

**November 24, 2013**  
**Christ the King Sunday**

*"What an Amazing King We Have in Jesus"*

**LUKE 23:35-43**

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**T**he 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."<sup>36</sup> The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar<sup>37</sup> and said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself."<sup>38</sup> There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.<sup>39</sup> One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!"<sup>40</sup> But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence?"<sup>41</sup> We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong."<sup>42</sup> Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."<sup>43</sup> Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

"The people stood watching." It was not a small crowd that watched the gruesome death by crucifixion. It was a large crowd that stood and gawked at Jesus. They read the written notice placed over his head in Aramaic, Latin and Greek: "Jesus of Nazareth King of the Jews." They shook their heads in disgust and scorn. "What kind of king is this anyway?"

What a disappointment Jesus was for those who had seen Jesus perform miracles. Here was the king who could provide them with welfare and healthcare. What a disappointment for those who thought he might restore the kingdom and glory to Israel eclipsing even David and Solomon. On Sunday morning they waved palm branches and sang, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." Now they are shaking their fists at Jesus and ridiculing his claims to be a Savior and a King.

On this Christ the King Sunday we ask you the all important question, what kind of king do you see in Jesus? Do you see someone who has disappointed you lately because you have lost your zip? You don't have the smile on your face, or the spring in your step or the song in your heart that once dominated your life. Where is my king when it seems the closer I follow him the heavier my cross seems to be? On this Christ the King Sunday rather than shaking our heads in disappointment, we shake our heads in awe and amazement at this King Jesus we see hanging on the cross.

**Do you see the power on the cross?**

They gawked. They mocked. They shook their heads in disbelief. "He saved others, let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One." They could see with their own eyes the blood that was streaming down the body of Jesus. They could see the nails that were pounded into his hands and feet. They could hear his groans and sighs. Where was the power the Messiah needed to build a great kingdom? Most of the people heard about the miracles Jesus performed. Some had even seen these miracles with their own eyes. They are ashamed of this Jesus who once filled them with hope. Can't someone at least take down that awful notice over his head, "Jesus of Nazareth King of the Jews?"

The Roman soldiers read the words written in Latin, "Jesus of Nazareth King of the Jews." They mocked also his claim to be a king. "They offered him wine vinegar and said, 'If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.'" Roman soldiers encouraged each other on the field of battle such words as "Strength and honor, strength and honor." They saw no strength in Jesus. They saw no honor in him. Already they have flogged him, put a crown of thorns on his head and clothed him with a purple robe. They hit him again and again. They mocked him with the words, "Hail king of the Jews."

Even one of the thieves joined in mocking Jesus with similar words, "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!" Usually criminals who are going through similar punishment bond together and support each other. It is hard to talk while dying on a cross. It is painful. Yet this criminal summons the strength to mock Jesus' claims to be a King and a Messiah and the Savior.

You have heard the expression, "If it looks like a duck, walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it must be a duck." The people who stood watching looked at Jesus and said there is no way he can be a king. Kings were rich. Kings were powerful. If Jesus were the King and the Son of God he claimed to be he could pull himself free from the nails and dash his enemies to pieces like a potter's vessel just as the Psalms predicted.

These people failed to realize that their Messiah was also a suffering servant. Isaiah predicted the Messiah would be pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities. Isaiah said "He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter." They forgot and ignored the great words of John the Baptist, "Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world."

What do you see when you see King Jesus hanging on the cross? Do you not see tremendous power and strength? The hands that are held to the cross by nails were the very hands of God that created the world in which we live. These are the hands of a king who could heal the blind, make the lame walk and even raise the dead. These are the hands of a king who fed five thousand people with only five barley loaves and two small fish. The power displayed in creation and the power displayed in miracles points to an even more amazing power that comes with humbling and himself and becoming obedient to death even death on the cross.

