



I HAVE COME TO BEAR WITNESS TO THE TRUTH

John 18:33-38

December 24, 2009

Dr. Todd Wilson, *Senior Pastor*

Introduction – The Man Born to Be King

This year I've noticed something new in our Christmas carols. It's not new to the Christmas carols; it's just new to me, something I'd not really seen before. I'd not fully appreciated a theme that runs through many of the Christmas carols we all love to sing.

Perhaps you too noticed this theme as we sang. It is there in "O Come All Ye Faithful."

O Come All Ye Faithful, Joyful and triumphant,
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem.
Come and behold Him, Born the **King** of Angels.

It is there in "Joy to the World."

Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth receive her **King**.

We sing it in "Hark the Herald Angels Sing."

Hark the herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn **King!**"

And it's there in "Angels We Have Heard on High."

Come to Bethlehem and see, Christ Whose birth the angels sing;
Come, adore on bended knee, Christ the Lord, the newborn **King**.

Do you hear the theme? It's the theme of a King. And did you realize, then, that Christmas is ultimately a royal affair? Christmas is ultimately the celebration of the birth of a king.

The British author and playwright, Dorothy Sayers, got it exactly right when she entitled her play about the life of Jesus Christ, *The Man Born To Be King*. That is who Jesus was, the man born to be king.

But what kind of king is Jesus? And what kind of kingdom does he have? And how does his kingdom advance or expand in the world, or in your life or mine? This is an all important question to ask at Christmastime, when we so cheerfully sing and celebrate this man born to be king.

Jesus Interrogated by Pilate

There was once a man named Pilate, who was intensely interested in these very questions. He was interested in whether Jesus was a king and, if so, what kind of king was he. Pilate was interested in these questions because he was himself a person of significant political influence and power. He was, if you will, the Rod Blagojevich of the Roman world for he was a Roman governor and lived during the time of Jesus. In fact, when Jesus was unlawfully arrested and put on trial, he had to stand before this Pilate.

Now, Pilate, wanting to discharge his duty to Roman law, needed to give Jesus a fair hearing. So he began his own interrogation of Jesus with this question: “Are you the King of the Jews?” Evidently, Pilate had been told by the Jewish leaders at that time that this is what Jesus had been claiming for himself. But Jesus doesn’t answer Pilate directly; instead, he puts a question to the questioner: “Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?”

Obviously offended and annoyed with the question, Pilate answers Jesus in return: “Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me.” Then, getting right to the point, and knowing there must be *some* reason why the Jewish leadership has turned Jesus over to him, Pilate asks Jesus: “What have you done?” What have you done to so incense the Jewish establishment that they have it out for you; indeed, that they want to kill you?!

Again, Jesus does not answer Pilate directly. But, instead, he explains something critically important about his kingship and his kingdom. In fact, what he says to Pilate is decisive enough to settle the whole dispute, should Pilate choose to listen. For Jesus answered Pilate this way:

My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world (v. 36).

Jesus’ Kingdom Advances Not Through The Use of Power

You see, Jesus, the man born to be king, is not like other earthly kings. And his kingdom is not like other earthly kingdoms. His kingdom is not like other earthly kingdoms, because *his kingdom does not advance through the use of power.*

Power is, of course, the method of every earthly kingdom. The rulers of this world establish their kingdoms and exercise their rule ultimately through military might. Might makes right, is the old adage, isn’t it? And it’s been this way from the beginning, and it will no doubt be like this till the end. Even a country as benevolent and peace-loving as our own nevertheless spends more on its military than the next 25 highest spending countries combined. Total global military spending reached nearly \$1.5 trillion in 2009. Power is the method of every earthly kingdom.

Yet the use of power has, regrettably, also been an ever-present temptation for the followers of King Jesus. So too has it been this way from the beginning. One of Jesus’ closest followers, a man named Peter, succumbed to this very natural temptation. On the night of Jesus’ arrest, while they were praying in the Garden of Gethsemane just outside Jerusalem, a band of soldiers came to arrest Jesus. Wanting to stand up for his Lord and King, Peter decided it was time to establish Jesus’ kingdom by force. So he drew his sword, the Bible tells us, and struck one of the men who had come to arrest Jesus, cutting off his ear. Peter was going to establish Jesus’ kingdom by force!

Jesus’ response to Peter was both timely and timeless: “Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?” (18:11). As if to say to Peter, and all who were there to listen, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from this world” (18:36). Jesus’ kingdom does not advance through power.

