

## **Sermon Reading: Luke 23:35-43**

<sup>35</sup> *The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is God’s Messiah, 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 Messiah? 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, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”*

## **Sermon Theme: Here is Your King**

What comes to mind when you hear the word “king”? I asked the students in our school and preschool that question. After some encouragement from Miss Carter the preschoolers say things like a crown, a purple robe, and riding a horse. When I posed the question to the other students in grade school I hear much of the same. Again there was talk about a crown and fancy clothes. There was mention of a castle; a place where the king lives and rules a nation. They also speak to the type of person a king is. A king is supposed to be brave while he leads at the head of the pack.

What comes to mind when you hear the word “king”? You understand that a king is supposed to look like one. We know a king will do certain things. Whether riding on the horse or sitting on a throne in his castle, the king rules and leads looking royal and kingly.

That’s not how we see Jesus in Luke 23. He doesn’t look like much of a king when he is nailed to the cross to die. To die on a cross as Jesus does is a horrible, painful way to die. The Romans reserved it for those who we might call “the scum of the earth.” To be executed by the state was one thing; to be executed by crucifixion was much worse. It was horrifying and humiliating meant to dehumanize an individual, strip them of any honor or pride, and make them an object of ridicule. It turned a person into thing. So should we be that surprised with how the people are treating Jesus?

For the person in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus, what were they supposed to think as they saw Jesus hanging there between seriously bad criminals? What could they do? Would it matter? So the people just stand by, watching.

Surprising? The greatest threat to the Christian church and your faith is not always the attacks from the world around us; it's the apathy and seemingly not-caring attitude that eats from within. Too easily do we stand and watch a family member or friend not live as God wants while we say or do nothing because we don't think it's our place. Too often we see our own sin as not being that bad because everyone struggles with something. Apathy isn't just not doing something. It can be just going through motions with your heart not in it. You go to church because that's what you are supposed to do, but if you get out of the habit it's not that big of a deal. Apathy is a lack of concern. With reasons loaded and ready to go, it's standing and watching not seeing the need for that king Jesus.

The leaders of the people are having the time of their lives. They hate Jesus. They wanted Jesus dead for quite some time. And now they get to watch it all happen. Who doesn't love it when a plan comes together? Of course they would rub some of that proverbial salt in the wound and relish in their supposed moment of victory. For them, Jesus wasn't the King they wanted.

What kind of king do you want Jesus to be? Some want Jesus to be Savior of America and democracy. Others want Jesus to be Savior of the American dream and hard workers. Some want Jesus to be their relationship guru and life coach. Others see Jesus the good teacher who teaches me right from wrong with good moral values. Or Jesus is the good friend who doesn't tell you "no" for any decisions you made for your life. But God's chosen one? Like those rulers we are quick to question how good of a king Jesus is, especially when he isn't doing what we want or expect. We might say or think: "If he is really God's chosen one, then why did he let that happen to my friend? Why doesn't he take that pain away from my loved one? If he's God's chosen one, then why isn't my life better?"

Those soldiers act as soldiers did. Here's a guy who claims to be a king but is not very kingly. So they make fun of him as they pretend to be his servants serving him the sour wine, probably laughing all the way.

We say Jesus is king, but then is your service to him a mockery? Maybe there's a great divide in your life: the person you are in church is far different from your life Sunday afternoon through the rest of the week. Too often we say we love God with all our hearts, but then do what we want to do even when we know it's wrong. Too easily we say we want to serve those other people in our lives, but then turn around treat them as objects to make ourselves feel better about who we are. You may know the right words to say and even the right actions to do to convince others, but your heart shows what you think of Jesus as King.

At least the first criminal on the cross is honest when making fun of Jesus. He doesn't think Jesus could actually do anything for him. But, "If you can really save yourself, make sure you save me to."

Like that criminal we want Jesus to be King only when it's convenient for me. When life isn't too busy and there aren't other plans, then I'll think about making it to church. When my finances are better in order, then I will give something into the offering plate. When God answers the prayers the way I think he should, then I will better serve him.

