

Christ the King Sunday

November 20, 2016

Prayer of the Day: Lord Jesus Christ, by your victory you have broken the power of the evil one. Fill our hearts with joy and peace as we look with hope to that day when every creature in heaven and earth will acclaim you King of kings and Lord of lords to your unending praise and glory; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Verse of the Day: Alleluia! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. Alleluia! (Revelation 22:13)

Sermon Text: Luke 23:35-43

Is this what comes to mind when you think of a king? And not just some random king ruling in a far away land—but your king, the One who rules over you and with your interests in mind? Do you expect people to come up and insult him? ... to mock him? ...to execute him? ... to watch him powerlessly stand there?

I mean, Jesus is a king, right? A group of wise men see a star in the sky, pack up gifts of expensive perfumes, and specifically ask: *“Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We [...] have come to worship him”* (Matthew 2:2).

But draw a line from his birth to our gospel reading in Luke. We are told: **The people stood watching[.]** They are not watching now-full-grown Jesus, dressed in purple robe, with golden scepter in hand, and jewel-encrusted crown on head strolling down the road in his royal carriage, barking out commands. The people gawk at a crucifixion.

That is the point of a crucifixion— to be watched. Two wooden beams are tied together into a ‘T’, taken to busy main street, and planted into the ground. Then, soldiers lead out the most hardened criminals— the heartless murderer, the conniving riot-leader [insurrectionist], the homegrown terrorist— and tie them to the cross. As you walk through town, running your errands, you would walk past the gruesome sight of a man stretched out to die. That sight tells you one thing: Society does not need this man.

Luke 23:35-43

³⁵ The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One.”

³⁶ The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar ³⁷ and said, “If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.”

³⁸ There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

³⁹ One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Christ? Save yourself and us!”

⁴⁰ But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? ⁴¹ We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.”

⁴² Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

⁴³ Jesus answered him, “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.”

Those huddled around the cross today would agree. Put yourself into the scene and you see **the rulers even sneered at him**. These “rulers” are religious leaders. For years they have scoured the Old Testament Bible, studying God’s promise of a “Christ.” That little word “Christ” means “Anointed One.” To be “anointed” means to be “set aside for a specific mission.” One day, God would send his Son and anoint him for a specific mission. The signs highlighting this special child would be so evident. This “Christ” would come from David’s family tree. This “Christ” would rule over a kingdom. This “Christ” would bring peace to the nations.

But on that Good Friday afternoon, their hopes of Jesus being the “Christ” came crashing down. Never did they watch Jesus, the Son of David, storm into Jerusalem on a majestic white stallion in order to re-conquer the land in the name of the Jews. Never did Jesus speak of organizing an army, setting up a cabinet of leaders, and doing what it takes to establish a new country. No, as those rulers look up at the cross, they see just another man dying.

They make sure to remind Jesus of who he is not. With nose held high in the air, they spit out snarky, superior mockery: **“He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One.”**

Even **soldiers came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar and said, “If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.”** Because they too saw someone insignificant. To them this is just another man who angered the wrong people and now is getting what he so rightly deserved. In case anyone wondered who he claimed to be, a little card reminded them: **THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS**. It reminds everyone that victorious kings reign; they do not die. If Jesus is truly a king, he should not be dying.

But no one sees a king on the cross. The soldiers still pledge allegiance to their one king who reigns— and his name begins with “Tiberius” and ends with “Caesar.”

Not only do those who committed no crime heap insults, even a guilty criminal **hurl[s] insults at him: “Aren’t you the Christ? Save yourself and us!”**

Is this what comes to mind when you think of a king? Insults? Arrogant mocking? Execution? Is this what you expect Jesus to endure?

You know who Jesus is; you believe he is God’s Son. That’s what you confess to be truth—and maybe a part of you wants to shout out: “Prove it Jesus! Just prove that you are truly God’s Son! Call down the legions upon legions of angels to rip through the heavens, unpin the nails, untie the ropes supporting your body, and gently lay you on the ground! Send out your angelic armies swinging swords to kill those arrogant soldiers and leaders! Throw your throne down right now; damn them all to hell!”

That’s what you expect kings to do, right? Assert authority. Make sure no one ever crosses them. Command punishment. But if that is what we expect to find in Christ our King, then we too are missing the point.

“Christ’s” mission is not to make sure you never have to hear people insult your faith ever again. His purpose is not to punish everyone who wrongs you. He is not a king whose main purpose is to ensure that you have the most luxuries, most pain-free, most pleasant days in your earthly life. We know Jesus did not come to set up a literal kingdom on earth.

