

REIGN OF CHRIST SUNDAY

Luke 23:33-43

“Soon, and very soon, we are gonna see the King.” The children of Israel had been promised a King anointed by the Almighty; a Messiah. So for centuries they looked and expected to find one. They looked for a mighty leader who would enforce God's will. They looked for one who would bring peace to the people and to the land. They looked for one who would display the power of God. They looked for one who would lead the people in righteousness.

They were looking for a King by earthly standards. They expected someone who looked like a king. They were looking for someone who wielded power. They were expecting one who demanded respect.

They were looking for a Saviour. They were looking for someone who was strong enough to save them from the Persians, or the Greeks, or Romans, or whomever. They were looking for someone who was wise enough to bring real peace, not the kind of peace that the Romans enforced. They were looking for someone close enough to God to bring them closer to God. They were looking for someone spiritual enough to display the powers of God in their midst.

In response to the promise and the prayers of the people, God didn't just send a mighty man, God sent His Son. But Jesus wasn't what they expected the Messiah to look like. Sure He was spiritual enough. He certainly seemed close to God. He

appeared wise. He even displayed the power of God by healing the sick, casting out demons, raising the dead, feeding the multitudes.

But, He appeared to be a weakling. He was certainly a holy man, a prophet, a wonder worker. But was He the Messiah? He didn't look like a King.

Then the Romans arrested Jesus. Would the anointed Messiah of God allow those pagan Gentiles to lay hands on Him, and haul Him into an unclean Roman building? Would the Messiah of God allow Himself to be beaten and nailed to a cross? The conclusion most of the people came to was “No! Never.” So in anger and disappointment they lashed out against Jesus. “If you are the Messiah why don’t you save yourself?”

Sure the people needed a Messiah to save them from the Romans, from their sicknesses and hunger, and from themselves and their sins. But there were two people in that crowd whose need for deliverance was more immediate than any of the others there. They had been caught in their sin. All the Bible tells us about them is that they were thieves. We don’t know what they stole, and what circumstances drove them to the decision to commit a crime. But they were guilty.

They were paying the price of their crime. A serious price it was. Nails driven through their feet and hands. Left to hang by their agonizing limbs until they either drowned in their own fluids, or died of blood loss or exposure. So they both turned to Jesus. One said, “If you are the Messiah save Yourself and us while You are at it”. But the other could see that Jesus was the King. Instead of mocking Jesus with his last breaths, he admitted that they deserved what was happening to them. So he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into Your kingdom”. And Jesus replied, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with Me

in Paradise”.

Just like the people back then, people today need a Savior. We need someone who can be our deliverer. Like the people back then, we need someone stronger and wiser to bring us peace and guidance. Like them, we need someone closer to God, to help reconcile us with God. Like them we need someone who can manifest the power of the Almighty in our lives, and our world.

Like those thieves, we are all under a death sentence: the wages of sin is death and we are all sinners. Like them, we need someone who can deliver us from that death sentence.

The good news is that God has promised us just such a person.

This Messiah is Jesus. But often people fail to recognize Him.

Like that one thief on the cross, and like most of the people in that crowd, most people don't see Him for who he is. And so they go looking for another. That is one of the reasons we have so many different religions, and even so many Denominations within Christianity, in our world today.

Jesus is the one. He is the Messiah who has the power to deliver us. He can save us from sin and death. The people in that crowd though that He couldn't be the Messiah, because He couldn't prevent them from crucifying Him. Ironically, He is the Messiah because He gave Himself to die on the cross for the sins of the world.

Jesus is the king, the Messiah, anointed by God. The question we all need to answer is: Is He our King? The two thieves show us the reality of this question for our lives. They were each facing death; a death they justly deserved. They each saw Jesus doing that He was meant to do as the Messiah; being crucified.

They both had a choice to make, just as we do: Do we dismiss Jesus as a great, but tragic, religious man? Or do we acknowledge Him as the Messiah, the Son of God?

Well? We have been presented with the same dilemma. In our Gospel reading for today, we were presented with Jesus the Son of God, dying for the sins of the world. We are all going to die, and since we have all sinned, we all deserve to. Each one of us has to face the same decision those thieves did, which is to accept, or reject, Jesus Christ as God's only begotten Son, the promised Saviour of the world.

Jesus is the Messiah, the king. Let us put our trust in Him. Let us join with the thief who said "Jesus remember me when You come into Your kingdom". Jesus is the King. Let us be sure that He is our king.

AMEN.