you want, think of the sign above His head changing so that it no longer says, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." Imagine that sign with your sins listed upon it – the big ones, the small ones, all of them. It's for those sins that He is found guilty, and it is for those sins that He is condemned. Not just yours, but the sins of all. The inscription on that sign then is nearly infinitely long, the tightly packed words a blackest black, a deepest darkness.

The innocent bears the sins of all, writes that charge Himself on His own sign and dies for it.

What, then, of your sign, your inscription? How does God remember you now?

There are no sins left to list. If they're all on Jesus His cross, they're not on you anymore. God sees you now as innocent and holy – as innocent and holy as His Son. He does not label you as a fornicator, lover of riches, gossip, blasphemer, thief, liar, hater or murderer.

Instead, for Christ's sake, He calls you forgiven.

Loved.

His beloved child.

Innocent.

Pure.

Holy.

Without spot, stain or blemish.

He calls you alive in Christ, for Christ is risen from the dead; and in Christ, He calls you alive forever.

He does not see you as one stripped and exposed in sin and shame; for in your baptism you were clothed with Christ, and you now wear the robe of righteousness that befits a child of God. You do not see that robe with your eyes, not yet. So for now, the risen Christ keeps speaking to you as He did on the cross. He keeps interceding and saying, "Father forgive them, for I have died for them." At your Baptism, He said to His bride, the Church, "Woman, behold your child;" and He points out the Church to you and says, "child, behold your mother, for it is with her that you will feed on forgiveness and life until I return in glory." He declares, "Because I was forsaken by My God on the cross, I will never leave you nor forsake you. You are Mine." He says, "Because I thirsted on the cross, I will give you the water of life forever."

He says, "I have conquered sin and death and grave and hell, and I am risen from the dead. Truly I say to you, you will be with Me in Paradise."

See, as one baptized, you share His cross; and the sign above your head says that you belong to Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. King of kings and Lord of lords. The Christ, your King.

The world may not think that much of the new you in Christ, but the world is passing away. The Lord lives and reigns forever; and because of the cross, you know how He regards you, how He remembers you. Because all your sins were borne by Jesus on the cross, your name is written in the Book of Life. They are engraved on the palms of His hands, near nail-scars that testify of your redemption.

So the Lord calls you forgiven.

For all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen