

# Christ the King Sunday: The True King

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, again, let me welcome those of you, especially those of you who are here for the first time, joining us, maybe visiting with friends. We are glad that you've joined us tonight.

Tonight's a unique night in the church calendar. Actually, in the Christian calendar, this is the last Sunday of the year, and beginning next Sunday, we begin in the Christian calendar a new year. So this is sort of the final Sunday gathering of this Christian year. And I want to give you fair warning that tonight we're going to talk a lot about the A word, authority.

And this is a word that really is, I think, synonymous with many four-letter words. The word authority, I think, the minute we hear it, the minute we hear things associated with it, words like submission, words like king, we squirm.

And so it really is a difficult word. I think that we, you know, there are a lot of things that make us squirm, talking about politics or sex or any of these other things. But authority really is one of the most difficult to talk about.

[ 1 : 13 ] And yet we have to talk about it, because this Sunday is actually in the Christian calendar called Christ the King Sunday, where we focus on the fact that Jesus, in fact, is a king and what that means.

In John chapter 18, these verses that we just read, Jesus is actually making it clear that he's not just a teacher, that he's not just a healer.

That he's not just a crusader for reform, but that in fact, he is a king. And yet what we'll see is he's a king unlike any king the world has ever known.

He's a completely different kind of king. And on the surface, there's this fascinating story, and we're not going to be able to get into all of the little aspects of this story, because there's a lot going on here.

But there's this fascinating story where Jesus is brought before the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, and Pilate has to decide his fate.

[ 2 : 23 ] But what's really going on in this story under the surface is this is all about authority. It's about the difference and really the conflict between Jesus' authority and human authority.

authority. The conflict between Jesus' authority and human authority. And so we're going to look at authority, this sort of four-letter word, and we're going to look at how we resist it.

And by we, I mean every single one of us. How Jesus transforms it, and then why we need it. So why we resist it, how Jesus transforms it, and then why we need it.

Let's pray. Our Father, we have joined together in song, proclaiming that you are the holy God from all eternity, of all eternity.

We've confessed our unworthiness to be in your presence, and yet we've heard of your grace that comes through Jesus that enables us to know you. And now we look at you from a different angle, that you're not only the one who came to save us, but you're the one who came to lead us.

[ 3 : 36 ] And Lord, we know that this can be a terrifying thing for many of us, and yet we hope that through your word we would come to understand the hope that can only be found in your kingship.

We hope that your word will do your work in us by your spirit. In your son's name, amen. So the first thing we want to ask and consider together is, how do we resist authority?

And I say that as an assumption, you know, and you may think of yourself as not necessarily the most anti-authoritarian person, and maybe you're thinking, well, I think I'm pretty much okay with it. I've never been a rebellious type. And to a certain degree, I would probably believe you. But when you really get under the surface, I think, and this is as autobiographical as as much about me as it is about anybody I know, but virtually everybody I know, when you push deep enough, we all at some point start to become highly suspicious of, highly mistrustful of authority.

I think down deep, we all have authority issues. And so the question we want to ask is, why? At this point in the story, when we look at John chapter 18, the Jewish leaders have been trying to find a way to get rid of Jesus.

[ 4 : 54 ] They've tried everything. And finally, they realize that they need Rome's help, and they realize, well, here's one thing that the Roman authorities won't ignore. If we tell them that Jesus is a threat to Caesar, that Jesus is setting himself up as a rival king to Caesar, well, that'll get their attention.

And so they take Jesus to Pontius Pilate, the local governor there. He had been given this territory of Judea, and word on the street was that he was a pretty brutal ruler and thought nothing of doing horrible things to the people under him.

And so the Jewish leaders said, perfect. This is the kind of person that we need to get rid of Jesus once and for all. And so they take him, but very ironically, so that they won't defile themselves. They don't actually enter his house because they want to be able to eat the Passover meal. And so they wait outside and send Jesus in. Ironic, because this is leading to the fulfillment of all that the Passover meal points to.

