

# **All About Him: Caesar Bows to the King**

## **Revelation 19:11–16**

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The year was 160 AD. Polycarp was the pastor/bishop of Smyrna in modern-day Turkey. He was revered by the Christian community as he was the last living disciple of an Apostle. He was likely an understudy to the Apostle John. He was a champion for gospel truth, having stood against heresy including the famous early church heretic teacher Marcion. We pick up his story. Polycarp was 86 years old. Smyrna was a city dedicated to the worship of the emperor of Rome. Polycarp taught against such worship along with the rest of the pantheon of Roman gods. He was arrested and brought to the stadium of Smyrna to appear before the ruler. The proconsul urged him to deny Christ saying, "Swear, reproach Christ, and I will set you free."

"86 years have I have served him," Polycarp declared, "and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?"<sup>1</sup>

Polycarp was burned to death that day refusing to worship Caesar and continuing to worship his Savior, Jesus.

*All About Him 2020.* In a year like none we have ever experienced and during a series on government from Romans 13, this year is the right year to celebrate the supremacy of Jesus over government, governors, Caesars, presidents, kings, and every human authority.

Romans 13 has taught us that government is God's common grace for organizing and overseeing society. It is God's plan and is not itself the problem. The problem is the sinners sinfully governing sinners. We read through history and everyone from Caesar to Napoleon to Mao to Washington to whomever the president of the USA will be in 2021—all sinners governing sinfully. We would think that this is the way it will always be. It's always been this way. It will always be this way. *Que sera sera.*

And we would be wrong. History forgets a moment when the power of the new creation invaded a stone-sealed tomb in Jerusalem and out walked not merely a resurrected human, but the God-man. The Savior. And if we had eyes to see, we would have seen the crown of thorns replaced with an eternal crown. The one who came out of that grave was and is the eternal King and Lord of all.

What that means and how it should shape our view of human government is the subject of *All About Him 2020: Caesar Bows to the King.*

### **The Anticipated King**

There is a back story. The Old Testament is brimming with anticipation of a perfect king someday. Even from the beginning in Genesis 3, we are told of someone who would come and crush Satan's head (Genesis 3:15). Who has the power to crush such a powerful demon? Abraham was told that through his descendants all nations of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 22:18). Who could this bring this about? In the course of progressive

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<sup>1</sup> Translated by J.B. Lightfoot, abridged and modernized by Stephen Tomkins, Edited and prepared for the web by Dan Graves, "#103: Polycarp's Martyrdom," <https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/study/module/polycarp>.

revelation, God prophetically paints a portrait of One who would crush Satan and bless and rule all the nations of the world.

We look back now and see, through the prism of the cross, exactly who this was. Old Testament saints didn't have this privilege. What was said of the Messiah was so extraordinary, who could it be? The mystery of a messiah to be born of a virgin yet also a suffering servant (Isaiah 53). But what really blew peoples' minds was what was said about him politically and governmentally. The scale and scope of this coming king was far greater than anyone could imagine.

*"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."* (Isaiah 9:6 ESV)

*"The government shall be upon his shoulder."* What government? All government. Every human kingdom and rule will be on his shoulders. Shoulders are where we carry things. Nearly every night my girls ask me to carry them upstairs to their bedrooms. They are getting so big now that about the only way I can do it is to put them on my shoulders. As I do, they are completely dependent on me. My shoulders are carrying them. I am upholding them.

*"The government shall be upon his shoulder"* – This one will have a relationship with human government in which their entire existence and authority will depend on him.

*"Prince of Peace"* – this speaks to his rule as a peacemaking rule. His wisdom and his power will compel people to come together. Our world could use a bit of that these days, couldn't it? Not just government, but communities, families, and churches. He is the Prince of Peace. The scale of his rule is breathtaking.

*"I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession."* (Psalm 2:7–8) The nations of the earth will be his possession. No king or kingdom in all of human history has ever ruled the whole world. Many have tried, including Hitler, Napoleon, and Alexander the Great. But even Alexander wasn't great enough. One is coming who will be.

*"I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed."* (Daniel 7:13–14)

This incredible vision of Daniel shows Jesus, the Son of Man, presented to the Ancient of Days (God the Father). God the Father grants to Jesus dominion, glory, and a kingdom. Who is in that kingdom? Everyone. This kingdom is a dominion that will last forever. This harkens the promise God gave David in 2 Samuel 7 that his throne would be an eternal throne; an earthly kingdom which never ends.

This Old Testament foreshadowing includes an eternal throne, an eternal rule, and an absolute dominion over all kings and kingdoms. The scale and scope are so far-reaching (everything) and so enduring (forever and ever). Who could do this? Who is this?

## The Veiled King

When we get to the New Testament, this language becomes much clearer and the royal line and nature of the Christ moves to front and center even as Jesus' true identity was temporarily veiled. Two titles of Jesus best describe his relationship to human government: King and Lord.

### King

Mary is told by the angel in Nazareth, *"He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."* (Luke 1:32-33)

The wise men from the East arrive in Jerusalem and say, *"Where is he who has been born King of the Jews?"* (Matthew 2:2). All Jerusalem was in an uproar at the Magi and the best they could come up with was if the Messiah was born, he would be born in Bethlehem, the city of David. Jesus' royal pedigree was only understood by foreigners and philosophers.

But even with that, Caesar felt threatened and so to kill the usurper child he had all the children two and under around Bethlehem killed. But the true Child-King had escaped to Egypt.

This kingly language finds its pinnacle years later as Jesus rides triumphally into Jerusalem. What was his triumphal entry if not a royal presentation of the King? Those who had eyes to see would understand that donkey foal was a royal carriage and the one who sat on it, the long-prophesied King. Some understood and chanted royal psalms. But nobody really got it.

In a few days, the Jewish Caesars would unleash their terror at this usurper and threat. How? Jesus was charged with claiming to be an actual king:

*"And they began to accuse him, saying, 'We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king.'"* (Luke 23:2)

This was pure hypocrisy as the Pharisees in particular were no fans of Rome. But the enemy of your enemy is your friend. They needed Caesar's sanction to kill Jesus. There was no more treasonous threat to the Roman Caesar than the potential for an alternate king. *He claims to be a King, Pilate. O Great Caesar, what will you do?*

Surprisingly, Pilate initially seeks to release Jesus. *"From then on Pilate sought to release him, but the Jews cried out, 'If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar.'"* (John 19:12)

What's going on? Political theater. They are manipulating Pilate. They know he can't let a threat to Caesar go free. It would cost Pilate his position and maybe his head. There can be no rebel king in Rome but Caesar.

Pilate asks Jesus directly in John 18:33, *"Are you the king of the Jews?"* Jesus' replied, *"My kingdom is not of this world"* (John 18:36). Pilate Caesars big and small, even in our day, only view things through the grid of human power and political might. We see this in our day where hurricanes and human tragedy are only viewed through the grid of the upcoming election. Why? Pride. Power. There are many Pontius Pilates. Pontius Pilates always see

Jesus and Christianity as a threat to their authority. Why does Communist China outlaw Christianity? Why did ancient England burn Tyndale and Wycliffe at the stake for translating the Bible into English? Why did Nero hate Christianity so? Caesar is all about power and Christianity undermines Caesar's hold by declaring a higher and greater King.

Why did they put a crown of thorns on him? Why did they beat and mock him, "Hail, king of the Jews!" (John 19:3)? Of all the things they could have said on the crucifixion sign over his head, it said, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." (John 19:19)

The ultimate Caesar of the world is Satan. The Bible calls him the prince of this world. Is it a coincidence that when given the chance to terminate God's plan, Satan's most powerful seduction was to offer Jesus the kingdoms of the world if only he would bow to him? Caesar desperately wants Jesus to bow.

## Lord

The second title is *Lord*. We use this so much that we can fail to realize that this title is a statement of absolute governing authority. In the Greek Old Testament, *Lord* is the replacement for YHWH, the very name of God. It does so over 6,000 places in the Old Testament. To take that Greek word and apply it to any human being would have been blasphemy in Jewish eyes.

Yet this is exactly the message of the gospel first preached by the apostles. After Jesus' resurrection and ascension Peter declares on Pentecost, "Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." (Acts 2:36)

*King* refers to Jesus' royalty as descendant of David and ruler of all. It is positional. But there are kings and queens who have no power. Europe is filled with them. They are titled and they are bejeweled, but they are impotent.

This reminds me of a moment I had with my two young daughters this summer. I thought it would be nice to show them an old neighborhood we lived in. As we drove around, we came upon a man from our church washing his car. It was a hot day. He had his shirt off and was enjoying the summer sun. He came over and talked with us through the window. As we pulled away, my girls said loudly, "Dad, his muscles are bigger than yours!" I dispute that.

Jesus is no merely titled divine gentry. He has the title of King and he has muscles. Power. He is both King and Lord. *Lord* is authority. *Lord* is supremacy and control. Jesus is both the enthroned King and the absolute Lord of all. Listen to one commentator explain the significance of Jesus as Lord:

*"Since Jesus is Lord, he shares with the Father qualities like deity (Romans 9:5), preexistence (John 8:58), holiness (Hebrews 4:15), and compassion (1 John 4:9), to name just a few. He is co-creator (Colossians 1:6) and co-regent, presiding in power at the Father's right hand (Acts 2:33), where he intercedes for God's people (Romans 8:34) and from whence, as the Creed states, he will return to judge the living and the dead (2 Thessalonians 1:7-8). Just as it is impossible to overstate the power, grandeur, and goodness of the Kyrios the Father, so there is hardly limit to the glory ascribed in Scripture to the Kyrios the Son."* (Yarbrough)<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Yarbrough, *The Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Ada, Michigan: Baker Publishing Group, 2001), 410.

The Lordship of Jesus Christ is an affirmation of all who believe in him. Romans 10:9 says, *"If you confess with our mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."*

This confession of Jesus became the earliest creed in the church. *Iesous Christos Kyrios*. "Jesus Christ is Lord." In the early church, that was a countercultural revolutionary mantra that separated Christianity from the polytheistic, emperor-worshiping peoples. It was scandalous then. It is scandalous now. The creed summarizes everything found in any other creed. It is to pledge our faith and ultimate allegiance to Jesus as sovereign Lord and King of the universe. He is presently such a King and Lord.

As the great commission celebrates, *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me"* (Matthew 28:18). Yet his reign is a provisional reign in which Satan continues to exert his destructive influence on earth. Billions do not presently bend the knee to Christ. He continues to be mocked and profaned even as kingdoms still fear him and outlaw his worship. There continue to be earthly human governments: Caesars, governors, kings, and presidents. They exercise an authority granted to them temporarily by God. We could think that the United States government will go on forever. The United Nations will always be. China and Russia and Great Britain and Brazil will just always be. We could think it will always be this way. We would be wrong. All the Caesars have a shock coming.

### **The Enthroned King**

*"Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords."* (Revelation 19:11–16, ESV)

This anticipated King, veiled and suffering King, someday he will step out behind the veil of this sky and will proclaim both his royal title and display his sovereign might. Lest any be confused with who he is, as he comes, who he is will be written on his thigh, *King of kings and Lord of lords*.

In that moment every human authority, every Caesar on the planet, every king, queen, prime minister, president, governor, and everyone else will tremble as they see divine glory and absolute power. He is not a king and a lord. He is King of all kings and Lord of all lords.

*"Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."* (Philippians 2:9–11)

All humanity that has ever lived will gather. Every angelic being ever created will gather. Angels and demons. The redeemed and the unredeemed. The great and mighty of history. The small and forgotten. All will gather. *At the name of Jesus, every knee will bow*. Satan wanted Jesus to bow to him. Rome wanted Jesus to bow to him. But Satan bows. Rome bows. Caesar bows. Alexander the Great bows. William the Conqueror bows. Genghis Khan bows. Hitler bows. Judas Iscariot bows. Queen Elizabeth bows. Frederick the Great bows.

Nero bows. Caiaphas bows. Every US President bows. Get this, and you will bow before the Lord someday. Bow now or bow later because someday all will bow.

The urging of the gospel of Jesus is to bow now. Confess him as Savior and Lord now. Today is the day of salvation. By bowing now and believing now, we enter eternity under his grace and with eternal life. To enter eternity as an enemy of the Lord of lords is eternally perilous. He offers his forgiveness for sins now, in this life, for all who believe in him.

Finally, this puts all our government debates and arguments in their proper perspective. Is Christian citizenship important? Yes. In a democracy should you vote Christian values? Sure. Do we care about who is governing over us these fleeting years on earth? Yeah, OK. But not too much. Not when we see with eyes of faith our forever King on his throne. Our sovereign ruler before whom all bow. *Iesous Christos Kyrios*. Jesus Christ is Lord!

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