

# The King We Needed

March 30, 2018

Luke 23

This evening, we move from the King we wanted as evidenced by the Triumphal Entry to the King we needed, as evidenced by the crucifixion scene. In many ways, this distinction over type of king is at the core of why the Jews of His day called for Jesus' crucifixion. They were intent on defining who their Messiah ought to be and Jesus was not him. They wanted a leader who would take on their oppressors and restore the radiance of the Jewish nation as it existed under King David. They thought they understood the Scriptures that seemed to promise such a thing. Even though Jesus had proven Himself to be who He said He was with many, many miracles, even though He had again and again schooled His critics who attempted to trap and discredit Him, even though He spoke with the authority of God Himself, when it came down to it, He was not King, not the Savior they wanted.

But this evening we celebrate the fact that Jesus was, indeed, the precise King they needed. And their behavior that day proved it beyond a shadow of a doubt. They put to death a completely innocent, indeed sinless man. They had a pure and righteous and blameless man put to death in the most gruesome way imaginable: crucifixion. They called for Jesus not only to die but to be crucified. And they mocked Him, beat Him, spit upon Him while doing so. Oh yes, those people that day proved they needed a Savior to free them from their oppressor, satan, and his powerful hand upon their lives, sin. They needed a true King, a Savior who would once and for all conquer their most oppressive enemy, an enemy we still face today, here, among us. But to do it, to defeat satan, to take away all that sin, our King had to die. This ruthless king could be defeated and his works destroyed no other way. All that sin had to go somewhere. It couldn't go onto sacrificial animals. It couldn't be cast into a herd of pigs. It had to go onto a pure and righteous man, who stood in for all His people. It had to happen this way. And so, willingly die Jesus did. Endure unjust suffering, He

did. Use all His authority to die Himself rather than save Himself, He did. Humble Himself to the point of death, even death on a cross, He did. Carry the sin of the world on His back, He did. Restrain Himself from using that unlimited power of Almighty God to stop it all, He did. Oh yes, Jesus proved Himself to be precisely the King we needed, One who would die to save His people. What a King we have!

Follow along as I read a section of the story of Jesus' death from the gospel of Luke. I am going to read a rather lengthy section of the text, and then dwell on the later portion of this text. We pick up the story in chapter 22, after Jesus was arrested, and here, being mistreated by His captors. READ. 22:63-23:49.

Main point: The recorded details of Jesus' death show He was precisely the King we needed, even if it did not fit our description of a King.

I do not blame the people that day for misunderstanding. I would have probably been among them, proving I too needed a King who would die for me. I can only stand here tonight, preaching this text because I am able to look backward, in hindsight, with a perspective unknown to those present that day. Even writers of the gospels, who were there that day, who had followed Jesus from the beginning, even they did not get it. They could not put it all into context until later. So, I don't blame the angry mob. Things went according to plan, a plan designed to highlight that everyone needs a Messiah, a Savior, a King who would willingly die for them. And from my perspective, this truth could not have been more clearly displayed than the detail Luke records of the conversation between Jesus and the two criminals hanging with Him. I see here not gory details, but gospel glory! We see the timeless impact of the event in the tale of two men, and how they viewed Jesus. One saw Him as not the King he envisioned, the other as the very King he needed.

We picked up the story as the arresting mob led Him before the Sanhedrin, the ruling body of the Jews. This would have been the assembly of all those who had hated Jesus for some time. They had been waiting for this day, when they could show their power and authority over this One who sought to destroy their world. When Jesus went in and overturned the tables of the merchants in the temple, this would have been their world. When Jesus was drawing crowds wherever He went, their crowds would have been getting smaller. When Jesus taught with authority, their authority diminished. He was everything they were not, and this was their hour, when they proved to Him otherwise. In this courtroom setting, all of Jesus' enemies were gathered and empowered.

The charges against Him were two-fold: He claimed to be the Christ, the Messiah and He claimed to be the Son of God. As we see in Jesus' answer, He answered both in the affirmative, but He said it in a way that put the spotlight back on them. "If I tell you, you will not believe me, and if I asked you, you would not answer." (22:67-68) In other words, to be the Messiah, they would have to recognize that fact. You can only be a Savior to those who need saving. So, whether He was their Savior, their Messiah was really a question for them, not Him. He could be THE Messiah and yet not be their Messiah. He could be THE King without being their King.

Then they asked Him to confirm the claim of being the Son of God. If He answered in the affirmative, then by definition He was guilty of blasphemy, even if it was true, even if it was known from OT prophecy that the Messiah would be the Son of God. It was blasphemy to claim to be God, and Jesus admitted His guilt. No more witnesses were needed, no more testimony needed to be heard, Jesus was guilty. The trial was over. Send Him to the Roman authorities, the Roman king for execution (since they lacked to kingly authority to execute).

Now, on the Roman end, they couldn't care less whether Jesus was the Jewish Messiah or the Son of God. Their concern was for a peaceful society that paid its taxes. So, the charges brought forward to them had to be different. The claim to being king, to overthrowing the Roman authorities, this would, shall we say, peak their interest! They bring out charges that Jesus was leading a rebellion, advising people not to pay taxes, and claiming to be king.