But that's a different sermon. So we'll move on from that. And so they send him in, and Luke's version tells us what their accusation is. Luke's version of the story says that they say this to Pilate. [ 6 : 09 ] They say, we found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Christ, a king. So in verse 33, Pilate asks Jesus essentially, he says, so, is it true?

Are you a king? And Jesus responds in a very interesting way. He responds with a question, which is very common to Jesus' style. And he responds by asking Pilate, are you asking for yourself, or are you asking because that's what they said?

In other words, is there something in you that wants to know this for your own sake? When you look at me, and you look at the things I've done, and you consider my life, and you consider the things that you've seen and heard about me, does that lead you to think that I'm a king?

Or are you just saying that because that's what they're accusing me of? And you see by Pilate's response that what he's really after is not understanding who Jesus really is.

But I don't want to move past the fact that Jesus is trying to create an opportunity for Pilate here. He's trying to give him an opportunity. Pilate bypasses it and says, and you can tell by his response, that what he's really trying to get after is whether or not Jesus poses any political threat to his authority.

[ 7 : 25 ] Are you setting yourself up as a political rival? And what Pilate is trying to get at is, is my authority as this governor secure or not?

Are you a threat to me? And there are two possible outcomes to this. Either he decides that Jesus doesn't pose a threat and he lets him go, or he decides that Jesus does pose a threat and has him executed.

It's the only two ways out of this situation for Jesus. But what we need to see is here that Pilate's main priority is making sure that Jesus' authority will in no way threaten his own authority.

Okay, you claim to have authority. Does that have anything to do with me? Because if it does, you're going to die. That's essentially what he's saying. So, I want to pause right here because I think this is something we can actually identify with.

We're not Roman governors. This is a long time ago. But I think that hopefully you would agree that our generation is quite possibly, relative to previous generations, the most resistant and suspicious, the most mistrustful of any outside authority imposing itself upon us.

[ 8 : 52 ] That there's nobody I know who thinks that's a good thing or would even really be open to the idea of that being a good thing. It sounds like everything that's wrong with the world.

And I actually believe that our generation is more aware of and resistant to this than any previous generation. It's so extreme in our culture that we don't even want people to influence how we think. You know, among our highest ethical convictions as a culture, I would say, one of our highest ethics is the idea that each of us must create our own system of beliefs, our own system of ethics, our own moral framework, that each of us must create that for ourselves.

And that the only rule here, the only rule in that is that your self-creation of your beliefs and your ethics and your morals and your identity, that that cannot be, that has to be something that resonates with who we feel we really are.

That that is, that's the source. It has to, it has to feel right. And, and the absolute worst thing that we can do is to conform. You know, somebody who just conforms to some institution or some outside source of authority, they're selling out.

[10:12] That's the kind of cheap way out. The only authentic way to develop a belief system or to develop a system of morals or ethics or identity or meaning or purpose is to do it entirely free from any external influence.

So the eminent philosopher Charles Taylor has written very thoughtfully on this and he says that there are five kind of kinds of authority that we tend to resist because they threaten our individual authenticity.

He says we resist, first of all, anything that comes from the outside. It has to resonate from within. He says we very strongly resist societal imposition. So for instance, gender, the whole idea that, that gender identity, that's something that is imposed upon us and it's a very strong value in our culture to resist that.

To not allow yourself to be defined by social norms. That we, we very strongly resist having our, our being imposed upon by previous generations.

You know, it's interesting. I mean, a lot of cultures actually very much value the wisdom of the ancients. The, the, the elders and the older people in society are looked to and respected and treated with reverence.

[11:26] It's really not true in our culture. We tend to assume that newer is better. You know, to call somebody progressive, all that means is that they are moving forward, leaving tradition behind in significant ways in this area or that area of life.

But that's a highest of high compliments. You know, if somebody says you're, you're such a progressive, most of us would say, well, thank you. I think so too, you know. But, but if somebody says, wow, you're, you're pretty traditional kind of person.

You'd be like, well, what gave you that idea? You know, is it the jacket? Well, why would you say something like that? You know, we hear it completely differently. But to be progressive is the highest of compliments.

