
That's My King

John 18:28-37

A Sermon preached in Duke University Chapel on November 25, 2018 by the Rev. Bruce Puckett

Nineteen years ago this coming April, a prominent pastor from San Diego, CA, Rev. Dr. S.M. Lockridge moved on to meet Jesus his King face to face in glory. Rev. Lockridge was a pastor for 40 years at Calvary Baptist Church. In addition to being a trusted pastor, he was a civil rights leader in his city and a renowned preacher, who traveled around the United States and the world, proclaiming the good news of Jesus through preaching, lecturing, and public speaking. Rev. Lockridge was known for his soaring sermons that motivated and inspired and compelled people to follow Jesus. If you've heard of S.M. Lockridge, it might be because you, like me, have heard a portion of a sermon he preached in 1976 in Detroit, Michigan often called, "That's My King" because of its repeated refrain of the same. It is a truly inspiring invitation to recognize Jesus as King. Let me share just a bit of it with you. Lockridge says:

"The Bible says...[Jesus is] the King of the Jews... He's the King of Israel... He's the King of righteousness. He's the King of the ages. He's the King of Heaven. He's the King of glory. He's the King of kings and He is the Lord of lords. Now that's my King.

Well, I wonder if you know Him. Do you know Him?... David said the Heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows His handiwork. My King is the only one of whom there are no means of measure that can define His limitless love. No far seeing telescope can bring into visibility the coastline of the shore of His supplies. No barriers can hinder Him from pouring out His (limitless) blessing.

He's enduringly strong. He's entirely sincere. He's eternally steadfast. He's immortally graceful. He's imperially powerful. He's impartially merciful. That's my King. He's God's Son. He's the sinner's savior. He's the centerpiece of civilization. He stands alone in Himself. He's honest. He's unique. He's unparalleled. He's unprecedented. He's supreme. He's pre-eminent. He's the grandest idea in literature. He's the highest personality in philosophy. He's the supreme problem in higher criticism. He's the fundamental doctrine of historic theology. He's the carnal necessity of spiritual religion. That's my King.

He's the miracle of the age. He's the superlative of everything good that you choose to call Him. He's the only one able to supply all our needs simultaneously. He supplies strength for the weak. He's available for the tempted and the tried. He sympathizes and He saves. He's the Almighty God who guides and keeps all his people. He heals the sick. He cleanses the lepers. He forgives sinners. He discharged debtors. He delivers the captives. He defends the feeble. He blesses the young. He serves the unfortunate. He regards the aged. He rewards the diligent and He beautifies the meek. That's my King.

Do you know Him? Well, my King is a King of knowledge. He's the wellspring of wisdom. He's the doorway of deliverance. He's the pathway of peace. He's the roadway of righteousness. He's the highway of holiness. He's the gateway of glory. He's the master of the mighty. He's the captain of the conquerors. He's the head of the heroes. He's the leader of the legislatures. He's the overseer of the overcomers. He's the governor of governors. He's the prince of princes. He's the King of kings and He's the Lord of lords. That's my King...."¹

He goes on to say, "I wish I could describe him!" Yes. And Amen. Rev. Lockridge's words reverberate and ring out about who Jesus is as the King of kings and Lord of lords. These words resonate deeply with the proclamation of Psalm 93: "The Lord is king, he is robed in majesty; the Lord is robed, he

¹ Transcript of portion of sermon posted at <https://97bravo.livejournal.com/18946.html> (Accessed November 24, 2018).

is girded with strength. He has established the world; it shall never be moved.” That’s my king! Do you know him? And Rev. Lockridge also proclaims the truth of Revelation 1, “Grace to you... from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.” That’s my king! Well, do you know him?

These great and glorious images, declarations, and truths of Christ as King are the very things we celebrate and remember today on this Christ the King Sunday. We’ve sung together this morning, “Rejoice the Lord is King, your Lord and King adore; mortals, give thanks, and sing, and triumph evermore;” and “His kingdom cannot fail, he rules o’er earth and heav’n, the keys of death and hell are to our Jesus giv’n.” And praise God for these truths. We see Jesus in his majesty and glory, and we recognize him as the transcendent King whose reign and rule has broken into our world and will reach its fulfillment when Christ returns in all his triumphant glory.