What do you see in Jesus as he listens to the crowd taunting him and mocking him? You see your God who came down to this earth in human flesh. In that badly beaten body covered with blood you see someone who has lived the perfect life you could never live. You see a king who miraculously has taken on himself the sin of the world. 2 Corinthians 5 says, "He became sin for us." Isaiah said the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all. Your King Jesus is the only one in all the world who has the power to pay for sin and expunge it from your record. No other religion in the world has God coming down to this earth and becoming one of us and then going to the cross and making a ransom payment for sin.

A twelve year old girl did not want her mother to help out in school. She was ashamed of her mother because of the ugly burn scars her mother had on her face. She could hear

the boys and girls say under the breath, "I wonder what happened to her?" Then one day the mother realized it was time to tell her daughter how she had received the scars. "When you were a little baby, dad was gone, and a fire broke out in the house. You were trapped in your bedroom. I rushed into your room and wrapped you in a blanket. I had to go through the flames to rescue you and that is how I was burned." The girl looked at her mom and looked at the scars and cried. She didn't care what others saw. She now saw nothing but love. So it is with King Jesus suffering on the cross.

How can I know that King Jesus who has died and paid for the sin of the world wants to pardon a sinner like me? Is there room for me in his mercy especially since I have made such a mess of my life?

### **Do you see his pardon from the cross?**

I know there is mercy for me because of what Jesus said to the dying thief who turned to him for help. Notice how this thief who had earlier joined the others in mocking Jesus now has a change of heart. "But the other criminal rebuked him. 'Don't you fear God,' he said, 'since you are under the same sentence? We are being punished justly, for we are getting what our sins deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.' Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.'"

Visit the prison in Lompoc and talk to the prisoners. Most of them will tell you how bad the system is and how they are not guilty of the crimes they have committed. This thief realizes he is getting what he deserved. He does not say, "We are getting punished unjustly." He says, "We are getting what our sins deserve."

The first step to entering into the kingdom of God begins with realizing the truth about yourself. The evangelist Billy Graham used to speak to large crowds of people. He often pointed his finger in the air and say, "Your sin will find you out." The dying thief knew that his sin would find him out. He realized he had to answer to God for the life he lived. If you have ever stolen money, or cheated on taxes, or even cheated on a test, or been dishonest, your sin will find you out. Our only hope for escape is to plead for mercy from our God as David did in Psalm 51 when he said, "Have mercy on me O God...I know my transgressions and my sin is always before me." Let's cut through the excuses and all the foolish reasons we give for the things we do. The second grader had it right when asked, "Why did you hit your sister?" His corrupted human heart was at least honest when he said, "Because I wanted to."

The dying thief turns to Jesus and says, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He used the name of Jesus, the beautiful name of Jesus, the name that means Savior. The crowd laughed and mocked Jesus for having a name that meant Savior. This man turns to Jesus and calls on him as the one who can save him from his past sin.

We wonder what it was that changed him. Did he hear Jesus praying "Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing?" Was it the loving way Jesus looked at people? Was it the voice of people criticizing Jesus as the Christ, the King and the Savior? He realized their mocking voices were wrong. What Jesus said about himself was true. He saw the blood of Jesus falling to the ground. He knows that his own blood and his own

suffering could not atone for sin. He finds his hope of pardon and peace in Jesus' suffering when he says, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." King Jesus tells him, "Today you will be with me in Paradise." When Jesus died he prayed, "Father into your hands I commit my Spirit." When the thief died later he was privileged to pray the same prayer, "Father into your hand I commit my spirit."

"Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus, remember ME. Remember ME for the perfect life you lived for me. Remember ME for the perfect suffering and death you went through for my sin. And when we die, (all of sitting here will die) we can look forward to spending eternity with Jesus our King in the place he has prepared for us.

Shortly before Stephen was stoned to death, it says in Acts 8, "But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus sitting at the right hand of God." I like to think that when your last hour of life comes, the Holy Spirit will do the same for you and for me. He will allow us to see Jesus sitting on the right hand of the Father as our King of kings and Lord of lords. What an amazing King we have in Jesus. Amen.