

The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One.”

³⁶**The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar ³⁷and said, “If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.”**

³⁸**There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.**

³⁹**One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Christ? Save yourself and us!”**

⁴⁰**But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? ⁴¹We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.”**

⁴²**Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”**

⁴³**Jesus answered him, “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.” (NIV84)**

Theme: Our Dead King Reigns

1. The King was killed
2. The King now reigns

It was early in the morning. He was being led to the place where he would be executed. So the people lined the streets. They wanted to get one last glimpse of him before he died. Some mocked him, while others supported him. When he arrived at the place of execution, he went willingly. Before he was executed he claimed that he was innocent and free from any wrong-doing. Then he prayed for those who were executing him and God would forgive them.

The execution took place on January 21, 1793. He is Louis XVI, the last king of France before the French Revolution. He became a king at a young age after his Grandfather had died. He inherited a country with numerous problems. He decided to support the American colonies in their fight for independence against France’s arch enemy, Great Britain. He had a famous wife—Marie Antoinette. He tried to make some reforms, such as supporting non-Catholics, and getting rid of serfdom. But the French nobility resisted the reforms which

Holy Cross, Standish, MI. November 24, 2013
eventually led to a revolution in France. Some people saw Louis XVI as a symbol of the tyrannical reign of the French Royalty. Eventually a republic was declared—stripping the king of his power. When Louis XVI fought to restore the monarchy he was found guilty of treason and so he was executed.

But Louis XVI wasn’t the first king to be executed, and he wasn’t the last. In fact, kings have been executed throughout history. And they all have one thing in common—they are all still dead—except one. Christ. He may have died, but our Dead King reigns. Our King was killed on the cross, but he now reigns forever in heaven.

About 700 years before Jesus was born, the prophet Isaiah called Jesus a king. **For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom.** The prophet Zechariah was foretelling Christ’s entry into Jerusalem, on Palm Sunday, when he also calls him a king. **Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.** When Jesus was born men from the east came to worship the King of the Jews. When Jesus was before Pilate the Jews accused Jesus of claiming to be a king. When asked by Pilate if he was a king, Jesus confirmed that he was. But he also added, **My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place.** Jesus is clearly a king. And many people loved him. But others hated him.

By the time our text for today takes place, Jesus’ enemies had convinced Pilate to sentence Jesus to death. He was led outside the city to Golgotha. People lined the streets to get one last glimpse of him. Many mocked him, while he had some supporters. And as he was nailed to the cross, Jesus prayed for those who were putting him to death. And many hurled insults at Jesus. From the Jewish people watching there on top of the hill, to the Jewish leaders who started the whole thing, to the Roman soldiers who carried out the crucifixion, to the thief on the cross—They all mocked Jesus. They mocked him for

claiming to be a king. **If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.** Even Pilate got in on the action. According to Luke, he had a sign erected above Jesus that read, **This is the King of the Jews.** That was the shortened version, John tells us that it fully said, **Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews**—often abbreviated INRI from the Latin. In fact John tells us it was written in Latin, Greek, and Aramaic so anyone could read it and understand.

And he certainly didn't seem like a king at the time. Kings are supposed to be majestic. They are to be rich and powerful. They are to have legions of soldiers risking their lives to defend him. But here we see Jesus, covered in blood. His flesh ripped open from being flogged. Sure a crown was on his head—but it was a crown of thorns, causing blood to drip down his face. They ripped his clothes off. He was nailed to a cross. There he hung in the middle of the day, with many standing around watching him die. He certainly didn't look like a powerful king. He certainly didn't look like someone who would forever over all things.

Of course, we know what happened to Jesus upon that cross. He hung there for about six hours before he breathed his last and gave up his spirit. Jesus, our king, died. He is just like us. We will all die one day. No matter who you are, how young or healthy you are, you will die. No one is immune. That is because we are all sinners. The wages of sin is death, and since we all sin we will all die. And we are powerless to do anything about it. We can't save ourselves we need a Savior.

But Jesus, an innocent king, was executed. He Jesus wasn't the first king to be executed and he wasn't the last. For instance, the prophet Samuel put Agag the king of the Amalekites to death when Saul refused to do so. And then there is Louis XVI. No king every wanted to be executed. But they were powerless to stop their enemies. If they could, they would have stopped their executions.

But not Jesus. He is God. And as God he has the power to do anything he wanted to do. If Jesus wanted to, he could have stepped down from the cross and destroyed those who were trying to kill him. But Jesus knew it was his Father's will. So he let himself be killed. He let himself be beaten, mocked, ridiculed, crowned with thorns, and flogged. He willingly carried his cross to Golgotha. He let the

soldiers take three nails and punch them into his body. Jesus knew the pain he was going to endure. He had the power to stop it, but he didn't—he suffered through it willingly.