And so we resist the imposition from previous generations. Our culture today very much values innovation. We believe that newer is better. We also resist and are very cynical of political authority. You know, we get very passionate about candidates. I don't know if you're passionate about anybody this time around. Maybe you are. But very quickly, a lot of that passion will turn to cynicism, regardless of who's elected.

[12:35] And then, and then lastly, Taylor says that we're all very resistant to religious authority. You know, the rise of, of people who say, I prefer to my, think of myself as spiritual, but not religious, is, is really a way of saying, I want ways of experiencing, having spiritual experiences, but, but which are not tied to any institution.

Because the idea that any institution would have any say into your spiritual experience is anathema to everything our culture seems to hold dear.

That, that's, again, tainting an otherwise authentic spiritual experience, if it is somehow corrupted by the influence of a religious institution.

And so these are all of the things that we resist. And I want to make it clear that we're not talking about the difference between Christians and non-Christians, or a religious versus a secular worldview. This is something that affects all of us.

This is something that Christians feel. It's something that non-Christians feel. If you're here and you're not a Christian, it may surprise you to know that this is as real and as, as much a factor among Christian communities as it is anywhere else.

[13:44] Because it's the water that we're swimming in. So I know that some people are hearing this and they're thinking, well, you know, you're saying that we're resistant to authority and all these different kinds of authority and blah, blah, blah.

But doesn't that make sense? I mean, look at what happens when people are given power. Look at, look at all around the world. Look at the violence that's happening right now all around the world. Look at all that stuff.

And you say, you know, haven't you ever heard that power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. And of course we should question authority. Of course we should resist authority. Abuses of authority are responsible for all kinds of horrors all across history.

And I would say absolutely. You're right. All of that is true. But I think we also need to be honest and actually understand that our authority issues didn't originate there.

Yeah, they're justified by that, but they didn't originate there. In fact, our authority issues as human beings go all the way back to Genesis chapter 3, when human beings set ourselves up as kings and queens of our own lives.

[14:53] This is the thing that we call sin in Christian tradition. This desire to set ourselves up as kings and queens of our own lives.

And this desire is actually woven into all of our ambitions, even our most altruistic ambitions. Woven into those ambitions is this ancient desire to set ourselves up as kings and queens.

I don't want to be under authority. I want to be the authority. So all of us have ambition. You know, some cities, you know, it's about looking good, right?

In some cities, it's about having a lot of money. A lot of good-looking people in D.C., but not really concerned overly about looking good relative to other places. A lot of money in D.C., but same kind of thing.

But there is more ambition per capita, more ambition per city block than anywhere I know in the world.

[15:54] People come here because they are ambitious. They want to succeed. They want to make a difference. And so all of that ambition, we, you know, we have these desires to gain more influence, to have a bigger platform, right?

To have more people under us, to have more sway and more ability to shape the direction of the institutions we're a part of. And we say, well, I want to do that because I want to increase the good that can be done.

And I believe you. I think that that motivation is in all of us, but I don't think it's the only motivation. I think that alongside the very good motivations for ambition, right alongside, there is a deep-rooted hunger for all of the trappings of power and authority.

The sense of self-importance. The sense of personal value. The sense that because you're in this position of influence rather than all these other people, there must be something different or special or unique about you.

The sense that we're special. And those things are like, it's like a shot of heroin to your soul. It just, there's nothing like it.

[17:18] It is the most delicious feeling. It's intoxicating. It makes all of the bad things in life fade. Because it feels so good to have that sense of peerless value.

I'm the one. I'm the one. And so all of our best intentions are laced with this same desire that we see in Genesis 3.

To define ourselves apart from God. This is where I get my meaning. This is where I get my identity. And so human beings have this innate resistance to authority. And that's rooted in our rebellion against God.

Our desire to be our own kings and queens. And so that, I believe, is where. I just want to suggest to you, that is the root of our authority issues. All our authority issues are ultimately rooted in our authority issue with God.

So the question then becomes, how does Jesus respond to this? And we said that Jesus responds by actually transforming authority. So how does Jesus transform authority here?

