

What Kind of King is Jesus?

Colossians 1:11-16, Luke 17:20-21, Luke 23:33-43

Oh, if I could only be king...or as sometimes we hear it: "It is good to be king." Being king or being queen places someone in a position of great authority and privilege. There is great opportunity to exercise one's power and carry out one's wishes. And we know there are all kinds of kings. Some are ruthless rulers demanding strict obedience to their laws, some are kind and compassionate leaders who earn the respect of those in their kingdom.

One of my favorite movies as a child was the Wizard of Oz and one of my favorite characters in the movie was the cowardly lion. You remember the lion tries to give the image of being brave and strong, but when confronted with danger he knows that deep inside he is just a coward....well, that is until he is truly tested and is able by his courage to help Dorothy defeat the Wicked Witch of the West. And I love that song that he sings: "If I were king of the forest". I'll resist the temptation to try and sing it. Here are some of the words: "If I were king of the forest, not queen, not duke, not prince. My regal robes of the forest, would be satin, not cotton, not chintz. I'd command each thing, be it fish or fowl. With a woof and a woof, and a royal growl. Each rabbit would show respect to me, the chipmunks genuflect for me. Though my tail would lash, I would show compash, for every underling! If I were king...just king!"

I suppose all of us have at one time or another had those sentiments. Maybe not expressed out loud but inwardly want to be king or queen of our life's situations...to be able to exercise some authority in how we carry out our lives. To be able to say I'm in charge of my destiny or I want to have the ability to control the direction of my life.

But how does that kind of thinking measure up to being a follower of Jesus Christ.

Today is Christ the King Sunday, a day when we reflect on the significance of Jesus as King. And what it means to be part of his kingdom. Certainly we think of other images of who Jesus is. Jesus is shepherd, Jesus is teacher, he is Savior, and he is healer. But there is also this description of who Jesus is...the King of kings. And many places in the Gospel refer to the kingdom of God. And so this morning the question I ask is simply this: What kind of king is Jesus?

When you think about and read the Scriptures, you realize that Jesus was perceived in a number of different ways by those who encountered

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him. Jesus preached the kingdom of God...yet he did not promote himself as king. There were those who followed him, listened to his teaching, were amazed at the display of God's power in the miracles...and they wanted to make him king. I go to the story of the feeding of the 5,000, people were overcome with wonder at this great miracle. The Bible says: "When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world. When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself." Certainly the people he ministered to felt the oppression and injustices of the Roman authorities and they were putting their hopes in this Jesus as the Messiah who would overthrow their enemies and establish his kingdom.

Of course, there were those who were threatened by this Jesus. Just the very idea that he might be a king. You remember King Herod at Jesus' birth. How troubled he was by the wise men's inquiry: "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?" And the opposition Jesus encountered by the religious authorities threatened by his teachings and his crowd of followers.

And what about those at Jesus' crucifixion. Those who were mocking him, taunting him...putting a purple robe on him: "If you are king of the Jews, save yourself." An inscription was placed over him: "This is the King of the Jews."

Well, I suppose the Romans authorities didn't realize the significance of such a proclamation. But what kind of king was Jesus? Over and over he preached and taught about the kingdom of God. And when he spoke of it, the kingdom had both present and future implications. When the criminal hanging on the cross spoke about the kingdom he said to Jesus, "Remember, me when you come into your kingdom." But Jesus also spoke of the kingdom as a present reality for all who will embrace it. One of today's Scripture readings makes that clear. "...being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed,²¹ nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is in your midst." Some translations say : "the kingdom of God is within you." In other words, we don't have to wait until we die to experience the kingdom of God. If we are followers of Jesus, if we have experienced a changed life because of his presence, then the kingdom of God is here and it is within us.

