



# A Tale of Two Kings

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**T**he thrones before us today represent two kings. Two thrones can never be occupied at the same time. When one king is seated, the other one leaves.

Let me tell you about the first king. He is very prominent this time of year. He is the One who rode into Jerusalem on what we celebrate as Palm Sunday. As He rode into the city, throngs hailed Him as the King of Israel. The first chair represents the throne of Jesus.

Back in the Old Testament, the prophets said a king, the Messiah, would come to Israel and forever occupy the throne of David. When Jesus was born, the wise men asked the people of Jerusalem where the child was who had been born King of the Jews (Matthew 2:2). At one point in Christ's ministry, after Jesus had fed five thousand people by a miracle, they wanted to make Him king by force (John 6:15).

Now it's the last Sunday of Christ's earthly life. He had arrived a few days earlier to stay with some friends in Bethany, a town about two miles from Jerusalem. One of His friends, Lazarus, had become a celebrity. Jesus had recently raised him from the dead four days after his death. So the talk of the whole region was about Lazarus and Jesus.

Thousands of pilgrims were also arriving in Jerusalem from all over the country

for the yearly Feast of the Passover. It was a solemn event remembering the exodus of Israel from Egypt under the mighty hand of God. But it was also a festival of food and celebration.

The Jews in those days were not a happy lot. They lived under the oppression of ruthless Roman rulers. While they enjoyed some freedoms, they lived under constant pressure and control. They longed for the day that liberation would come when a promised king would give them back their country and restore the glory of Israel.

That Sunday morning, Jesus leaves Bethany with an entourage consisting of His disciples, friends, and many villagers. They are headed towards the feast in Jerusalem. Word gets out—Jesus and Lazarus are nearing the city! (John 12:17-18)

It's amazing how fast news travels in a crowd. The Sunday after President Kennedy was shot, my Dad decided to take our family to Washington, D.C. to get a glimpse of the funeral cortege approaching the Capitol. We got there early and had a good view from the street. Like Zaccheus, I climbed a tree for a better view. Sometime near noon, a piece of news swept through the multiplied thousands of people like wildfire: "Lee Harvey Oswald has been shot!" It was amazing to see how fast a crowd can spread news.

Thousands of people began to line the route of the approaching Christ. These people were somehow dialed in. They knew a coming king was prophesied. They knew they were ready for one. They knew that Jesus was the most controversial and unusual rabbi alive. He had been ministering for three years in the country. The crowds had been taken by His miracles. They also sang a song every year at the feast—Psalm 118. It was a song that anticipated the coming of Messiah. They began to make a connection.

I can't imagine what the landscape looked like the day after. Thousands of people had stripped trees of their branches. The road lay littered like a tickertape parade in New York City. But this day, they waved their branches and laid them in the path of the coming Jesus. To them it was a symbol of royalty and military victory. Their king was coming! And while they waved and laid down their branches, they sang the verses from Psalm 118, "Hosanna, blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord (verses 25-26)." The word "Hosanna" means "Save now!" They were ready for salvation from Rome. But they added these words which were not in the Psalm, "even the King of Israel." They had concluded that Jesus was the one of whom the Psalm spoke.

It's interesting. The crowd got it right and they got it wrong at the same time. Jesus was actually presenting Himself to the nation of Israel as King. But He was presenting Himself in a different way than they imagined.

They wanted a king that would meet their felt needs. They wanted a king who would deliver them from political oppression. They wanted a king who would take good care of them with miracles and who would make them happy. Simply put, they wanted a king who would do what they wanted Him to

do. They were blind to what was actually going on.

Jesus sent them a huge clue. How did earthly conquering kings parade before the people? They rode a horse of war or rode in a dazzling chariot. They displayed their glory with a crown, a sword, and marching soldiers followed by the prisoners and slaves they had conquered.

But Jesus found a young donkey and rode it into the city as the Prince of Peace (cf. Mark 11:1-6). In the Old Testament, those who rode on donkeys were on an errand of peace. They were looking for a king who would use force to restore the kingdom to Israel. On the donkey, Jesus was expressing that He would conquer by the force of spiritual power.

