

# Sermon Text for November 21, 2021

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## *II Samuel 23:1-7, John 18:33-37* *“Jesus the King”*

On Monday I showed up at the Lancaster court house reporting for jury duty. I had done it once before and I was sent home well before noon, it was an insurance fraud case. This case was a criminal case and the person was charged with the most heinous of crimes, if you think of a terrible crime you can multiply it by three powers and this was the crime that he was accused of, it was terrible. During the jury selection the judge asked if there was anyone who would not be able to convict or exonerate someone based upon their religious or other beliefs.

There were three Mennonite women who were with us as part of the people who were being selected to be on the jury. They all stood and one of them spoke for the three of them and she stated while we so appreciate all that the state provides and we live in a belief that there is a separation between church and state. Our responsibility is to provide grace and redemption and while that of the state is to provide judgment and punishment. Those two cannot be reconciled in us, we would not be able to cast a guilty plea if it came down to it. It was so well stated and so simply put that I wanted to stand up as well, even though I saw a connect between church and state. Neither these three Mennonite women nor I were selected to be on the jury, thanks be to God.

When the pilgrims left Holland departed from England to come to what they called the New World they came to settle here in order to establish a kingdom where they did not have to live under the threat of the temporal power, of the king who was responsible over them in their old world. They literally understood America as their chance to leave the world which they knew, and enter into a new world where they could worship their king freely. As a result that first thanksgiving they were able to give thanks for this new world. Now, we know that as a disciple of the King of the Kings we are called to live into his commandments of loving God and loving your neighbor. They obviously did not consider those already living here as their neighbor after that first Thanksgiving.

Both of these examples provide us with the phrase of being in the world but not of it as Jesus prays that we would be in John 17. When we say that Jesus is King as we do today, what do we mean and specifically what impact does our King have on our institutions and our way of live today? As we read our second Scripture this morning we see that Jesus came as King in

order to speak the truth to any that would hear. His followers would listen, both when he was on earth and today as well, and will obey his truth.

But what is that truth that we are called to follow which allows us to follow a King with our eyes on heaven but our feet and our hands on the ground. You should know it by now, the truth that Jesus proclaims and upon which his kingdom is built is that we are called to love God and to love our neighbor. Let's learn how to worship the King and how to live according to his commandments.

## **READ**

In Jesus' day we know that the Jewish people were expecting a King to come and to bring about a moral, political, and religious victory over their current occupiers, the Romans. We don't understand that because we have not lived in a time or in a place where we as citizens are not controlling our own destiny through the exercise of political freedoms. It is impossible for us to imagine what it was like to be a Jewish citizen of Rome and not have the same freedoms as everyone else. So, they were looking forward to the day when their King would come, and he would not just be a spiritual king, but a real flesh and blood king who would bring out a victory that was complete, that affected every single aspect of their life.

In short, they were expecting someone like King David to come back and lead them to victory. Our first Scripture reading was King David's last words to his people. He reminisced how God had blessed him tremendously, how God had blessed his political reign. He looked back over his reign and was able to say with conviction that God had placed him in political power to rule and his people had fought for him and in that combination God had blessed him and the land. David was the head of what we would call a Theocracy, the king was establishing God's rule and he was God's anointed for this earth and for the earth to come.

You do know that we do not live in a theocracy. We do not believe that God has chosen our current President, or any President for that matter, to establish his political kingdom like the days of Israel so that we would be governed solely by a King who called all the shots based upon what they understood God to tell Him. We have chosen to have a democracy where by election our President has been chosen and that President has checks and balances. I like our system better especially in a pluralistic culture in which we live, but that's just me. But that is what the Jesus' people wanted and expected God to come through with someone who would instill this system soon and very soon.

Jesus, though, brought something very different. He never doubted or cast into question that Caesar was King. From when he told the religious leaders when they questioned him to

render unto Caesar that which is Caesars to today when Pilate asks him the accusatory question of what he was charged with: Are you a King? Every Gospel has the first words of the dialogue between Pilate and Jesus this question, and really it is an accusation and a charge brought against Jesus. Jesus, though, understood that there was a difference between the king that Pilate and his people were expecting, a political king, and the King that he truly was, a Messiah that brought about a kingdom based upon God's commandments that did not require an army or followers to fight for him.