[18:22] And I want you to see how Jesus responds to Pilate. Verse 36. It says, Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, what?

My servants would have been fighting. My servants would have been fighting. So he's not saying he's not a king. He doesn't say, well, Pilate, I think there's been a huge misunderstanding here. And all, when, okay, when the Jews talk about Christ, it's a spiritual thing. And, you know, all this, you don't understand the theology. It's okay. You believe in lots of different gods and goddesses. That's fine. But this is just kind of a Jewish thing. It has nothing to do with you. He doesn't say that. No, in fact, it has everything to do with Pilate. But what does he say?

He says, if my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting. But my kingdom is not of this world. In other words, when you use words like king and kingdom, you have no idea what you're talking about. When I use those words, I mean something completely different.

[19:29] So he's saying, in effect, our whole notion of king, our whole notion of authority, our whole notion of kingdom is completely twisted. It's completely turned upside down.

It's completely perverted from what it was originally intended to be. And Jesus says, here's how you know. You want to know that your concept of authority and kingship is completely messed up? Look at how people in the world gain power.

And then look at what those people do to keep power. And then look at what those people do with their power. Look at that and tell me if your understanding isn't a bit skewed.

He says, this is how authority works in the world. People fight to get it and they fight to keep it. But in Jesus, we see a completely different kind of king.

It's a completely different kind of kingdom. And Jesus makes it very clear that he doesn't want his followers to take power by force. Why don't we get this?

[ 20 : 34 ] You know, so whether you're looking at the Crusades that happened eons ago but somehow just keep coming up, whether you're looking at that or whether you're looking at something more recent, like the attempt by some politicians to institute in the United States a kind of Christian theocracy, whatever you're looking at, whether you're dealing with actual assassination or just character assassination, you know, whether this is being worked out in the battlefield or in the boardroom, that regardless, whenever you see Christians trying to take power in the name of Jesus, they have deeply misunderstood the nature of the kingdom of God.

They've deeply misunderstood it. Now, that's not to say that Christians aren't called into positions of power. But he says this, listen, here's how you know the difference. Jesus, my followers aren't fighting.

They're not drawing the sword. The only time, in fact, any of his disciples ever draws the sword is when Jesus is being arrested. He draws the sword to defend Jesus. And what does Jesus do? He doesn't say, hey, great job. Glad to know you're on my side.

He rebukes him sternly. Put your sword back. That's not our way. Instead, here's how Jesus describes authority in the kingdom of God.

He says, you know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them. And they're great ones, and the word is tyrannize them. He says that's how they operate.

[ 22 : 02 ] They lord it over their underlings. They tyrannize people under them. And then he says very clearly, it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant.

And whoever would be first among you must be your slave. Even as the son of man came not to be served, but to serve. And to give his life as a ransom for many.

So Jesus is saying, we've forgotten the purpose of authority. We in the world have completely lost sight of the reason authority exists. Do you want to know why God gives human beings authority? What's the purpose of authority? Flourishing. When God gives authority to the first human beings, it's for a purpose.

We just looked at this a few weeks ago. God creates this beautiful world, but it's incomplete. And he needs these human beings. He creates these human beings with a purpose.

[ 23 : 07 ] And that is to make creation flourish. And in order to accomplish that mission, he gives them authority. To do just that.

Have dominion. Rule over and subdue. Make it flourish. That's what he's saying. The purpose of authority is to bring about flourishing for everybody under your authority.

Often at your own expense. That's the purpose of authority. Authority. And so authority is actually, if you had to define biblical authority, I would define it this way. Authority, biblical authority, is the responsibility to serve others in a way that enables them to flourish and become what God made them to be.

It's the responsibility to serve others and enable them through your service to flourish and become what God made them to be. So you see glimmers of this, like tiny glimmers of this, with coaches. You put yourself under the authority of a coach, and that coach's job is to use their authority in your life to make you a better athlete. And good coaches do that well. You see it with doctors who help their patients flourish by making them healthier.