Yet, as we see, an interesting thing happened. Pontius Pilate, the local Roman authority, asked Jesus a simple question, “Are you the king of the Jews?” Jesus’ answer? “Yes, it is as you say.” (23:3) But at this point something unexpected happened. With that answer, Pilate announced to the accusers, “I find no basis for a charge against this man.” Say what? He just admitted to be the king of the Jews. What’s up with that?

Pilate saw in Jesus no rival, no threat. He was leading no army. His army consisted of eleven men, a fleet of one donkey, and an arsenal of two swords. He is not leading a rebellion. There were no prominent leaders among His followers. These were the least, the last, and the lost. Whatever kind of king he was, he was no threat to Pontius Pilate. He’s not guilty.

Can you see how this whole text revolves around what kind of king Jesus was? And Pilate in his pronouncement affirms that Jesus was not a political king. The people had rejected Him for precisely the same reason: He was not a political king. And the process of reaching this conclusion was proving the point. Jesus did not stand up to Pilate.

But there was a problem. Pilate still needed to keep the peace to save his job, especially at this time of the year when all these Jews from all over were gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. That was probably why he was there in Jerusalem in the first place. His normal home was not Jerusalem. He ruled from Caesarea, an appropriate name for a place of Roman authority. But he was in Jerusalem that day, probably to make sure there was no riot among the Jews gathered for the Passover. And right now he had Jewish accusers condemning a popular leader with a whole host of people watching... So, he did what good leaders do...he passed the buck to his rival, king Herod. Herod was in charge of the neighboring district, Galilee. And Pilate found out that Jesus was from Galilee, so this was Herod’s problem. I am confident Herod was in Jerusalem that day for precisely the same reason: to make sure there was peace. Jerusalem was not in his territory, but his people were all there, and among such a crowd of oppressed people gathered together, there was surely the possibility of trouble, so Herod was there.

But again, Herod was not threatened. He was curious. He was from Galilee. He had heard of this Jesus. He wanted to meet Him. He wanted to watch as Jesus did one of those miraculous things. He wanted to see the show. But Jesus was not into putting on a show. He stood mute. He silently resisted the orders of the king. So, did Herod order Jesus put to death? No! He mocked Him, put a robe on Him, made fun of Him...and sent Him back to Pilate. Jesus posed no threat to King Herod. He was not a rival King!

But from the standpoint of the people, this only proved their point. Jesus was not the kind of king they wanted. At that precise moment, He had the opportunity to stand up to two Roman authorities and He failed to do so. He could have started a rebellion right there, perhaps cut off the king's head, or maybe his ear, and he would have had the whole mass of people with Him. But He did not. He stood silent. He posed no threat. We see the importance of this in the fact that when Jesus was returned to Pilate, they called for the release of Barabbas, one who actually did lead a rebellion, who was caught, and was awaiting his punishment. They chose a rebel over a king.

Ultimately, I believe this failure to confront the Roman authorities was what caused the switch in the crowd. From this point on, the people were on the side of the accusers, not simply watchers of the proceedings, not hailing Jesus. When the Jewish accusers led the war cry to crucify Jesus, they joined in. They not only wanted Jesus dead, but they wanted Him dead in the most painful, humiliating, degrading, drawn out way possible: crucifixion, stretching Him out and nailing Him alive to poles in the ground and waiting for Him to die by asphyxiation from exhaustion. They wanted revenge against Jesus for failing to be the king they wanted.

But, all of this only added to the truth that Jesus was the King they needed. These people that day all showed they were sinners, they sinned, they all sinned, they all sinned publicly, profusely, prominently, persistently. They were guilty sinners who needed saving by their King. This is where we see that Jesus knew what kind of King He was. He was on task, He was in control, He was faithfully carrying out His duties as the King who died so His people might live. We see that most clearly in the exchange with the two criminals crucified with Him.

I point you to 23:38, where we are told of the sign over Jesus' head, "This is the King of the Jews." We are reminded once again, in a surely mocking gesture, of this battle over the type of king Jesus was. Here, hanging over His head was a sign challenging the people to see whether this dying man fit their dreams of a long-promised king of his people, a king like David.

But there were two other men executed that day, one on either side of Jesus. Let's pick up the exchange at this point.

38- One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!"

What are we to make from this? He sounds just like the mob. In actuality, he is expressing right thoughts, but certainly in a mocking manner. Yes, the big question was whether Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah, the Savior. He then challenges Jesus to save Himself. Put on a show. Can you see the reference back to the temptation of Jesus and the challenge to have His angels catch Him as He threw Himself off the highest point of the temple? It is the same thing here. Put on a show that would demonstrate to one and all that you are the real deal. Be that kind of king. But He refused. And notice the criminal made sure to include himself in his request. Save us! (Isn't that the same thought as "Hosanna" shouted by the crowd in last week's text? Hmmm...) Clearly, he was not appealing to Jesus as His Savior. Clearly, he did not view Jesus as his King, as the king he needed.

