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John 18:33-37

JESUS IS A KING WITH AN UNKINGLY RULE!

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I don't know who would ever want to be President of the United States. It is a thankless job. I suppose that there is a lot of power and glory that goes along with it, but there is also a lot of criticism. Nevertheless there are still about 12 Republicans who are running for the right to face Hillary Clinton a year from now. You certainly can't please everybody. Everyone has his or her most important issue. For some it is the economy and jobs. There are fewer jobs today and many that don't pay all that well. Some people are demanding a minimum wage of \$15/ hour or more. For others the issue is immigration. There are many people in this country illegally. What do you do? Deport everyone? Allow amnesty for some who have been model citizens and have family here in this country? Do you build a wall all the way along the Mexican border? How much would that cost? Others are concerned about national security with threats from ISIS and other terrorist groups. There is the cost of going to college and student debt and protecting social security and healthcare and a million other things. What about fixing the roads? If you spent money on every one of these things it would cost trillions of dollars. Where would the money come from? More taxes? From whom?

No, you certainly won't please everybody. You only have to win a plurality of the vote to be elected President. You will endure constant criticism. Would it be better to be a king? Well, that depends upon what kind of king you wanted as well. This morning we come to the end of the Church Year. We will be talking about the king that we have. He is not the King that everyone wanted 2000 years ago and he is not the King that everyone wants today. But that doesn't matter. He is our King and his rule is eternal. JESUS IS A KING WITH AN UNKINGLY RULE!

Our text is one that we have certainly seen before. It comes up every year in the Lenten season. We see our Lord Jesus on trial before the Roman governor Pontius Pilate. Jesus was there because his own people the Jews demanded his death. The Jews hated the Romans. The Romans were occupying Palestine. The Jews didn't even have control of their own land. There was, of course, a reason for that. The land was promised long ago by God to Abraham and his descendants. Yet there was a catch. It would be their land as long as the people remained faithful to the LORD. That they did not want to do. They preferred sleeping around with other gods rather than remaining faithful to the one who had given them his promises to remain faithful to them. They rejected God's commandments. They rejected his prophets. They beat and killed those whom God sent to warn them of their sin. The Northern Kingdom of Israel was destroyed by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. while the Southern Kingdom of Judah went into exile under the Babylonians in 586 BC.

They wanted their power back. They wanted their kingdom back. They were waiting for the Messiah to come and make things right. They saw something special in Jesus. He was able to do miraculous signs. He healed the sick, he raised the dead, he fed the multitudes, he walked on water. Yes, he could do the job. The feeding of the 5000 was enough to convince them. They would take Jesus and make them their king. He would do what they wanted him to do, of course. That was the kind of king they wanted. He would snap his fingers and give them anything their little hearts desired.

Jesus had a little heart to heart talk with them. We call it his Bread of Life discourse. Jesus was very blunt. He was not going to be their bread king. He came down from heaven to give life to the world. The real problem that they

faced was not physical hunger. No matter how much they ate, they would be hungry again. They needed food for their souls. They were sinners who lacked the righteousness that God's Law demanded from them. They could not provide it for themselves. They needed Jesus as their Bread of Life.

Well, that went over like a lead balloon. Not only did many curiosity seekers reject Jesus, but many of his disciples decided that they weren't going to follow him any more either. The crowds would start to shrink. The opposition would continue to grow. More and more people wanted Jesus dead. The religious leaders were not disappointed with Jesus. They simply saw him as a threat to their own power. They didn't want Jesus to do something stupid so that the Romans would come and strip away their power. They got one of Jesus' own disciples to betray him for 30 pieces of silver. They condemned him to death for blasphemy, for calling himself the very Son of God.

They had one problem. They didn't have the authority to execute anyone. For that they needed the hated Romans. They viewed the Romans as stupid. They thought that they could twist the governor Pontius Pilate around their little fingers, simply demanding his death and Pilate would carry out their wishes. No, Pilate wanted a chance to examine Jesus himself.

