

The Reign of the King: The Power, Care, & Victory of Jesus – Jn 19:16b-30

CBC Ilderton

Andrew Hall

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This past week, our country faced enormous pressure. Our federal government required Canadians to self-isolate if they had been travelling and were rolling out enormous economic plans to help Canadians as businesses and services were shut down. In the midst of a bipartisan effort, concerns were raised about enormous powers that the federal government wanted to take on. Opposition parties protested at Clause 2, a section of the economic package that would have given the government absolute control to tax and spend without parliamentary approval.

In other cases, the Ontario Premier was warning businesses not to price-gouge at this time. Just because supplies of certain items are in demand, the Premier warned these businesses that taking advantage of Ontarians during a global pandemic will not be tolerated.

What are you like when you're under pressure? For most people, their true nature comes out during a crisis – some struggle with anxiety and worry; others want to take advantage of the situation; still others just want to help because they want to get past the crisis.

In John 19, Jesus is in the greatest crisis of his life: he has been falsely accused, his trial has been a mockery of justice, and he is crucified for nothing that he has done. Yet what comes out of Jesus at this time reveals to us what God is like for us – even when the world seems like it's turned upside down.

See Your King on His Throne (Jn 19:16b-24)

Recall the setting: Jesus has been taken before Pilate and tried, but found without fault. But Pilate, a wily man who is afraid of the mob, doesn't give Jesus the justice he deserves. Rather, he hands Jesus over to be crucified. Jesus is now handed over to the desires of the mob and the Romans take him to the Hill of the Skull. The charges against him are written up and placed above his head: King of the Jews.

And now Jesus is exalted. John has been preparing us for this moment. When Jesus talked about being "lifted up," he was referring to this moment. This cross is the place of his exaltation. This cross is his throne. And his throne has the label above him – he is the king!

But this king doesn't look like a king, and his throne doesn't look like a throne. He looks like a beaten man left to die, and his throne looks like an execution device. How can Jesus be reigning here?

We get a clue when we read that the soldiers were dividing up the clothes of Jesus, fulfilling the prophecy of Ps. 22:18 – "They divided my garments among them, and for my clothes they cast lots." This Psalm is one of David's a royal psalm where David the king cried out to God to remember him and not forsake him. The other gospels quote the opening of this psalm as they hear Jesus cry out, "My God, my God! Why have you forsaken me!" So we know from the context of Psalm 22 that the NT writers saw this moment as the moment of Jesus' exaltation.

But there is one other detail that points out that Jesus is reigning. But it isn't just as king. As the soldiers divide up his clothing, there is one piece that stands out – v. 23 mentions a seamless tunic, woven in one piece from top to bottom. And this garment is intended to remind us of

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Aaron, Israel's first High Priest. As Aaron would go about his duties, we are told that he wore a garment that, by implication, was seamless, ornate, and decorated (Exod. 28:39). But on the day of Atonement, the day where a sacrifice would be offered for the sins of the people, we are told in Leviticus 16 that Aaron would lay aside these beautiful and ornate garments and do the work of the High Priest.

And now here is how your King comes to reign. He comes from the glories of heaven, lays aside his majesty, takes on the form of a servant, and does the work of the High Priest to offer forgiveness of sins. Here is your King – serving you, forgiving you, loving you. Here is how your King reigns – from a cross to bring you back to God. Here is the heart of your King – to obey the Father's very commands so that Scripture would be fulfilled.

Do you want to see how your King uses his power? When pressed and squeezed, when tried with the greatest trial, your King becomes a servant, ruling so that forgiveness of sins and a life of joy and peace can be yours. When we look to the cross, we see a King who is a Priest, working for your joy!

See Your King Caring For His Own (Jn 19:25-27)

Now from the cross, in excruciating pain, when the physical trial was at its greatest for Jesus, who is he thinking about? "When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, 'Woman, behold, your son!' Then he said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother!'"

When in excruciating pain, we are prone to look out for our own interests. When our head is pounding, we want everyone to be quiet. When our body aches, we want to be left alone so that we can not spread our misery to others.

But not Jesus. In this moment, as he hangs from the cross – after being whipped, beaten, with nails through his hands and feet, what does this King do from his throne? He remembers the command of God "Honour your father and mother" (Exod. 20:12). Mary, probably close to 50 at this time and a widow, with little to no economic means, was incredibly vulnerable. A woman, she would not have had much economic opportunity. And here was her oldest son, now being killed. What would she do?

Jesus looks at her, and seeing her there with the disciple he loved – a refrain John uses for himself – he provides for his mother. "Woman, your son!" In the moment where he is squeezed and pressed, where he is crushed beyond human comprehension, what comes out of Jesus? A love for others. Care and concern for his own.

This is the nature of our King. His throne is a cross, and his concern is for the well-being of his people. In excruciating pain, what comes out of him is love. Why? Because this is the nature of our God. Our God uses his power for eternal good. Our God uses his power to waken men and women to their deepest needs. And our God is mindful that we need our daily bread.

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Some have looked at Jesus' words and said, "Yes, we should follow Jesus' example." And in one sense they are right. We should be mindful of our parents. We should love others who are in a moment of need. But before Jesus is our example to follow, he is a Saviour to be trusted. And the reason we can trust him is that he is always working for your eternal good. He is always mindful of you. This is why the Scriptures tell us to cast our burdens and anxieties on the Lord – he will sustain us (Ps. 55:22), he cares for you (1 Pe. 5:7). Even from the cross, as Jesus does the work of saving men and women, he cares for his own.

What trial are you experiencing now? What difficulty feels so overwhelming? Can you look to the cross and hear the care and concern of your King?

See Your King Working his Victory (Jn 19:28-30)

And now, after all is said and done, what is left for our King to do? Nothing. His work is completed. His triumph over his enemies has been accomplished. Knowing that all that his work was finished, Jesus asks for a drink, fulfilling Scripture again (Ps. 69:21). Here is the victory of God over sin. He has obeyed his Father perfectly. And his final words are, "It is finished!" and he breathed his last.

Here is the work of our God, completed. Yes, it looks like the King is dead. Yes, it looks like darkness has won. Yes, it looks like evil has triumphed over good. But at the place of the Skull, the promise of Genesis 3:15 is being fulfilled. In that first garden, the serpent had come and had deceived the man and woman. But God had said that Eve would have a son, and that son would have his heel bruised, but the serpent's head would be crushed. And now, on the Hill of the Skull, the descendant of Eve's heel was bruised – very badly. But here is the serpent getting what is due to him – on the Hill of the Skull, in this garden scene, the snake's head is being crushed. And Jesus cries out, "It is finished!"

Everything Jesus came to do was building to this moment. Perfect obedience. Perfect love. Perfect sacrifice. Why? To crush the serpent's head. To bring the victory of God over sin. To be in the place of sinners.

And what do we want to offer Jesus in this moment? How will we help him with his sacrifice? We'll offer him a drink of sour wine. He'll do the perfect work of redemption, and we will try to add to it by giving him vinegar.

He has crushed the head of the serpent. He has defeated sin. He has loved you and me to the very end. He has cared for us, even on the cross. And what do we have to offer? Nothing that adds to his saving work.

Friends, there is nothing that we can do to make God love us more. There is nothing that we can offer to help the King's victory be more secure. Jesus paid it all! His work of redemption is complete! When pressed, what comes out of Jesus is grace, mercy, and love. And his call to you is to trust him completely, to rely upon his precious sacrifice as the high priest who stands in your place, to depend upon his power as king to win the victory for you. We live in uncertain times, but we have a God who is for us, not against us – even to the very end. So trust him!