

HE CHOSE THE NAILS

## I Will Speak to You in Your Language

“Pilate wrote a sign and put it on the cross. It read:

*‘JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS.’”*

John 19:9

Have you ever tried to say one thing, but what actually came out of your mouth meant something completely different? What you intended to say seemed perfectly clear to you, but others took your words to mean an entirely different message. Sometimes in our communicating with others, we send the wrong signals. Like these

real messages posted on real signs:



This hotel gives you a

Free WIFE! Shouldn't that be free wifi?



Or this sign from a McDonalds. SEVERED. Yuck!

Over 10 billion ...

Here's another one from a fast food restaurant.



Probably the manager wanted to encourage the workers, lift morale, tell the community that their team work is the reason for their success. But in a business that sells hamburgers it just sounds very, very wrong to say that "People are their secret ingredient." No wonder they need to hire more!



And then this gas station and convenience store. What a way to say that they also sell bait! ("We have worms in the rear.") Yes, sometimes we send the wrong signs when we communicate.

Other times, we misinterpret the signs that others give off. A husband wonders what his wife's big sigh means: is she just tired from a long day? Or did he do something that made her mad?

Or the wife that misinterpreted the signs when she came home late one night. She quietly opens the door to her bedroom. From under the blanket, she sees four legs instead of just her husband's two. She reaches for a baseball bat and starts hitting the blanket as hard as she can. Once she's done, she goes to the kitchen to have a drink. But in the kitchen she sees her husband sitting there, reading a magazine. He says, "Hi darling, your parents have come to visit us, so I let them stay in our bedroom. Did you say hello?"

God knows we miss the signs. Maybe that's why He's given us so many. He gave the rainbow after the flood as a sign of His promise to never destroy mankind again. God told Abraham that the number of stars in the night sky show the size of his family. God gave festivals and priestly clothing and burnt offerings as signs of His forgiving love.

The most powerful sign, however, was found on the cross the day Jesus died. A three-language, hand-painted, Roman-ordered sign.

*<sup>19</sup> Pilate wrote a notice and put it on the cross. The notice read, "Jesus from Nazareth, the king of the Jews." <sup>20</sup> Many Jews read this notice, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city. The notice was written in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek. <sup>21</sup> The chief priests of the Jewish people told Pilate, "Don't write, 'The king of the Jews!' Instead, write, 'He said that he is the king of the Jews.'" <sup>22</sup> Pilate replied, "I have written what I've written." John 19: 19-22*

Why was a sign placed over the head of Jesus? Why are the words written in 3 languages? And what's so important about that sign that all 4 Gospel writers – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John – make a point of mentioning it?

Why? Let me suggest that this piece of wood is a picture of God's devotion to you. Could the sign be a symbol of God's passion to tell the world about His Son? A reminder that God will do whatever it takes to get across to you the meaning of Jesus' death for you? That sign reveals two truths about God's desire to reach the world.

The first is: **THERE IS NO PERSON GOD WILL NOT USE TO PROCLAIM HIS TRUTH.** There is no one God will not -- and cannot use - - in His mission to save the world from sin, death, and hell. God used a pagan, unbelieving, Roman governor: Pontius Pilate. If God can use

him, God can surely use you and me to share His forgiving love and hope with the people of this world.

Let me give you some historical background: The sign that Pilate had made for Jesus was called a “titulus.” It was made of wood and covered with gypsum. It was kind of like a white blackboard that could be used over and over again. The prisoner’s charges would be written on the ‘titulus’ in black letters and either hung on the criminal’s neck or carried in front of him as he marched to the place of execution. Once he was on the cross, the ‘titulus’ would be nailed above the criminal’s head.

On Jesus’ titulus was written: “Jesus of Nazareth – The King of the Jews.” The Jewish leaders didn’t appreciate the lack of clarity in Pilate’s words, and for the sake of truth in advertising, they request that the inscription be changed. But Pilate refused. And the Jewish leaders can do nothing about it. That must have really ticked them off! They plotted and manipulated to have Jesus murdered, until they got their way. They thought they were in control of stamping Jesus out. But they were not in control. They had no power to change the wording. God was working out a plan beyond what they realized. The sign proclaimed a truth that Jesus had said all along for 3 years. He and the Father are One. **“God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him will not perish, but have eternal life.”**

The sign is no mere human mistake on the part of Pilate. We know, God is in control here. Jesus was not a pawn or a victim. God the Father foretold this day in detail centuries earlier. Jesus chose to go to the cross. He laid down His life out of love, out of His decision to save the human race. Pilate was just the hand God used to proclaim the truth planned from eternity: Jesus is the Messiah, the King of the Jews, on a cross, bleeding and dying as He sacrificed His life to pay for all sin.

Around the First Century, experts estimate that at least a hundred thousand people would descend on Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. Some of them would come from as far away as north Africa, Turkey, Greece, and the Black Sea. Along with them, tens of

thousands of sheep ... lambs without blemish ... brought to be perfect sacrifices for Yahweh, the God Most High.

