

The Unimaginable Crowning of the King

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[0 : 00] This is Jesus, King of the Jews.

Well, we got two, three more days of shopping left, right? I did something I promised myself that I would never do. I would never go to Causeway Bay during the Christmas time.

You can keep me accountable that I would never do it again, and if I do, you're welcome to kick me in the knee as hard as you dare. I figured my wife said I needed to go get a doll, so go to Toys R Us.

There's two mistakes there, ladies. Don't ever tell your husband just to go get a doll at Toys R Us, because there's something about our brain, and we walk in there and we see thousands of dolls, and we kind of become paralyzed, and we have no idea what to do, what kind of doll to get, how to get it.

It was just out of control. I didn't know what to do. I bought a craft box instead, or as the British would say, a craft box instead. I bought a craft because I couldn't decide what doll to get amongst the thousands of them.

[1 : 33] And as I sat there and pondered my dilemma and what I should do, I walked around, and as I walked around, I heard the most amazing music. I was like, silent night, holy night.

All was calm. All was bright. And I walked through this door, and I felt so weird. I felt like there was this struggle of kingdoms with inside of me.

I mean, I knew there is this struggle of kingdoms all around us. We talk about it often. There is a kingdom of Tobin, and I know how to act there, and I know what to do there, and I know what is required of me there, and I know who the king is because Tobin is the king, or he wants to be the king.

And there is the kingdom of God. And as I listened and I walked through there, I felt weird because I felt this tension and this battle coming up within me.

And I realized that within me there's this struggle of these two kingdoms. And if I'm honest, if I'm brutally honest, sometimes it's so much easier to work and live in the kingdom of Tobin.

[2 : 48] Because in the kingdom of Tobin, I know all the rules and everything makes sense, and sometimes I don't even have to think about what I'm going to do next because I just know in my flesh what I'm going to do next.

But in the kingdom of God, things are different. We've been talking and we read things like, the first shall be the last, and the last shall be the first.

And I just don't get that sometimes. We hear things that says the greatest is the least. And if you want to be great, you need to serve.

I've never taught that in the kingdom of Tobin, but in the kingdom of God, that's a message that goes over and over and over.

And we struggle with it in our lives, if we're honest. As a theologian, we call that a paradox. There's something that's happening and we see it, but we don't understand it because it shouldn't be happening the way it should happen.

[3 : 47] In this journey of these last four sermons, we've been calling it invertedness or upside-downness, that we see things that aren't the way they should be or the way that we think that they should be, and we have a hard time.

And the Gospels that we've been reading for the last three years share a lot about Christ's kingdom and how the rules in his kingdom are so different than the rules in the kingdom of Tobin.

And I struggle with that, and sometimes, I have to be honest, I feel like it's easier to live within the kingdom of Tobin. I mean, just look at the passage today. Six days before this passage happened, Jesus walks into this place, Jerusalem.

There's over a million people there now. And 20,000 people are following him, and they're cheering for him, and they want the Christmas story to come true. They want the baby who's born, he's the king, he's going to be the one who's going to rule over us.

But now, six days later, they're yelling, crucify him, kill him, kill him. It's a paradox.

[5 : 08] It's upside down. I mean, if I were to write this story, I wouldn't end it the way we did in verse 46, when Jesus yells out, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

In my story, in the kingdom of Tobin's story, the story would go something like this. We'd get to verse 44, and then there would be three hours of darkness. The Greek says that the word is basically that everyone became blind.

There would be three hours of darkness that everyone would become blind, and at the end of that three hours in the kingdom of Tobin, what would happen would be Gandalf would run down the hill with a light, and the light would be blinding out, and everybody would look up to the cross, and Jesus would be there in golden shield and armor with a sword like this, and behind him, there'd be 100,000 elves, I mean, angels.

There'd be 100,000 angels, and Jesus would be sitting there like this, and he says, okay, let's get it on. And he would go in there, and he would just destroy and cut and destroy all the enemies, and he would be victorious, and he would build this massive palace on Jerusalem Boulevard, and we would worship him there today.

He would be the hero. But in the story we just read, he's not a hero. He's weak.

[6 : 30] He's gentle. He's mild. He's meek. He dies. No hero ever dies.

