

**PARK HILL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
CHRIST THE KING SUNDAY  
REV. JOHN L. THOMPSON  
“IS CHRIST A KING?”  
Matthew 25:31-46  
November 23, 2008  
8:45 & 11:00 AM Services**

This passage of scripture has to be embarrassing to those who define religion in terms of doctrinal purity or ritual observance. Jesus separated sheep from goats on the basis of a single norm: whether they showed compassion to needy people.

According to Paul, God is concerned about all aspects of our lives. Out of compassion God sends his Son into the world to live and die for us. This compassion is the power that saves us from death and equips us for life.

It is most significant that the ultimate test of our human nature and our spiritual nature is the same. Compassion is the mark of an authentic human being as well as the badge of a faithful Christian. We manifest our true kinship to God and to one another in our compassion for those in need.

This is Christ the King Sunday, the last Sunday of the church year. Next Sunday is the First Sunday of Advent, the first Sunday of a new liturgical year. During Advent we re-enact the season of expectation and preparation for the coming of Christ. Today, at year's end, we make the ringing declaration that the One who became flesh and dwelt among us is God's anointed King of creation, redemption, and eternity. We also confess that he is the King of our lives. On Christ the King Sunday we make a very bold claim concerning Jesus of Nazareth. Therefore, I put to you the question, Is Christ a king?

Some outside the Christian faith may question the appropriateness of this acclamation. Jesus is a king? Jesus ignored the overtures of those who wanted to make him a king, and at his death the title *“King of the Jews”* was

used to ridicule him. There is also the fact that “king” is not necessarily a positive title. Monarchs were generally the villains of biblical history and even the better ones tended to be morally and spiritually ambiguous. In today’s world, kings and queens are primarily figureheads, symbolic representatives of historical traditions that have run their course. Even the less democratic, more autocratic forms of government prefer a chancellor or a president or a prime minister to a royal, all-powerful monarch. Why do we refer to Christ as a king?

Historical titles are not sacrosanct, and Jesus is called a “*king*” largely because of the period in which he lived. The American Declaration of Independence sees national leaders as “deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.” But Jesus lived when national leaders were kings or queens, who were the ultimate embodiments of power and authority. That we call him “*king*” simply means that he is our leader and we are his followers. To call Christ a “*king*” affirms that we consider him worthy of such devotion and obedience. We believe his life and ministry were approved by God and that it is God’s intention that we inaugurate him as the king of our lives. This phrase, “*King of the Jews*”, is an expression of faith.

For two thousand years the world of Christendom has made extravagant claims about Jesus. Because these claims are largely expressions of faith, they have generally had their detractors. Jesus’ disciples eventually acknowledged that he was the Christ, that is, the Messiah of Jewish expectation. But neither the Jewish religious leaders nor the Roman officials in Palestine gave any credence to this claim. In the Gospels the titles “*Son of God*” and “*Son of man*” both imply a unique relationship to God. The validity of these titles, however, was essentially a matter of faith, accepted by very few except Jesus’ own followers. The same is true today. The messianic and theological titles given to Jesus have meaning only for those who believe that Jesus is who he is presented to be in the New Testament. Christians should not be surprised that non-Christians do not believe in the Incarnation, that Jesus was God in human form. We should not expect non-believers to believe in Jesus’ miracles or his resurrection or his continued presence through the Holy Spirit. These things are matters of faith.

Scientific claims and faith claims are different. That they are different does not mean one is true and the other is false. Scientific claims are subject to objective, scientific proof. Whether they are true or false depends on

whether they can be empirically verified. The criteria of such truth are logic and empirical data. Faith claims, on the other hand, are verifiable in human experience and relationships. We may believe they are facts, but non-believers may insist they are not facts that are subject to scientific proof. This is true, but it is also true that faith claims cannot be disproved by the scientific method. The point here is that all of our affirmations of Jesus can be countered by denials. Whatever we claim to be true of Jesus, someone else may insist is not true. Does our faith in Christ, then, rest exclusively on our personal belief systems? Is there nothing about Jesus that all must accept as true?

There is one thing about Jesus that cannot be denied. It is the power of his influence. It is not merely that his influence is extensive, but that it is profoundly and uniquely based on love. Napoleon Bonaparte said, **“Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and I have founded empires. But on what did we rest the creations of our genius? Upon force. Jesus Christ founded his empire upon love; and at this hour millions would die for him.”** Jesus’ vision of the final judgment is centered on love as God’s great criterion, both for judging individuals and nations.

Jesus was the supreme teacher of love. He taught that the entire tradition of Judaism is contained in two commandments: love God with your whole being, and love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus even went beyond this, insisting that we are to love even our enemies. Yet it is not merely as a teacher of love that Jesus has influenced the world. He was the embodiment of love. In his daily life we see the beauty and meaning love. In his death we see the incredible power of self-giving, sacrificial love. Jesus was unique in fully expressing the love he taught. This simply cannot be denied. Matthew Arnold said flatly, **“Miracles do not happen.”** But he also said that true **“righteousness” is “the method and secret and sweet reasonableness of Jesus.”**

Is Christ a king? Yes. **“The King of love my Shepherd is, / Whose goodness faileth never; I nothing lack if I am his / And he is mine forever.”**

Taking Christ at his word is a terrifying thing. But what if we have been too busy or too blind to see Christ coming to us in the needy of the world? While we have sought Christ in the sanctuary, he has confronted us in the

streets. While we are calling to him in our prayers, he is speaking to us through our needy neighbors.

If you believe that Jesus Christ embraced all of humanity, sharing God's love with the poor as well as the rich, with the downtrodden as well as the powerful, then I would love to be your pastor. I would love for this to be your church.