Someone I know once told me a story about a friend of theirs had who had taken a trip to Europe by travelling on their private jet. Being the consummate Scotsman, I asked why they didn’t just fly business class -- it would have been cheaper plus you get a lie flat bed, free cocktails and one of those little hot towels. They said that, for their friend, it was not about the actual flying experience, rather it was about showing the world that they could do things that other people simply could not. Thousands of people fly business class to Europe everyday while only a handful have the means to take their own private jet. That is the thing with worldly striving; it is never enough. Somewhere, someone might have more than you, so you are constantly looking for any angle to put yourself at the head of the pack. No one has ever gone broke betting against human pettiness. And today, on Good Friday, amidst the crucifixion of Jesus and the seeming triumph of the high priests, we see that it is still not enough, the pettiness is still not satiated. Here is what happens.

While Jesus is hanging on the cross, we read a very human (i.e. petty) discussion. It says, “Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, ‘Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.’ Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, ‘Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" Trumped up charges and a horrific death were not enough for the chief priests. They got uneasy because someone walking by Golgotha might read Pilate’s inscription and get the wrong idea. This inscription had the potential to give Jesus some dignity and the High Priests were not having it. They could not live in a world where someone might get confused and believe that Jesus was not the fraud they claimed. So even in the moment where their plan had reached its culmination, they had to stand guard to make sure that Jesus was left with no shred of dignity. His loss had to be complete and their victory had to be total. In his book *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis writes this about pride, “Power is what Pride really enjoys; there is nothing that makes a man feel so superior to others as being able to move them about like toy soldiers.” Good Friday is really about power. It is humanity’s last desperate grasp for ultimate power, wherein we get to decide who is the Son of God. We get to decide how he will act and what he will do. We get to move God about like a toy soldier. But even in so doing, even in death and humiliation it is not enough, because human pride can never be satisfied.

Just look at our world. Vladimir Putin is by many accountings the wealthiest man in the world. But that is not enough, is it? No, he must bomb railway stations full of refugees and maternity wards to show the completeness of his power. Today, the high priests can’t simply say they don’t agree with Jesus or that they think he is wrong. No, they must humiliate and destroy him and make sure everyone know that it is they who are pulling the strings. And so, none of this King of the Jews business could be left to stand. It must, along with Jesus’ life, be obliterated.

In Percy Bysshe Shelley’s poem *Ozymandias*, he describes a desert scene in which a ruined statue lies half buried in the blowing sands. Writing, “And on the pedestal, these words appear: My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings; Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair! Nothing beside remains. Round the decay Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare The lone and level sands stretch far away.” That is where human pride ultimately leads. Our self-aggrandizing claims and seeming power all lead to rot where our boasts mock themselves. The pride of the high priests today, their searching for more and more power to blot out the name of Jesus of Nazareth, all came to naught. The only reason we remember them at all is as a footnote to Christ’s Passion. Their actions were wicked and evil, but ultimately, they were just sad and pathetic. Today their actions are seen as the work of small men doing small things, culminating with a demand for the addition of some words on a wooden sign. All of the powers that conspired to put the Son of God to death are now whining to Pilate about modifying a phrase. And while evil seems to have a good PR firm it is ultimately terribly boring and dull. It is grown men fighting over a few words in Latin, Greek and Hebrew. But on Good Friday that is all we are left with -- the sheer banality of human pride. This moment will pass but today we see what it looks like when evil triumphs and there is nothing interesting about it. We are left contemplating the dull grey nothingness of evil. Life will spring in a few days but right now we are left with that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare which is us and our pride.