I mean, Hollywood's not going to buy this script, are they? No way. I mean, in Hollywood, the hero just takes as much as he can to the very, very end, and finally he says, that's enough. And then the higher the body count, he just kills everybody.

The better the story is. But Jesus is kind of like an anti-hero. When I used to read this story to my students in China for the very first time, the very first time they ever heard the gospel, I would be reading these stories, and I would get to this point, and Jesus would die, and I would just stop and say, okay, that's the end.

We'll talk about it next week. And my students would look at me, and they would go, what? Oh, me, lao, shi. Bu hao, bu hao. If you want to have a movie, the hero has to be great.

He has to be strong. He has to be powerful. This is no good. This is no good. He has to be passionate and have pride and dignity. But the Jesus you just told us about, Jesus, he's weak.

[7 : 45] He's wounded. He dies. He's wounded. He dies. No good, no good. I never remember the look on their faces as they're trying to figure out, this is a good thing?

But the passage says, this is the Christmas story. I mean, this is why the baby was born. The baby was born to suffer, to be his servant, and to die for us.

We don't think about that often on Christmas, do we? I mean, this is why I chose this passage today, because I think this passage is the ultimate upside-downness. This passage is the ultimate invertedness.

This passage is the ultimate paradox, and the ultimate paradox is basically this, that the whole Christmas story is about a baby being born in a manger in Bethlehem to go to a cross to get what you deserve.

It's the greatest paradox. The Christmas story is about a baby being born, and Jesus takes God's punishment for us.

[9 : 16] For us. We don't think that often. when we go to a nativity scene. Because in our kingdoms, we vision things differently, and we have different kings, and we have different rules.

But in the kingdom of God, things are very, very different, and people act very, very different. I gave you this passage today.

I hope that you will come back and read it, and as we look through it, I just want to make a couple observations that have stuck out to me as I've been reading Matthew 27. Because I think it's full of what we are supposed to do and look and act like in Jesus' kingdom.

It's supposed to be what a comparison of his kingdom and our kingdom. And I'm going to share some things that I've been comparing with the kingdom of Tobin.

In God's kingdom, in the inverted kingdom, in the upside-down kingdom, in verses 11 through 14, Jesus stands silent. Jesus doesn't even answer one question.

[10:34] In fact, he answers one question, the very first question. Pilate answers the question, asks him the question, are you the king of Jews? And in Greek, he basically just says, you say. You say.

And by then, from that point on, he doesn't answer any of his accusers. We're told that he remains silent. It drives the people crazy. I mean, Pilate is sitting back and he's kind of laughing because he's kind of liking Jesus because he hates the Jews.

They've caused him so much trouble. And here's this guy who's perplexing the Jews, who's causing them all this trouble. And you can read it in the Greek. There's just kind of this amusement and awe and wonder. Wow.

This guy really can give it to them without speaking. accusation after accusation after accusation. And he says nothing. But you know, in my kingdom, if people were to come and to accuse me, I would yell. I might even get really frustrated and maybe feel like I want to swing out and punch them.

[11:41] I would lash out. I would blame. I would accuse. I would try to justify myself. I would try to explain myself. I might even gossip to hurt other people. But Jesus doesn't do that.

Jesus doesn't do that. We're told in this passage and the rest of Scripture that Jesus is silent. Jesus remains silent so that one day we can be heard.

When we say, Dear God, forgive me. I need you. In our kingdom in verses 11 and 22, when we're being condemned, I mean, when we're being condemned in 11 and 22, in my kingdom, man, I would be quick to make excuses.

I would be quick to justify myself. I would be quick to show my innocence, especially if I were innocent. And even if I weren't innocent, I would try to make myself look innocent. But in the inverted kingdom, in God's kingdom, in Jesus' kingdom, Jesus is condemned and he takes all of the condemnation even though he's innocent.

He takes it. He's like a sponge. Have you noticed this when you read the passage? He's like a sponge. He just, he doesn't squeeze it out and squeeze his wrath out. He's just sucking it in. And we're told it in Jesus' kingdom.

[13:05] He takes the condemnation even though he's innocent so that you and I who are guilty will one day be set free.