Even as we watch and wait for the King of the world, the King of our hearts, the King of kings and the Lord of lords to return, Jesus calls for our allegiance to him and his kingdom even now. And allegiance to this king and his kingdom requires recognizing him for all of who he is; our participation in the in-breaking kingdom of God requires us to recognize Jesus, the one who is our king. Yet, if we only can hear the glorious descriptions of Jesus as king, we just might miss our king when he comes in our midst. On this final Sunday of the church year, as we anticipate moving into a season of waiting on the Lord’s coming, we must look to see what it fully means for Jesus to be king. So we turn to the gospel lesson this morning, as John invites us to see Jesus and his kingdom more clearly and fully, so that we might live as citizens of Christ’s kingdom more faithfully.

The 18th Chapter of John may seem like a strange place to go for learning how to see Christ as the king he is. Of course, the book of John is all about seeing rightly. Jesus in John’s Gospel is always inviting people to come and see, and through seeing to believe him as the way, the truth, and the life. But compared to the other Gospels, John doesn’t use the language of king or kingdom frequently at all. The vast majority of the kingship language in John is in this setting. And the setting is a strange one for a king. The scene is Pilate’s interrogation of Jesus as a criminal that eventually leads to Jesus’ crucifixion. Let’s look closely to see if we can recognize our king.

Leading up to the passage we read earlier, Jesus was with his disciples teaching them through word and deed, and praying for them. After Jesus prayed a lengthy prayer for his disciples and those who would come after them, Judas showed up with a detachment of soldiers. Judas had recognized already that Jesus was not his king. Perhaps he expected Jesus to be a different kind of king—perhaps the kind that would overthrow the powerful of the world around him with power rather than the kind who would take off his robe, wrap a towel around himself, and wash the feet of his disciples. Perhaps he expected Jesus to be the kind of king that would destroy the oppression of his people by any means necessary in the present time—even if it meant using the same tactics as the oppressors. Whatever it was precisely, Judas betrayed Jesus, handing him over to those who had not believed Jesus and who had not seen him for who he is.

One of Jesus’ disciples, Simon Peter, reacted to this handing over of Jesus. He too already misunderstood the kind of king Jesus is and from where Jesus’ kingdom comes. So he reacted by drawing his sword and cutting off the ear of one of the high priest’s slaves. Peter seemed to believe that Jesus’ kingdom utilizes the way of violence instead of the way of self-sacrificing love. Yet, Jesus had just been teaching Peter and the other disciples the very opposite, saying: “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15:12-13). So Jesus chastised Peter, and then the soldiers, officers, and police took Jesus to the high priest, where he was questioned. While Jesus was being questioned, Peter denied him three times in the court yard—“that’s not my king.” From there, the religious elite took Jesus to Pilate’s headquarters, where the drama of Jesus’ interrogation unfolds.

The Jews—those who didn't see Jesus for who he is and therefore did not believe—insisted they would not go into Pilate's quarters because they did not want to be defiled before the Passover. Instead, Pilate comes out to them, and they declare that Jesus is a criminal and hand him over to Pilate. "That's not our king!" This criminal king is not their king. This Jesus who challenged their elitist piety; this Jesus who associated with the lowly and the destitute and sinners; this Jesus who touched those he should not have touched and healed when he should not have healed; this Jesus who claimed to be one with the Father; this Jesus could not be their king. Yet, Pilate tries to push the trial back into the hands of the Jews, but they insist this trial is not theirs because they want this criminal to be on death row, with an execution date set immediately. So Jesus, the criminal on trial, goes into the place of defilement, into Pilate's headquarters, and is interrogated and accused of political treason. He's accused of the act of claiming to be a king in a land where only Caesar could be king. "Are you the king of the Jews?" Pilate asks.

