

Christ the King Sunday

Bible Verses Referenced: John 18:33-37, Joshua 5:13-15, Daniel 7, Revelation 1:1-3, Romans 10:9, Mark 10:45

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, thank you so much for the gift of your Son, Jesus Christ, who today we proclaim as King of Kings and Lord of Lords, we ask that you would enthrone Him on our hearts and in our minds and in our lives that our lives would be given up for Your service to His praise and glory.

May the ministry and preaching of Your Word be Your Word for the sake and glory of Your Son, Jesus, in His name we pray. Amen. Please. So today is the Christ the King Sunday is what we call it in the church year. It's the last Sunday of the year, which I know you think, well, maybe December 31st is the last year, last day of the year.

But in the church calendar, this is the last Sunday of the year. And then next week we start the season of Advent, which is the beginning of the church calendar and the church year as we look forward to the expectation of the coming of Jesus Christ, which is what advent means. It's very significant that as sort of the grand finale of the church year, we emphasized the lordship of Jesus Christ.

One of the questions that is very important for all of us to answer for ourselves is, "What must I do to be saved? What must I do to be an inheritor of eternal life?" It's probably the most important question that any of us could ask and one day find the answer to.

And in a nutshell, what the Scripture teaches is that in order to be saved, we must believe in our heart that Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead and confess with our lips that Jesus Christ is Lord.

In other words, it's the confession that this day celebrates that Jesus Christ is King and the application of that truth and that belief to our lives is at its root and at its core what leads to our own personal inclusion and salvation in the life of God.

And so I'd like to use our Gospel passage today to reflect on, one, misunderstandings of what the kingdom is and then the true nature of the kingdom and then our calling from the king, from the kingdom. And we're going to use the interaction between Pontius Pilate and Jesus to reflect on these three things.

There's a little bit of a Q&A going on here in our Gospel passage where Pilate, the scene is from right before Jesus is crucified, where He is going through various authorities, and He has an interaction with King Herod, who is the Jewish puppet king at the time. He speaks to the high priest, Caiaphas, and interacts with the Jewish authorities.

And then in this scene, he's interacting with the Roman authorities who are put in charge of Jerusalem and the region under the reign and authority of Caesar Augustus. And so we have all of the worldly powers and kingdoms represented here, and yet they're puzzling over and misunderstanding the true king who is in their midst. Jesus.

Listen to the way Pontius Pilate puts it. So Pilate enters the headquarters again and summons Jesus, and he asks, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on your own or did others tell you about me?" Jesus often answers a question with a question.

But part of what he's doing here with Pontius Pilate is saying, "I know that you are asserting your authority and your power over me, and you're trying to find a reason to bring me up on charges and to try me as a Jewish insurrectionist." That was the charge that was brought by the Jewish authorities, that Jesus is claiming to be the king of the Jews, and therefore he is stirring up rebellion and fomenting insurrection against Caesar.

And so they hand him over to Pilate to be dealt with. And Pilate doesn't want to give the Jewish leadership the time of day. He doesn't want to play into their hands and their politics. And so he would just assume, as we'll see later in the story, wash his hands of the situation. But nevertheless, he plays along and plays the game, which is all again about politics.

But for Jesus, and this is the lesson for us, is that when it comes to the kingdom, it's never political but very much personal. And Jesus won't let Pilate off the hook here. "Are you the King of the Jews?" And he asked him a very personal question, "Did you come up with this?"

Or did somebody else tell you this?" I want you to answer with that. I want you to answer that question, Pilate. I want you to wrestle with the answer to that question. Indeed, that's the challenge of today, isn't it? What do I think about the Lordship of Jesus Christ and His rule and His reign?

And what are my misunderstandings about the nature of that reign and that rule? I love this scene. This is from the Old Testament. Joshua was the one who was to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land after they had left Egypt and spent 40 years doing laps around the desert. And so it's the threshold moment. And Joshua is surveying the promised land and he goes across the river Jordan and he comes to that great walled city, Jericho.