This was the first time that Pilate would see Jesus, but he had surely heard of him. As the Roman governor he had to hear lots of things about Jesus. He had to separate fact from fiction. He knew that the Jews didn't like the Romans. He wasn't exactly fond of the Jews either. There were many Roman soldiers who would observe this Jesus and report back to him. They really didn't see Jesus as a threat to Caesar. Perhaps this Jesus was misguided or delusional, but he really wasn't a threat. He would cross examine Jesus before Jesus would go to the cross.

Pilate knew that the Jewish leaders hated Jesus and wanted him dead. He knew that Jesus wasn't really any kind of threat to him or the Roman Empire. But was there any kind of kingdom? Was Jesus some kind of king of something? He knew that many people saw something in Jesus. He asks him point blank, "Are you the king of the Jews?" Pilate would have the opportunity to see why Jesus came into the world. Just think he could have all his questions answered by God himself.

Pilate had the opportunity to be different. The people rejected Jesus' claim to be king because he refused to meet their desires for temporal security. You know that no matter what Jesus would have given them, it would never have been enough. Sinful desire only follows Jesus to get what it wants. The religious leaders rejected Jesus as the true king from heaven when Jesus failed to restore the kingdom of David and Solomon. They demanded miraculous signs and once again, even if Jesus had performed every one of them that they demanded, it would never have been enough. When Jesus refused to do them because of their unbelief, they decided that they would prefer the rule of Caesar to the eternal grace of God's Son.

Now it was Pilate's turn. Jesus would extend an invitation to learn more about him and his kingdom of grace and truth. Jesus would often do that. He would ask probing questions that would lead the listener to think about the most important spiritual issues facing him. "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" "Who do you say that I am?" "Do you believe that I am the Resurrection and the Life?" To Pilate, he asks, "Is that your own idea or did others tell you about me?" Jesus extends this invitation of grace.

Sadly, Pilate does not want to learn more. Pilate is insulted that he, a Roman, would want to learn anything about this Jew. But Jesus would speak of the true nature of his kingdom. "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place." Jesus' kingdom is not of this world. It is unlike anything else. It is not like Rome or Greece or Assyria or Babylon or Egypt, great

kingdoms of this world that would rise and fall. This would be an eternal kingdom ruled by the one who stood before Pilate.

Jesus would explain further. "You are right in saying that I am a king. In fact for this reason I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me." What Jesus says boggles our minds. Jesus was and is the eternal God. He has all power and glory, yet he was willing to leave it all so that he could become one of us. Jesus would humble himself and become a human being, but not merely a human being. He would become the lowest of the low. He would become a servant willing to do whatever it took to buy us back from our slavery to sin, death and the power of Satan. You would never know that Jesus was the Son of God. You would never know that he was the King of kings and Lord of lords. He was born of a virgin. He was born in a stable in the little town of Bethlehem, the home of King David. He grew up in another little town in Galilee called Nazareth. He learned the trade of a carpenter. As far as we know, he never owned anything. He was always borrowing: a boat to preach from, a donkey to ride, a room to celebrate the Passover. Yet heaven and earth was his. His disciples were Galilean fishermen and outcasts. And he would die the death of criminals, being nailed to two pieces of wood on a cross. He would die the death we deserved. He would bear the cost of our rebellion.

Yet this same Jesus would rise from the dead exactly as he and the Holy Scriptures had promised. Pilate would ultimately sentence Jesus to die, because Pilate was afraid to lose his power. He would do anything to save his earthly life, yet he would lose his spiritual life by not listening to the true king who stood before him. The things of this world will soon pass away, but Christ's kingdom is an eternal one.

Jesus is a king of truth. We live in a world of lies. We are constantly being told lies and we are constantly lying to ourselves. Jesus is the Truth. The truth is that we are doomed without him. The truth is that only through faith can we become a member of his eternal kingdom. The truth is that Jesus did everything needed to restore our life with God. He lived for us and died for us and rose for us. He ascended into heaven and he is now preparing a place for us. The truth is that he will return and bring us safely into his kingdom.

We have once again come full circle. The church year ends with our Lord Jesus Christ ruling as King. He is not the King that everyone wanted, but he is the King that everyone needed. He rules in power, in grace and in glory. He didn't look very kingly as he stood in Pilate's courtroom or hanging on the cross, but he certainly will as he returns with all the heavenly angels with him. Hail to the King! AMEN.