In this thread I am discussing whether Jesus considered himself the messiah prior to his death. So far I have made one major argument for that view, involving his death itself. All of our sources report Jesus was executed by the Romans specifically for calling himself the King of the Jews. They do not report that the Roman governor Pontius Pilate ordered him crucified for raising an army, or for causing a disturbance in the temple, or for being a pain in the neck for the Sadducees, Pharisees, or anyone else. They report that the charge was for calling himself the Jewish king.

This seems almost certainly historical, because it is not a report Christians would have made up. The title “King of the Jews” appears in the Gospels only in connection with Jesus’ trial and crucifixion. It is not a title that Christians ever (so far as we can tell) used of Jesus. And so it’s unlikely they invented it for the occasion of his death.

Moreover, I think it is fair to say that Jesus did not publicly proclaim himself the King of the Jews. The reason is the same: we have no public teachings of Jesus in which he takes this title for himself. Read for yourself: see his longest teaching in Mark’s Gospel, chapter 4: no mention of him being the King of the Jews. Or the longest teaching in Matthew, the Sermon on the Mount, chapters 5-7: no word of such thing. Look at all the Gospels. Jesus never publicly declares himself the King of the Jews.

So why was he executed for calling himself that? My view is not an idiosyncratic theory that I made up myself. I inherited it from scholars far better than me. It is the view, roughly, of the great Albert Schweitzer himself. Jesus taught his disciples, in private, that he was the King of the Jews. And one of them, Judas, betrayed the secret to the authorities. They arrested Jesus, questioned him about it, and executed him for it.

But is there any evidence from Jesus’ teachings for this view? I believe there is. Among other things…

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