

## JESUS IS THE KING OF KINGS

This is Christ the King Sunday, and our text for Christ the King Sunday is Matthew's account of the cruel and savage beating Jesus endured at the hand of the Roman soldiers. Ironically enough this portion of God's Word is one of the few places in the Gospels where Jesus is addressed as 'king.'

From the 27<sup>th</sup> chapter of Matthew's Gospel, we listen again to verses 28 & 29:

*<sup>28</sup> They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, <sup>29</sup> and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

Nobody wants to follow a loser. Back when I was a student at the U of A, when the McHale Center was brand new, it was very easy to get a ticket to a U of A basketball game. That's because the basketball team lost a good percentage of their games back then. There were empty seats at every game because few people wanted to watch a team that lost consistently. Nobody wants to follow a loser. With the tradition of winning stretching now over the past three decades, tickets are now hard to come by, because everybody wants to follow a winner. Nobody wants to follow a loser.

It's not surprising then, when Pontius Pilate's soldiers started to mock and beat Jesus, there were not too many followers of Jesus who were willing to come forward to defend him or confess allegiance to him publicly. Many of Jesus' disciples had already deserted him. Judas had turned on Jesus and betrayed him. In the Garden of Gethsemane, his closest friends turned their backs and ran away from Jesus. The fact of the matter is this: Jesus didn't look like the King of Kings. He looked like a loser.

Kings are surrounded by their advisors and their subjects. Jesus was surrounded all right, but not by loyal soldiers and loving advisors, he was surrounded by vicious enemies. We read in verse 27, *Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him.*

Kings wear expensive clothes made from the finest cloth and richly-ornamented royal robes. But not Jesus. What he had was taken from him. *They stripped him and (mockingly) put a scarlet robe on him* (v. 28).

Kings wear a jewel-encrusted royal crown. But not Jesus. Oh, he had a crown all right, but his crown was a crown of long, sharp thorns that pierced deeply into his scalp.

Kings carry a staff or a scepter, a rod that symbolizes their royal power. Jesus was given one by Pilate's soldiers. *They put a staff in his right hand* (v. 29) but then, (they) *took the staff and struck him on the head again and again* (v. 30).

It is customary, if not mandatory, to kneel before a king. The soldiers knelt before Jesus but not in honor and in reverence. They knelt in front of him to mock him. *"Hail, king of the Jews!"* they said (v. 29). Then they spit on Jesus.

It is common to say “Long live the king!” But the soldiers didn’t say that to Jesus. In fact, they did just the opposite. Then they led him away to end his life, to crucify him.

His enemies wanted Jesus dead. And, at this point, Jesus did not look like at all like a king, he looked like a loser. But looks can be deceiving.

So on this “Christ the King” Sunday, let’s turn back to our text and be assured of this fact: even though Jesus looked like a loser, he was not. On the contrary, Jesus is the King of Kings, the King of Justice and the King of Love.

We expect earthly justice to be carried out when people do wrong. If someone broke into our church, smashed the windows, spray painted gang signs on the altar, stole our communion ware; and if they were arrested, we would work to forgive them, but we would expect a judge to punish them for such an outrageous act against a CHURCH. We would want the judge to hand them a stiff sentence. Justice demands punishment for wrong doing. And if the judge didn’t give them some form of punishment, we would get very upset because justice was not carried out.

God is a God of justice. He is holy. He hates sin and he punishes sin and he sets the rules. He said, *“Be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.”* (Leviticus 19:2, 1 Peter 1:16 NIV).

You’re not holy. I’m not holy. We just confessed our unholiness a little while ago. We recited the Confession of Sins. Were you perfect last week? Were you always patient? Did you grumble or complain about anything? Did you love God above everything else? Have you shown it in your prayers, your study of his Word, in the gifts you brought today?

Have you shown that you love your neighbors like you love yourself? Have you helped them? Have you even talked to them? Have you shown love to them or have you ignored them? Failure to follow every one of God’s commands is sin. And our God of justice demands that sin be punished. *“Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.”* (Galatians 3:10 NIV). That curse, the curse of the law, is the promise of eternal condemnation for all who sin.

But Jesus took that curse of the law upon himself. Galatians 3:13 *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.”* Jesus became the very embodiment of the world’s sin when he hung on the cross of Calvary. *God made him who had no sin (that’s Jesus) to be sin for us . . .* (2 Corinthians 5:21 NIV). God punished Jesus for our sins, pouring out his just anger on Jesus instead of you and me.

God doesn’t overlook sin. Look at Jesus suffering for you and me, being led away to be crucified for you and me. Listen to Jesus cry out, *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”* (Matthew 27:46 NIV).

