

“KING JESUS”

John 18:33-37 and Revelation 1:4b-8

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[Cornerstone U.M.C.; 11-26-23]

--I--

1. [BOTH 9 & 11 services... Read Texts: John 18:33-37 and Revelation 1:4b-8 and Pray.]

2. In today's American culture, the concept & practice of “kingship” is mostly foreign to us.

A--We don't *have* a king. We've never been ruled by one (except *before* we became a nation), and for most us, the closest *modern* reminder of what this is comes from Great Britain's coronation of King Charles III this past May.

B--So when today's two scriptures talk about the “Kingship” of Jesus, we sometimes have a hard time understanding exactly what that means. <sup>1</sup>

3. Well, today I want to address that -- in a world where the concept & practice of monarchy seems ancient and out of place, I want to use *TWO metaphors to talk about what it means to call Jesus our "king,"* and how these can help to guide our own practice of faith today.

--II--

4. The 1st metaphor is that of **a SERVANT, modeling how we are to *interact with others*.**

A--In fact, in most nations where monarchy *has* been a form of government, one of the phrases often used to describe that monarch is that they are a "*servant of the people*."

B--Not only that, but we also have to remember that *Jesus'* use of the words "king" and "kingdom" meant something totally *different* from our typical use of those words.

1--In Verse 36 of the John text, for instance, Jesus tells Pilate quite plainly that "*My kingdom does not originate from this world.*"

2--In other words, he's telling Pilate (and us today) that *His* kingdom is a *spiritual* kingdom where things are done differently than the *physical* kingdoms of this earth -- a place where...

(a) ...the last shall be first, and the first last;...

(b) ...that those who want to lead and have power must become humble and willing to be serve others from the lowliest of positions;

(c) ...that in order to find our life we'll have to be willing to lose it; and that those who lose their life for God will (in the end) find it.

3--In fact, Verse 5 of the Revelation text calls Jesus the “*the faithful witness*,” which in Greek is also translated as “*the faithful martyr*” (a reference to Jesus being willing to offer up his very *life* to gain salvation for us all) <sup>2</sup>

C--So we find here that the "kingship" of Jesus is, in fact, what we call a *paradox* -- something *opposite* our traditional understanding, but which is nevertheless *true*.

D--And since Jesus' practice of "kingship" therefore involved -- first and foremost -- this paradoxical willingness to live as a *servant* for others, it means that WE as his followers are to do the same in *our* lives and interactions with/for others, as well.

5. But let's remember, too, that Jesus' servant behavior/attitude should *not* be mistaken for *weakness* or allowing folks to "walk all over him," because a second metaphor found in today's scriptures talks about Jesus as **a LEADER, modeling how we should lead others** <sup>3</sup>

A--Of course, in today's world we see and experience all kinds of examples of leadership. But not all of them are healthy or helpful. Some of them, in fact, are downright tyrannical and toxic.

B--But in today's text, we instead find a very *different* model of leadership than what is commonly touted as such in today's culture. Let me share three characteristics from today's scriptures that describe what I mean:...

C--First, according to today's texts, a good leader **knows both what's behind, what's at hand, and what's ahead** -- they're familiar with *past* tradition and *current* reality, but also know the importance of scouting ahead to see what opportunities/dangers the *future* might hold.

1--Verses 4 and 8 of the Revelation text call Jesus "*the Alpha and the Omega*," (referring to the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet), "*the Almighty*" (meaning the one who has authority over ALL things, past, present & future), and as the one "*who is and was and is coming*." <sup>4</sup>

2--And in Verse 5 he's called the "*firstborn from among the dead*" -- meaning: the first one to be resurrected and defeat death itself, making eternal, resurrection life possible for us *all*.

3--So, these texts point out that, Jesus knows where you and I have *BEEN*, who we are and what we struggle with *TODAY*, and has scouted out our future to help to guide us into where we're *GOING*.

4--Some of you have heard me say that Jesus "*knows the worst we'll ever do and yet loves us anyway!*" Well, this is why he can be trusted to lead us.

5--And if we're to be good leaders for *others*, then (like Jesus) our job also involves helping others to discern what's behind, at hand, & ahead, as well.