In our kingdom, in Jesus' kingdom, in the upside down kingdom. In verses 26 to 33, we read this in verse 26.

He's scourged with a flagellum. It was this whip with eight pieces of leather on it with bone and metal in it. And the Romans were perfect and they would whip it across and they would rip it through there and it would rip out the flesh and there'd be blood everywhere.

The Jews had a rule. They couldn't lash anybody more than 40 times because that was the death penalty. But the Romans had no such rule. And so they went after Jesus. And in upside down kingdom, Jesus is there being scourged.

In verse 27, in his upside down kingdom, we see that he's stripped naked. He's totally shamed. Do you realize that? I mean, when people went to the cross, they tried to make it as shameful.

[14:18] They would try to take away your name. They'd try to take away everything from you. And so he's stripped. He's totally naked. He's totally shamed. He's totally humiliated.

We're told that Pilate brings them into the praetorium. We've gone there on our trips to Israel. And he brings out the whole cohort. So there's 600 soldiers surrounding Jesus. They're actually playing a game with Jesus.

It's called the King's Game. If you go there, you can find it. It's this little slide. I don't know if we have the slide there, but it's on the ground. And it's right here. It's this little circle. And it's this little circle like the King of Life. And you would roll dice.

And as you entered in from the right, there's a little scorpion there. You can't see it. But the scorpion meant flagellum. You started it all off by getting ripped up. And then you would just kind of walk your way around. And whenever they rolled the dice, the next thing happened to you.

And the next thing happened to you. And the next thing happened to you. And at the end, the end was always the same. The end was, you die. And so there's 600 soldiers, and they've stripped him naked, and they're playing this game, and they're totally humiliating him.

[15:23] And in verse 29, we see that in Jesus' kingdom, in the upside-down kingdom, they mock him. They put a crown of thorns on him. They beat him in the head over and over and over with a

reed.

The verbs are very active. It's not just like, but they're very powerful. They're very active, and it's continually, continually, continually in this kingdom. In Jesus' kingdom, in the upside-down kingdom, he takes the lashes so that one day you and I are healed through his blood.

In Jesus' kingdom, he takes the stripping, he takes the humiliation, he takes having all his clothes ripped off of him so that one day you and I will be clothed in glory.

In Jesus' kingdom, he's totally mocked, he's made fun of, he's beaten with a crown of thorns, it's pushed deeply in his head, his head, his scalp is copious with veins, and he's bleeding everywhere, and his back is ripped open.

And he takes the crown of thorns in his kingdom so that one day you and I, we get a crown of glory.

[16:50] In the upside-down kingdom, in verses 27 through 37, we see that God, Jesus, our king, he's mocked, he's reviled, he's spit on, he has his beard pulled out, he's beaten unrecognizable.

I mean, he's not a cute baby in the manger anymore. I mean, no one can recognize him. He's shown no mercy. I mean, you think about this. In five of the 13 verses, all they talk about is mocking.

In five of the 13 verses of the crucifixion, he's just mocked, continually, continually, over and over and over. He's mocked by the soldiers, he's mocked by the passerbys, he's mocked by the religious leaders, he's mocked by, he's even mocked by the, the guys dying on the cross with him, they even turn around and they mock him also.

And what we see in Jesus' kingdom is again, that he takes all those things, he takes all those things on him so that one day you and I, we might be blessed.

We might be honored. We might be declared innocent. We might be justified of all our sins. In the inverted kingdom, in the Christmas kingdom, we see in this passage that Jesus doesn't even save himself.

[18:21] I mean, he allows himself to be forsaken by God and he dies an incredibly painful and humiliating death so that one day we can be saved.

one day we can meet God. One day we can be called his children.

Have you ever thought about that? When you looked at a nativity scene? It's the greatest paradox. It's the greatest upside-downness.

It's the greatest unexplainable thing in the history of the world. It's the meaning of Christmas. We get God's glory.

Jesus gets a cross. How do you feel about that? How do you feel about that? How do you feel about the Christmas story?

[19:51] How do you feel about God's kingdom? The upside-down kingdom as opposed to your kingdom? Does it make you feel good? I keep reading this passage over and over and I wonder why those 20,000 people who were following him for three years and some of them less than that.

They're coming to Jerusalem. I wonder why they give it up. I wonder why they turn. I talk to people all the time about Christ and what he's done for them.

You know, sometimes people look at me and they go, I don't want that. That's not the kind of God I want. I don't really want I don't really want a mild God.

I really don't want a gentle God. I really don't want a meek God. I really don't want a suffering God. I really don't want a weak Savior. I don't want a Savior like that because I don't want to live like that because I know if I have a Savior like that then he's going to call me to live like that.

And I don't want to live like that. I want to be or I want a God like the soldiers or the religious leaders.

[21:04] They wanted a God who was powerful. They wanted success. They wanted it now. They wanted to be sexy. They wanted to be relevant. They wanted health. They wanted education. They wanted wealth.

They wanted power. They wanted to prove it now. Why would I choose a gentle and meek and weak God over a God who can do things for me like that?

I mean, in our minds, I think we read these passages and if we're honest, we can't ever believe that God would really work through that way. Would God really work through weakness? Would God really work through failure? Would God really work through suffering?

Would God really work through pain? Does he want me to have pain so that I can become a better person? I mean, I don't think many of us are out there saying, Dear Lord, please bring me more

suffering today.

I need suffering today. I need to become a better person. Are we really saying that? Do we want a God like that?

[22 : 07] I mean, we want a God who comes down from the cross. We want a God who's powerful. We want a God who takes our lives into control. We want a God who's going to give us everything we want. We don't want a weak God.

God, I mean, if God were to give us stuff that was hard and difficult, we'd get angry. We'd become mad.

We'd become bitter. We might even scoff. God, if you were really real, you wouldn't make this happen to me. God, if you were really alive, I wouldn't get sick. I would be married by now.

I would have children. Maybe I wouldn't have children. Maybe my children would treat better. God, if you were really real, you would crush these people who are making my life miserable. That's the God most of us want.

Isn't it? We know the story tells us that in God's kingdom, in the upside down kingdom, in the inverted kingdom, God doesn't work that way.

[23 : 19] God works through darkness. You ever been in a dark place? I have. God works through pain.

You ever had pain? I have. God works through suffering. God works through weakness. God works through the difficult times in our life.

You ever had difficult times in your life? I have. Verse 45 in your bulletin says that now on the sixth hour, darkness fell.

The word of the Hebrew in Greek is skotos. It means to become blind. And for three hours, people could not see anything. Do you realize that? Jesus was crucified at nine o'clock in the morning.

At 12 o'clock noon, everything just went dark. I mean, it was black. I mean, the word is you couldn't even see your hand in front of your face. You ever been in a place where you can't see your hand in front of your face? I have.

[24 : 24] It's kind of scary, right? We were going through the tunnels underneath Jerusalem this last summer, and we were in this tunnel, and I realized I'm on the front of the line, and I don't even have a light with me. And I'm ducking, and I'm weaving, and I have my camera, and I'm kind of trying to take a little flash so I could see what's ahead of me, but I couldn't see anything in front of me.

And the passage says that when Jesus was crucified from 12 to 3, people could not see anything. It was the darkest hour. I mean, if you were a Jew back then, you'd be going, wow, this is probably not a good thing, is it?

I mean, they probably would have been reminded of Exodus 10 when Jesus, when the people of God were in Egypt, and God was trying to free them, and in Exodus 10, I think it's verse 16, he sends this darkness for three days.

It says in Exodus that the darkness is so dark that you can feel it. You've never been in a place where it's so dark?

You've never been in a time in your life when it's so hard. But you can feel it. For three hours, people can see nothing.

[25 : 38] In Exodus, the people just kind of sat down, the Egyptians, the Jewish people had light, but the Egyptians didn't because no one could move. And we read in this passage that basically Jesus is dying.

He's suffering. He's experiencing his worst nightmares in complete darkness. I mean, God, God is doing his greatest miracles in complete darkness.

I've been thinking about this in my kingdom, and I wonder if many of us think that's even possible. do we really believe that God can work in the darkest times in our lives?

Do we really believe that he's there? I mean, when we face hard times and failures, losing our jobs, loneliness, sickness, betrayal, insults, shame, discouragement, divorce, abandonment, hard times, mocking, do we really believe that God would allow that to happen?