We know he ascended into heaven and rules over the entire universe. Yet, how often we may want Jesus to rule above so that our life on earth is perfect!

Look at the reading again. Three times you hear: *“Save yourself!”* The Jewish rulers, the soldiers, the guilty criminal all say that. But three times Jesus remains on the cross. It was not that he lacked the power to come down— God could certainly have commanded his angels to save his beloved Son. Jesus remains on the cross not for “self,” but for “you.”

Look past what people expect of Jesus and see what Jesus expects to do for you. Yes, Jesus could have easily come down from the cross and judged every transgressor right then and there. If he had done that, then how would we be saved?

Behind all the insults, beneath the sight of blood and flesh, apart from the smell of death is the eternal Son of God, who knew this day would come. From the very minute Adam and Eve plunged the world into sin, God the Father anointed Jesus for a special task: To crush the serpent’s head ([Genesis 3:15](#)). His life fits the promises of Moses— that God did indeed raise up a great Prophet ([Deuteronomy 18:15](#)). With powerful words Jesus drives out demons and heals the sick, just as Isaiah the Prophet foretold ([53:4](#)). The powerful preaching and miraculous healing proves that Jesus is someone more than just a mere mortal— he is the promised Son of God. Now he dies, not just dying for the sake of dying; he is completing his mission: to establish his eternal kingdom.

This “Christ” is pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities, and carries our punishment ([Isaiah 53:5](#)). For those who rebel against Christ the King’s holy orders, the King suffers to free his prisoners from hell. He dies to wash the heart clean from guilt.

He does not merely die, he is punished. There is no greater punishment than for God Almighty to turn his back to you, close his ears, and demonstrate how little he loves you ([Psalm 22:1](#)). Yet, the “Christ” is ignored instead. This is the wage our sins deserve— and Jesus pays it off in full ([Romans 6:23](#)). By his wounds, you are healed ([Isaiah 53:6](#)).

The dying thief understands that. He turns his head and sees Jesus. He does not see a failed leader. He is not hoping for a better earthly life. His eyes see the fulfillment of every prophecy wrapped up in this God-man. His heart rejoices that God indeed is washing away his every guilty stain. With a heart full of faith: **[H]e said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”**

Maybe you already understand what the thief is saying. He is not afraid that Jesus would forget he was dying. He is not afraid that his body would rot in the ground forever. The thief knew he had committed many, many horrific sins. The sins done long ago keep many awake at night. Hidden, secret shame that nobody else knows causes immense fear. When faced with the thought of entering heaven, those are the things you may see. These are the things we want gone

How does Jesus answer? “No, you are a sinner!” “No, you have not suffered long enough!” **Jesus answered him, “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.”** No question about it; the guarantee comes from the mouth of God himself. You don’t have to wonder what God would say about forgiveness because God has already

spoken on the subject. Nothing will change his mind or his declaration. Because Jesus paid the debt, forgiveness is given.

Visualize what Jesus describes. You King has reestablished the perfect paradise of Eden. Life in heaven will be like life before sin entered the world. You get to stand in the presence of God—see him face-to-face! You will never cry again, no one will ever fail you, you will never be disappointed! For all eternity sin will never exist. No more serpent; his head is crushed. No one will try to overthrow your God ever again. All is perfect in that paradise!

You, you by faith already live in it. That thief on the cross knew God's kingdom had arrived. Jesus opened it. When he left his earthly life, he would enter those doors. You are not in heaven yet; life is not perfect. But look ahead. You are not dreading the fact you have to go to hell. You carry no fearful weight that you will be in hell. You look forward to knowing heaven is yours— that perfect paradise has a room reserved for you.

Is that what you expect from a king? No! You expect a palace, off in an area far removed from people, with gates high around, hiding their king deep within. You expect a king not to pay attention to one plea, let alone care much for the needs of a group of people. You expect kings to rule with might and power and crush everyone who dares challenge their authority.

Yet, Jesus is no earthly king. He is not born to establish a kingdom on earth. He does not reign in heaven to make life on earth a new heaven. He enters our world to complete his mission—and he does. He purges the effects of sin from you and makes you citizens of a heavenly kingdom.

The King pays your way into his kingdom! Who would do that? Only a King who rules in the most perfect of ways. Only a king who can grant you what you truly need. Only Christ your King— **A KING FOR YOU!**