

# ***King***

Luke 23:35 ~ 43

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NOVEMBER 24, 2019

*"Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."*

On the Hill of Calvary, "The soldiers also came up and mocked Jesus. They offered him wine vinegar and said, 'If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.' "There was a notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS. "One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: '*Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!*'"

That is the question that needs answering this morning on the Feast of Christ the King. *If* Jesus is the Son of God, why *didn't* he save himself? And if Jesus is the Son of God, why did only a very few people recognize him? And finally, if Jesus is the Son of God, why do so few people recognize him as their King today?

We will look for the answer to these questions through the eyes of two witnesses ~ the two thieves crucified on either side of Jesus. One of them did not recognize Jesus as King. The other did. What did the second thief see in Jesus that made him recognize the King of Glory on that cross?

In the first place, one thief saw a King who was sent by God for a special mission. "One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: '*Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!*' "But the other criminal rebuked him. '*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.*'

“Then he said, *‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’*” Jesus was a King who was recognized only by those who had faith in him. God deliberately hid His identity in Jesus Christ so that only those who live by faith rather than by sight would recognize him as King. In the last days of Jesus’ life, he knowingly, willingly sacrificed himself to save others. He absorbed the penalty of death in his own body so that we could live. What kind of king would give up his own life for his subjects? A King who was sent by God for a special mission. A King who was to lay down his life for the world.

In other words, the second thief saw a King whose agenda was motivated by mercy and love.

Jesus was playing the game of thrones too, but he was fighting for a heavenly kingdom. His opponent was Satan, which was why he could look into the faces of the brutal soldiers and the mocking bystanders and pray, *“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”* And Jesus’ motto wasn’t “win or die.” It was “die and win.” Take on the burden of our sins and die in our place, as our perfect sacrifice, to free us from our enemy Satan and save us from the penalty of death forever. The second thief saw a King whose agenda was motivated not by dominance but by mercy and love.

And finally, the second thief saw a King whose sacrifice was necessary for our salvation. The first thief wanted to be saved from his situation. But he didn’t want to be saved from his sin.

His cry was simply, *“Get me down off this cross. Be the Christ of convenience, the Messiah of magic tricks.”* That was the desire of his heart. He didn’t want to be redeemed, just rescued.

And that’s us, isn’t it? *“If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from the temple.” If you’re the Son of God, save my marriage. Heal my child. Take away my pain. Just*

get me down off this cross. Then I'll believe in you. Then I'll call you Lord.

But the second thief looked at Jesus' sacrifice, and he recognized the character, the mercy, the plan of God. He looked at Jesus, beaten and bloody and insulted and spit upon, and he saw a God who loved the world so much that He came to walk in our shoes and share our sorrows and die the most painful and humiliating death imaginable so that we could live forever with God.

Steven Cole tells the true story of a mother whose daughter ran away and fell into a life of sin. For a long time, no one even knew where she was. But eventually that daughter returned home and repented of her sin and gave her life to Jesus.

Someone asked the mother what she had done to bring her daughter back. She said, "I prayed for her night and day." But that was not all. She also said, "I never went to bed at night without leaving my front door unlocked. I thought that if my daughter came back some night when I was in bed, she should never be able to say that she found the door locked. She should never be able to say that she came to her mother's home, but couldn't get in." And so it happened. One night the daughter came back, tried the door, and found it open. This unlocked door was such a symbol of God's grace to the young woman that she decided that night to turn her life around.

That unlocked door is a wonderful illustration of God's grace toward sinners. God's door is always unlocked whenever we are willing to come home.