[ 24 : 23 ] You see it with good managers who help maximize their team's productivity. You know, those of you who work on teams under managers, or maybe you are managers, you know the difference between a good manager and a bad one.

I'm not a very good manager. I know this. But I've been under amazing managers. And I've seen how it maximizes the potential of each person on the team.

And people are satisfied and love their jobs because they're doing what they were built to do. And that manager can see it and bring it out on them. Teachers do the same thing. The students are under their authority, but they use that authority to cultivate and to draw out the fullest potential of their students.

That's what makes a good teacher. And you see it again and again and again and again and again. These are all glimmers, little foretastes, little shadows of the ultimate example, which is in Jesus Christ.

And in John chapter 19, verse 11, Jesus says something really striking to Pilate. He says, you have no power over me. You have no power over me except what's been given to you.

[ 25 : 31 ] In other words, he's saying, in this situation, I have all the power. And yet, on this very same day, this is the early morning, but on this very same day, Jesus allows himself to be marched out, tortured, and ultimately executed like a common criminal by orders of Pontius Pilate.

And so the question is, why? And the answer is quite simply this. This is what real authority looks like when it's used the way it's meant to be used.

The cross. That's what authority looks like. Jesus knows that the only way human beings are ever going to flourish again is if they can be reconciled to God.

And the only way that that's possible is if Jesus takes the punishment that we deserve. And so he sacrifices himself so that we can be redeemed and restored and flourish.

This is Jesus as the ultimate king saying, if it takes that for you to flourish, then that's what I'll do. And it takes nothing less than that.

[ 26 : 42 ] And so that's what he does. So this is how Jesus transforms and restores and writes authority to what it was always meant to be. See, in our world, we so often abuse authority to make sure we flourish at other people's expense.

And Jesus is saying, no, you got it backwards. It's the opposite. He's the one with authority, but he sacrifices himself so that everyone else can flourish.

So the cross is the picture of true authority. Why? Because at the same time, it's a symbol both of his crucifixion and his coronation. Crucifixion, coronation.

Defeat, victory. Weakness, ultimate strength together. And this brings us to the last point.

This isn't just the kind of authority Jesus has that we say, well, that's interesting. Glad I learned some things. It's the kind of authority we all need in our lives.

[ 27 : 45 ] We need this in our lives. And this is the hardest sell. You know, this is the part where you're like, I don't know. We need this kind of authority. Jesus goes on to say this to Pilate.

He says, you say I'm a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I've come into the world. To bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice. So what he's saying is, this is the whole reason I came.

The world needs not just another teacher, not just another spiritual guru, not just another healer. The world needs a massive reality check.

A massive reality check. When he talks about truth here, it's in the context of reality. He's saying the world is completely blind and completely upside down.

And the only hope for flourishing is a huge divine reality check. And that's why I'm here. The only way to flourish is if our entire way of thinking and feeling and loving and living is utterly turned upside down.

[ 28 : 47 ] We need a divine revolution. We need a coup. A spiritual coup. A spiritual uprising. Where we are the ones who are toppled from the throne. And Jesus takes the throne.

Of our lives. Nothing less will do. So I'll ask you this. I mean, do you have issues with authority? Some of you legitimately do. I said we all do spiritually, but I think some of us really do.

You know, some of us have been abused. Some of us have been deeply mistreated, deeply hurt. We're right to be suspicious. But here's the counterintuitive truth that we're getting to here.

The only way to heal from your authority issues is not to flee from authority. It's to come under godly authority. The only way to heal from your authority issues is not to flee, which is what we all want to do by instinct.

It's the counterintuitive hope that comes from putting your life under healthy, godly authority. The authority of Jesus Christ. So if someone's abused their authority in your life, a parent or a pastor or a boss or any number of possibilities, you're never going to heal from those wounds if you run from authority.

[ 30 : 06 ] Because we weren't made to live as sources of our own authority. We just don't have what it takes. The only way you'll heal is by coming under the authority of the king who loves you so much that he was willing to give his life for you.

