

NOVEMBER 16, 2020

Your Path to Victory

Luke 2 and John 18-19

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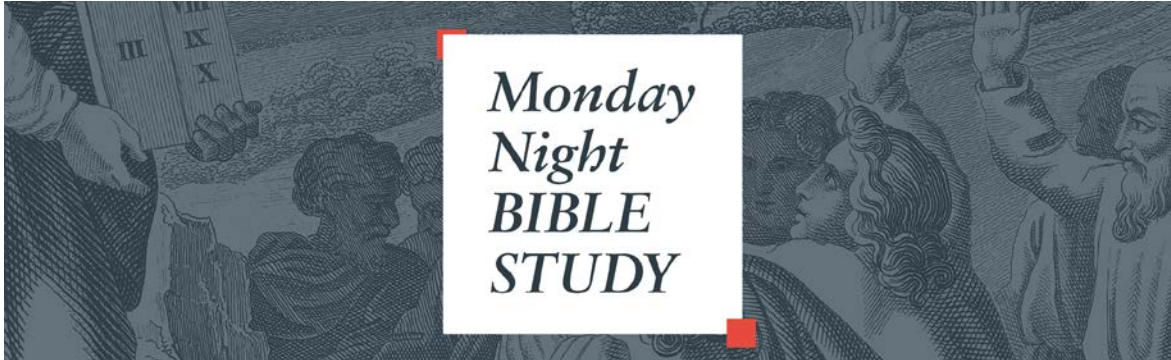
In this teaching, we'll look at what "Messiah" means and how Jesus being the Messiah should impact our daily lives.

In Luke 2 we see the story of the birth of Jesus. Luke frames the story of Jesus's birth as the clash between two kingdoms – the kingdom of God clashing with the kingdoms of this world. When we see that Jesus was involved in the ultimate battle against the forces of evil, we begin to see how Jesus's birth in a lowly manger begins to make sense.

The people in Jesus's day were waiting for God to send a Messiah that would do battle against the forces of evil. Many believed that God would send His Messiah and He would be a mighty warrior – a great military leader that would defeat Rome and would eventually rule over the whole world. They believed that this Messiah would bring peace to the nations and that God's creation would experience lasting justice. What we see in the gospels is that the unleashing of God's power, when it's fully on display, starts off with a tiny baby in a manger. Real power looks quite different than expected.

Luke 2:1-14 - Luke is showing us that this is the birth of a king. It's a birth of royalty, nobility. We know this because of the fact that angels stood at attention and praised God at Jesus's birth. In addition to this, the angel, in verse 10, says that this birth is "good news." "Good news" is where we get the word gospel. Gospel was a word used in that day as an announcement of a new king. For example, whenever a new king came into power, the first thing that king would do is get a group of his men to go into his land. And from town to town they would announce "good news" we have a new king. They would tell the people that there is a new king ruling and that this king must get their full allegiance. So we know that Luke is telling us that the birth of Jesus is the "good news" announcement of the birth of a new king.

Verse 12 - The baby in a manger is a sign, a pointing finger, to something else. And Luke is very clear that this sign of the manger, is the pointing finger to the arrival of a new king. The angel that appeared to the shepherd and then the great heavenly host praising God is a royal announcement of a king. We can certainly assume that these shepherds, as Jews, were aware of the promise of the coming king. They knew what a Savior, a Messiah, a coming Lord, was meant to do. He was