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And the calling upon our lives is to live in such a way that people may see that kingdom life in us. It happens when we seek to follow in Christ's ways, when we are obedient to what Jesus has taught us. Because ultimately Jesus is the one who is worthy of our praise, he is worthy of our allegiance and our faithfulness. This is how the apostle Paul describes the authority and place of Jesus. "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him." Think of that: All things have been created through him and for him. In Christ, Paul says, in Christ all things are held together. It is the place of supremacy or preeminence. But how different is this king from earthly kings. I read a message from Pastor Philip Ryken who put it like this: "Most kingdoms do anything they can to protect their king. This is the unspoken premise of the game of chess, for example. When the king falls, the kingdom is lost. Therefore, the king must be protected at all costs. Another notable example comes from the Allied invasion of Normandy on D-Day, June 6, 1944. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill desperately wanted to join the expeditionary forces and watch the invasion from the bridge of a battleship in the English Channel. U.S. General Dwight David Eisenhower was desperate to stop him, for fear that the Prime Minister might be killed in battle. When it became apparent that Churchill would not be dissuaded, Eisenhower appealed to a higher authority: King George VI. The king went and told Churchill that if it was the Prime Minister's duty to witness the invasion, he could only conclude that it was also his own duty as king to join him on the battleship. At this point Churchill reluctantly agreed to back down, for he knew that he could never expose the King of the United Kingdom to such danger. But King Jesus did exactly the opposite. With royal courage he surrendered his body to be crucified. On the cross he offered a king's ransom: his life for the life of his people. He would die for all the wrong things that we had ever done and would do, completely atoning for all our sins. The crown of thorns that was meant to make a mockery of his royal claims actually proclaimed his kingly dignity, even in death."

This is the kind of king we worship and serve. The king of the universe who gave his very life for you and me. Such a glorious truth

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requires my obedience and faithfulness. To allow Jesus to be the Lord and King of my life. Some of you remember how the Gospel was presented by the 4 Spiritual laws produced by Campus Crusade. As part of their presentation, they would picture a diagram which asks us to consider: Who is on the throne of your life? They pictured the self-directed life and the Christ-directed life. When we live for ourselves, when we see life as living only for our own needs....we put ourselves on the throne, but when we surrender our lives to Jesus, when we are ready to live life as a committed follower of Jesus, then we put Jesus on the throne of our lives. It's all about the place of Jesus in our life. Yes, Jesus is worthy of all our praise, but he also wants the surrender of our hearts.

The interesting thing about this king is this. Jesus is not a strict ruler who forces people into loyalty. Jesus does not command our obedience. When I look at Jesus, I see a different kind of king. I see someone who ruled with compassion, who looked at people who needed God's mercy and forgiveness. When I look at Jesus, I see him loving the stranger and the outcast, calling all people to come into his kingdom. And we are called to follow him out of a grateful heart, not out of fear or compulsion. In the parable of the vine and the branches in John 15, rather than calling his followers his subjects or servants, how does he describe them...He calls us his friends. To be in a relationship with the Lord is to follow with joy and out of love.

I heard of a woman who was very unhappy in her marriage because she had a very harsh and strict husband. He was constantly giving her lists of things that he was demanding her to do. She wanted to keep her marriage together, but no matter how much she tried to do what he wanted, he was never satisfied, and if she neglected to do something on his list, he would explode in anger. After a number of years, this man died, and eventually the woman remarried. This time she married a man who dearly loved her. He lavished his attention on her and tenderly showed his love, support and encouragement. One day as the woman was going through her papers, she came across one of the those lists of chores from her first husband. As she read all that was on the list, tears began to fall from her eyes. For she realized something. I still do all these things. But oh, what a difference. I now find joy in doing them.

That's how it is in our relationship with God. Some people think of God as some harsh taskmaster, demanding our obedience, making sure

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we don't step out of line. And we live with guilt when we mess up. So we try to do all these things that we believe God wants of us, often many good things, trying to work our way into heaven.

But what I want to say to you this morning is that's not the kind of king Jesus is. He calls us to discover the wonderful grace of God, to realize that he wants us to be in a caring and loving relationship. And so we learn to serve this King Jesus out of gratitude and love, not out of fear and guilt. Jesus' commands are not burdensome, because we realize how much this King cares for us. Why, he even calls us friends. And in this kingdom we seek to serve him with all our hearts, because God's love is so great and because of what the Lord has done for us.

On this Christ the King Sunday, let us rejoice, give thanks, and sing. We serve in the one who is King of kings and Lord of lords. We come to serve the Lord with gladness. What a joy to offer our lives to our loving King?