

## End Times – Christ the King

Luke 23:35-43; November 20 & 21, 2016

*“Make America Great Again.”* Ever heard that phrase? Whether you like the choice that has been made for the new President of the United States (and I’m not touching that one at all), there was something that resonated across the United States with that phrase. Why? Pundits, talk show hosts, and a host of other people across the United States have discussed the answer to that question of *“WHY?”*. For some, it has been suggested, that it takes them back to a time when they believed that Americans were leaders in the world. It’s kind of like the person who says: *“I remember back in the good old days....”* (The danger in doing that sometimes is that our mind tends to remember the good and forget the painful.) But I think the answer to that *WHY* question is more basic than that. Who doesn’t want to be great? I have never seen a sports team compete to be last. Who doesn’t want to succeed in life? Who hopes or even tries to fail in this life? Most people want to be great.

I don’t think the people of Jesus’ day were any different. If they used that phrase it would have been *“Make ISRAEL great again!”* They wanted to become that nation that would have the strength of the nation that King David had ruled over. They wanted once again be that great nation that had been promised to Abraham. They wanted to be great. They wanted a Great King.

Some looked at Jesus as being that Great King that would make them great again. Massive crowds had followed him at first. He was shaking things up. The people loved him. It wasn’t supposed to end like this. This wasn’t their King that they saw on the cross. Yet, THIS is exactly the King that this world needed.

Today, we celebrate the Last Sunday of the Church Year. The Christian Church has called this Sunday, *“Christ the King” Sunday*. At first glance, this Gospel Lesson doesn’t make a lot of sense, does it? We’ve been building up throughout the entire Church Year, and we’re now finally here, the Last Sunday of End Times. It’s time for a celebration. Next week, we start Advent. Christmas trees are coming out. Christmas lights beginning to be displayed outside homes. It’s not the time of the year to see a bloody Jesus nailed to a cross. Definitely not the same picture Jeremiah painted of Jesus, as our wise King. Doesn’t seem compatible with the supreme ruler over all creation Paul describes in Colossians. Yet, this is the Perfect King that we need. This is the Perfect King for this world.

To see God’s plan for this King on the cross, we need to go back at least 2,000 years before Jesus. We go back to Abraham. God had given Abraham a promise: **“I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.”** (Gen. 12:2) (*Sounds almost like a slogan.*) But God has a funny way of working out his promises. A great King would come! Abraham gets his long promised son – Isaac. Then God comes to him and says: **“Take your son, your only son, Isaac, go to the region of Moriah... sacrifice him there as a burnt offering.”** (Gen. 22:2) Imagine how Abraham felt. He travels 3 days to go up the Mount of Moriah. Abraham loved his son, but he loved his Heavenly Father more. Abraham trusted the plan of God, even if it meant that God would raise Isaac from the dead. (Heb. 11:17) He binds his son with rope. Lays his willing son, Isaac, on the altar, and raises the knife to kill his son, and then God says: *Stop!* He would make Israel great again. God provides the sacrifice that day.

Move forward 2,000 years to that same mountain. Same **“region of Moriah,”** just a different name 2,000 years later – Golgotha. We see another Son following his Father’s will. He prayed to his Father: **“My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”** (Mt. 26:39) Yet, he knew that there would be only one way that God would make the people of this world great again. This time, it would require death. So, Jesus makes that journey to the cross. Like Isaac, carrying the wood for the sacrifice. Like Isaac, willing letting his father sacrifice him for the sins of the world.

This time, on that same mountain, there would be no substitute. Jesus was the Substitute for this world. He bled so we might be forgiven. He suffered the anger of God so that we might feel the awesome love of God. He became this world’s greatest “sinner,” so that we might be made God’s saints. He experienced the agony of hell, so that we might experience an eternity in heaven. That’s the King that hangs on a cross in today’s Gospel Lesson.

Many didn't see THAT King that dark day on Calvary. They stood and mocked him – **“He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One.”** The soldiers mocked him – **“If you the King of the Jews, save yourself.”** How true their words were. Jesus didn't need to save himself. He was there to save others. This is THE KING, not just of the Jews, but also of this world.

So, what do we do with this King? How does he make us great again? We could be like the one thief on that cross. He didn't need this King. He needed no Savior up to this point, and he wouldn't need one going forward. Or we could be like the other thief. For the one dying thief, there were no more excuses. Promises to do better in the future were out of the question. None of that was going to matter anymore. All he could do is despair of himself. There was nothing more to do than beg for mercy and plead for grace. There was nothing he could do to make himself great in the eyes of God. There on that cross, he saw the Grace of this King. He had heard his words of Jesus either from the cross or earlier in his life. There was nothing more to do than trust Jesus. **“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”**

Then Jesus spoke those words of Grace: **“I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in Paradise.”** With those words, Jesus is promising this criminal a place in his Kingdom. This Jesus of Nazareth is your Savior and your King. He has come to make you great again before Him in heaven. The greatness of this world will come and go through the pages of history. This is the Son of God declaring to you that no matter what you have done, he gave his life for you. He has come to be your Savior and to rule in your heart. Your King says to you: **“I tell you the truth, you will be with me in Paradise!”** Amen.