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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

**“WHAT KIND OF KING?”**

**John 18:33-37**

☑ Today is Christ the King Sunday. Our purpose this morning is to celebrate the lordship of God the Son and surrender ourselves more completely to his reign.

❓ But what does this mean? Let’s face it, this idea is a bit abstract. For most of us, kings and queens are confined to dusty history books and fanciful fairy tales. They have no place in our lives.

Granted, a few royal families still exist, but largely within the constraints of constitutional monarchy. For example, *His Majesty Carl XVI Gustaf, King of Sweden* is esteemed as the head of state, yet he has no power to govern.

{Rev 19:16} Surely, his position is not analogous to that of Jesus, who is **“King of kings and Lord of lords”!**

❓ What does it mean that Christ is our King? What constitutes surrender to his reign?

⚡ To answer this, we need to know what kind of king he is.

☐ Please turn with me to John 18:33-37.

■ In verse 33 Pontius Pilate, the Roman Procurator over Judea, asks Jesus, **“Are you the king of the Jews?”**

☆ **“Are you the king?”** Where are your regal robes?

A first century sovereign wears splendid purple robes at pompous ceremonies. For regular business he dresses in elegant garments of the highest quality.

Jesus’ clothing is unremarkable. He is clad in a basic outer robe, a simple under-tunic, and a leather belt of average quality. His sandals show a lot of wear.

☆ **“Are you the king?”** Where is your jewel-encrusted crown?

No monarch wears their diadem 24/7. However, they do own one, if not several, which they wear for certain state ceremonies.

{Jn 19:2} In a few minutes Jesus will wear a crown for the first – and last – time during his Incarnation. **“A crown of thorns”** will be jammed down onto his bruised and bleeding head.

☆ **“Are you the king?”** Where are your grand titles?

Queen Elizabeth II has dozens. Her most important one is: “Elizabeth the Second, by the Grace of God, of Great Britain, Ireland, and the British Dominions beyond the Seas Queen, Defender of the Faith.”

{Jn 12:13} Most people address Jesus as *Rabbi*. He is called *Master* and *Lord* by his followers, but so is every other rabbi.

☆ **“Are you the king?”** Where is your splendid palace?

Emperor Tiberius resides in a vast edifice on the Isle of Capri. Herod Antipas is only a client king, yet even he dwells in extravagant luxury.

{Mt 8:20} Jesus is homeless. For three years he has slept on floors, beneath sheltering trees, and under the stars. **“Foxes have holes and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”**

☆ **“Are you the king?”** Where is your opulent treasure?

There are no statutory limits on how much money an ancient king can wring from his subjects. Many amass mind-boggling fortunes in gold, silver, gems, and real estate, all tax-free, of course.

{Lk 8:2-3} Jesus has no material treasure of his own. He and his disciples are financially dependent on Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna, who **“support them out of their own means.”**

☆ **“Are you the king?”** Where are your noble courtiers?

Royals generally surround themselves with aristocrats and other members of the socio-economic elite. A commoner *might* win a place in the circle, if they are exceptionally beautiful or charming.

{Lk 7:34} Jesus seeks out all kinds of friends. His “court” includes a few rich people, but it consists mostly of fishermen, day laborers, beggars, **“tax collectors and sinners.”**

☆ **“Are you the king?”** Where are your obsequious slaves?

Some first century sovereigns own vast numbers of slaves. Most utilize prisoners as *de facto* slaves. Many compel their subjects to labor on public works with little or no compensation.

{Jn 13:1-11} Jesus invites his followers into service, but he keeps no slaves. Last night, he got down on his knees and did the menial work of a servant by washing his disciples’ feet.

☆ **“Are you the king?”** Where are your ruthless soldiers?

No ancient king will keep his throne – or, for that matter, his head – without an army. He needs troops to repel invaders, repress insurgents, and foil assassins.

{Mt 26:52} Jesus has no army. He teaches non-violence. When Peter tried to protect him in Gethsemane, Jesus commanded: **“Put your sword back in its place, for all who draw the sword will die by the sword.”**

**“Are you the king of the Jews?”** If Pilate sounds doubtful rather than inquisitive, it is because Jesus does not resemble an earthly monarch in any way, shape, or form. He completely lacks the royal accessories.

❓ What does it mean that Christ is our King? What constitutes surrender to his reign?

✎ To answer this, we need to know what kind of kingdom he is building.

■ In verse 36 Jesus says, ***“My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.”***

**“My kingdom is not of this world .... my kingdom is from another place.”**

Consider these strange incidents.

{Jn 6:1-13} Incident A) A huge crowd has gathered around Jesus by the Sea of Galilee. It is late in the day, and the people are hungry. The Lord feeds 5,000 men, and thousands more women and children, with nothing but five small barley loaves and two small fish.

{Jn 6:14} Having witnessed this miraculous sign, the people start talking amongst themselves. **“Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.”**

The Lord fails to capitalize on the recognition. John 6:15: **“knowing that they [intend] to ... make him king by force,”** that they plan to make Herod vacate the throne and install him on it, he withdraws to a mountain by himself.

{Mk 10:35-45} Incident B) James and John ask the Lord to promise that he will seat them to the immediate right and left of his throne when he comes in glory. (These will be the places of highest honor.)

Instead Jesus says, the **“rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise**

**authority over them. Not so with you. ...whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all”** (Mark 10:42-44).

**“My kingdom is not of this world .... my kingdom is from another place.”**

Consider Messiah’s radical teachings.

{Lk 18:24-25} **“How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for the rich to enter the kingdom of God.”**

{Mk 10:15; Mt 18:4} **“Anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” “Whoever takes a humble place – becoming like this child – is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”**

{Mt 20:1-16} Then there’s this parable. A landowner needs a crew to pick in his vineyard, so at 6 a.m. he hires some day laborers. Three hours later he hires more. It’s such a bumper crop that at noon he hires additional workers. At 3 in the afternoon he does the same thing again. He expands his crew one last time at 5 p.m.

At the end of the day he pays each of them the same exact wage. The men who picked for twelve hours get a denarius – as do those who labored a single hour. That is what **“the kingdom of heaven is like”** (Matthew 20:1).

‽ What does it mean that Christ is our King? What constitutes surrender to his reign?

The texts I have quoted raise as many questions as they answer. But allow me to share a few observations.

‡ First, the Kingdom of God is distinctive.

★ It is fundamentally unlike any other nation. Hence, we must not draw conclusions about God's kingdom from our experiences of earthly states. Likewise, we must not equate it with any earthly country, including our own.

‡ Second, the Kingdom of God is countercultural.

★ Here, glory is obtained by humble service, not self-assertion. Wealth is measured by what we give, not what we get. Power is sourced in weakness for love, not in strength for control. Life is found in dying with Christ, not in protecting oneself.

‡ Third, Kingdom citizenship is manifested in obedient love as a fruit of conformity to Christ.

{Mt 7:21} A verbal declaration of allegiance is not enough. **“Not everyone who says to [Jesus], ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom, but only those who do the will of [his] Father.”**

★ {Jn 14:23} Doing his will is a matter not of legalistic effort, but of *αγαπη* [agapē] love. Jesus says, **“Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching.”**

★ {Php 2:13} Though consistent obedience is beyond us, it is not beyond Christ in us. **“For it is God who works in [us] to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.”**

This is the kind of king Christ Jesus is.

This is the kind of kingdom he is building.

May we, by his grace, celebrate his lordship and surrender more completely to his reign.