

Sermon at Mattins (24.11.2019)
by the Revd Ish Smale, Cathedral Deacon

Readings. 1 Sam 8 v 4-20 / John 18 v 33-37

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

If I mention '**the king**', many people around my age would immediately think of Elvis but Elvis Presley himself is quoted as saying, *I am not the King, Jesus Christ is the King, I am just an entertainer.*

Today as we celebrate **Christ the King**, it's appropriate that a little later we will be thanking God for our bell ringers. As I hear the bells toll I'm reminded that '**Christ the King is in residence here!**'

But before then, a few thoughts from Scripture.

In our Samuel reading we find Israel is in a time of political crisis. They too wanted a sort of Brexit but far more serious, because they wanted a Brexit from God not from Europe!

Samuel their ageing prophet has no successor lined up and they tell him it's time for change. Instead of God ruling over them, through prophets and Judges, they wanted a human King to rule over them.

Actually Israel demanding a king was not sinful because God had already told **Abraham in Genesis 17 v 6 & Jacob in chapter 35 v 11** that '*Kings will come from them*'.

Israel's sin was their motivation and timing.

Their sinful motivation was that they wanted to be like the Godless nations around them and they were trying to force Gods hand to do what wanted immediately.

It seemed God already had **His** King lined up backstage ready to appear mainstage very soon.

God and Samuel felt very hurt by their demands but God, seemingly against his will, gave into their demands and let them have a king named Saul.

King Saul did have some good qualities but is known for being neurotic, suspicious, paranoid, impatient, easily influenced, making foolish commands, and being disobedient to God.

But he is mostly remembered for being insanely jealous of his successor in waiting.

Ultimately Saul served as a foil for God's chosen king, the man after Gods own heart. David.

It would be through David's royal line not Saul's that **Christ the King** would be born roughly 1000 years later.

But during those 1000 years in between David and Jesus the vast majority of Israel's monarchy, were wicked and oppressive.

We will soon be celebrating the season when, to everyone's surprise, **Christ the King** was born in Bethlehem, in a palace that was designed for housing domestic animals not Kings.

Although **King Herod** was insanely jealous at just the mention of a rival king, the **religious leaders** of the day failed to recognise **Christ as their king**.

But others around at the time did.

Oddly enough, the first to recognise the newly born king of the Jews were not Jews. The **Magi** came from way out east having spent two years seated on camels, following a star. These foreigners were not seeking a Messiah, Saviour or God. They came to worship a king with gold, frankincense and Myrrh which were standard gifts to honour a king or deity in the ancient world.

As Jesus began His ministry the first person to recognise **Christ the King** was **Nathaniel** who on first meeting declared 'You are the King of Israel' after Jesus prophesied seeing him under a fig tree.

But Jesus was never going to be like any earthly king.

In the wilderness **Satan** offered **Christ the King** all the kingdoms of the world but why would Jesus be tempted to take what His Father already owned?

After Jesus miraculously fed the 5000 the crowd wanted to make him king but Jesus backed away from that.

Christ the King could not be made King, he already was a king but.... his kingdom was spiritual.

Yet to fulfil prophecy **Jesus** did make his triumphant entry into Jerusalem as royalty with the crowds shouting blessed is the king who comes. But his would be subjects must have noticed the lack of pomp and ceremony. Riding a donkey not a white stallion and supported by simple folk, not important city dignitaries.

During his last week **Caiaphas** accused Jesus of blasphemy but then realised that would mean nothing to the pagan Roman governor **Pontius Pilate**. So the charge was changed to claiming to be 'King of the Jews' which could impose the death sentence for high treason for opposing Caesar.

Jesus never refuted his kingship but he did tell Pilate that his kingdom was not of this world.

Whether in seriousness, mockery or just to place the blame on the Jews, Pilate appeals to the baying crowd to accept Jesus as their king but the crowd shouted that they preferred the moody perverted Tiberius Caesar to Christ the King.

Even the **Roman soldiers** joined in and mocked and persecuted **Christ as a king**.

In those final hours as Jesus hung dying on a cross with the sign king of the Jews above his head, **the crowd** were shouting if you truly are a king.... save yourself.

5

So why was Jesus crucified?

Strangely enough, just for committing the crime of claiming to be **Christ the King** it seems.

But close to his dying breath one more person recognised **Christ the king**. The **convicted criminal** hanging on a cross next to him. Whilst he too was in great agony, he shouted '*Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.* Jesus replied '*today we will enter it together.*'

Without doubt...Christ the King was like no other king that has ever existed.

Graham Kendrick wrote a great song which goes

*From heaven you came.. helpless babe
Entered our world, your glory veiled
Not to be served... but to serve
And give Your life.. that we might live*

*This is our God, The Servant King
He calls us now to follow Him
To bring our lives as a daily offering
Of worship to The Servant King*

A thousand times in history a baby has become a king.

But only once in history... did a King become a baby.