You remember the children's song, "Joshua fought the Battle of Jericho, Jericho, Jericho." Joshua fought the Battle of Jericho and the walls came tumbling down. You know that one? Yeah. Oh, thank you. Yes. James, if I lose this preaching gig, I'm coming for your job. So Joshua's out surveying this you know fortified walled city.

And he comes across this man. He's out there in the evening. And this man is there and Joshua doesn't recognize him. And he says to the guy, he says, "Are you for us? Are you for our enemies?" you know Which side are you on? Are you for the gators or are you for the Seminoles? You know Which team are you playing for? Who are you rooting for here?

And the man says, "Neither." Oh. He says, "I am the commander of the army of the Lord." He was not going to allow Joshua to ask whether God was on his team or the other guy's team. The real question is, and this is something that Pontius Pilate is going to have to wrestle with, and we all have to, is not whether the Lord is going to help us out with our agenda and our plans and our battles and our difficulties.

But whether we are going to submit our lives to his leadership and his plans and his agenda and his kingship? That's a very different question. Pontius Pilate is being challenged to wrestle with that right to the core of his being. And so we come to the second question as Pilate is still wrestling with this, and he knows that Jesus has just stuck his finger in his chest, and he goes, "Well, I'm not a Jew.

I don't have to I don't have to deal with you and your lordship and your kingship. What are you talking about making this personal to me? I'm not a Jew, am I? No, it's your nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?" And now he's trying to throw Jesus back underneath him again and say, "Clearly, you have done something wrong here." And Jesus answers him taking back the transcendence.

Jesus says, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here." We also had the passage from Daniel read today. Daniel was beloved stories from Sunday school. Remember Daniel and the Lions Den and Shadrach Mischeck and Abednego, who were the three friends who were thrown into the fiery furnace?

Well, why was Daniel thrown into the lion's den? Why were Shadrach Mischeck and Abednego thrown into the fiery furnace? And the answer is, is because the kings at that time thought of themselves not merely as governors and rulers and appointed kings and authorities, but they actually in their narcissistic way of thinking about themselves and their egos and in their vainglorious ideas of themselves actually began to see themselves as little gods on earth.

And so what Daniel refused to do, actually, was offer a prayer to the Caesar, to the emperor of that time. And that's what got him thrown into the lion's den as he wouldn't worship the king. And then Shadrach, Mishak, and Appendigo were challenged to bend the knee and bow down before a statue of Nebuchadnezzar as if he was God, and they refused to do it.

Why? Because Daniel and Shadrach and Mishak and Abednego all knew that the kingdoms of this world were not the ultimate authority, that God's kingdom transcended all other kingdoms, and that their

loyalties and allegiance and their worship was due to God alone, and that they would be willing to be thrown to lions or be burned at the stake in order to avoid bending the knee to a false worship or to a false god, and especially to a human being who was setting themselves up to be worshipped as a god.

One of the paradoxes of that kind of vainglorious leadership when you see that happening in any human ruler, that when you start to think more highly of yourself than you ought as a ruler, and this goes for political rulers or leaders of corporations, even pastors of churches, that the more that we exalt ourselves to a godlike position, the paradox is, is the more we actually debase ourselves and become more animalistic and beast-like.

In other words, the way that the Scriptures describe it is we become monsters. I mean, just think in your own mind of the most vainglorious leaders of our time and what monsters they were. You know The Adolf Hitler's and the mouths and so on. We have some of our day, don't we? Who in their exaltation of themselves become beast-like in their arrogance?

And this is the vision that is given to Daniel that here he is in the midst of having to interact with one of these beasts and the Lord says, "I'm still in charge." And he gives Daniel this vision of God the Father sitting on the throne. He's called the Ancient of Days, and he's got this white hair and he's glorious, and there's 1,000 times 10,000 attending him.

And as he's seeing the Lord in this vision, there the beast is brought before the Lord, and He is judged. See, here is a reenactment of this with Pilate and Jesus. Pilate is becoming a beast. He's a monster. Here he is talking to the King of kings and the Lord of lords and acting like he's all that.

And the Lord is putting Him in His place. Daniel would, in his vision, see one like a Son of Man come on the clouds of heaven and take the throne of the right hand of the ancient of days, and over to Him all dominion and power, authority, and thrones would be given that every tribe, every language, every people would bend the knee to Him and confess that He is Lord.