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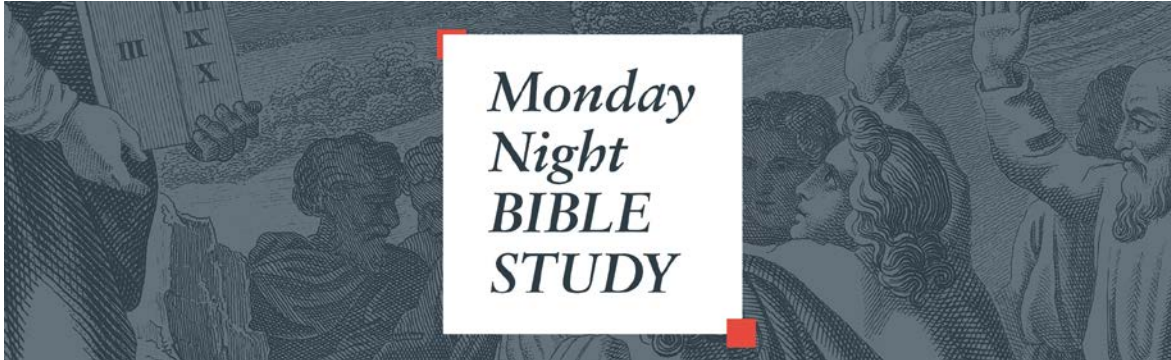
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meant to rule over all of God's creation. He was meant to bring God's rule to the earth. The point that Luke will make throughout this book is that if Jesus is the true ruler of the world, then everyone is called to show Him allegiance. Jesus, born in the lowliest conditions, will claim the world's highest position as Lord over all. Jesus is being hidden by God, out of sight from the powerful rulers in that area. He's tucked away, hidden in a lowly manger. Jesus doesn't come with a fanfare that would alert the rulers of this age. Yet Luke is telling us that God has already infiltrated Caesar's kingdom. A new king, born right underneath Rome's power, hidden from their sight. In time, there will be a clash of kingdoms – God's kingdom and the human kingdom.

Verse 2:1 - Here, Luke introduces the birth story by telling us about Augustus Caesar in Rome, at the height of his power. He became sole ruler of the Roman world after a bloody civil war in which he overpowered all other rivals who were trying to claim the throne. By declaring his dead adopted father, Julius Caesar, to be divine – to be a god – Augustus was calling himself the “son of God”. Meanwhile, in Augustus' empire, a child was born – Jesus. Within a few years, Jesus's followers would call Him “savior” and “Lord” and would announce that Jesus had brought true peace and justice to the world. Although Jesus never stood before a Roman emperor, at the end of the gospels, he stood before Pontius Pilate, the representative of the Roman Empire. The ultimate showdown of God's kingdom, God's way of doing power, and earthly kingdoms and the world's way of doing power. From beginning to end, the gospels tell the story of God overthrowing all other kings and placing Jesus as Lord over the world. The birth of the world's true king happens as Augustus signs a decree for a census.

A census meant not only that people were going to have to pay more taxes, but that they were being enlisted as subject members, as servants, to the king. The decree of a census was one of the greatest ways that Augustus could flex his muscles over those who lived in his domain. And as he's flexing his muscles, right as he's being declared a god, lord, savior, a child is born in a lowly manger, tucked away and hidden. And when His time comes, Jesus will face head on the human arrogance and worldly power that sets itself up against God. But when this clash happens – when human, worldly power is confronted with God's power – what will this clash look like? We see when the world exercises its power it turns people into slaves. But what happens when God exercises His power? What does it look like when God's power is on display?

These questions are exactly what Luke wants us to ask. For the gospel writers, it's not enough for them to hear us say we believe Jesus is the true Lord, they want us to see exactly what it looks like when Jesus rules. They want us to see what true power looks like so that we can follow in its footsteps.



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We know what it looks like when the world takes over. They send in the bombs the tanks and the machine guns. But when God takes over He doesn't send in those things. He sends in the meek, the merciful, the peacemakers. And it is those people who are quietly transforming the world offering signs of hope that can't be found anywhere else. When God takes over, when His power is on display, Luke wants us to know that it looks like humble, self-giving love.