They would be sacrificed to be eaten on the Passover. Each lamb had to be set aside for four days prior to the day of their sacrifice so that the lamb's health would be observed, and then the Temple priest would authenticate they were acceptable to be offered as a sacrifice without flaw and blemish as commanded by God.

Get this: Jesus came into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. He spent Monday through Thursday in the Temple teaching. The priests observed Him. They heard Jesus and saw Jesus before their very eyes for those 4 specific days. During those 4 days the priests tested Jesus too. They sent undercover spies into the crowds who listened to Jesus teach. The spies tried to trip Jesus up into saying the wrong thing. But, they were amazed that Jesus never stumbled. It infuriated them that they could not find anything Jesus was guilty of. The priests wanted Jesus dead because He was more popular with the people than they were. But the priests couldn't find a crime to pin on Jesus.

The Passover was on Saturday. So the lambs would be killed and prepared for the Passover meal on Friday.

It was the same day the Passover lambs were killed, on Friday – *Good Friday* – that another Lamb was sacrificed. That Lamb was Jesus. The timing of Jesus' arrival and His death is a miracle of God. Three years earlier, Jesus came to be baptized by John. When *[John the Baptizer]* ***“saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”*** *John 1:29*

Jesus is THE perfect, spotless, sinless Lamb. He is fit for the sacrifice. The Bible says: ***[Jesus] “in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.”*** *Hebrews 4:15*

What a crazy week that must have been in Jerusalem. A hundred thousand tourists. Tens of thousands of lambs. How in the world did they keep all those lambs straight? How did they know whose little sheep-y belonged to whom? Simple. They would put a name tag on each one. When the crowds of people would arrive in Jerusalem for the Passover, each family would either purchase or bring with them a special bronze name plate to hang around the lamb's neck. Like a dog

license today. The bronze plate would be etched with the family's name to designate which family was offering that particular lamb as a Passover sacrifice.

Follow me on this ... Pilate had the charges against Jesus written in three languages: Greek, Latin, and the language of the local Jewish people, Hebrew. In Hebrew, the words written would have been "Yeshua [Jesus] Hanatzri [of Nazareth] Welmelech [the king] Hayhoodem [of the Jews]."

There was something subtle about the Hebrew ... not something that everyone might catch. Most people might not see it right away ... or at all. It has to do with the first letter of each word. Take the first letter of each word and you get ... ("Yod-He-Waw-He.") What does it spell? Yahweh! Yahweh... the personal, sacred name of God!

Remember those bronze name plates the people placed on the necks of their Passover lambs? The signs on the lambs bore the name of the family that lamb was to be a sin sacrifice for. The sign that was nailed over Jesus' head on the cross was God's way of telling us that this was His sacrifice on our behalf.

For centuries, Jewish families had been hanging bronze name tags around their paschal sacrifices as a way of saying: "See, God ... this lamb is for our family." God used Pilate to hang a sign above His Son on the highest hill in Jerusalem. By that sign God the Father proclaimed, "See ... This is My Lamb ... This is for My family!" By faith, you are part of this family!

Take a moment and let that sink in!

The very fact that Jesus wore that sign on that day at that time proclaimed to all that He IS our payment for our sin.

God used Pilate to proclaim who Jesus is. The Bible reminds us: *Pilate wrote a notice and put it on the cross. The notice read, "Jesus from Nazareth, the king of the Jews."* The King of the Jews. On that cross was a king. The crucifixion was a coronation.

Pilate knew that Jesus was innocent. And Pilate was angry that he was being used in a cruel game. He tried several times to convince the Jewish religious leaders to release Jesus but they threaten him: ***"If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone***

***who claims to be a king sets himself against the Emperor***” John 19:12. Very effective threat. That’s not a tweet that Pilate wanted to get back to Caesar, true or not.

The sign was an opportunity for Pilate to humiliate the Jewish authorities who had blackmailed him into crucifying an innocent man. He had written on the sign “Jesus of Nazareth.” There was a saying amongst the Jews: “Can any good come out of Nazareth?”

Nazareth was a hick town ... barely a spot on a map. The idea that a great king like could ever come out of some backwoods town like Nazareth was just ridiculous ... laughable.

Pointing out and emphasizing that Jesus was from Nazareth was pure mockery. “Some king,” Pilate scoffs. “A carpenter ... from Nazareth. Really? A loser king from a loser town. A loser king fit for a loser people. Look! Look at what I did to your ‘King’ from Nazareth!”

From the Roman perspective Christ’s crucifixion was a graphic warning to anyone foolish enough to make such a threat against Rome.

Let’s stop and think about this for a minute. The purpose of the sign was what? To publicly pronounce the “crime” of the condemned prisoner, right? And didn’t the Jewish leaders bring Jesus before Pilate because they wanted him to put Jesus to death for the crime of claiming Himself to be “The Son of God”? And yet, the reason that the Jewish leaders where so upset is that the sign, while spelling out Jesus’ so-called crime, also bore the truth ... that Jesus’ was who He claimed to be.

