

## **“BORN FOR THIS: *Born to be King*”**

*Matthew 27:11-29*

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX  
Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • November 23, 2014

As the famous song goes, “It’s beginning to look a lot like Christmas.” The stores have had Christmas decorations up for several weeks now and there’s at least one local radio station that has switched to all Christmas music. But if you didn’t know anything about Christianity and started listening to that station, you would think that you couldn’t have Christmas without snow. Thankfully for us here in South Texas, snow is not a requirement for Christmas, so to help us prepare for Christmas, we are going to spend the next few weeks talking about the *true* meaning of Christmas. We are going to wrap up our study of Matthew with a series of sermons called, “Born For This” where we’ll be looking at *why* Jesus was born and we’ll start with the main theme of the Gospel of Matthew – Jesus was born to be King.

When we think of royalty—kings, queens, dukes, etc.— we naturally think of power and prestige and wealth. We also think of the abuses of power and wealth that so often has taken place by monarchs. As we celebrate Thanksgiving this week we are reminded that our country was founded by various groups escaping oppression by European kings and queens. That’s why our nation’s government is based on the Presbyterian belief that no person should be given absolute authority. Only Jesus has absolute authority. He delegates some of that authority to people but he is the model for leadership. Jesus said, “I did not come to be served but to serve.”

In our Old Testament reading from 2 Samuel we heard God’s promise to King David that one of his descendants would be king and that God would establish his kingdom forever. Over and over again in the New Testament we read that Jesus is that king. Matthew’s gospel begins by showing us that Jesus is a direct descendant of King David. He is of royal lineage. In Matthew 2, after Jesus is born the Magi travel over a thousand miles and ask, “Where is the one who has been born King of

the Jews?”

Now here we are, almost at the end of Jesus’ earthly life and Pontius Pilate the Roman governor asks Jesus, “Are *you* the King of the Jews?” We have no way of knowing the tone and inflection of his voice, but I think he may have been saying something like, “*You* are the King?” Certainly Pilate could not have missed the commotion caused by Jesus riding into Jerusalem less than a week earlier with the crowds waving palm branches and singing. Maybe he had heard about some of Jesus’ miracles and the crowds that followed him. But the man standing before him was beaten and bruised and didn’t even bother defending himself. And yet Pilate was greatly amazed by Jesus. He tried three times to find a way to release Jesus, he even declared Jesus innocent. In the end, though, Pilate ended up having Jesus crucified anyway.

Pilate found himself in a difficult position. His career was at stake. The position of governor of Judea was not a great appointment. In fact, it was almost a punishment. Pilate had already upset Rome by dealing too harshly with the Jews, probably in the uprising led by Barabbas. So he didn’t want to upset them any further. But he also didn’t want to appear weak. Most of all he didn’t want to lose what position and status he did have. So he tried to conduct the trial “by the book.”

Apparently one of Pilate’s customs was to release a prisoner during Passover as a way to gain favor with the people. He knew that it was the chief priests and elders who had brought Jesus to him because they were jealous. So Pilate decided to ask the crowd if they wanted him to release Jesus. The Jewish leaders, however, had been working the crowd so that they demanded Barabbas.

You have to love the way Matthew builds the tension here and he does it with irony. Barabbas was in prison for leading a revolt against the Romans. He was trying to set

himself up as the king of the Jews. The name Barabbas is Aramaic and means, "son of the father." Some sources even say that Barabbas' name was Jesus also, which was a common name at the time. So the people are faced with a choice between the man called Jesus who is a son of the father and tried to be king, or the Jesus who is *the* Son of *the* Father and is *the* king. They demand Barabbas instead of Jesus. This scene reminds me of 1 Samuel 8 where the Israelites demand a king, against the will of God. Samuel tries to talk them out of it because the Lord is their king but the people insist. Listen to verses 18-20: "And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the Lord will not answer you in that day." But the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel. And they said, "No! But there shall be a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles."

Do you see the irony? Now they have the real king, God himself, and they want someone else. The people of God reject God. They want Barabbas. When Jesus is crucified he is between two other criminals. It seems likely that these two were accomplices of Barabbas. The Romans had prepared three crosses. So Jesus goes to the cross in place of Barabbas. And he goes to the cross in place of you.

The passage ends with the soldiers mocking Jesus. They put a scarlet robe on him. They make a crown of thorns and jam it down on Jesus' head, cutting into the skin. Then they kneel down and mock him saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" But they unknowingly speak the truth. Jesus is king. In John's gospel, when Pilate asks Jesus if he is king of the Jews he says, "yes, but my kingdom is not of this world." Jesus is not the kind of king people were expecting. Unlike earthly kingdoms that have a specific geographic place, Christ's kingdom is not a kingdom of place.

One way to define a kingdom is that place where what I say goes. Dallas Willard said that your kingdom is the "range of your effective

will." God's Kingdom is wherever his will is being done. That's what we pray in the Lord's Prayer, "Thy kingdom come, they will be done on earth, just as it is in heaven." The problem, of course, is that we each set up our own little kingdom and immediately our kingdom clashes with God's Kingdom. Instead of giving God the glory He deserves, we seek our own glory. Instead of offering our entire life to him we begin to think that God owes us blessings. Instead of being truly thankful for the gifts he's given us, we think we've earned what we have. And maybe worst of all, we only come to Jesus for the benefits he offers instead of coming because we love him with our whole heart, mind, soul and strength.

Tim Keller, pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian in New York writes, "If Jesus is the King, you cannot make him a means to your end. You can't come to a king negotiating. If you try to negotiate..., if you say, 'I'll obey you if...', you aren't recognizing him as a king." He goes on to point out that for Jesus, being king means going to the cross and he calls each of us to do the same thing. "Taking up your cross means for you to die to self-determination, die to control of your own life, die to using [Jesus] for *your* agenda. For us, the kingdom of God begins with weakness, relinquishment, giving up our rights to our own life; it begins with admitting we need a savior."

So this morning I want you to ask yourself, "Which kingdom am I serving? Who is in charge of my life?" Do you organize your life to serve your own kingdom? A good place to look is how you spend your time and your money. That will show you your priorities. Or do you daily take up your cross, sacrificing your own desires in exchange for Christ's desires for your life? Because once you meet Jesus it's impossible to remain neutral about him. You must either crown him as king and lord of your life, or kill him. If you crown him, the kingdom of heaven starts right now. You can begin living in the kingdom of heaven today. But it depends on how you answer Pilate's question: "What will *you* do with Jesus who is called Christ?"