6--In a very real sense, that's at least part of what I see my job to be as your Pastor: to help each of us to reflect on the *past* (good, bad or otherwise), to get through the struggles of our *present*, and to guide us into our *futures*.

7--But since "leadership" simply means "influence," we don't need to be a Pastor or elected church official to be a "leader" -- ALL of us "influence" others, for good or for ill.

8--The only question is: does YOUR influence turn others *on* to Christ or *away from* Christ? How do *you* help others understand their past, present & future?

D--According to today's scriptures, though, a good leader also **gives of themselves for those they lead** -- the power they wield is for the sake of *others*, not for *themselves*.

1--Verse 5 of the Revelation text calls Jesus the one who "*loves us and frees us from our sins by his blood.*"

2--That is: he used *his* power and authority to enable *us* to be freed of our bondage to sin, even though it cost him his own life on the cross.

3--Like Jesus, a good leader -- a good *Christian*, for that matter -- is always willing to sacrifice him/herself for the sake of those that they lead.

4--In your relationships with others, is your focus only about YOU and YOUR needs? Or do you give of yourself for the sake of others?

5--Jesus led by sacrificing himself for the sake of others, and we're called to do the same.

E--A final characteristic of leadership in today's scriptures is that a good leader also **empowers others** -- Revelation 1:6 says that Jesus "*made US [to be] a kingdom, priests to his God and Father.*"

1--In other words, after Jesus *saved* us, he then *empowered and ordained* us (you and me!) to be "*priests*" for others -- *intermediaries* for God here on earth.

2--That's all a "priest" is... an intermediary who's called to speak to others *about* God, and to *God* about others -- to *pray* with and for others, to *serve* with and for others, and to *share* God with and for others, as well.

3--I've heard it said that "*baptism is the ordination of every Christian*," which means that if you are a baptized follower of Jesus Christ, then YOU -- as much as myself or any other Pastor or clergy member -- are a "minister" (servant) of God, called to delegate, equip, encourage and empower others by helping them to find God in their life.

--III--

6. So... Jesus was a **SERVANT**, modeling how you and I are to *serve* others. And he was a **LEADER**, showing the *right* way to lead others (a way often *missing* in today's culture).

A--And these same qualities (servanthood and sacrificial leadership) are ones that you and (as his followers) are called to practice in our own lives, as well.

B--They're part of what it means to call Jesus our "King."

C--So today, as we celebrate the "kingship" of Jesus, let's give thanks to God for teaching us the way of servanthood and Godly leadership.

7. [PRAY]

8. [CLOSING 11am HYMN: UMH#176, "Majesty"]

### **ENDNOTES:**

<sup>1</sup> In Verse 37 of the John text, we find Pilate asking Jesus if he IS a king, and he answers, "...*For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth,*" to which Pilate then rhetorically asks (Vs. 38) "*What is truth?*" Well, we then find the answer in Verse 5 of the text from Revelation 1, where says that Jesus is the "*ruler of the kings of the earth.*" Elsewhere in that same book (Revelation 17:14), it calls Jesus is the "*Lord of lords and King of kings.*" So, the "truth" that Jesus was testifying to before Pilate in the John passage is that he is, in fact, a king -- and not just *any* king, but the "*King of [all] kings.*"

<sup>2</sup> The writer of Revelation is saying that Jesus "witnessed" to the glory of God not only through his teachings and his miracles, but also through his sacrifice and "martyrdom" on the cross. Philippians 2:8 says that Jesus was "obedient to death, even death upon a cross." In other words, he was "faithful" to God even in death.

<sup>3</sup> Again, in America we don't have a king/monarch with unlimited powers, but instead a "President" with limited powers -- yet, both of these are types of "leaders." Notice that Verse 5 in the Revelation passage says that Jesus is "*ruler of the kings of the earth*," meaning that he is, in effect, the "*Leader of leaders*" on earth --... so much so that Verse 7 goes on to call all people to "*Look! [For] he is coming with the clouds; [that] every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail....*" In other words, there's a universality to Jesus' leadership that transcends the power and authority of any "President," "Chancellor," or "Prime Minister" here on earth.

<sup>4</sup> This is reminiscent of Exodus 3:14, where God Himself is described as the great "I AM."