

## An Unexpected King

What we have in front of us today is one of the saddest, most heart-breaking sections of the bible. Our Lord and our Savior is being beaten and mocked and spit at. As you think on these words your heart goes out to your Savior and you wish you could have been there to stop it all and save him. You wish you could explain to the soldiers who this person really is. But they didn't see it. They didn't see him as a king. He didn't look like a king, act like a king or talk like a king. Pontius Pilate didn't see it. The Jews didn't see it, and obviously these soldiers not only didn't see it, but were amused by it. It was laughable to them that he could be called the King of the Jews. But their misunderstanding of Christ as King may not be all that different from our own misunderstanding of Christ's role as a King.

The bible talks about 3 different areas over which Christ rules as King. He has the kingdom of power, the kingdom of grace and the kingdom of glory. The kingdom of power has to do with his rule in our world. The kingdom of grace has to do with his rule in our hearts. The kingdom of glory has to do with his rule in heaven over the saints who have gone before us. We want to think about how Christ rules in each of these areas so that we aren't left disappointed or confused about the things that Christ is doing.

Let's first think about the Kingdom of power. Just before he ascended into heaven, he said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." He is in control of our world. Christ is the one who decides which kingdoms will be built up and which will be torn down. He is ultimately the one who is going to decide who wins an election, when and where a person is born, who gets a disease, who is cured. Nothing happens in this world and in your life without him allowing it to happen.

The misunderstanding begins when we think about that. If Christ is King, why does he allow problems in my life and in this world? That dilemma is there because we misunderstand what the job of Christ our king is. His job is not to take away all your problems – financial, health, emotional problems, whatever they may be. His job and purpose with how he moves things around in this world is not to eradicate poverty, or racism, or war, or murder or abortion. If that were his job, he has failed miserably. You see, if we misunderstand Christ's role as king over this world, then we can easily be left disappointed or doubtful of his power, love or both. How often don't we want to give our king advice and say, Lord, if you really are our king, I would make these changes to our world?

Or we talk about Jesus being king over his kingdom of grace. That refers to him ruling in our hearts. His kingdom is not the kind of kingdom that anyone would expect with walls and borders. In John 14:23 it says, "Jesus answered him, 'If anyone loves me, he will hold on to my word. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.'" Or in 1 Corinthians it says, "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is within you, whom you have from God?" (1 Corinthians 6:19) And yet we are disappointed with his reign in our heart, because if Christ is in here, then why do I struggle so much? I don't feel him in my heart. In fact, Christians struggle with sin as much as anyone else. How many people outside the Christian church, look at individual Christians or a Christian high school, college or grade school after a moral failure and say, "I thought you were Christian." The world expects more from us. Should they? Absolutely! Why do Christians struggle with temptations so much? Why does it seem that Christians have as many moral failures as non-Christians? And while that question makes us hang our head in shame, we look at our Lord and say, I thought you were supposed to rule in our hearts. Why is temptation so difficult for me if you are supposed to be right here. There are we again, giving God advice, "Lord, if you are really going to rule in the hearts of Christians, could you be more of a help to us?"

Is our misunderstanding of our king any different than those soldiers? This is not the kind of king that we would expect. But it turns out he was exactly the kind of king that we need. Our king didn't send an army to fight to expand his kingdom. He fought himself and sacrificed himself. He didn't want to expand his kingdom to make him rich, but to make us rich. The scene that we see here doesn't look like a hero's march to victory. Instead of strength, it looks like weakness. There was probably blood and sweat dripping down his bruised and swollen face. He allowed them to mock him, beat him and spit at him because those soldiers were the object of his love. He was going to go to the cross for them. Regardless of how disappointed we may be with our King and how he reigns, regardless of how much advice we want to give to him about how he should reign in our world or in our hearts, he is exactly the kind of King that we need. He is a King who doesn't need us, who gains nothing by expanding his kingdom in our hearts, who doesn't have to bother with the pain of moving things around in this world and being in control of it. But he does for you.

