

There Is Another King, Jesus

Acts 17:1-9

“[They] have turned the world upside down. . . They are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus” (Acts 17:6, 7).

This accusation, leveled against the early Christian missionaries, sounds remarkably similar to the one thrown at Jesus when he was on trial: “We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king” (Luke 23:2). The similarity is no coincidence, for it raises an often-overlooked theme throughout the gospels and Acts, but one to which must give careful attention: *What does it mean that Jesus is king?*

This is an important question for Christians (and non-Christians) because on the one hand, we claim allegiance to King Jesus, but on the other hand we also work, play, study, and live within other social structures (“kingdoms”) as well. More importantly, we all feel the persistent craving to be “kings,” building kingdoms by advantaging ourselves—and disadvantaging others.

Since we feel politically removed from a monarchy (the idea of “king” and “kingdom” seems fairy-tale and medieval), perhaps it would help to point out three basic components of a kingdom, discover how Jesus approached these components, and what this means for us.

1. How Kingdoms Work

Every “kingdom,” whether large or small, formal or informal, has some idea of *prize*, *problem*, and *process*—

- that is, what the heart says is most valuable (*prize*)
- what stands between you and that prize (*problem*)
- and how to get past that problem to the prize (*process*)

The way a social structure or kingdom sorts out these values is the way they work. Jesus describes the way kingdoms typically work in Matthew 20:25, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.”

2. How Jesus’ Kingdom Works

When we study the gospels and Acts, we discover that Jesus’ view of the prize, problem, and process was radically counter to every other kingdom on earth—including the self-preserving, others-harming kingdoms *we* try to build. A few examples illustrate this:

- When contrasting himself with other leaders (“thieves”), Jesus said, “I came that [you] may have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10).
- When Peter tried to dissuade Jesus from going to Jerusalem (where Jesus had assured his disciples that he would be killed), Jesus rebuked Peter: “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns” (Matthew 16:23).
- When Jesus stood on trial before Pilate, Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world” (John 18:36).

- When Jesus hung on the cross, the plaque above his head said, “This is Jesus, the King of the Jews” (Matthew 27:37).

More examples could be given,¹ but what do these have to do with the way Jesus reigned? What does it teach us about what it means that Jesus is king?

- Jesus knew that the greatest prize—what every heart really longs for—is God himself, the only source of life and joy.
- Jesus knew that humans’ greatest problem was *not* slavery to Rome (or even sickness or poverty) but their bondage to sin. He knew that sin (a turning away from God) was the reason they *thought* they could find satisfaction in building their own kingdoms.
- Jesus knew that the process to get that problem and past the prize was through *self-sacrificial love* (Matthew 20:25-28).

When Jesus wore the crown of thorns and the placard announcing his “crime” stood above his head, Jesus’ tormentors proclaimed something truer than they knew: Jesus’ crucifixion—which by all accounts would be a humans’ worst defeat—was actually the ultimate triumph, for it was the way victory truly comes: self-sacrificial love.

Remember the angry cry of the Christians’ opponents in Thessalonica? “[They] have turned the world upside down. . . .They are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.” To say that “Jesus is King,” is to proclaim that the true emperor of the world is not one who takes from others to enrich himself, but who gives *himself* to enrich others. That is why to say “Jesus is King!” is good news that turns the world upside down—or, more accurately, *right side up*.

Discussion Questions

1. What “kingdoms” or “social structures” do you live in?
2. Take some of these “kingdoms,” and think through what values would you assign to the three components of a kingdom: prize, problem/s, and process.
3. Why do you think we have an impulse to build a kingdom? In light of Genesis 1:26-27, is this impulse right or wrong?
4. Reading Revelation 22:5 in light of Genesis 1:26-27, what does this teach us about how Jesus corrects yet fulfills our truest desire for dominion?
5. What does Jesus’ triumph on the cross teach us about how victory truly comes?
6. What do you tend to think about the claim that “Jesus is King?” How does an understanding of his unique way of kingship excite you about serving him as king?

¹ When a paralyzed man was lowered to Jesus, he first said, “Your sins are forgiven,” then, to prove his authority to do so, said: “Rise, pick up your bed, and go home” (Mark 2:5, 11); When religious leaders try to skewer Jesus on the horns of a political dilemma regarding the Roman tax, he said, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Luke 20:25).