Why? Jesus knew what he would accomplish. On the cross Jesus became guilty of everything we have done wrong. He took all our sins upon himself so that he could suffer through the eternal punishment that we deserve. Think about it—the wages of sin is death. But Jesus was perfect and holy, he had no sin; yet he still died. How? Because he became guilty of all our sins—taking them upon himself. He became sin for us. He went through the pain and agony of hell in our place. Plus he gave us his perfect life. Christ became our substitute so that we might be saved. Christ had to die to save us. So our King willingly died.

While it's rare, it's not unheard of for a king to be executed. But what makes Christ different is that he willingly died. But not only that—Christ is different than any other king in that he still reigns—even after his death.

But we might wonder today if Jesus is really the king he claims to be. He claims that he is a king that rules over all the world. If so, then why do his people suffer? Why does he let the wicked prosper? Why does he allow unbelievers to abuse believers? At times it seems as if Jesus isn't really in control. We don't see Jesus reigning from his throne, so we might wonder if he reigns at all.

Everyone else didn't see it either. That is why they mocked Jesus. Well not everyone—there was John and Mary and the other believers who were there. And that includes a thief on the cross. When one thief mocked Jesus, the other defended him. **Don't you fear God, since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.** This repentant thief knew who Jesus was and what he had done or did not do. He referred to Jesus as God. He wasn't just a man, but he is God's son and God himself. And since he is God, he is without sin. He was perfect, holy, and thus not deserving of punishment. So he asked Jesus to save him. **Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.** He knew that Jesus was God and would enter his eternal kingdom of heaven.

This man showed a remarkable faith in his God and king—even if he didn't look the part. And so Jesus gave him the comfort he was seeking. **I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in Paradise.** Today, Jesus knew that when he died he would go to heaven. And so would the thief. Through faith that thief received the forgiveness of sins that Christ was in the process of winning for him. He would receive eternal life. He would see Jesus, not as a bleeding and dying man. But he would see him in his full glory. And he wouldn't just be with Jesus that day. He would be with him in heaven forever.

How is this possible? Jesus didn't stay dead. Three days after our text, he rose from the dead. And that makes him different than every other king. That makes him different than anyone else. All those other kings who have died, remained dead. When a king was executed his reign died with him. But Jesus isn't dead. He lives. One of the major jobs of a king is to lead his people into battle. They are to fight wars and win battles. Some are good at war and score many great victories. Other's aren't. It didn't seem as if Jesus was all that powerful. While he hung on the cross, it didn't seem as if Jesus was a great warrior who would win any victories. But Jesus won the ultimate victory. When he rose from the dead he defeated sin, death, and the devil. And he gives that victory to us. So sin cannot condemn us, death is no longer the end, the devil holds no power over us. Christ's victory is now ours, so we will live with him in heaven forever.

40 days after his resurrection, Jesus ascended into heaven. He took his spot at the right hand of God. And he rules over his whole creation from his throne in heaven. Paul points this out in Ephesians 1. **That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.** Christ was executed just like Louis XVI and many other kings before and after him. But what makes Christ different is that he still lives. And he still reigns. For his is an ever lasting kingdom. That is what Gabriel told Mary about

her baby before he was born, **he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.**

A king also needs subjects. A king needs someone to rule over. It's true that Jesus rules over his whole creation now. And that he rules in the hearts of believers through faith. He is also the head of the Church as we saw in our second lesson for today. But what about in the future, after the world is destroyed? Christ still needs people to reign over. But that's not a problem. For he promises that we too will rise from the dead just as he rose from the dead. On the Last Day he will take all believers to heaven with him. And there we will live under him in his kingdom forever.

And unlike other kings there will be no abuse or neglect. There will be no reason to revolt or start a revolution. Because our King is also our God and our Savior. It will be a perfect life—free from sin, pain, and sorrow. It will be a life of rejoicing and singing the praises of our Savior. For Jesus is the King of kings. He is our Lord and Savior, who rules over all things—including all kings and other in authority. And we get to live with him in his kingdom—forever.

Jesus wasn't the first king to be executed and he wasn't the first. Kings throughout history have been put to death, like Louis XVI. But Jesus is a king unlike any other. For he was killed, yet he still reigns. He truly is the King of kings and Lord of Lords. For he rules over all things now, and he will reign in heaven forever. Amen.