

“The Pope!” Josef Stalin is reportedly to have said. “How many divisions has he got?” At that time in history, Stalin had been in charge of some **34 million Soviet soldiers** who fought in WW2.

King Charles III is head of some **35,000 people and 150 aircraft in the Royal Air Force**, but across the ocean in America, King (President) Biden (or Trump!) will control some **300,000 personnel and 5500 combat aircraft, not to mention 300 combat vessels in the navy**.

And the greatest King of the earth? It might be Biden or Trump. Or it might be Xi of China, who has **2 million soldiers at his disposal**. This is worldly power.

But how many divisions, how many soldiers, does the Pope have? Well, it turns out that his personal bodyguard, the **Swiss Guard, is 135 men**. Honestly, that’s not going to threaten many nations.

Though there are some **2 billion people who might claim some allegiance to Jesus** – or not, it’s hard to tell where lines might be drawn!

And those who **control nations are rewarded very well**. In 2016 *The Guardian* newspaper asked “can Trump afford to be president?” Well, 8 years later, he’s said to be **worth \$5.5 billion**. Over in the UK, the **Prime Minister who ruled for just 49 days**, Elizabeth Truss, is said to be **worth over £8 million**, while former Prime Minister Tony Blair is said to be worth **at least £50 million**. In other words, those who hold positions of power in this world are always financially rewarded.

There is a great **personal benefit** to get hold of earthly power. It was ever thus.

Pontius Pilate, a mid-ranking Roman official, was not rich by the standards of the Roman Emperor. But in Palestine 2000 years ago, he was **probably in the top 3 richest men**, and was definitely one of the most powerful.

So when he looks at Jesus and asks him who the King of the Jews is, there is a **big disparity**. Jesus, you’ll remember, relies on **donations**. Pilate lives in a palace and has soldiers to force people to give their money to him. Basically, you have a huge contrast: worldly **power** meets worldly **poverty**.

Yet the worldly power is **not secure**. Pilate asks Jesus if he is King of the Jews. This is important – if Jesus claims to be king, then he is challenging the Roman system, and threatening political rule. Rome allowed only the kings that they could control, like Herod, and only the Emperor was the real king. Anyone else claiming that, was a threat to be eradicated.

So the man with the power – Pilate – is actually nervous. He has to make sure if there is a threat here to the man who controls him! **There’s always a bigger fish in the sea!**

And then Jesus looks at Pilate, and begins interrogating him! “Do you say this, or did others tell you?”

The man with no power asks the man in charge if he has been told this by the Jewish authorities. Jesus is questioning Pilate: **do you actually know what you are talking about?** Or are you just saying what the pharisees told you to say?

Pilate didn't like that – I'm not a Jew! he shouts. So Jesus – the man under arrest – takes the lead. "My kingdom is not **from** the world."

The Greek is "from", not "of". Many older translations say "of". The Kingdom of God is **IN** this world, but it does not come **from** this world. The Kingdom of God is something different, sitting and inhabiting this world, and this world, like Pilate with Jesus, does not know how to cope. The Kingdom of God challenges this world, and the world feels threatened, because as Jesus interrogated Pilate, so **Jesus interrogates every system of power in this world.**

The one the world arrests and persecutes looks back, and **asks hard questions of the world.** And he calls us, as his followers, to do the same.

Why are Western governments **causing poor countries to pay \$100 billion per year in debt interest payments? This is much more than the aid the West gives...**

Why does the amount the world spends on **peace-making** only buy 10 metres of 1 US Virginia-class nuclear submarine? For context, the US is building 66 of them. What if the money was spent in Sudan and Nigeria and the DRC? **Why is life in those countries so cheap?**

Why do schools hand out contraception yet **fail** to call pupils to **commitment** and **fidelity**?

Why do we see so much of **super-rich** people in the media, as if they somehow matter more? **Doesn't every person carry the image of God?**

As Christians, as followers of Jesus, we are called to be like **diplomats**. I was talking to some diplomats from Canada on Thursday, and they said they receive a **commission** and a **mandate** – go forth, this is your mission, and accomplish these things. And this is for the benefit of the people of Canada as the government sees it.

We have the same! **Congratulate** yourself and the person next to you! **You are an ambassador!** Call each other "Your excellency!" We all have a mission to go out and represent our King, and to ask hard questions of this world, and to show this world a different way of living.

So let's be those diplomats of Jesus! People who don't steal when others do. People who know when we've had enough and give the rest to people who are hungry. People who celebrate the weak and vulnerable. People who spend time with the dying and sick.

People who keep, **relentlessly**, pointing back – **with joy** – to this King, **this King called Jesus**, who gave his life for all people, and calls us to do the same.