

Christ the King

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Christ the Rock Evangelical Lutheran Church
Farmington, New Mexico

Luke 23:35-43 And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!" **36** The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine **37** and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" **38** There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews."

39 One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" **40** But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? **41** And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." **42** And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." **43** And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise."

"The King Who Claims Sinners"

Kings get attention. Spectacle surrounds royalty. When Meghan Markle married Prince Harry, hundreds of millions of people watched the wedding ceremony. And royalty can get just as much attention when things don't go well. When there is a scandal. When rumors are especially juicy. When there is a fall from grace with loss of power and prestige.

That's the scene we get in Luke chapter 23. Religious leaders gloat over the fall of Jesus. Soldiers join in the cruel fun, mocking and play mind games with their victim. Even the criminals who have a front row seat from their own crucifixions on either side of Jesus take out their frustrations on this so called king. And yet none of that abuse changes Jesus. Nothing they do change the fact that Jesus truly is a King. Whatever they say won't cancel out the kingdom Jesus brings for his people. Jesus is the King who claims sinners. Jesus wants you. He wants you to know clearly who he is. Jesus wants you to know what he is doing for you. Most importantly though, Jesus claims you to rule in your heart through his grace.

So that leaves us with the question why? Why do they treat Jesus this way? Don't they realize who they're dealing with? Don't they understand this is Jesus? There has to be something more. A deeper explanation. It's especially troubling because they know Jesus. They understand his claims about himself. And yet they still reject Jesus as their king.

Think about it in this way. There aren't too many actual, ruling royals in our world today. But they still dominate stories. Big stories. Tales that sell millions of tickets and earn hundreds of millions of dollars. Today we have basically two kinds of kings. The Disney kings and the HBO kings. We see kings and queens in most of the big Disney movies. But the main characters are the princesses. The kings are either bumbling idiots who try to control their adventurous daughters and need to be taught how to stop being so old fashioned or they are killed off early in the story so that child can be faced with a moment of personal

crisis and reach her full potential as a person and future leader. Then there are the HBO kind of kings. In hit shows like Game of Thrones the kings are ruthless in their determination to grab the throne. They let nothing get in their way to get power and all the perks that come along with it. They are willing to do anything, eliminate any rival who would stand in their way. So other minor characters make sure they are on the right side of that king. But they don't want to get too close either, otherwise they might be viewed as a threat and dealt with appropriately.

What we have in Luke chapter 23 is a very different kind of King. Our King is suspended on a cross at a location outside Jerusalem known as The Skull. (Luke 23:33) There is an irony so thick hanging in the air. A king, but without obvious power. A ruler who suffers without any help from an army. A kingdom, almost invisible and despised by commoners. A rescuer who spared so many of such pain but won't apply his magic to his own tragic cause.

There is a saying in Alcoholics Anonymous about unrealistic expectations always ending in disappointment. Expectation is a planned resentment. I think that helps us explain why the chief priests, the scribes, and all the other members of the Jewish ruling council treat Jesus with such disrespect and abuse. God's promised Messiah should come to meet all their expectations. Jesus had no time for matching his life performance with the traditions of their elders. He didn't bring an overthrow of foreign oppressors like national heroes from the past. He didn't even reach their standard for purity that could enable God to really make a moral cleansing in the ongoing culture wars. He should use power to set things right in the world, flex his muscle to put Israel back on top or at least allow God's chosen people to control their own destiny. But Jesus is not that kind of King.

No doubt the mockery of the rulers gave the soldiers a green light to bring their own personal brand of ridicule to Jesus. Even the criminals crucified alongside Jesus joined in the fanatical fun. Jesus failed to live up to the expectations of the criminal. There's a bite, a sting in the mocking taunt of the criminal. He had to deal with his own messes, the consequences of his poor choices throughout life. But he had heard Jesus had the power to cancel out those painful effects. A true spiritual leader should be able to help people get themselves out of the traps and jams in life. A worthy king should use majesty and might to improve the lives of his citizens, make them more comfortable and successful. A spiritual guide should be someone we could look up to and give us hope for a better life. He should at least be able to show us the way to become better people and lead more fulfilling lives. But Jesus is not that kind of King.

It's actually among God's faithful people that we see the greatest discouragement at our king. We don't get to see real, visible results we are after. We don't see a huge, overflowing church. We don't see Christianity dominating personal opinions and public policies. We don't even see joy and pleasantness as obvious as we'd like in our own lives. So much of our attitude toward Jesus depends on the expectations we bring to Jesus. If Jesus is just spiritual meth, giving us the energy to make us feel great and get a jolt of energy; if Jesus is a therapist, walking me through troubling times toward self-improvement; if Jesus is a moral reformer, bringing surface level change to our society; then we will always be disappointed with what we see. Jesus is not that kind of King.

