

Pastor Troy Schreiner—Victory Lutheran Church, Jacksonville

November 24, 2019—Last Sunday of End Time—Christ the King Sunday

Series/Theme: Welcome Home, To Christ's Glorious Kingdom

Sermon Text: Luke 23:35-43—The King We Need

Imagine you're part of a special committee tasked with selecting a new king. To avoid any bias, I'll give you three blind resumes, and you choose which candidate you think would be the best king.

- 1.) 40 years old. Wealthy. Dashing handsome. Son of royalty. Achieved the rank of major in the Navy. Married to a glamour model. Father of two young sons. Well-liked and respected.
- 2.) 37 years old. Wealthy. Classically handsome. Son of royalty. Served in the Armed Forces. Royal wedding to his beautiful wife was televised to millions. Father of 3. Well-liked and respected.
- 3.) 33 years old. Homeless. Nothing about his appearance to attract us to him. No formal education. From a lower-class family. Single. No children. Despised by many.

Which would you choose to be your king? First, let's reveal our candidates. Candidate 1 is Prince Carl Philip of Sweden. Candidate 2 is Prince William of England. And candidate 3 is Jesus of Nazareth. As Christians, we'd hopefully choose Jesus. But let's be honest. Jesus doesn't always look very "kingly" does he? We Americans don't like kings--just ask the British. But if we did, I think we'd want a king who is wealthy; powerful; influential.

And especially in our sermon text, Jesus doesn't look like that kind of king at all. He looks powerless and defeated. But although Jesus doesn't look like the king we'd want or expect on the cross, he is in fact, **The King We Need.**

Initially, many people wanted Jesus as their king, especially when he did amazing miracles like healing the sick and raising the dead. Then, after miraculously feeding over 5,000 people with a boy's lunch, the people ***"intended to come and make [Jesus] king by force."*** A king who could provide constant "all you can eat" buffets? A king powerful enough to free them from the Romans? Jesus was the king they wanted! Until Jesus explained that he hadn't come to rule an earthly kingdom, then people bailed. He wasn't the king they wanted anymore.

Later, when the Jews brought Jesus before the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, accusing Jesus of insurrection for claiming to be a king, Pilate looked at the weak, beaten man standing before him and thought, "This is no king." And yet, when Pilate asked him, ***"Are you the king of the Jews?"*** Jesus affirmed, ***"Yes, it is as you say."*** But he explained, ***"My kingdom is not of this world."*** Jesus wasn't a king concerned about political power and prestige. He was a king concerned about his people. But because the people didn't understand that, Jesus was hauled away-- broken, bloody, and beaten, to die the death not of a king, but of the worst criminals.

If you polled 100 people what a king should do and be, what do you think they would say? I think the majority would give 3 basic points. 1.) A king should be powerful, and fully in control. 2.) A king should rule in a way that cares for the needs of his people. 3.) A king should fight our battles and defeat our enemies.

I think that's why so many people on Golgotha that day failed to see Jesus as a king. He didn't look powerful and in control, he looked weak and helpless. He couldn't even care for himself, let alone care for the needs of others! He wasn't defeating his enemies, it looked like he was being defeated! As the people stood at the foot of the cross and watched Jesus dying, they didn't see the king they wanted, or at least, the king they expected.

Luke pays special attention to 3 groups of people in this text, and all had the same expectation. If Jesus was really the king, the Son of God, he could prove it by saving himself from the cross.

First, there were the Jewish religious leaders. Their hatred poured from their lips as they sneered at the innocent man, remorselessly cheering his death, smugly taunting him, ***“He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One.”*** Let him save himself.

Then there were the Roman soldiers assigned to carry out the death sentence on Jesus. Like the soldiers who had dressed Jesus in a purple robe and smashed a crown of thorns onto his head to mock him as the “king of the Jews,” these soldiers gave him the sour wine that was the drink of the poor—certainly not the kind of fine wine worthy of a king. They too mocked him, ***“If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.”*** Save yourself.

That’s what most kings would do. History is full of kings who only cared about their power and prestige, not their people. Most kings would have tried to save themselves, as everyone mockingly told Jesus to do. But Jesus isn’t most kings. He’s the King of kings.

