

Title: The Savior King**[Slide 1]****Text: Matthew 4:8-11****Savior****The Great Cameo of France:****[Slide 2]**

It's called "The Great Cameo of France." Originally from ancient Rome, it eventually found its way to the royal treasure of a French King – hence its present name. The cameo was produced for the Roman emperor Tiberius around 23 A.D., when Jesus of Nazareth was still an unknown young adult living in the realm of the puppet king, Herod Antipas.

One look at the cameo tells you how the Roman rulers saw their world. It's divided into three levels:

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- **Heaven:** where the recently deceased Caesar Augustus sits enthroned among other dead family members. Like his adopted father, Julius Caesar, he is now a god among the gods.

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- **Palace:** where his successor, Tiberius, now sits enthroned as a "son of god" with other royal family members gathered around him, including two future emperors.

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- **The Conquered:** where we find the barbarians that Caesar has defeated. They are utterly at his mercy; Tiberius Caesar is King of the world.

The underlying message of the cameo: To be King of the world you need powerful connections in the spirit realm. Or, to put it another way: the gods make the king, and the king rules the world.

A world in search of a Savior:

So how do you get that kind of spiritual support for your cause? Augustus was a young man in 44 B.C. when his adopted father, Julius Caesar, was assassinated. With the death of Julius Caesar the Roman world broke into three factions, all warring for supremacy. Augustus emerged victorious after 15 years of civil war and became King of the World.

Augustus wanted more than mere military superiority, however. He wanted heaven itself to proclaim him lord. That is why he pushed to create the story that when Julius Caesar died, he was taken up into heaven and made a god. If Julius Caesar were a god, then Augustus, his adopted son, was necessarily *divi filius*, son of god.

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Even before his own death, Augustus was worshipped and glorified as Lord and Savior. He was known as *Dominus*, or Lord, and as *Soter*, or Savior – the one who had rescued the empire from war and invasion. He was *Pontifex Maximus*, High Priest. Lord of the world.

His peoples built temples in which to worship him. One such temple still stands in Pula, Croatia.

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Still visible on its façade are the holes which anchored the dedication found on other temples to Augustus:

Roma and Augustus Caesar, son of the deity, father of the fatherland

To be King of the world meant having the right connections in the spiritual realm.

The Great Cameo of Bethlehem:

Unbeknownst to Augustus or Tiberius, however, was the existence of an utterly different story of the world and its King. Like the emperor's cameo, its story reaches back to the glory days of Augustus, while he was at the height of his powers. Tiberius was still a general, fighting Rome's enemies in Europe.

This story's upper level is filled with vast armies of heavenly messengers. They surround an angel who announces the birth of God's King:

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Luke 2:10-12 NIV

"Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

The middle level reveals the royal family: Mary, Joseph and the infant King. He is not pictured as an emperor seated on a throne. He is "wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

The lower level reveals not a cowering mass of captives, but the first representatives of a free and forgiven human race: shepherds who have hurried to the stable to find their king!

This King's connection to heaven is no propaganda stunt cooked up by a Caesar's minions. He is the Creator God's One and Only Son.

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John 1:14 NIV

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

His name is Jesus: Yahweh saves.

His title is royalty: Messiah, Christ.

God has made His King.

The Third Test

The view from the mountaintop:

Now the King finds Himself alone in the desert. It's time to find out what it means to be the world's true Lord and King. Will He become another Caesar?

What kind of connection will He make with the spirit world – the upper level of the cameo?

Satan's final temptation goes like this:

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Matthew 4:8-9 NIV

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor.

"All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me."

Imagine seeing the entire Roman empire with all its power and wealth in the blink of an eye. Fleets of ships carrying the wealth of nations to Rome. Armies marching into battle. The emissaries of a hundred puppet states bowing before a single man.

All you need is the right spiritual connection!

Savior King?

Jesus' own Jewish heritage desperately longed for a godly ruler who would take the place of pagan caesars and their empire. The word 'salvation' for them spoke of

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"...rescue from the national enemies, restoration of the national symbols, and a state of shalom in which every man will sit under his vine or fig tree.

"For 1st-century Jews it could only mean the inauguration of the age to come, liberation from Rome, the restoration of the Temple, and the free enjoyment of their own land." (Wright, NT and the People of God, p. 300)

In order for this to happen, Israel would first have to be forgiven for her sins. Only then would their exile end. They would need a Savior who would "save His people from their sins." And when that happened, they would finally see what they longed for: the Kingdom of God, with Yahweh, the LORD, as King of the whole world. They would reign with their King, with Heaven looking down and the nations under their feet.

A peek behind the screen:

As you can see, the devil's temptation was right in line with what Israel was looking for: a Savior from Rome who would first remove the nation's sins so that God's triumphant Kingdom would come.

But there was a catch, one that the desert temptation put in full relief:

"Make me alone your spiritual source and power. Let me do for you what I did for August and his brood. I'll carve you a cameo! You worship me, and the whole world will worship you. It's as simple as that. Deal?"

Satan's offer wasn't a "one off." Look behind the screen at the world's empires and what do you see? Time and time again, you see a man or a woman who has sold their soul. It looks like they have the power and the glory. But they are nothing but puppets on the devil's strings.

The Savior King

A greater connection:

So what kind of Savior King would Jesus be? What victory would He win that would qualify Him to be not only King of the Jews, but King of the World?

Well, first of all, He chose to be a King who refused the default spiritual connection that had brought Caesar and a thousand other rulers their power.

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Matthew 4:10 NIV

Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"

No discussion. No argument. Just another quotation from God's Story and God's Word: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'

Jesus knew full well that to rule God's World He needed a spiritual connection. For Him there was but one option: to worship and serve the One who created the world. For Him there was only ever one prayer:

Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

A greater victory:

Secondly, Jesus came to fight an enemy far greater and more powerful than Tiberius and his legions. He came to conquer Sin and Death – those forces that hold humans and all creation in slavery. He came to be the Savior of the whole world, starting with people made in God’s image.

That day, or night, in the desert Jesus turned Satan down. On another hilltop, with day turning for six hours into night, He would destroy Satan’s hold on the human race.

The world stood by, watching what looked like a failed messiah die a deserved death on a cross. Here was no Savior. Here was no release from exile. Here was no King. Even God had forsaken Him.

But Heaven was telling a different story. Paul puts it this way:

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Colossians 2:13-15 The Message

Think of it! All sins forgiven, the slate wiped clean, that old arrest warrant canceled and nailed to Christ’s cross. He stripped all the spiritual tyrants in the universe of their sham authority at the Cross and marched them naked through the streets.

Paul paints the picture of a triumphal procession like those Roman generals staged after a great victory. Only this time, it is the devil and his hordes that are marched in chains before the King of the World.

The Savior King:

Satan offers every one of us a customized version of the Great Cameo of France. He offers a way to meet our needs and fulfill our dreams. But it comes at a terrible price: we must first sell our souls to the devil.

God offers you a different story: it’s the story of how He Himself came down from Heaven to a manger to be born as our Savior. It’s the story of how He made a way for every captive to be set free. It’s the story the angels announced when they sang:

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Luke 2:14 NIV

*"Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."*

We choose the story. We choose the Savior. We carve the cameo. Will we sell our soul, our values, our character for a short-term gain? Or will we join the shepherds as they *"go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."* (Luke 2:15 NIV)

We choose the story. Choose well.

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