

Jesus Our King Leads Us...

Luke 23:35-43

- I. *Not by His beauty;*
- II. *Nor by displays of earthly power;*
- III. *But by His promises.*

Recently President Obama went on a trip to India and the Pacific-rim which drew much attention. Whenever the President of the United States leaves on a trip it is a big deal; when it is an international trip, it is an even bigger deal. Much criticism was made of the cost and the pomp and circumstance of such a trip.

The President of the United States has been called the most powerful man in the world and for good reason. Sadly, that makes him the most valuable target for assassination in the world. The President doesn't fly in an ordinary plane but he flies in his own special plane, Air Force One. Air Force One is a highly sophisticated jet which can both protect the President and act as a virtual White House in the sky. Few people know that there are actually two identical Air Force One planes and whenever the President leaves internationally both jets go with the President. Should one breakdown or become incapacitated the identical plane is there as a back-up. The President doesn't ride in an ordinary automobile but he rides in a vehicle nicknamed the beast which is essentially an armored vehicle that looks like a limousine on steroids.

Whenever the President travels it is a costly event—especially so when he travels internationally. Some are critical of such cost. As an American citizen I am not critical of what our government provides our Chief Executive Officer. I want our President safe and secure. I think it is a sign and a great tribute to the power and freedom of the United States that Air Force One represents.

Some of you will remember that it was President Jimmy Carter who put a stop to having "Hail to the Chief" played when he entered a room.<sup>1</sup> There was an outcry by many and the song was reinstated. Even many dignitaries and State Officials lamented the absence of a special song announcing the President's arrival as it led to confusion.

There is a time and a place for formality, respect and yes the projection of power. This is accomplished by song, by display and by grandeur. Today as we gather for the final Sunday of our church year and as we celebrate Christ the King Sunday God surprises us with the fact that Jesus our King of Kings and Lord of Lords doesn't use the ways of the world to lead and guide us nor to display His great glory.

Jesus is our King and we have no other. Kings lead, Kings, rule, Kings are honored and that is exactly what we do in worship. But think about how our King leads! Think about how our king rules and guides our hearts! If anyone deserved all glory laud and honor it was Jesus, both during His earthly ministry and today, yet this is not what we see with our eyes.

One of the more shocking and telling passages of the Old Testament regarding Jesus is found in Isaiah 53:2 which talks about what people physically saw with their eyes when they saw Jesus. **"He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him."** (Isaiah 53:2). I find it astonishing that God in the flesh—Jesus the Christ—was someone you couldn't pick out of a crowd! As a matter of fact virtually nothing is said of Jesus' appearance at all.

People expect great leaders to look, sound and appear a certain way. Jesus didn't have any of this. In fact much of Jesus' appearance was found as weakness and an opportunity for ridicule by Jesus' detractors. Jesus' enemies relished in the fact that Jesus' special birth clouded who Jesus father was...

Even those who believed in Jesus were often astonished by Jesus' background. Remember what Nathanael said when Philip told him about Jesus the man from Nazareth? Nathanael replied, **"Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?"** (John 1:46) Nazareth was a small insignificant town in Galilee the northern part of ancient Israel and was the last place the Messiah was expected to be associated with.

Throughout Jesus' ministry this would be a problem in the eyes of the world. Jesus didn't surround Himself with the loveliest, most powerful, most popular people of His day—in fact He often reserved His harshest criticism for them. They hated Him for that. They hated that Jesus surrounded Himself with ordinary people like Peter, James and John. They hated the fact that Jesus would not only talk to and associate with but even go out of His way to find the lost, the broken-hearted and the alienated. How often were Jesus' own disciples asked why Jesus associated and ate with sinners and tax collectors? (See Matthew 9:11; Mark 2:15 and other places).

All this of course pales in comparison with the picture of Jesus from the Gospel of Luke today. What did people see when they saw Jesus on the cross? They saw a man rejected by His own. They saw a man beaten and punished as the worst of criminals. They saw a man on display for all to see

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2010/09/16/60minutes/main6872344.shtml?tag=contentMain;contentBody>

in the most humiliating of ways. Remember the sign? “This is the King of the Jews.” Even that was meant sarcastically. Yet it was true wasn’t it. When the people saw Jesus on the cross they really were seeing with their own eyes the King of the Jews and the very King of Kings! Even more they were seeing him perform His most powerful work—yet it was all so hidden from their earthly perspective. Why?

Because Jesus doesn’t lead by earthly beauty. Jesus doesn’t act like any other leader ever. That was true then and it is true today. Today we are the Christian church and so often we are far from the most powerful, the most beautiful the most alluring in the eyes of the world. But none of that matters because we are God’s kingdom on earth. This is why the world is scornful of us just like it scorns Jesus. The world desires earthly beauty and it desires earthly power: Jesus uses neither as our King.

Listen to the requests of those at the crucifixion. **“The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One.” The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar and said, “If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.” One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Christ? Save yourself and us!”** (Luke 23:35-37,39).

It only makes sense: powerful people are people who have power, why would a powerful person allow themselves to suffer like Jesus did? They couldn’t understand it. The very idea of the Christ, the King of Kings coming to suffer and die went against absolutely every expectation the Jews had. Even after years of personal training by Jesus even the disciples refused to listen or understand what Jesus was plainly telling them: that Jesus must be rejected, suffer and die for the sins of the world.

The disciples had to learn the lesson that Jesus doesn’t lead by earthly beauty nor by earthly power but He leads by His very words which give life. Jesus leads us to a relationship with Him and to everlasting life by the Words and promises that He speaks. This is where the power of Jesus is found.

Who had the real power when Jesus was on the cross? Who was ultimately in control while Jesus was on the cross? The world would answer: Jesus’ enemies! They had won. Jesus was there humiliated, rejected and dying. They would soon be done with the man that they hated for so long. From an earthly perspective they were not logically wrong were they. But in reality they were wrong.

The one truly in control and in power while on the cross was Jesus Himself. Jesus came to die and He did die. Jesus came to lead the world to Him and to eternal life. He did—by His words. While the world was clamoring for Jesus to come off the cross in a bold display of power one criminal said: **“Jesus, remember me when you come into kingdom.”**

(verse 42). Then, in full control as a King leading His subjects Jesus replied: **“I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.”** (verse 43). Only Jesus could give the promise of paradise to that criminal who believed in Jesus. Only one completely in control one fully empowered could give the ultimate gift of eternal life. That’s what Jesus did on the cross.

That is what Jesus does today. From an earthly viewpoint the Christian Church isn’t the most beautiful organization on earth. We don’t worship in the most elegant or grand buildings. We are not the richest, we are not without sickness or challenges. When we travel we don’t travel in bomb proof limousines nor fly on our own private fortresses in the sky. But we are powerful. We are powerful because Jesus our King is our leader and our God. We are powerful because we have His words of forgiveness and of life.

Jesus still leads the world today. Whenever we share the Gospel and our faith it may look like something weak and insignificant in the eyes of the world, sometimes even to ourselves. This is why we have to remember that we are doing God’s work and we are giving nothing less than a place in God’s everlasting kingdom and the antidote to death itself.

Jesus is still leading...to heaven itself. Amen.