When Jesus is asked that question, are you a king, he deflects at first but then he answers and says that his kingdom is not of this world. So yes, I am a king, at least that is what you say that I am. If you look at John 17 he prays to his Father and says that his disciples to not belong, the key word here is belong, to the world. They are in the world, but they do not belong to it. That's us by the way. He tells his disciples when he is arrested that if he wanted he could call down a legion of angels in Matthew 26:53 if he wanted. He says the same to Pilate, if I had any interest in setting up a kingdom here on this world, if that were my primary emphasis, then my disciples, my followers starting with Simon the zealot, would be fighting for me. But they're not, because that is not my interest.

You can see Jesus explain that to Pilate in vs.36 of our second reading. He is explaining to him that he is a king, but not the type of king that Pilate thinks of, it is a different type of king. In fact, his kingdom is defined by what he explains then in vs.37 that he came, he was born, in order to speak the truth. This isn't the first time nor the only time that we have Jesus allude to his close affinity to the truth and how the truth is the defining feature of his ministry. In John 14:6 he lays down the basic principle that he himself is the way, the truth and the life, and that no one comes to the Father, no one is able to ascend to the kingdom of God, except through him. We do not all worship the same God if we do not understand Jesus to be the truth and the only way to heaven.

And then we have my favorite verse in all of Scripture in John 8:32 where Jesus proclaims to his followers that they would know the truth and the truth would set them free. This freedom is what we all aspire to receive and achieve. A freedom both in heaven and on earth that is based upon a following of Jesus Christ as King. That is what we are after, and Jesus says that is why he came. To speak to this truth. The pursuit of this truth in Jesus only helps to emphasize that fact that our kingdom that we are pursuing is not on this earth, but rather in heaven.

Listen to what Paul says in Philippians 3:20. Do not set your minds on earthly things for you are citizens of heaven. Jesus the Savior, whom we expect and wait for, has to be proclaimed. There is no other way, there is no other King. This has to be where we start.

On Wednesday I was struggling with our verses because I could not come to terms with Jesus' kingdom in heaven and our earthly responsibilities that we read about in Matthew 25. If our citizenship is in heaven, then does it matter what happens here on earth. What about the Lord's prayer and thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven? Then I realized that there is no contradiction when we understand the truth of Jesus' commandment. Our task is to love God, our eyes are on heaven, and to love our neighbor, while our eyes are in heaven our feet and our hand are firmly planted here on the earth ensuring that we follow all of God's commandments.

We find ourselves in a place where we are called to prioritize loving God and loving our neighbor. While our kingdom is not of this world, our kingdom does have a tremendous impact on what you do in this world and how this world is shaped. Our goal as Christians is not amass political power so that a theocracy the like of which haven't been seen since the days of David are established, but rather our goal is to love God so that our neighbors feel the effect of that love in unmitigated grace and redemption.

As we find ourselves making our way through this Scripture we see the dynamic change from Jesus being on trial, to almost Pilate being on trial. Jesus makes Pilate relax because he recognizes that the kingdom that Jesus is talking about is not a threat at all to the political power of either Pilate or Caesar. But this conversation begins to be a bit uncomfortable for him because he is forced to answer the question, does he know the truth that Jesus' kingdom is centered on?

Jesus tells Pilate we are no fighting against you. We don't look for power in this world, but we look for people loving each other and loving God. Those who do are his followers, and they make up his kingdom. Pilate realizes that he is not a part of that kingdom. Today, that question is posed to us. For those who see an overlap between political quest for power with the religious quest of power it is impossible to pursue the truth over which Jesus is King, that we are to love God and love our neighbor.

While we love God and while we love our neighbor it will have a tremendous impact on the political structures of this day, as Jesus' influence had a tremendous impact, but he never wanted to be Caesar. That was never his desire to be that kind of a King. The same is true for us today. I think Pilate figured it out at the end. In John 19:19 when Jesus is crucified what did he hang over Jesus' head on the cross. This is the king of the Jews, the type of king that leads us to

redemption and grace, which is so very different from the type of king that others, and maybe even some of us, might be seeking today. Amen.