Riding a donkey was a literal fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9. In the following verse there, it is clear that Messiah will conquer the nations and set up His kingdom. But it wasn't to be done then in the manner they expected. Jesus was coming in meekness, not displays of might. We must be very careful about the expectations we place on Jesus.

Word must have gotten to Pilate about how the Jews felt about Jesus. In his own handwriting, Pilate wrote an inscription to be hung above Jesus on the cross, "The King of the Jews (John 19:19-22)." But by this time, the crowd had changed their minds. Jesus had disappointed them and they rejected Him as king. Instead of crying out "Hosanna!" they were crying out "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" The rise and fall of a king in Jerusalem in a span of 6 days! Incredible!

Let me tell you about the second king. That king is man and woman in the image of God. It is you and I. We were created to be the kings of this earth. In

the first chapter of the Bible, God told us to fill the earth and subdue it and to rule over all the animals of creation (verse 28). But something happened in the third chapter of Genesis. The entire race plunged into sin and separation from God. We couldn't rule well any more. Corruption entered the world and self began to sit on the throne. Man decided to rule the world for himself and for his benefit rather than God's.

Much of the time, self sits on the throne. It is self that wants our own way. It is self that demands our rights. It is self that seeks our own glory. It is self that wants to control others and circumstances. It is self that gets irritable, envious, resentful, critical, and anxious. It is self that is offended and vengeful. It is self that is embarrassed and shy. It is self that wants to get more than the Jones's, that seeks it's own pleasures. It is self that asserts its independence. It is self that does not want to be submissive to others. It is self that wants God to do things our way. It is even self that so often tries to live the Christian life and serve the Lord.

We get on our throne early. As a child, we think the world exists for us and our needs. As we grow older, we continue to manage life from this chair. We tend to sit in this chair our whole lives. When self is on the throne that long, is it any wonder why there are so many misunderstandings, conflicts, and clashes in families, churches, and business relation-ships? The problems of the world stem from people sitting on this throne.

The truth is—most of us occupy far too much time on this throne. I surprise myself by how often I sit here. Last week I told you that when you have the urge to do the wrong thing, you should push the pause button, figure out the opposite, and do it. Well, on Monday, I'm coming back from Pittsburgh on I-79.

I'm passing a truck when he cuts into my lane and nearly runs me off the road. I wanted to let him know how mad I was. So I pass him playing a horn concert, pointing an accusatory index finger at him. Soon something inside of me said, "You're on the throne!" I'm there more than I think I am. And so are you.

God has given us free access to this throne and we do a lot of governing from it. We rule from this throne when we try to secure ourselves, promote ourselves, and indulge ourselves in some fashion. When we are on the throne, we are at the center of the universe and we want to control what goes on. Many of us have come into a personal relationship with Christ. Yet most of us live more in our own kingdom than His. From our throne we try to control the weather, traffic, and other people.

In the days of Christ, the Jews had limited personal power. They lived under oppression. They longed for someone to deliver them. But they wanted a king that would be willing to enhance this throne. They wanted a king who would give them material blessings and provide political power. They wanted a king who would work for them.

But Jesus didn't give them what they wanted. He didn't overthrow the Roman government. He didn't set them politically free. He didn't hand them oceans of material blessings. He offered to free them from Satan. He offered to set them free from their sins. He offered them every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies. But they didn't want it. So they stayed on their own thrones instead.

There are only two kings in the world. Jesus is one of them. We are the other. When we allow Jesus to sit on His throne, our throne is vacated. And not only do we get off our throne, we bow at

His. What does it mean to bow at His throne? I think the best verse in the New Testament about this is Matthew 16:24. Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to follow Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me." To do this, we will have to get off our throne of self-rule and do three things.

**We must deny ourselves.** **Self-denial** is a word we know little about in America and in churches. We are about getting what we want. We are overindulged. We scream when something is denied us. Rarely do we initiate self-denial.