This was all written before the coming of Jesus Christ, but this is the plain teaching of Scripture, and especially in our New Covenant, New Testament, that Jesus did not come to lord it over people like the Gentiles do, but He came to give His life as a ransom for many, so that through His death and resurrection and ascension to the heavenly realms, He might bring all evil empires and powers and authorities and thrones under His command and His submission in order to liberate the people of this world to be spiritually free, able to worship the one true God and the One True King.

And this is the last question is the call of the kingdom where Jesus is inviting Pilate to respond. And Pilate's starting to get the idea, "So you are a king," he says. And Jesus answers, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world to testify to the truth.

Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." I love the ministry of Bill Bright, who started Campus Crusade for Christ. He led millions and millions of people to the Lord with very simple illustrations of the gospel. And one of his favorite ways of sharing the gospel was simply to say, "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life." And just to see how people would respond to that statement.

And if they said, "I know that," or, "I believe that," or they might say, "Really? God loves me and has a plan for my life?" Well, that would lead to an opening to talk about the Lord. And so it's a great opener. But one of his tools was a little pamphlet that was called The Carnal Christian. And it had a couple of circles in the pamphlet, both of them with a chair drawn inside the circle.

And the idea is, is that the chair in the circle, the circle represents your life, the sphere of your life. And the chair represents the throne of your heart. And so in one of the circles, on the chair is an S, and outside the chair is a little cross, inside the circle, yet outside the throne. And on the other circle, the cross is on the throne and self is dethroned.

And so what Bill Bright would say is some people who claim the name of Jesus Christ are really living with an acknowledgement of Jesus. They say, "Yeah, Jesus, you're part of my life. You're important to me." In other words, you're inside my circle, but you're not yet ruling my life. I'm not letting you be in charge. I still want to keep myself in charge of everything.

And Jesus, I'm happy to have you along for the ride, but you're not in charge. That's trying to live the Christian life out of a fleshly, carnal way, a worldly kind of way. Now, some have argued that's not even being Christian. There's an argument to be made for that. But on the other side is a person who has said, "You know what?"

I'm going to dethrone myself. Lord, I give you the throne of my heart. I want your cross to be on my throne. And I give you my heart today, Lord." And so Bill Bright would say, "Which circle best represents your life?" And that's a question for us today. Which one of those represents your life? And I think for most of us, it's actually a little more complex than that.

So another way to think about it is we all have this interior life with a lot of different rooms and compartments to it. And we might have our church life where Jesus is definitely on the throne, but then we've got our work life over here, which is another room and another building, and we haven't quite invited him into that yet.

And then we might have our marriage life or our parenting life or our financial life or the life that we live down at the club on the golf course or whatever it is. But we compartmentalize things and we say, "Jesus, you can be in charge of this part of my life, but would you please stay out of this room over here?" Because there's a lot of stuff in there that I'm a little bit afraid that if you started messing with it, you'd mess some things up.

I think that's actually more the case for a lot of us is that we've compartmentalized. I had a parishioner at one of my other churches that said, "I've got my Christian life that I live at church, and then I've got my business life, and I try to keep these things separate." But what Jesus is claiming is that He wants to be Lord over all your life, every room.

And so the call today from the Lord is in His response to Pilate, "Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." And so the invitation of the Lord is to open up the doors of your heart in all the different chambers and rooms and places and see what the Lord would say about these things.

Let His voice come in, invite him into the room, and say, "Lord, You're the King." Well, maybe I've kept this compartmentalized or I've kept you off the throne of this piece of my life. I invite you to come in right now, and I want to hear you speak into this. I want to listen to your voice. I want to let the busyness, the other voices, the culture, whatever it is, I want those minimized, and I want to hear your voice.

I love the I'll end here with the Book of Revelation, the passage that talks about benediction, to Him who loves us and freed us from our sins. To Him be the glory. Let's make that a question. Are we listening? Are we listening to Him who loved us? Are we listening to Him who freed us from our sins by His blood?

Are we listening to Him who made us to be a kingdom of priests serving His God and Father? Are we listening to Him that is all the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.