

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 Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. Alleluia. (Rev. 22:13)

Sermon Text:

No matter who sits on any earthly throne, Jesus is King! Have you seen that phrase in the weeks before the election and now in the days after it? It's popped up a few times in various places and in various forms on my computer screen. It can be a welcome reminder that no matter what happens here in this world God is ultimately in control.

But it has got me wondering if we are really as willing to accept that as we think we are. Oh, sure as long as God has my back and does the things I like I'm onboard with His bid for King of Creation but when His campaign promises include suffering and pain, earthly lose and shame, and then He would say it is all for our good, well, we might just be ready to protest before the throne of God.

Case in point, take a look at our King in our Gospel Lesson today. It's gotten too easy for us to look at this with "Christian" eyes. We come to the dark a gruesome scenes of Calvary and very quickly move on because victory is easier to talk about than the payment for sin. It's fun to talk about heaven but are we willing to talk like the criminal before we get there? So today, I ask you to really stop and look at the history before us on a day that asks us to reflect on Christ's Kingship and **SEE OUR KING: SUFFERING, DYING, FORGIVING, REDEEMING.**

The picture is anything but triumphant as it bludgeons our sensitive sensibilities. People looking on not in horror but in disgust and hatred, the leaders of God's chosen people sneering and taunting a dying man, soldiers mocking the very one they mauled before nailing him to a cross and letting Him slowly suffocate on His own blood and fluid. Our intuition, tells us that if the sign above His head is right, then He was not a very successful King of the Jewish people. That's when the fairness alarms begin to scream in our minds. There is a side of us that decries God for too much and too far. What kind of a monster would allow this to happen?

Text: 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." – NIV84

It all begins to sound a bit familiar. That's the trouble with suffering isn't it? We don't like it. We don't like it when we don't get our way. We don't like it when life is filled with a dose of hardship and we begin to let God know that we deserve better than all of this. We need to be humbled. We're acting like the first criminal.

One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!" What's the problem that the first criminal has with this Guy in the middle? In his mind it's either one of two things. Either He is a complete fraud in his mind and then worthy of the scorn and hatred hurled at him on every side on the cross or He really is Messiah and in that case He's being mighty selfish as this one sees it. He could end the pain of the criminal, He could prove to all those standing around that He was who He said He was and let the two hanging on either side down as well in the process for a bigger effect and a less pain filled end for the criminal. It all sounds like a win-win to him.

Of course, with the clarity that comes from a lack of nails in ones hands and feet and the slow and torturous death of a cross, one can clearly see what this criminal is truly concerned about. It's himself! The interesting thing is that when we find ourselves in situations far less life threatening, we are clouded by the same selfishness and the desire not for God's glory and will but for a life of ease and a carefree existence. I stub my toe and scream, "why me?" or I face a little persecution and wonder why I have it so bad, when I have not yet resisted to the point of spilling blood as Paul reminds us.

That's why Jesus is here on a cross and not on a throne, isn't it? Well at least worldly speaking. He refused to provide the bread King the people wanted. He didn't provide them with the political uprising that would oust Rome from Judah forever. Instead, He offered more but the people craved less. Do we foolishly do the same?

As begin to search our hearts and minds, I would imagine it doesn't take very long and our own heads begin to hang. As we celebrate Christ the King, I have often acted as if He was the court jester and I knew far better. Isn't that what any sin boils down to at its core? I decide that I know better than God so, I can disrespect those in authority, just this once because I have a good reason. I can let linger eyes look and lust because it doesn't really hurt anyone. I can run someone else into the ground because well they crossed me which means they are wrong.

Interestingly enough it's another criminal who calls us to our senses. *But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong."* Dwell on that for just a moment also. One criminal was completely focused on himself but in this moment, the Holy Spirit has emptied the throne of the other criminal and placed the king there instead.

He rebukes the selfishness of the other criminal and reminds him that anything they are receiving is well deserved because of their offenses. That's repentance worth stopping and looking at. The criminal isn't trying to lighten his sentence or avoid some greater penalty. He simply confesses the truth, he's a sinner. Of course, He also knows something about the man in the middle.

Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Faith sees beyond the earthly wrapping, past the suffering and the pain and acknowledges what this one is doing. Stricken for him, smitten for him, pierced for every sin, afflicted to forgive and His prayer issues forth from lungs that burn with fatigue and a body wrenched in pain. *Jesus, remember me when*

you come into your kingdom. It's beautiful in its simplicity. One asks Jesus to take him down. The other that Jesus take him up.

Up until now we have not heard a word from our King. He's been strangely silent as we focus on ourselves and our sinfulness. All that is about to change. *Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."* Jesus shows us nobility beyond compare. This is why a King hangs on the cross.

He turns to this one whose life has been a bust up until this point. He turns to a condemned criminal as he hangs on the instrument of his punishment and death and conquers every sin, conquers death itself and guts the guilt and guile of Satan. This is truth, undeniable and unending. He is saved. Today you will be with me in paradise.

Notice that all the loop holes are closed. All the work we would expect to be demanded is not here. A sinner is declared a saint in an instant and given every reward or a perfect life he has not lived. This is why a King hangs on the cross.

He has allowed Himself to come to this point in history because it is pivotal for His people. Paul will tell us *just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous* (Romans 5:19). John rejoices in the truth which confounded him at the cross. *This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins* (1 John 4:10).

Have you ever known a King like this one? Earthly power and prestige mean nothing to Him. He makes Himself nothing that you might be everything. He sets aside the full use of his divinity that you might have eternity. Because of His sacrifice for you, yes that culminates in an empty tomb and a living King, you will be with Him forever in paradise.

No matter who sits on the throne in this world, Jesus is the King, our King. And it's all accomplished here in the least royal of places, fixed in death between two sinners. He endures the attacks of our greatest enemies as we **SEE OUR KING** suffering and dying that we might be with Him forever, forgiven and redeemed, saved by his perfect life and innocent death. It's a truth worth recalling regularly, a truth worth celebrating often, a truth worth holding out to others. Jesus is Our King! Amen!