But on the other side, we have another criminal, a different man, a man with a different perspective. He actually takes on his counterpart.

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."

He rebuked the one who was attacking Jesus. Notice his reference to the fear of God. What does he mean by this? He goes on to explain. He knew they were both guilty of the crimes for which they were being punished. He knew he deserved the punishment he was getting. But worse than the punishment he was getting, he was concerned for God's perspective on it all. What he was getting in punishment was not the end. After death, he would have to face God, and what would God think? What was God's perspective on what they had done and what his fellow criminal was still doing? This man was compounding his problem by mocking Jesus. He knew he was in deeper trouble with God than he was with the government.

But this man, this Jesus had not done anything wrong. He was innocent. Yes, this first criminal was mocking the execution of an innocent man. Surely God would have a perspective on that too. A God who promises to avenge the unjust suffering of His own would surely take action against those who caused or added to the suffering. This man, this admitted criminal feared God. But he goes on from there to say something more, something even more important.

42 Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

I could go on for quite a while about this verse, this request. He requested that Jesus "remember," or consider with the intention of taking action. He wanted Jesus to take up his cause. But I want you to notice that he was making a request of Jesus for a period of time after Jesus would be dead, "when you come into your kingdom." In other words, it had not happened yet. He was making a request of a king who was about to die about an event that would take place after He has died. Are you catching this? He believed that Jesus would be king after He died, would rule over a kingdom after His death. He believed that Jesus was not a would-be king, a phony king, but a King of another dimension. And he believed that this King had the power to save His people, to save people who did not

deserve saving. He was guilty and he knew it. But He was speaking to a King who could and perhaps would save people like him.

I pause for a moment to take you back to some of the first comments of Jesus' ministry. There, in the Sermon on the Mount, He began with the beatitudes. Do you remember them? Can you see how many of these attributes this criminal about to die for his crimes had? He was poor in spirit. He mourned over his condition. He came meekly for help. He hungered and thirsted for the righteousness he knew he lacked. He came for mercy as evidenced by his mercy for Jesus. He came to make peace with God. He found salvation!

Or, perhaps look forward to Romans 10. He treated Jesus as His Lord, He believed that God could raise Him from the dead (of some sort). He called on the name of the Lord. And he was saved. This man met all of the characteristics of one admitted to the kingdom of God.

[43](#) Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

Jesus responded to his request by granting his request, vowing it, pronouncing that it was a done deal, that it would actually take place before the day was over. He decreed it as if He put His signet ring on the document (Oh wait, His hands were nailed to the cross!). He was King and His word was sure. This man would indeed be with His King in paradise before the end of that day! All of this took place while the two were hanging there in the process of dying.

I can't get over the image, the picture being presented. There are three crosses and Jesus is in the middle. On either side there is someone also dying, but who deserved to die. The sign over Jesus' head declares that this one is the king of the Jews. There, this is what passes these days as the king of the Jews.

One of these two men mocks Him, rejects Him, treats Jesus as a failed phony. But the other man sees in Him the King he needed. He believed in His

kingdom, His kingship, the promises to His people EVEN AS JESUS WAS BEING PUT TO DEATH! What a contrast! What a picture of the gospel! The King was saving His people while He was dying! And He was saving not the best, not the brightest, not the most holy, not the one who had followed since the beginning, but the least, the last, the lost. The first man in the kingdom was this guy! This is what His kingdom looks like. Our King died to save sinners like him, like us! This is the gospel of Jesus Christ being lived out as it was happening.

After this, the scene turned somber. The sun stopped shining in the middle of the day. The temple was cleansed, this time from above. Jesus too put His future in the hand of the King, He committed His spirit to His Father. He died in faith that His Father would not fail Him. Just like the criminal, He trusted that His Father would protect and guide His spirit. The King died trusting His King.

Even then, amazing things happened. What transpired in that hour convinced the Roman soldier guarding the scene from interruption to express some sort of faith in the One who died. I say, "some sort" because we don't know how far it went. But clearly, he saw the event as it was and not what others were intending it to be. The gospel had spread. The people, unexplainably went away filled with sorrow. That detail intrigues me, perplexes me. What were they sorrowful about? His supporters, those who followed Him from the beginning, all watched from afar. And they all left. The event was over. The King was dead. No wait, according to the wording here, He was now in the presence of His Father. He was sitting on His throne. He was now issuing decrees. He was now saving His people, both despicable criminals and perhaps Roman Gentile soldiers. From day 1, He was fulfilling His duties as the King we needed.

So, my question to you this evening is this: which criminal are you? Are you the one who does not believe you need a king, or not that type of king? Or, are you the one who put his complete trust in a King who at that very moment was being put to death as a fellow criminal? Are you one who thinks this event was some long ago dusty event of history that only silly people and old women believe? Or, are you one who puts your trust in one to help you even after death? Which side of Jesus are you one? Is He your stumbling stone or your cornerstone? Is He your King or not!

The King lived, the King died, the King entered into His paradise of a kingdom and continued to carry out His responsibilities as King. Long live the King!