God doesn’t overlook sin. As the King of Justice, Jesus took God’s just punishment for your sins, my sins, and the sins of the world.

And by taking our sins onto himself and dying for you and for me, that makes him the King of Love. Nobody forced Jesus to go through the disgrace described in our gospel lesson for today. Jesus willingly took this pain and punishment for us. He willingly allowed himself to be forsaken by God the Father. He lovingly took God’s justice and suffered the pain of hell for us. In love he declares believers forgiven, not guilty, justified. In love he invites us to trust in him, to believe in him as Savior and Lord. In love he

makes us heirs of eternal life with him forever, an eternal life we haven't earned or deserved, but which he freely gives us in a place where there will be no pain or suffering ever again. Jesus truly was the King of Justice and the King of Love. But remember this: Jesus is still the King of Justice and the King of Love today.

At the time of his beating and mocking Jesus didn't look like much of a king. Our Lord doesn't look like much of a king now, either, does he? Even though he rules this world, you can't see him. And sometimes when you look at how wicked this world is, and how the wicked in this world seem to get away with so much evil, you might wonder if he still is the King of Kings. Where is his justice?

But keep this in mind - On Judgment Day, Jesus will return in power and glory as the King of Justice to judge all the world. The Bible tells us, *"As surely as I live," says the Lord, "every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God"* (Isaiah 45:23, Romans 14:11).

Even the wicked will bow before Jesus on the Last Day when he returns to judge the living and the dead. It will be too late for them to be saved. But they will acknowledge that they made a big mistake as they bow before the King of Kings in fear and horror, and receive from him the sentence, *"Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels."* (Matthew 25:41).

Oh, the wicked in this world may seem to be getting away with everything. They're not. God knows everything they do. And even now he sometimes delivers his divine justice on the wicked of this world. Romans 1:18 *"The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness."* But if the wicked don't feel his just wrath now, they will feel it on the last day and forever in hell.

But that doesn't mean the King of Kings is without love. Jesus is still the King of Love. He still wants all to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth.

Jesus rules as King in the hearts of believers. Look at how he guards and protects you in this life. Look at the blessings he showers upon you in this life for which you can thank him again and again. That's what we'll be doing in our Thanksgiving Service, thanking and praising him for his continuing love which he has poured out on us this past year, despite being surrounded by so much evil, despite our sinfulness and rebellion.

But nowhere will that love be more evident than when Jesus returns in power and glory as the King of Love to take us believers to be with him to heaven. He will say to us sinners, sinners cleansed by his blood and righteousness, *"Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world."* (Matthew 25:14). What wonderful words as this King of Love lovingly invites you to join him in heaven for all eternity.

Yes, he was the King of Love as he suffered and died for you. And he's still the King of Love as he invites us sinners to spend an eternity of joy with him in heaven.

I said earlier in this message, things often aren't what they appear. My stepfather used to tell about a character he encountered every so often on the campus of Princeton University in the '40's. This disheveled character often wore the same dirty sweatshirt for days. His baggy pants were torn and frayed, his hair was unkempt and if you got near to him it was evident he hadn't bathed for quite some time. One day when he was wondering why the Princeton security force didn't escort this bum off the

campus, someone pointed out to him that the smelly, disheveled n'er-do-well was none other than Albert Einstein. Things often aren't what they appear.

In the same way, Jesus didn't appear to be the King of Kings in our text when he suffered and died for us. But don't be fooled by what you see on Good Friday. There was a battle going on. Although Satan bruised Jesus' heel in the struggle, Jesus crushed Satan's head for a permanent victory. Jesus is the victorious King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He is also the King of Justice and the King of Love.

On Judgment Day he'll be surrounded not by wicked soldiers, but by *"many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand... In a loud voice they will sing: 'Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!'"* (Revelation 5:11-12).

He'll wear a robe again, but not at all like the scarlet robe the soldiers mockingly put on him. Revelation 19:16 *"On his robe . . . he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS"* He'll wear a crown again, but not at all like the crown of thorns. We will see Jesus *"crowned with glory and honor."* (Hebrews 2:9).

On that Last, Great Day, people will kneel before Jesus, not to mock him but to confess him. *"At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."* (Philippians 2:10-11).

The wicked will confess that Jesus is the King of Kings to their own shame and foolishness. The righteous, you and I, will confess that Jesus is the King of Kings to his glory. Don't be fooled. The Bible makes it clear. Jesus is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Let us continue to praise him, to honor him, to believe in him, to trust him and follow him, the King of Kings, today, and every day, forever. Amen.