The scene is rich with theological irony. Jesus turns the tables, so he is no longer the interrogated one being judged but the one interrogating and acting as judge. Jesus answers Pilate's question with a question, "Do you ask this on your own or did others tell you?" Jesus asks, "Pilate, do you see? Have you recognized me as king?" Pilate answers, saying "I'm not a Jew, am I?" Ironically, "the Jews" is the Gospel of John's short hand for saying, "those who do not believe in Jesus," so the answer is, "Yes, Pilate, you are seeing me without believing, just as the Jews." Pilate goes further in missing the point by asking Jesus, "What have you done?" Instead of answering this misguided question, Jesus answers the question of who he is and where he is from. "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." Again, in an ironic twist, Pilate latches on to the kingdom language, and in essence calls Jesus a king: "If you have a kingdom, then you must be a king. So you are a king, right?" And Jesus says, "You say that I am a king."

You know how the story goes from here. Pilate hands Jesus over to the people and offers that he will free either Jesus or Barabbas. The people choose Barabbas and call for Jesus to be crucified. Pilate sends Jesus to death row, and then attaches a sign to the instrument of execution—the cross—that says, "The King of the Jews." Jesus is announced as king with thorns as his crown and is executed as a criminal among criminals.

Because of what he taught and how he demonstrated the ways of his kingdom, Judas couldn't recognize Jesus as his king. In this moment of abasement, Peter couldn't claim Jesus as king. Because he challenged their privileged status and sanctimonious self-righteousness, the Jewish elite couldn't recognize Jesus as their king. As one whose authority and power came from a reality beyond what he could imagine outside of the domain of Caesar, Pilate couldn't recognize Jesus as his king. "That's not my king," they all say. But this isn't that surprising really because Jesus is a peculiar kind of king. I wonder if we even would recognize him as king. You see, in this crowning moment of Jesus as king, he looks a lot like a criminal. He looks a lot like a person with no home, no material wealth, no friends to stand beside him, and no real political voice or power. He looks like a person who is impious and unchurched. He looks like a person from an out of the way, off the map town of no real significance, from which he journeyed crossing borders as he avoided those who would kill him. In seeing all this, he does not look much like a king we might expect to see. Do you recognize him as your king?

Yet this is Christ the King as proclaimed by the Gospel writer. For John, what it means for Jesus to be God's King is for him to be the lamb sacrificed for the sins of all people. To be God's king is for Jesus to put a towel around his waste and wash dirty feet. To be God's king is for Jesus to talk with those he shouldn't talk with—like the Samaritan woman at the well—and heal those he shouldn't heal at a time he shouldn't heal them—like the man blind from birth who Jesus healed on the Sabbath. To be God's king is for Jesus to hang out with those he shouldn't hang out with, to pardon those he shouldn't pardon, to have mercy on those who deserve no mercy, and to love those he shouldn't love. To be God's king is for Jesus to go into the places where he will be defiled and instead make them the places of God's holy reign—from

the inside of Pilate's chambers to the inside of a tomb. To be God's king is to be wrongly accused, tried as a political criminal, and punished by death, and for God than to claim that whole story and make it irrupt with resurrection glory. For Jesus to be God's king in these ways signifies that there is no place that God's reign doesn't touch, there is no space that God's rule will not be supreme, and there is nowhere in life or in death that Jesus will not ultimately be King. Now that's my king!

Do you recognize this king? Do you know him? You see, the king that is high and lifted up is the same king who is lowly and abased—standing a criminal's trial and awaiting a criminal's death. The king whose kingdom shall know no end is the king who journeys in solidarity with the marginalized who've been told their ends do not matter. The King that we recognize and celebrate as the transcendent and glorious King is the same King who is immanently with the broken and the outcast, the hurt and the hurting, the downtrodden and the poor. Well, that's my king. Do you know him?

If you recognize the crucified Jesus as the one who reigns and rules in your life and over all the world, then you are ready with the likes of Rev. Dr. Lockridge to proclaim, "That's my king!" And if you can see and believe that the one who always bears the marks of a criminal's death is your king, then you are ready to live as a faithful citizen of this kingdom. You are ready to live guided and inspired not by the need for power and privilege and prestige or by the desire for status or success or strength. You are ready to live guided and inspired not by doubt and dread and despair or by fear or failure or folly. No you are ready to live guided and inspired by our crucified Lord, whose reign and rule is established on a cross and through a glorious resurrection. Hallelujah! Now, that's my king! Do you know him?