Jesus' Kingdom Advances Through the Power of Truth

Yet, don't think that this means that Jesus' kingdom doesn't advance at all, or doesn't impact this world. Even though his kingdom doesn't advance through the use of power, it still advances. *But it advances, not through the use of power, but through the power of truth.*

It was clear to Pilate from what Jesus had said about the nature of his kingship and his kingdom that he was—or at least thought he was—some kind of king. So Pilate asks a second time, though in a more general way, “So you are a king?” (v. 37).

Having already denied that his kingdom is of this world, or that it advances according to the principles of this world (i.e., power and violence), Jesus now, in answer to Pilate, defines his kingdom for what it is. And he explains how it does indeed advance in the world.

You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth (v. 37a).

Here, in these words from the lips of Jesus, we not only get a clearer picture into the purpose of Christmas, the reason for his birth, the reason why he has come into the world; we also gain an insight into how his kingdom advances in the world: *by bearing witness to the truth.*

This is why Jesus was born; this is why he has come into the world—to bear witness to the truth: the truth about who we are, as human beings, as people who love darkness rather than light; the truth about who God is, as the Holy One who dwells in light inaccessible; and the truth about who Jesus Christ himself is, as the One who is, in his own immortal words, “the way, and the truth, and the life,” and therefore the only One who can lead fallen humanity back to God the Father (John 14:6).

This is the truth to which Jesus has come to bear witness. And this is the truth that, when embraced by faith, allows one to escape the dominion of darkness and enter into the kingdom of God's beloved Son (Col. 1:14).

We Must Listen to the Voice of Truth to Enter Into Jesus' Kingdom

Now, you will notice the last thing Jesus says to Pilate. “Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice” (v. 37b). Profound words, provocative words. Provocative words because they contain an invitation, *an invitation to submit to Jesus' kingship and enter into his kingdom.*

How does Jesus' kingdom advance? Not through the use of power, but through the power of truth. But how do you and I—how does anyone, how might everyone—enter into his kingdom? By listening to the Voice of Truth, Jesus' voice, Jesus' call, Jesus' invitation.

Here, Pilate has *his* opportunity to enter into Jesus' kingdom. There, before him, bound like a criminal, stands the man born to be king. And he is speaking directly to Pilate; Pilate can hear his voice, the voice of truth. Yet, tragically, Pilate doesn't believe Jesus; or, at least, he doesn't want to hear what Jesus has to say. Instead, he shrugs his shoulders, and cynically says to the Voice of Truth: “What is truth?” He then turns on his heels, and walks out of the room, sealing the fate of the Son of God.

This is a sad, indeed, tragic, response. It is the response of a man hardened by the hard realities of life. It is the response of a man disillusioned by the disillusioning realities of life. Yet it is an all too common response, not least in our own day and age, is it not? Perhaps this has been your response. A little shrugging of the shoulders; an air of cynicism and disbelief; a

general tendency to avoid hearing the Voice of Truth by posturing behind Pilate's question: "What is truth?"

Now, there is a great irony in this whole exchange between Pilate and Jesus. For the question is not *whether* one will bow to the kingship of Jesus Christ, it is only a question of *when* and *how*. The Bible is crystal clear on this point: one day, "at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" (Phil. 2:10-11). One day, on the Last Day, everyone will openly acknowledge that Jesus Christ is indeed King.

But will they do so willingly, or unwillingly? This is the only real question. And this is the question for you and me, for us all, at Christmastime. Will you, will I, willingly, indeed, gladly, bow the knee to King Jesus in humble adoration and worship, even in this life, even on this night? Or, will you, will I, choose not to, only to find that one day you and I will because we will have to.

That is the ultimate question that confronts each one of us at Christmas. That is the question that confronts each one of us this Christmas, as we celebrate the birth of the man born to be king.

Conclusion

Christmas is a royal celebration. We celebrate the birth of a king. This is what we sing about all season long: the birth of the man born to be king. We sing about it in "Joy to the World." We sing about it in "O Come All Ye Faithful." We sing about it in "Hark the Herald Angels Sing." And we sing about it in one of my favorites, "The First Noel." In fact, I love the refrain of that classic carol; it gets repeated throughout: "Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel. Born is the King of Israel!"

The word, "Noel," comes from the French word, Noël, meaning, "Christmas," which itself comes from the Latin word *natalis*, meaning "birth." Thus, we sing of the birth of him who was born to be king, him whose kingdom is not of this world, him whose kingdom advances through the power of truth.

May, then, this song be your song this Christmastime. May this be your refrain this Christmas:

Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel
Born is the King of Israel!

Amen.