For 3 years Jesus clearly said He is God. He calmed storms, cast out demons, and raised the dead. Just 2 weeks before Jesus raised Lazarus after he was dead in the tomb 4 days. That was only 2 miles from where they stood. Jesus is God. No doubt about that. And they killed Him for it – Jesus was condemned for being who He really is: The King. The Messiah. The eternal ruler of all.

Pilate’s sign was very effective! A criminal on a cross next to Christ’s noticed the words. Luke tells us in the Bible: <sup>39</sup> ***One of the criminals hanging beside him scoffed, “So you’re the Messiah, are you? Prove it by saving yourself—and us, too, while you’re at it!”*** <sup>40</sup> ***But the other criminal protested,***

*“Don’t you fear God even when you have been sentenced to die?”<sup>41</sup> We deserve to die for our crimes, but this man hasn’t done anything wrong.”<sup>42</sup> Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom.”<sup>43</sup> And Jesus replied, “I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise.” Luke 23:39-43*

The criminal said: *“Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom.”* What an interesting choice of words. He didn’t plead, “Save me.” He didn’t beg. The criminal is like a servant before a king. Maybe he had heard of Jesus before – we don’t know. Luke makes a connection between the words on the sign and the criminal’s prayer.

The thief knows he’s in a royal mess. He turns his head and reads that Jesus is the King, and so he asks for royal help. He believed the truth of the sign. ... Do you?

**DO YOU BELIEVE THE TRUTH OF THIS SIGN?** Is Jesus your king? Is He your Messiah, your Savior?

I’m not asking if you KNOW about Jesus. I’m not asking if you’ve HEARD about Jesus. The Jewish leaders knew all about Christ but absolutely rejected Him as their king, their leader.

Is Jesus the Lord, the Ruler of your life? Do you hang on His every word for hope and life? Is His promise of forgiveness one you trust? Do you rely on Him – not yourself – rely on Him alone for heaven? Do wake up in the morning and ask, “Jesus, how can I live this day to serve You? How can I show my love for You?”

Is Jesus your King? When faced with temptation do you ask what He wants you to do? Do you want to live by Jesus’ values of love and life and humility and servanthood? Or do you follow the values of today’s people – values like: live for yourself, spend on yourself, commitments to marriage and family and integrity don’t matter?

There is no person God won’t use to proclaim His truth. He used Pontius Pilate to proclaim that Jesus is the Lamb, the Sacrifice for sin. He is your forgiver. And He is your King, and Ruler, and Lord – for eternity and for every day.

Pilate’s sign also declares that **THERE IS NO LANGUAGE GOD WILL NOT SPEAK TO PROCLAIM HIS TRUTH.** Hebrew was the language of religion. Latin was the language of law and government. Greek was

the language of the everyday man. Every passerby could read the sign. There is no language God will not speak.

So let me ask you: What language is God speaking to you in your life? What signs is He using?

I'm not talking about English or Spanish or a dialect. God DOES speak, you know. He speaks to us in whatever language we will understand.

Are you hearing the "language of affliction"? You and I both know how God speaks in hospital hallways and at sickbeds. Nothing seems to turn our ears toward heaven like a weak body. This is the language God is speaking to us now through a pandemic. His message is "Turn to Me. Trust in Me. Depend on Me. Follow My ways."

Is God speaking to you in the "language of confusion"? When we don't know which way to turn, God says ***"I will ... teach you in the way you should go."*** Psalm 32:8 ***"Receive instruction from His mouth."*** Job 22:22

Is God speaking to you in the "language of abundance"? Is your tummy full? Bills paid? A little jingle in your pocket? God says, don't be proud of what you have. Remember these things are temporary. God says "Don't think these are your own doing. They are all gifts from His hand. Be filled with gratitude to God. Be generous to people in need."

God wants to speak your language. To receive His message means slowing down. Slow down to read His message to you in daily devotions in His Word and Bible study. Slow down to pray and reflect on what God is saying to you through the signs in your life. Slow down to ask a wise, trusted, Christian friend to help you SEE the signs and INTERPRET the signs God is using in your life.

The sign on the cross. Hung above Jesus' head as He suffered and died for you. It wasn't fancy. Hand painted. On a slab of wood.

Through it God proclaimed that Jesus is the Lamb, YOUR Sacrifice for all YOUR sin. He is your forgiver. He is your King, and Ruler, and Lord – for eternity and for every day.

God used a sign ordered by Pilate. A thief was promised paradise that day because of it.



There is no one God will not -- and cannot use -- in His mission to save the world from sin, death, and hell. God can surely use you to share His forgiving love and hope with the people of this world.

Simply ask Him to use you.

Let us pray:

Jesus of Nazareth: The Lamb sacrificed for Yahweh's family. Through Baptism, You have made us members of Your family. You have forgiven our sins. Fill us with Your joy, with relief, with deep and lasting love for You.

Jesus of Nazareth: King of the Jews. You are King of all who trust in You by faith. The King of All Heaven. Rule and reign in our hearts and lives. In response to Your love, there is nothing we could possibly do BUT follow You, our Lord!

Jesus of Nazareth: You are true God. The Word of God. You came to teach us and lead us to You. Use each of us to lead others to know You. Amen.