We don't know exactly how many soldiers were there, mocking him and beating on him. There is one note in the NIV bible that says that a whole cohort is 600 men. There may have been that many. More importantly, how many of them recognized their mistake. Later on in this same chapter after Jesus died on the cross it says, "When the centurion and

those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, "Surely he was the Son of God!" Imagine beating on someone, mocking them, and coming to realize that this person actually is the Son of God, the creator and king of the universe. It's humbling, but it's also a joy to know that this person who is not a typical king, was exactly the kind of king that we need. He went to the cross for those soldiers, and he went there for us.

So while we may struggle to completely understand all that our king does in this world and in our hearts, we trust him. One verse that helps us to understand his work in the kingdom of power, that is, his control over this world is in Acts 17:26-27. It says, "From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. <sup>27</sup> God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us." Our King tells us the purpose behind his rule in this world. He tears down kingdoms and builds others up; he allows this person to be in charge of the government instead of this other person; he made sure you were born at the right time and the right place, all so that more people would seek him. It's important to know why God does the things that he does his world so that we don't end up disappointed anymore. It's not to give us world peace, or even individual, personal peace. It's to save souls. So thank God that you were born at a specific time and place with a specific family and friends who would bring you into contact with God's Word so that you would be saved. Ask yourself, who was that? Who did God place into your life so that you could be here today with faith? That's not a coincidence. That's our king at work.

Or think of the kingdom of grace, his work in our hearts. Unlike the Kingdom of power, which we are simply born into, the kingdom of grace is not something that we are born into. But Christ's work in our world, down to the details of where you would be born was all done to bring you into his kingdom of grace. So Christ lives in your heart. What does that mean? Does that mean that you can get better and better at saying no to temptation? Yes. But there will always be moral failures in our life as long as we are sinners. And when that happens we remember that Christ is right here. He tells you that you are forgiven. He tells you that regardless of what you have done in your life, regardless of how close you feel God is to you, he tells you that he couldn't be any closer. He's right there with you reigning in your heart.

His rule in the world, leads to his rule in our hearts, so that he can rule over you forever in heaven. That final place where he reigns is called the kingdom of glory. In the book of Revelation it says, "The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever."" (Rev 11:15) When that day comes when we are in heaven with all the saints, in his kingdom of glory, we are no longer going to have to believe with eyes of faith, but with our own eyes. We aren't going to struggle with trust in our king, because we'll be able to see him, and talk with him, and ask him whatever questions we want. Faith and trust in our king won't be a problem there. It will make sense. But here in this world, we have a lot to work on when it comes to our trust in the one who rules in this world and in the one who rules in our hearts.

Hindsight helps us to see why God did some of the things that he did in the past in this world. It was definitely for the good of the salvation of souls, but people probably didn't know that or see it at the time. God built up the Roman Empire after Jesus' life so that the disciples of Jesus and all those people at Pentecost would have a good road system so that people could travel quickly and peacefully. It helped the spread of the gospel at that time. Or think of the distraction that the pope had during the time of Martin Luther. At any other time, Martin Luther would have been burned at the stake as a heretic, but because of the war with the Muslims, and his need for the Germans, Luther was free to preach, write and even translate the bible during the reformation so that more souls could hear the message of the gospel. What is God doing today? Why did Christ our King allow this or that person into office? For the benefit of our country? For the benefit of my investments? To give us more peace in this world? Everything that he causes and allows to happen in this world is done so that more souls can hear about Jesus and be saved. How will that work? I don't know, but he does.

So instead of frustration about things that happen in the news, in our nation or around the world, a Christian is incredibly optimistic. Christ is in control. He rules over this world, in this kingdom of power, in order to bring them to Christ so that he can rule in their hearts, the kingdom of grace, so that finally he can rule over them in his kingdom of glory in heaven. We have no reason to be worried about the things are happening in this world. Rather, we have a front row seat to his work. With every good or bad thing that happens in this world we get to wonder, "I wonder how God is going to use that to bring more people into his kingdom?" So while Christ may not be a typical king as we understand the word, he is exactly the kind of king that we and this world needs. Amen.