Even the two thieves crucified with Jesus mocked him. One especially ripped into him, ***“Aren’t you the Christ? Save yourself and us!”*** Save yourself. And save us too!

If only they knew. Most people assumed it was weakness that kept Jesus up on that cross. But it wasn’t weakness. It was power that kept him on the cross—the power of his love for the world! Jesus could have come down off that cross, or called an army of angels to free him, or called down fire from heaven to destroy his enemies. But the King didn’t save himself, because his one purpose and goal was not to save himself, but to save the world. Yes, to save even the religious leaders, soldiers, and thieves who cheered his death and mocked his weakness. Even you and me. As Jesus told his disciples the previous evening, ***“The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”*** People want their kings to be powerful and have control. With his powerful love, King Jesus checks the box. He is the King we need.

As was the normal practice for crucifixions, Pilate attached a notice to the cross above Jesus’ head. These notices always told the name and residence of the criminal, and the accusation that condemned them. Jesus’ notice said, ***Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.***

That notice is a reminder to us why Jesus is the king we need. People want kings to rule in a way that takes care of their needs. King Jesus of Nazareth took care of his people’s greatest needs by not saving himself from that cross.

You see, that cross should be mine. Instead of “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews,” it should read, ***“Pastor Troy of Jacksonville, idolater...”*** What would your notice say? Adulterer? Slanderer? Murderer? Liar? That cross should be yours. And that means that your greatest need is forgiveness and salvation. But it wasn’t your cross. Jesus took all of our “notices” and covered them with his own—The King of the Jews. And on that cross that should be ours, our king suffered hell for us, to meet our greatest need. As Jeremiah prophesied, ***“This is the name by which he will be called: The Lord our righteousness.”*** People want their king to care for their needs. With his gracious sacrifice, King Jesus checks the box. He is the King we need.

By God’s grace, one of the two thieves that initially mocked Jesus was led to believe that. He knew they were getting what they deserved. He knew Jesus had done nothing wrong. He trusted that Jesus could save him for eternity. With humble faith, the thief requested, ***“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”*** He believed that Jesus is King, and therefore, has a kingdom. And he believed that Jesus is the only way into that kingdom.

Luke is the only gospel writer out of the 4 who records this dialogue between Jesus and the thief on the cross. That's really fitting, because two of the main characteristics of Luke's gospel is the completeness of God's grace, and the loving compassion Jesus shows to "deep sinners," like prostitutes, tax collectors, and thieves sentenced to death for their crimes! Jesus responds to the thief's request with complete grace, and compassionate love for this undeserving sinner.

If I was Jesus, I might have said, "No way! You mocked me earlier. You've dug your own grave!" Or "It's a little late for changes of heart now, don't you think?" No, because the thief believed this unexpected Jesus was the King of kings, Jesus could tell him, ***"I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."***

He could promise the thief immediate entrance into Heaven because on the cross, Jesus was fighting our battles, and defeated our enemies of sin, death, hell, and Satan. People want a king who can fight their battles and defeat their enemies. With his victory over our spiritual enemies, King Jesus checks the box. He is the King we need.

Jesus is the king I need, because... I'm that thief on the cross. And so are you. We are sinners, completely deserving of the punishments of Hell. We need our king to be so much more than just a good leader who provides for our needs and keeps us safe. We need our King to save us! And that's exactly what our unexpected King on the cross did. On the day you die, Jesus will also say to you, "today you will be with me in paradise!"

And there, we'll finally see our King in all his glory! In glorious victory, Christ rose from the dead, displaying his limitless power! In glorious power, Christ ascended back into Heaven to show that the victory has been won. In glorious power, Christ rules over all things for the good of his people from the Father's right hand. In glorious power and victory, the King we need has made us part of his royal family.

And there are lots of perks to being in the royal family! The British Royal Family pays nothing for their travel costs, or the maintenance and utilities for their palaces. Because they belong to the royal family, their costs are covered.

And the same is true, but infinitely greater when you belong to the royal family of believers! When Jesus is king, you have a king who is always working to save you; who always provides for your needs; who has already conquered all your enemies and daily continues to fight against your spiritual enemies for you.

This is your King. The King who refused to save himself, so that he could save you. He is the King we want. He is the King we need. All Hail, King Jesus!