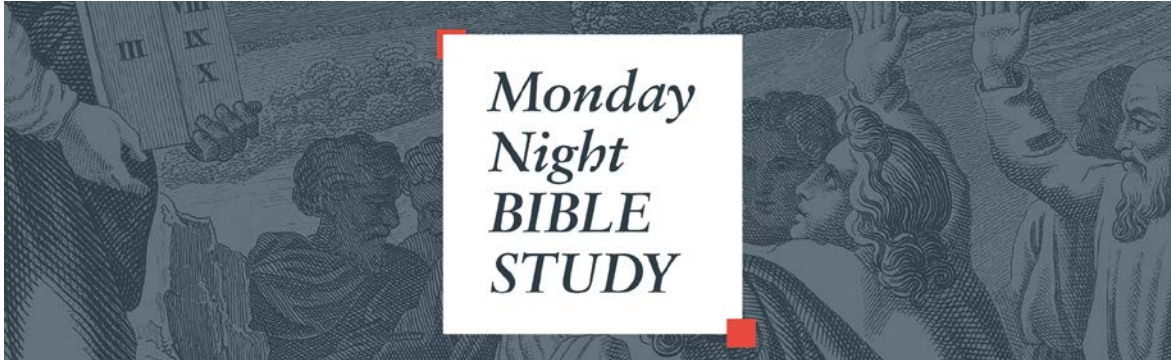
This is real power. And this power will win out in the end. To win in any battle you'll have to take the route of love. If you're in a situation right now, where you've been hurt and offended and you want to fight back, you want to make the person who hurt you feel the pain you're feeling, then you're at risk of doing power the world's way. And no matter how much we don't like it, God's way of power – the path to victory over your adversaries – will always involve the path of love and forgiveness. If you fight fire with fire, God won't be in it, and you'll end up getting burned. Is getting back at that person who hurt you really worth losing in the end? Instead trust God's way of power – trust that love and forgiveness will lead you into victory.

In Mark 10:42-45, Jesus said the kings, the rulers of the earth exercise power one way, by lording it over them – by bossing, bullying, manipulation, intimidation. But we're going to do it another way – the way of a servant. True power, in other words, is in service. True power is in self-giving love. True power, the kind that bring victory every time, is found in forgiveness, mercy, kindness. Jesus had to correct His disciples because they failed to see how God does power.

John 18:36-38 - This is the most dramatic scene in the whole New Testament – John 18 & 19. All that represents good and all that represents evil are having a conversation about who's in charge of the world. But in this scene with Pilate and Jesus, good and evil come face to face for the first time. Jesus who represents God's kingdom way of power, and Pilate representing the world's way of doing power.

John 18:36 "My kingdom is not of this world." Jesus is saying that not only is His rule and power not from this world, but it's of a different quality. This is very different than the world. No, His kingdom is not from this world, but it's for this world.

It's to recreate and renew the world into something that reflects and resembles its good, kind creator. This is the challenge of the gospel – to learn to live with a different understanding of what real power is all about. To learn to walk in true greatness. The world's way of power is seen in its threats and brute force. For God, His power is seen self-giving love.



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John 18:37 “You are a king then!” said Pilate. Pilate thinks Jesus just made a fatal mistake by saying He’s a king. This could be a charge of treason. John 18:37-38 - Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me. “What is truth?” retorted Pilate.” From Pilate’s point of view, truth is whatever those in power need it to be in order for them to retain their power. It’s whatever they say it is, so people better get on their side. The person with the power determines truth. Everyone else needs to get in line with it. Truth for Pilate only comes through a sword, though violence. Pilate is also saying, “Truth? Truth is my power against your weakness. Truth is your body hanging on a cross!”

John 19:10 - “Don’t you know I have the power to either to free you or set you free?” Pilate again uses the threat of violence and death to exert his power. Pilate is saying that he’s in charge and the fact that he can kill Jesus is the evidence of his power.

Jesus answered, “You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above.” Jesus says, “Pilate, I’m sorry, but you’re not in charge like you think you are.” Your form of power is a parody of real power. It’s weak and won’t win in the end. The ability to take a life is not real power. In fact, what we learn in the gospels is that real power is not the ability to take a life. It’s the ability to give life. Only Jesus can do that, so He must be the One and Only true king.

The next time you’re tempted to strike back, just remember this moment between Jesus and Pilate. Think about their discussion over who’s really in charge and what real power looks like. Every time we have the opportunity to get offended, we make the choice to follow Jesus’ way or the world’s way of power.