What is Jesus talking about? Giving up everything we like?—not at all. It's about giving up the things that feed the self rather than the things that feed our soul. It is recognizing the substitutes that we desire in place of the true pleasures of God. Self-denial is not about a denial of personal fulfillment. Self-denial is the only way to true fulfillment because it weeds out the things that get in the way.

Sometimes we almost get all the way off the chair on this one. We deny ourselves the things we know we shouldn't be into but we relish a few pet things. I went to the doctor at the end of February. Do you know the first bad thing that happens in the doctor's office? They weigh you. I stepped onto the scale. I knew I was in trouble when the nurse ran out of room with the top slider and had to move the bottom one to the right—200 pounds plus—first time ever.

I had a conversation with myself after the doctor had one with me. I recognized that I was on the chair on this one and I had to deny myself in order to be healthier and bring glory to God. I hate to deny myself. Calories are my friends. But self-denial is part of getting off our throne. We must self-

consciously deny ourselves the preeminence of what and when we want anything that dulls or injures the reign of Christ in us.

**We must take up a cross.** The cross was an instrument of death. Jesus told His disciples, "Whoever does not take up his cross and follow Me cannot be My disciple. (Luke 14:27)" Strong words. The cross for us is the experience of "losing our life." We must abandon all we are and love to Jesus. We must give our lives to God with no more claim for ourselves. We must come to the place as the Apostle Paul said in Acts 20:24, "I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself."

When we bow before His throne, we must step out of the center of the universe and put Christ there. What Jesus said is true, "He who has lost his life for My sake shall find it (Matthew 10:39)."

**We must follow Jesus.** Quite simply, we give up the pursuit of our own way and surrender to the will and bidding of Jesus Christ in our lives. We must give up our causes and surrender ourselves to His cause. Our will must be broken. We must come to the place where we yield our lives and agendas to God and accept His plans and ways for us. We stop directing our lives and take orders from the King of Kings and Lord of Lords! He becomes the boss. It's that radical.

The thrones in this room represent two kings. The one king is you. It is I. On our throne we take the seat of authority in our lives. We direct our daily affairs. We do as we please and as we like. We may involve Jesus for an hour or so a week at church or we may want Him to do something for us. But in practical terms, when we are seated on our throne, Jesus has vacated His.

The other king is the true king. It is Jesus Christ. When we acknowledge Jesus on His throne, we vacate ours and kneel before Him. We become His servants and He begins to direct our every move.

We often give Jesus a throne like England does the Queen. She is a figurehead but with no real authority. We tend to run our lives that way. We're the boss. Jesus is the figurehead. Jesus will have none of that. He rules on His terms only. And the terms are clear. We must get off our throne and bow before Him in total surrender.

Sometimes I wonder how possible this is. So many of us struggle here. Then I think of the early disciples. They did it! They surrendered fully to Jesus and came to live under His kingdom rule. And they changed the course of history! Jesus said that the same power is available to us (Acts 1:8). Surrender is totally possible if we are willing to get off our thrones and bow before Him.

I wish I could tell you that this is a once-for-all thing. That you only have to get off your throne once and bow before Christ, and for the rest of your life you live in surrender. The reality is, the throne we sit on has a huge magnet—the world, the flesh, and the devil. It continually pulls us to be the king of our lives. I must keep getting off my throne and bowing before His. It is a moment by moment thing. I must constantly recognize the two opposing thrones. The moment I see signs that I have gotten back on my throne, I must deny myself, die again to myself, and surrender to His will—in everything. Honestly, this is the greatest challenge in life!

Each one of us has a tale of two kings. Only one king can be in control at any given time. We are

either bowing or we are sitting. In the tale of your life, in which position do you most frequently find yourself?

## Scripture References

- **Zechariah 9:9**
- **Matthew 2:2, 10:39, 16:24**
- **Mark 11:1-6**
- **Luke 14:27**
- **John 6:15, 12:17-18, 19:19-22**
- **Acts 1:8, 20:24**

## Notes: