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End Times 4 – Christ the King

Matthew 27:27-31 – Hail, Christ the King!

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Israel clamored for a king. Even all the way back in the time of Samuel, Israel clamored for a king. Give us a king so we will be like all the other nations, they said. Give us a king that is tall and handsome and impressive and powerful, they said. They wanted a king like everyone else, even though that kind of king never lasted and was never really as great as they wanted him to be.

But still, as time went on, Israel clamored for a king. Even after the kingdom of Israel split in two after David and Solomon's time, after the northern kingdom was destroyed by Assyria, after the southern kingdom was exiled to Babylon, and after the Persians and Greeks and Romans each took their turn in the Holy Land, Israel clamored for a king so they would be like all the other nations. They wanted their independence, they didn't want anybody else telling them what to do, and they especially didn't want some Gentiles thinking they could push around God's chosen people.

But this kind of king surely was not what they had in mind. When a poor, homeless carpenter from *Galilee* of all places claimed to be the king of Israel, the Jews and Romans alike could only laugh... and scoff. The Romans looked at Jesus and thought he was the perfect king to represent the Jews. He was weak and pitiful, a nobody who thought he was a somebody. Sums the Jews up perfectly!, they thought. The Jews looked at Jesus, the one who claimed to be their Messiah, and wondered, "Where's the pomp and circumstance? Where's the sword and shield and bow and arrows?" Jesus wasn't the kind of king they wanted – in fact, it seemed like all he did was tell them all the ways that they had wandered from what God said was right. It didn't seem like he had any intentions at all of starting a new kingdom of Israel – and the Jews *really* didn't like that.

And so the Romans and Jews together resented and rejected Jesus. They hated him and arrested him and put him on trial in a kangaroo court, they beat him and mocked him and eventually even killed him, though he had done nothing even close to deserving it – except speak the truth, and for them, that was enough.

But it was that truth that Jesus lived and spoke that really revealed the kind of King he was and the kind of Kingdom that Israel really, finally

needed. See, Jesus wasn't as shallow as the kings of this world – he wasn't a Hollywood king who was really only a puppet to fame and fortune. Jesus was a king that ruled for the good of his people's real, spiritual needs; a king that wasn't afraid to do what he had to in order to protect them and provide for them; and a king that refused to back down from what was good and right no matter how his own people might rebel against him. No, Jesus wasn't the kind of king the Jews or the Romans were looking for. He was greater. They wanted a king who would live and die, and set up an earthly kingdom that would wax and wane. But they got a king who would live and die and rise again to set up a heavenly kingdom that would last forever. They might not have been able to see it with their eyes, but we can see it with our hearts: Jesus is the King of kings whose greatness is in his sacrifice and whose glory is in his salvation, so let's give Jesus the praise he deserves: hail, Christ the King!

It is true, though, that Jesus sure didn't look much like a king that day. As ironic as it was that Jesus was given a royal robe and a crown and a scepter and honored as a king, "*Hail, King of the Jews!*", the soldiers of course only did it to mock him. No true king would ever allow this to happen, they said. Kings aren't supposed to be beaten and spit on by their subjects, but you can't even stop us! They whipped him and scourged him and beat him with their hands and with their weapons, and they dared him to do anything about it.

Where was his greatness then? It was there – it was just too deep for them to see. The kings of this world – *they* care about being bowed to and honored and wearing all the nicest clothes and jewelry. *They* want to stand out from all the others because they think that makes them glorious. But really it just masks their insecurity and vulnerability, because they know and we know that no earthly reign and no earthly kingdom lasts forever.

But there comes a time when someone is so great and glorious that they don't need to flaunt it – when their greatness is so secure that they can share it with others and not worry about losing it or diminishing it, because they know that sharing it really only makes their greatness that much *greater* – and that's exactly the way it was for Jesus. His greatness was not in showing off. It was in his selfless sacrifice. It wasn't that he wasn't strong enough to stop those soldiers from hitting him and mocking him. It was that he was strong enough to restrain himself for our sake. See, everything Jesus went through that day, he went through *for us* – he *had* to so that we would *never* have to. He did what no one else ever

would or even could by suffering and dying to redeem us from our sins. Though in mockery he was clothed in scarlet like our sins that were placed upon him, his whole purpose for going through this was to make them as white as snow. Yes, every hit, every spit, every thorn, every nail was meant for you and me, but Jesus took them instead.

And the mind-blowing thing about it? He was suffering that way even for the very people who put him there. And before we heap all that guilt on the Jewish religious leaders and the Roman soldiers, let's remember well that we were there, too, adding to the suffering. Maybe not physically, but as the mockers gathered around Jesus that day, our own sinful attitudes put us right there, too. No, maybe you've never struck Jesus with your fists, but have you ever resented the cross of Christian faithfulness he gives you to carry at those times when it seems especially hard and heavy? No, maybe you didn't drive in that crown of thorns, but have you ever accused Jesus of being careless or hurtful in the way he rules your life and this world? No, maybe you've never spit in Jesus' face, but if worship and Bible study and opportunities for fellowship and service aren't the high priority that he wants them to be in your life, then that's really not much different, is it. And that's not just us, either – that's every sinner that has ever walked this earth. There might have been hundreds of soldiers personally present there to carry out this beating, but there were billions more who were there in spirit to add their own part.

But still, that didn't stop Christ the King from finishing what he came for. He came to humble himself, he came to sacrifice himself to accomplish something that was so much greater than anything any earthly king could imagine. He came to defeat not the Romans or some other earthly empire. He came to once and for all defeat sin and death and the devil himself, the greatest enemies this universe has ever known, and the way he had to do that was through his own suffering and death. He willingly left his heavenly throne and lowered himself to the level of his fallen people, because that's how far down he had to go to reach us and lift us up again with him to glory.

And now through faith in Jesus, we see the truth of his greatness. It was in his sacrifice for us. Now we Christians know that we may have to suffer in this world – but not like him. We may get mocked in this world – but not like him. We may even be beaten and spit on one day, as a lot of Christians already are around the world – but we can endure it because he endured it first. He suffered all those pains so that we would never have

to suffer the worst of them in hell, and he sacrificed himself to free us from our guilt and fear and to give us hope for something so much more. He took the worst that this world and all the forces of evil could attack him with, so that we could have salvation full and free. He died so that we, his people, could live. Now *that* is a king who is worthy of praise, so hail, Christ the King!

Yes, when you stop looking at outward appearances and start looking for something deeper, your faith will behold a King whose greatness is in his sacrifice and whose glory is in his salvation. For Jesus, it's not simply what he went through that made him great. It's what he went through *for you*, willingly, even though he didn't have to, because that's how much he loves you. His glory isn't hollow and fading like any other earthly king. His glory is in his forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life that he won for you forever, a glory that we too will behold one day with our own eyes when Christ the King finally brings us into his unending heavenly kingdom. His suffering for our sins? That was his coronation as our spiritual king, and the cross he died on for us, the throne from which he reigns for our good. Yes, there was glory there, covered in blood and spit and filth. There was the glory of salvation, the glory of a Savior who let everyone think he was a worthless, miserable failure and a sorry excuse for a king, so that he could one day prove that he was the greatest King of all.

So as the Jews and Romans asked, who would want that kind of king? I would, and you would. Jesus might not look like much up front, but his greatness is in his sacrifice for you, his glory is in his salvation for you, and his reward is coming soon for you, just as he promised. One day that king that was beaten and bloodied and crucified is going to return – no longer in lowliness but in exalted, heavenly glory, and in that day every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. At that kind of king, this world looks and mocks – but we look and marvel. Yes, everything Jesus went through here, he went through *for you*, because he loves you. Every blow, so you don't have to suffer it. Every drop of blood he shed, to cleanse you forever from all the evil and wrong that caused it in the first place. Yes, Christ the King reigns from the cross, and the way we can honor our King now is by taking up our crosses and following him until the day he comes again to take them away for good. So with sins forever forgiven and the sure promise of paradise to come, let's join with all the saints on earth and hosts of heaven to worship the King of kings, the king of our hearts – hail, Christ the King! Amen.