

# "Kings Are Always Powerful"

Philippians 2:5-11

April 17, 2011

Palm Sunday

Throughout the season of Lent, we have been considering the lies which Satan tells us about Jesus and His work for us. As we begin Holy Week, these lies get bigger and more serious. The lie which Satan wants us to believe today is very serious because it strikes at the very heart of who Jesus is and what He has come to do.

From the very beginning, Jesus was hailed as a king. The angel Gabriel said to Mary of the child whom she would conceive, "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end." (Luke 1:32-33) After Jesus was born, Wise Men came from the East, asking, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?" (Matthew 2:2)

This is pretty exciting stuff because we know what kings are like. Kings are mighty warriors, men who use power and force to defeat their enemies. Kings rule over great kingdoms. They maintain their kingdoms by force. That's the kind of king which we would desire. All successful kings are powerful and mighty like that...or so we think.

That's the lie which Satan wants us to believe. It's the lie which Satan wanted Jesus Himself to believe. Remember when Jesus was tempted in the wilderness. First, Satan said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus had gone without food for 40 days. He was famished. Satan was urging Jesus to use His power for personal gain like any true king would. It would prove that He was the Son of God. This show of power would cement His claim as king.

Secondly, after bringing Jesus to the top of the temple, Satan said "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down." By jumping off the temple and floating to the ground on the hands of angels, Satan was urging Jesus to use His power to do what any real king would do: attract a large following. Every successful king needs followers and this display of might would certainly do that.

Thirdly, after showing Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor, Satan said, ““All this I will give you, if you will bow down and worship me.” By this simple act of bowing down, Satan was urging Jesus to do what every true king wanted to do: be financially, militarily, and socially successful. Doing this surely would bring success to His mission.

On Palm Sunday, the power of this lie was increasing. It was the time of the Passover, the most important Jewish holiday, which emphasized salvation. The population of Jerusalem was swelling with the arrival of pilgrims. Many of the people hated the established rule – the Roman Empire which controlled the political power and the chief priests and scribes who controlled the religious power. Now was the perfect time for Jesus, as he entered into Jerusalem, to become the powerful king He was meant to be, to overthrow the established order with His divine power, and to establish and rule a new kingdom from Jerusalem. The hopes and the dreams of many people were resting on this kind of king and kingdom as they began their Palm Sunday parade.

Many people today are hoping for such a king and such a kingdom. The lies which Satan wanted Jesus to believe are the same lies which we may begin to believe. In Jesus, we want a king who uses His power to benefit us personally. We want Him to change stones into bread for us. We want Him to satisfy all of our needs if He is to be a good king worthy of our trust.

In Jesus, we want a king with a little pizzazz who will provide something exciting in our music, our worship, our Bible Study, and our Sunday School which will pack the people in the pews. If it brings the people in, it must be good, we think. And if Jesus is a good king, then He'll do the things that will pack them in.

In Jesus, we want a king who rules this world with might. We want a king who controls the culture and the politics of this world. We want our church to be well-liked, to be popular, and to be successful in this world. And if Jesus is a good king, then He'll make us popular among the people. He'll increase our membership, increase our treasury, and increase our success according to the standards of this world.

But this is all a lie! This is not the kind of king that Jesus came to be. This is hinted at in the frenzy of the Palm Sunday parade, but most people missed it. Jesus came into the city, not on the strong white steed of a mighty king. Jesus rode into the city on a donkey. This was in fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy which said, "Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." (Zech. 9:9) Jesus was truly a king, but a very different kind of king. He was righteous and victorious, but, at the same time, lowly.

This is the point which Paul is making in our text for today from Philippians. Jesus had everything He needed to be the most powerful and most successful king ever by worldly standards. He is the Son of God and possessed all the power of God Himself. Yet, despite the fact that He is God, He did not consider equality with God as something to be grasped and held on to. In other words, Jesus voluntarily gave up His right to act as God.

Jesus voluntarily set aside or did not fully or always use His divine power. In catechism class, we call this His "state of humiliation." While He always had divine power and used it to serve His neighbor, Jesus did not use His power to gain, dominion, riches, pleasure, or worldly glory for Himself. He made Himself out to be nothing. The king became a servant. God became a man.

But there's more. The Son of God did not simply become humble in attitude. He became humble in action, as well. The One who ruled the universe became obedient to the will and commands of His Heavenly Father. This was no small obedience. Jesus was obedient to the point of death. And this was no ordinary death. This was death on a cross.

In every way, Jesus appeared to be weak. In every way, Jesus appeared to fail. In every way, Jesus appeared to be no king at all. But the exact opposite was occurring. On the cross, in His weakness, Jesus was strong. In His supposed failure, Jesus was succeeding in all that He had come to do. Despite not appearing to be a king, Jesus was the perfect king.

How could this be? Are our senses deceiving us? Yes. That's exactly the point. Wealth, power, and worldly success are not the answers to our problems. They *are* the problems. Wealth, power, and worldly success deal only with the things of this world. Any good thing they provide for us is only temporary. They ultimately lead to a dead end, both figuratively and literally. Wealth, power, and worldly success are nowhere to be found in a graveyard.

Jesus is the only king who could deal with the transcendent issues of evil, sin and guilt, death and hell. What Jesus went through appeared to be evil because He was engaging evil in a great battle. In response to our sin, Jesus was being obedient that His obedience might be given to us in our account before God.

In response to the guilt which our sin produces, Jesus was offering the perfect sacrifice in His body on the cross. In obedience to His Father's command, Jesus laid down His life as the payment for our sin. In that sacrifice, we, who are slaves to sin, have full and free forgiveness for all of our sins because of King Jesus. Our guilt vanishes in Christ's sacrifice.

In response to death which our sin earns for us, Jesus, our King, undergoes death Himself. Death is the punishment for sin. In Jesus' death, our sin is punished. Since our sin has been punished in the death of Christ, death can no longer hurt us or make us afraid. Death now leads to life.

This is what happened to Jesus. After Jesus was obedient to death, even death on the cross, God raised Him to life, highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him a name that is above all other names. Here is the power. Here is the glory. In heaven, every knee in heaven, on earth, and under the earth will bow before Jesus. Every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Glory, power, and might come to our King Jesus at the right time and in the right way.

This changes who we are. We are no longer children of Adam, doomed to death and hell. We are children of God who have been rescued for life and heaven. This also changes how we are to live.

Our text says we are to have the same mind – the same way of thinking – that Christ Jesus had. Instead of demanding certain rights as children of God, we don't expect any special status as children of God. Instead of expecting God to use His power to give us power, dominion, riches, pleasure, or worldly glory, we make ourselves to be nothing. Instead of focusing our attention on success or glory as individuals or as a congregation, we take on the form of servants and become obedient to God and His will. This may lead to rejection, suffering, and even death.

But as God exalted Jesus, He has and will exalt us. He has given us the name that is above all other names: His name in Holy Baptism. He will bring us to everlasting life in heaven. We will share in His glory, power, and ruling forever.

Disregard Satan's lie as to what it means to be a king: that kings are always powerful and mighty and that kingdoms are always successful. Do not let the lie influence you as to how King Jesus works or how His Kingdom measures success. Every king who has had power and might on this earth has died, been confined to a grave, and had his kingdom crumble to dust. Jesus had the most might and power of all kings as the Son of God. He chose to not hold on to His equality with God and set aside His divine power. This King died, rose from His grave, and has established a kingdom which exists in humility now but will last forever in glory. This is *the* true King! This is His true Kingdom! Amen.