

Last Sunday of End Time: Christ the King; November 20, 2022  
+ Luke 23:35-43 +  
“Jesus is the King We Desire”

**The people stood watching. The rulers were ridiculing him, saying, “He saved others. Let him save himself, if this is the Christ of God, the Chosen One!”**

**The soldiers also made fun of him. Coming up to him, they offered him sour wine, saying, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!”**

**There was also an inscription written above him: “This is the King of the Jews.”**

**One of the criminals hanging there was blaspheming him, saying, “Aren’t you the Christ? Save yourself and us!”**

**But the other criminal rebuked him, “Don’t you fear God, since you are under the same condemnation? We are punished justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for what we have done, but this man has done nothing wrong.” Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”**

**Jesus said to him, “Amen I tell you: Today you will be with me in paradise.”**

Once there was a king named George. We learned about George in school. He liked to tax his colonists. A lot. He liked to force them to house his soldiers against their will. And he liked to give them no voice in their own governance. And so finally, two and half centuries ago, a bunch of George’s plucky colonists across the Atlantic Ocean said, “No more kings for us.” And they fought King George. Against all odds, they beat him. No more kings for them.

Those colonists who threw off their king gave birth to the republic we live in. And so it is no wonder that the idea of living under a king with absolute power is still repulsive to the American mind. Because we know what kings are like. Like King George, kings live to take from their people. So we do not want them.

But there is a King we want. Because he lives to give to us, not to take from us. Three times while Jesus our King was suffering on the cross, they encouraged him – dared him! – to save himself. **The rulers ridiculed him saying, “He saved others. Let him save himself, if this is the Christ of God, the Chosen One!” The soldiers also made fun of him...saying, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” One of the criminals hanging there was blaspheming him, saying, “Aren’t you the Christ? Save yourself and us!”**

The King was getting abuse from every possible direction, from every possible source. His own people. The Romans. The criminal hanging next to him. It was like the whole world was screaming at him at once: **“Save yourself!”** Give yourself relief. Give yourself life. And why wouldn’t he? He is a king, after all. And that’s what kings do. They take for themselves. But not this King. He gives. He lives – and dies – to save others.

What Jesus’ enemies were missing – both the Jews and the Romans, the soldiers, the religious leaders, and the criminal next to him was that as Jesus suffered and died, he was saving. Just not himself. There is an old saying that it wasn’t the nails that held Jesus to the cross, but his love for you and me. This is true. Jesus could have saved himself from pain and death. But his love for us is infinite, and held him to that cross to suffer infinite pain and damnation in our place, to save us from it. He shed his perfect blood to

wash away our sins and save us from them. He went through hell; he was separated from his Father, so we would not be. When you are free from sin and death, you are also free from Satan's control.

Normally, we do not want kings. Because normally, kings are in it for themselves. They take. But not Jesus. Jesus is the King who gives. He does not take safety for himself. He gives salvation for others. He suffers and dies on the cross to do it.

Once there was a king named Darius. Probably you didn't learn about him in school. Probably I shouldn't have bothered learning about him, either. But I can't help it. It just fascinates me. Darius lived a few centuries before Jesus. He was on the wrong side of another king called Philip. Darius didn't think Philip had it in him to attack. But Philip did, and Darius was caught off guard. So what did he do? Darius ran from the battlefield. He even left his wife and children behind. And he survived – for a little while, he lived on. In shame.

This is another reason we don't want kings. They huff and puff about bravery and valor. As long as it's someone else's bravery and valor. But when it's time to fight, many kings run. But not our King. When it was time to fight, he stayed. He stared down the Prince of Darkness and took the sin of every person on his own back. He fought. And he won. This is the King we desire.

He died in the fight to save us. When most kings die, that is the end of them. And this is another reason not to want kings. Even the good ones die eventually, and there's no guarantee that the next in line will be any good at all. In fact, good kings rarely come two in a row. But when Jesus dies, he lives again. He rises and lives forever. He is the King who gives salvation to others. He is the King who stays and dies in the fight. But he is the King who rises and still lives. This is the King we want.

He won against our enemies. Winning kings are better than losing kings. But even when kings win, they do it for their own fame, their own glory. They build monuments to themselves and their own greatness after their victory. There are a million examples of this, including one in the Bible. Once there was king named Saul. He was Israel's first king, and he was rising. And he built a monument at a place called Carmel. Not to the Lord, but to himself. This is why we don't want kings. Even when they win, they take the glory for themselves.

Jesus' cross and empty tomb is the monument to his victory. And it is for his own glory. But it is also for our glory. Because he gives salvation to us, because he stayed on the battlefield and died and rose and lives – his cross and empty tomb are our glory, too. In Christ our King we also live forever and ever. And we reign together with our King through all eternity. This is the King we want.

He is the King that gives to his people. He gives us salvation. He is the King that stays on the battlefield and fights for us until every enemy is defeated. And when we see the monuments to his victory we know: that victory is not only for his glory, but for ours too.

While this King was fighting for us to give us salvation, he was called a king three times. The first time Roman soldiers were making fun of him: **"If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!"** This is the only way an unbelieving heart can call Jesus a king: in irony and mockery. Because an unbelieving heart knows only kind of king: the human kind that would save himself first. So any supposed king that doesn't save himself first isn't a real king!

Then there was Pilate, who also called Jesus a king: **There was also an inscription written above him: "This is the King of the Jews."** Why Pilate wrote that is a mystery. Maybe he was just needling the religious leaders who earlier that morning had backed him into condemning an innocent man. Or maybe Pilate had come to faith that Jesus is a King, but a King unlike any other. There is no way of knowing for sure.

But then there was the thief who called Jesus "King." Technically, he did not address Jesus as "king," but his words reveal that he believed Jesus was a King. And not just a king, but the King he desired. **"Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."** When this thief looked at the man on the middle cross, he saw the King who gives him heaven, the King who fights for his people and wins, the King who lives to reign in glory with his people. Jesus was the King the thief desired.

And so he asked Jesus to remember him in his kingdom. When the Bible says that God "remembers" someone, it means that he acts to help them. For example, God remembered Noah and his family in the ark. And then he saved them from the Flood. Throughout the Psalms, the writers plead with God to remember them in mercy, love, and forgiveness. For the Lord, remembering does not mean snatching something forgotten back up from the memory banks. Remembering is moving to help.

The thief trusted that the King Jesus would help him from his heavenly kingdom. **Jesus said to him, "Amen I tell you: Today you will be with me in paradise."**

The Roman soldiers, Pilate, and the thief were all correct when they called Jesus a King. The soldiers at least were still thinking in terms of earthly kings. Pilate we don't know. But the thief saw the King who lives and reigns for eternity, and gives that glory to every believer he fought to save.

Jesus is the King you want, too. He does not take from you. He gives eternal life to you. He does not leave you to fight your enemies. He stays on the battlefield and conquers them. He lives and reigns forever, but not only for his glory, for your glory, too. Turn to the King on the middle cross, and ask him to remember you. He will. And you will be with your King in paradise. Amen.