That's a king you can trust. And this is also, by the way, the way that we learn how to lead well. Those of us who are in leadership, and many of you are at a point in your career where you're kind of beginning to move up, a number of you are going to continue to move up, and you will, at some point, some of you are there now, find yourselves in positions of significant authority. And you will have a lot of people under you, and you will have a lot of power by the world's standards. You want to know how to lead well? You want to know what it takes to be a good leader? Something I'm continuing to fail at and learn every day is, in order to lead well, you have to know how to follow.

You have to know how to follow. If you don't know how to follow, you will never know how to lead. The only way you can keep your ambition in check, the only way you can keep that thread of sin that runs through all of your ambition in check, and keep it from taking over, The only way you can keep from ever risking abusing the authority that you have in your own life, is if Jesus Christ is the central authority in your life.

It's the only way. And you know that your power and your influence cannot be a source of meaning and value, that that has to be found in Jesus.

[ 31 : 40 ] It's the only way. And if Jesus is love for you, his death for you, if those are the things that have come to define you, so that you're no longer trying to find these things in your power.

So this passage really leaves us with a choice. You know, here's we kind of close. Here's the thing that we need to consider, and I would encourage you to think about this. Will we see Jesus merely as one of the many sources of advice and input that we consider as we build our own meaning, identity, values, ethics, morals, etc.?

Will Jesus be one of the things that we take into consideration? A lot of Christians operate that way. Well, yeah, I know Jesus is important, but there's these other things that are important and meaningful too, and to a certain extent that's true, but, you know, you say, well, I think Jesus' words are important.

I'll take them into account. I'll pray about it, you know? I'll decide what I think about this or that. So is Jesus going to be just one of your advisors, or will you actually allow Jesus to determine these things in your life?

In verse 37, Jesus gives us the litmus test for knowing whether or not we are on the side of truth. He says, do you want to know whether or not you're on the side of truth? You want to know?

[ 33 : 05 ] He says, everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice. So we have two ways of responding. We can respond like Pilate when Jesus says this to us and say, well, what is truth really?

What is truth? Pilate's way ahead of his time. Doesn't that sound like what most of us say today? What is truth? He's sort of a pre-modern, post-modernist. He's just sort of a, you know, way ahead of his time.

It's this anachronistic statement, and yet it's right here. What is truth, you know? And I think the way that most of us functionally reject Jesus' authority, and by us I mean Christians, is to constantly question it.

What is Jesus really saying? What does this really mean? Can we really know what Jesus is saying here? Can we really know what Jesus is implying here? Because I just don't know if we can. What is truth really?

What is this really about? It's also a great way to appear sophisticated and thoughtful, to be sort of suspicious of any truth claim, to be always seeking but never finding, you know?

[ 34 : 08 ] I had somebody tell me recently that when she became a Christian, she was seeking, and everybody around her thought that that was great. Oh, it's so cool. You're so open. You're so curious. I want to do that too, and let's do our spiritual journeys together.

And in a minute she said, I found Jesus. People are like, what's wrong with you? You sell out. You've been corrupted, you know?

And they didn't want to talk about it anymore. Closed door. So are we going to be like, Pilate, what is truth? Or when we look at the cross, when we look at the depth of Jesus' love for us, are we going to actually have this divine reality check and realize that the one person in the universe more

qualified to run my life than me is Jesus the King?

Let's pray. Our Father, these are hard words. They're hard for me. These words have challenged me greatly this week as I think about all of the areas of my life that I hold with a white-knuckle grip. And Lord, you know that about us. You know that if we joyfully submitted to you and followed you, that your death wouldn't have been necessary. We thank you and praise you that knowing this about us, knowing that we would do anything to avoid coming under your kingly authority, that you still gave your life for us.

[ 35 : 36 ] That you still did everything necessary to reconcile us to yourself. We thank you and praise you that though we may fail again and again and again to live this out in our lives, that our relationship is not ultimately based on our willingness to submit ourselves to you, it is based on your willingness to sacrifice yourself for us.

Thank you, Jesus. In your son's name we pray, Lord. Amen.