The second criminal had joined in. He had given voice to his frustrations. He had gone along with the crowd. And then something happened. We don't know when. We don't know all the details about how. His heart had changed. He understood Jesus for who He really was. And yet, the second criminal had so much he was dealing with personally. He could have just kept quiet. He could have kept his newfound faith to himself. But that's not how faith works. That's not what faith does.

Faith sees who we are and clings to Jesus for what he does for us. Faith is honest about our shortcomings. We call those sins by God's description. Jesus is the King who came for sinners. Jesus came to save you, not himself. Jesus saves those who need saving. Jesus came to claim sinners who cannot save themselves.

When he was put on trial by the Jewish ruling council and their leaders, he proudly acknowledged his true identity. And he was condemned as deserving of death because he clearly claimed to be the Messiah, God's own Son, the world's Savior. (Matthew 26:63-66) The taunts and verbal assaults lobbed at Jesus while hanging from the cross were the reasons the religious leaders could convict him as worthy of execution. And yet, Jesus was exactly who they said he was. When they escorted him into the palace of Pilate, they made the accusation that Jesus claimed to be a king. That allegation was the basis of their prosecution against Jesus. And Jesus never wavered or hesitated to acknowledge his true identity. He proudly acknowledged his royal status even though a denial could have spared him from abuse, torture, and crucifixion. (Luke 23:2; Matthew 27:11) But Jesus made it clear he wasn't the kind of king they expected or wanted or would even imagine. He makes it unmistakable: **"My kingdom is not of this world...But now my kingdom is from another place."** (John 18:36)

The kind of King Jesus really is conquers unbelief based on faulty information about what a king should do. Jesus is the kind of King who ascends to his throne through humility and suffering despite all the world's false expectations. Jesus embraces who He is so no matter how often his subjects are embarrassed of him or how deeply ashamed they feel over his lack of power and might on display in this world. Jesus is the kind of king for Pharisees and soldiers, criminals and cringing disciples.

Jesus brings sinners into his kingdom. Coming to this earth to sacrifice all heavenly glory establishes a kingdom of grace for fallen humanity. The death of Jesus opened him up to ridicule and abuse but now opens wide the arms of a gracious heavenly Father to every man, woman and child who has fallen far short of God's perfection. Jesus comes to you today to bring his kingdom to you personally. Jesus conquers your heart with the good news that he did everything in his earthly existence for you. Jesus' conquest brings the stone cold hearts of sinners the sacrifice to wipe out the darkest and dirtiest offenses. Jesus brings vindication to timid and troubled hearts by his resounding resurrection. Jesus comes to rule in your heart by his glorious good news.

What are we to do with Jesus today? Recently Kanye West created a buzz after coming out with a Gospel-Rap album entitled "Jesus Is King." For those of you who don't generally care

about these things, Kanye West is a rapper who usually gets lots of attention for things Christians wouldn't normally be proud of. Rap lyrics filled with expletives and demeaning treatment of women. Glorifying sinful behavior. Marrying a Kardashian. And I'm not here to tell you I have insider information about what is going on in Kanye's heart. Whether this is just another publicity stunt or whether it is genuine conversion. But his album shows us Jesus is still a spectacle to our spiritually-starved world. When Jesus is revealed in songs or sharing, rap lyrics or lives lived in praise, then people have to wrestle with the kind of King Jesus really is. Jesus is the kind of King for people hungering for something new and better than what they've been fed by the champions of self-help and cheerleaders of life improvement.

Maybe the real question you're wondering is what God can do with you. How can God accomplish any kingdom work through someone like you? You aren't a Pharisee. You are no Roman soldier. You aren't a world famous rapper. But you can see yourself in that second criminal on the other side of Jesus. You struggle with your issues and your past. You wrestle with your doubts and weaknesses. That thief left us all a legacy. He left all frail and hurting and searching people an amazing prayer: **"Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."** (LUke 23:42 ESV) Reaching out to Jesus as his King, he was gifted supernatural security and infinite peace in the promise of Jesus. Jesus gave the guarantee: **"Today you will be with me in Paradise."** (Luke 23:43 ESV)

If you can recognize your own failures to be what God designed you to be, you can see yourself in that thief. And then you can see your King giving his life for yours. Your King, your precious Jesus, says you are worth dying for. Your King knows exactly who you are. Because He has claimed you as His own by His crucifixion as your King. Your King sees fit to give you a no strings attached guarantee of Paradise signed in His own blood. Your King powers you with his promises to live out your calling in an often hostile world. Your King equips you to boldly proclaim Jesus as the King our world needs. Your King lives in you to proudly embrace Him as ruler over your life. It's all because Jesus claims you. Jesus is your King who claims sinners. Amen.