

Matthew 27:11-52

¹¹ Meanwhile Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?”

“You have said so,” Jesus replied.

¹² When he was accused by the chief priests and the elders, he gave no answer. ¹³ Then Pilate asked him, “Don’t you hear the testimony they are bringing against you?” ¹⁴ But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge—to the great amazement of the governor.

¹⁵ Now it was the governor’s custom at the festival to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd. ¹⁶ At that time they had a well-known prisoner whose name was Jesus Barabbas. ¹⁷ So when the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them, “Which one do you want me to release to you: Jesus Barabbas, or Jesus who is called the Messiah?” ¹⁸ For he knew it was out of self-interest that they had handed Jesus over to him.

¹⁹ While Pilate was sitting on the judge’s seat, his wife sent him this message: “Don’t have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him.”

²⁰ But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed.

²¹ “Which of the two do you want me to release to you?” asked the governor. “Barabbas,” they answered.

²² “What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called the Messiah?” Pilate asked. They all answered, “Crucify him!”

²³ “Why? What crime has he committed?” asked Pilate.

But they shouted all the louder, “Crucify him!”

²⁴ When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. “I am innocent of this man’s blood,” he said. “It is your responsibility!”

²⁵ All the people answered, “His blood is on us and on our children!”

²⁶ Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

²⁷ Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. ²⁸ They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, ²⁹ and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand. Then they knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said. ³⁰ They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. ³¹ After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

³² As they were going out, they met a man from Cyrene, named Simon, and they forced him to carry the cross. ³³ They came to a place called Golgotha (which means "the place of the skull"). ³⁴ There they offered Jesus wine to drink, mixed with gall; but after tasting it, he refused to drink it. ³⁵ When they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots. ³⁶ And sitting down, they kept watch over him there. ³⁷ Above his head they placed the written charge against him: this is jesus, the king of the jews.

³⁸ Two rebels were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. ³⁹ Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads ⁴⁰ and saying, "You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!" ⁴¹ In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. ⁴² "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! He's the king of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. ⁴³ He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" ⁴⁴ In the same way the rebels who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

⁴⁵ From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. ⁴⁶ About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?*" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?").

⁴⁷ When some of those standing there heard this, they said, "He's calling Elijah."

⁴⁸ Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. ⁴⁹ The rest said, “Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to save him.”

⁵⁰ And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.

⁵¹ At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split ⁵² and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. ⁵³ They came out of the tombs after Jesus’ resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people.

⁵⁴ When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, “Surely he was the Son of God!”

Today is a day about kings. It’s a day that we celebrate that Jesus Christ was heralded as the king of Israel, and also the truth that he would later be crowned as a king upon a cross.

We started ever so briefly this morning with Palm Sunday. We acted out that blessed moment when the disciples and people of Israel rightly proclaimed that Christ was their king. Some were even acknowledging that he is their Messiah! They shouted out “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!” This is almost the exact same thing that the angels proclaimed to the shepherds at the birth of Jesus. In this moment, heaven and earth are rejoicing together that Christ has come to Jerusalem.

Jesus enters Jerusalem, triumphant! A king! And then he sets about the work of a king. Matthew records quite a bit of teaching that Jesus shared in the last few days he had. Jesus also drove out the money changers from the temple, cleansing that holy place from greed for a time, at least. He set things to right. He pronounced woes over those who held onto their own understanding of religion – those that refused to follow the way, the truth, and the life. He told parable after parable. He shared the Passover meal with his disciples, he spent time in prayer...he was a model king by earthly standards. A man of the people, and yet also wise, and powerful! He bore authority that set him apart, even though he was close and personal.

And then, almost like flipping off a light switch, the atmosphere changes. We all know what happens next. We focus on Palms in one moment, rejoicing and happy...and now we cannot take our eyes away from the passion. The pure malevolence on display. Pilate trying desperately not to bear the guilt for what he's about to allow, a guilt he cannot escape. The crowds, whipped up by the chief priests and Pharisees, willing to say anything that they must in order for this man to die. The soldiers looking at this beaten and bruised man – the same man that they had been warned to keep an eye out for, indeed there were rumours that he might start a rebellion! Any hint of anxiety or worry they might have had is gone now. They jeer, they mock, they dress him ironically as a king complete with a brutal thorn encrusted crown.

At the centre of this whirlwind of the worst parts of our human existence we see our king. And we can't look away. Because this king isn't powerless. He mighty! He's a king the likes of which this world had never known before! The very foundations of this world tremble at the thought of him coming again. There is power and authority in that broken frame! If we had been there...if we had but an inkling of the power that Jesus Christ has...that story would have gone very differently. It would have been like an over the top action movie, where the main character easily dispatches all the bad guys, doing amazing kung fu moves, never getting winded, never taking and hits, never needing to reload...we would have fought our way out! If we had just the power contained in Christ's pinky finger, we would have decimated all those arrogant priests and Pharisees, let alone the crowds that turned to betrayal so quickly. Pilate, and those lackey soldiers would be forced to their knees, to bow down before the king and creator of the universe!

Thank God that we're not Christ. Thank God that he could do what we could not. He remained humble and obedient to God. He didn't lift a finger to defend himself. He let himself be arrested. He let himself be flogged. He let himself be spit on. He let his body be mistreated to the point that he could no longer even carry his own cross. He let them drive nails into his body. As he hung there dying, as the blood and strength drained from his body, his ears were open. He heard every mocking statement. He heard them twist his own words against him. He was reminded again and again that if he but lifted a finger, if he but said

the word, this cup *would* be taken from him. His death would be stayed, and the wicked would be punished.

We should never look away from this king. Fix your eyes on his cross! He could have come down from it! Part of him wanted to! But your **king** loved his people so much, that he desired far more to punish wickedness than wicked people. We are sinners, we are wicked people. In the 'action movie' version of Christ's passion, we would be in one of those groups: the leaders trying to abdicate responsibility, the crowds condemning him, the soldiers beating him, the people twisting his words against him...we would be punished! But that's not what our king wants for us. That's not why he went *there*!

Christ went to the cross to rid this world of wickedness – of sin. He's not done this to remove sinful people from the world – we're clearly still here. Christ stayed his hand, he held back his power in order that we might be clean. His only goal was to remove the claim that sin and death...that Satan had over us. And he's achieved that goal. Yes, us sinners are still around, but now – in Christ, in the cross, in our **king** – we are saints as well.

In the passion of Christ we find unimaginable, world creating and world shaking power...held fast. We don't find a passive and submissive king, except of course that Christ was submitting to God's will. We find a man, the incarnate God, actively bearing every blow both physical and mental. We find a man holding fast to one goal. I can almost hear him reciting it in his mind, a private prayer. 'When I do this, when I bear this blow, this mocking, this pain, this death...my people will be saved.' My people will be saved. My people will be saved. Maybe the prayer was far simpler: just the meaning of his own name: Jesus. 'God saves. God saves. God saves.'

Next Sunday we will celebrate that God saved Christ, that death could not hold him. Today we celebrate that Christ, our king, came to his people, and that he saved them. He saved you.

Amen.