Or do we walk by the cross and say, if you were God, come down here and make this fixed right now because this is uncomfortable. I'm not happy.

[27 : 10] but the passage says that in God's inverted kingdom, this is how God works.

He works in the darkness. He works in the difficult times. He works in the pain. He works in the suffering. The passage says that God is doing his greatest work in creation, in your life, in the difficult times, in the darkness, in the pain, in the suffering, and if we don't realize that, we lose everything.

If we don't realize that God is working in the darkest hours of your life, that he's always there amidst the failures, the total loss, the poverty, that God is always there when things are at their worst, when we are at our worst.

The passage says that when we are at our worst, God is working. Do we believe that?

The passage says that in the midst of total loss, total failure, crucifixion, the kingdom of God is near.

[28 : 30] He's pursuing you. He wants a relationship with you. He wants that relationship back. He wants you to realize that in his kingdom, things work differently than in the kingdom of Tobin.

And he has an amazing plan for your life. But sometimes we have to go through darkness. sometimes we have to go through failure.

Sometimes we have to go through pain. Sometimes we have to go through suffering. Sometimes we have to be abandoned by everybody we know and love.

But the passage says God is there. And he's working. it's the greatest upside down. It's the greatest inverting.

It's the most paradoxical thing you're ever going to hear. The message of Christmas. The baby coming to you in your darkest hour. To save you.

[29 : 53] To save you. So the question we have to ask ourselves is this Christmas. What kingdom are we looking for?

What kingdom do we want to be a part of? Probably the more important question we need to ask ourselves is who do we want to be king?

Who do we want to be king? A baby in a manger? weak, mild, gentle, humble, who inverts everything so that we might come back to God?

God? Father, we thank you for this day. We thank you that you are so faithful.

We thank you that your kingdom is not like our kingdom. God. We thank you that you're working in the darkest hours and the darkest times and the times we feel like we've lost it all.

[31 : 09] There's no hope. This passage, your son, the cross, it says, no, there's all, there's all hope. But we look for it. We trust you to be God.

God. We release our striking out and our justifying in our words and we realize that you're God and you've already taken all those things to bring us.

You're not just bringing us to heaven, but you're bringing us along this journey. Lord, I pray for those of us who still want a strong, powerful God that makes it happen right now.

Lord, I pray that you would just invade our hearts, that your spirit would show us the meaning of Christmas and the baby born in a manger and that all he's done for us to turn our worlds upside down, to invert our kingdoms.

I pray that we would believe, that we'd repent of our selfishness and our own kingship. We'd ask you to come in, become king in our lives.

[32 : 19] Lord, I pray for those of us who crowned you, king, a long time ago, but in the midst of the journey, we've lost perspective, we've lost sight, we've lost understanding.

We've tried to put the crown back on our heads. We've tried to live for a different kingdom. Lord, we thank you for this passage because it says that you are the God who never gives up on your people, that you're the God of second chances.

I confess my kingship to you. I repent of my selfishness. You fill us with your spirit and with your word and with your truth.

Show us, even in the darkest, darkest, darkest times, that you're at work and you're moving. Lord, I pray for us as a church during this Christmas day, these holidays, these inverted days when it's so easy to become confused.

we're going to run into people every day and every moment who are like the people at the cross, but not just for three hours or for three days.

[33 : 39] They've been blinded for a long, long time. And the problem is they don't even know they're blind because they think they're looking for the right king, a powerful king, a wealthy king.

I want to pray for us as a church that we would be salt and light and they would see that we serve a different kingdom, that we follow a different king, and that you would do only what you could do is

open their hearts and their minds and their eyes and their ears to the message of your son, these holiday season, and that we would be faithful to be the hands and feet to love them and to encourage them to be real and honest with them, but to point them to your son.

Father, we pray for our church. We realize it's not our church. It's your church. It's your kingdom. Help us to be found worshiping the true king. Father, we love you. We realize that none of this is possible without your power changing us.

We realize that none of this is possible unless we look to the true king, your son Jesus, and realize he did all these things so that we could do them through his power. Change us.

[35 : 13] Make us different. Father, we love you. We pray all these things in your son Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.