Can we really be all that surprised with how the people treat Jesus when our daily lives seem to show the same? Understand me correctly, I am not excusing their actions. They are as much without excuse as you and I are. Their problem at the foot of the cross is our problem: we fail to see that Jesus is our King. He doesn't always fit into what we want, expect, or even demand from God. And so, by our lives and actions, we are saying we either do not want or do not need Jesus. And if that is the case, we are stepping right into the devil's trap. Getting you to fall into sin is peanuts to the devil. His greatest desire and achievement is keeping our eyes, ears, and hearts away from Jesus and convincing you that you do not need him. At times we may be too blind to see it or deaf to hear, the devil knows that without Jesus, you have no hope.

When the other criminal on the cross looks at Jesus, he sees something different. He puts the other criminal in his place, "**Don't you fear God,**" he said, "**since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong**" (v.40-41). He knows what he did wrong; he readily admits it. He knows that this punishment fits his crimes. Feeling the weight of the law of the land pushing down on him and the thought of standing in front of the Judge of all, this man is hopeless on his own. So he turns to the only hope there is. He says to Jesus, "**Remember me when you come into your kingdom.**" Forgive me. Have mercy on me a sinner. Do not turn your back on me and forget, but remember me, Jesus."

With eyes of faith the criminal see it and by the Spirit working in our hearts we know it: on this cross is our King. While the people are standing, watching, Jesus continues to battle the devil and sin. How easily Jesus could have come down from the cross. No one forced to him to go there. No one forced him to stay there. Did they really think that three spikes could contain the Almighty God!? But, Jesus—God's Chosen One—did not come into this world to rule an earthly nation, be a good teacher, or even miracle-performer. He came to die. It was not weakness that kept Jesus on that cross. It was the power of his love for selfish, blind sinners that kept Jesus there. Saving himself never was Jesus' plan. His plan is to save you. He knew we were lost on our own. No amount of good actions could outweigh all of the bad. No amount of kind words could erase the

hurtful ones. We were on the fast track headed to eternity in hell, so your King Jesus bravely faces death and hell for you. And he knows what the outcome will be when he breathes his last and dies, so he tells that criminal: **“Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”**

When Jesus looks at the criminal on the cross. He doesn't see the thief and robber. He doesn't see the sinner. He sees someone for whom he was dying and saving. He sees someone who will be with him in paradise—his kingdom and heavenly home—forever.

Your King came for people just like him: sinners. The screw-ups, the outsider, the one who has no chance. He came for the stuck in sin and struggling, the prideful, selfish, and those with messed-up priorities. He came for sinners like you. He came for sinners like me. And he says to you, “That's not how I see you. I took your place. I already paid the price for all your wrongs. I suffered and I died so that you might live with me. I give you my perfection and that's all I see. Today your sins are forgiven. Today you live without guilt in life or fear of death. Today you live in my love. Today heaven is yours. I am your king who did not just die for you. I rose again three days later on Easter morning. I live so that you might live forever in my kingdom with me.”

And because your King loves you, Jesus works to make this your own. He gives you his Word, the Bible, through which God creates saving faith that believes and trusts God's promises. Through that same Word Jesus speaks to you and assures you that nothing can separate you from his love. Jesus gives you baptism where you become part of God's family, all the wrongs you have or would commit are washed away, and God promises he will not count them against you. Jesus gives you his own body and blood in the Lord's Supper to remind you time and again, “Your sins, all your wrongs, you are forgiven.”

This King Jesus wants you as part of his kingdom. That's why we have this church. This is why we have this school. It's not just to offer a place to go to on Sunday morning. It's not only to give your children a good education and prepare them for the next stage in life. We are preparing them for eternal life. And this school is doing its job. The most common answer for what came to mind with the word “king” was Jesus. Through God's Word these students know and believe Jesus is their King who has died and rose again to give them a home in heaven. But we aren't done! We continue to teach and be in the Word because, as you know, life is hard. We are tempted daily and sin much. But Jesus does not give up on you. He continues to go after you, to pick you up when you have fallen, to assure you again that his love is not going to run out. Here is your King who is coming again to bring you to his kingdom where he shall reign forever and ever. Amen.