

**SERMON: "LORD OF LORDS AND KING OF KINGS"**

**TEXTS: OLD TESTAMENT  
NEW TESTAMENT**

**NUMBERS 24:15-19  
JOHN 18:33-37, REVELATION 17:9-14**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

It was eight years ago, Fall of 2015. It was the weekend of the rivalry game between Iowa and Iowa State. Being Fall just before the Iowa caucuses there were plenty of presidential hopefuls here to campaign.

It was a bit like this year, lots of Republicans in particular a dozen or more. You may remember very full debate stages.

It made sense for that many candidates to be there for the big game  
It was great opportunity to meet voters – Hawkeyes and Cyclones

I remember hearing a couple of stories about several candidates who missed their appointed time slots to speak before the game.

It seems they got stuck in game day traffic. It happens

But two or three lesser known candidates made matters worse.

They complained about it. Like they didn't know there would be traffic

Don't want to be too political ... but I think not knowing there would be game day traffic when two rivals meet for the big game ... That would, in my mind at least, make me think about caucusing for someone else  
Knowledge about football rivalries (or traffic) isn't the primary thing I look for in a leader. But not knowing that simple fact raises some doubts

What are the things we look for in a leader?

Can you name two or three things that are important to you?

Maybe an attribute like a positive outlook (Reagan and Obama come to mind)

Maybe what they say they are going to do, their campaign promises

Maybe that combined with what they have done, their record

What kind of leader are you looking for?

And the question I'm getting at ... What kind of leader was and is Jesus?

I want you think of Jesus as a leader ... and about other leaders

and how Jesus' leadership fits with the other leaders we look to?

How does Jesus' leadership compare to and combine with other leaders

We come to the sixth window in our series of sermons in stained glass

This is the window that asks (and answers) that key question

Compared to other leaders, Jesus is 'King of kings and Lord of lords'

## WHAT KIND OF KING?

You hear the song when you hear that phrase, You hear 'The Hallelujah Chorus' from Handel's 'Messiah.' Talk about a song that's got some ummphh.

That is the kind of leader Jesus is ... especially when compared to other leaders, the ones with positive outlooks and records of achievement and the ones that didn't know there would be game day traffic

The description of this window printed in your bulletins, passed down to us, uses that 'king of king' language and references the bible passages for today The lord of lords and king of kings title given in Revelation.

And the mention of a royal scepter, a symbol of authority in Numbers

Revelation describes a final conflict between good (the Lamb) and evil (the Beast) who, it would appear, has lots of allies. John identifies them not by name but with symbolism that we cannot easily translate.

**These are united in yielding their power and authority to the beast; they will wage war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.**

The passage from Numbers mentions one of the symbols of Christ's authority You see it featured in the window with the crown – the royal scepter

**... a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel; it shall crush the foreheads of Moab and the heads of all the Shethites. Edom will become a possession, Seir a possession of its enemies, while Israel does valiantly. One out of Jacob shall rule and destroy the survivors of Ir.**

The scepter is a symbol of authority. The one who holds it is in charge  
Maybe you remember the story of Esther the queen hoping to speak with her husband the king of Persia on behalf of her people, the Jews  
He held out the scepter to give her permission to enter and to speak

A scepter is like a gavel used by a judge in a courtroom or a talking stick used by the tribal elders. We have that same kind of symbol in the US House of Representatives. It is called a mace. 13 rods representing the 13 colonies bound together. The house cannot be in session without it present.

I mention the mace, gavel and talking stick as similar to a scepter.

I think the symbolism in the window with crown and scepter is more helpful than the language of the verses referenced  
Revelation talks about waging war and conquering  
Numbers talks about crushing heads and foreheads

## NOT FROM HERE ... BUT FOR HERE

That kind of violent imagery doesn't fit with Jesus' life and work.

He is the one who is called not only king of kings ... but Prince of peace

Jesus didn't crush foreheads or conquer the Romans

He taught. He told stories. He commanded us to love our neighbors

He touched the untouchable and loved the unlovable.

So I ask again ... What kind of leader was and is Jesus?

AND what kind of leader are you looking for?

Any connection between those two questions?

Wrestling with those questions myself (I always ask myself the questions

I ask you), I thought of another New Testament passage I would add

one about what kind of king we expect and what kind of king Jesus is

It is from the time, after he has been arrested and sentenced to death

that Jesus is called before Herod, the one with the scepter, with the power

**Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?" Pilate replied, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?" Jesus answered, "My kingdom does not belong to this world. If my kingdom belonged to this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here."**

Lots a preacher could preach on in these verses

Let me focus on just the two prepositions – belong and from

These are key to understanding how Jesus' kingdom as the king of kings

is related to the kingdoms, dictatorships and democracies of the world

You remember the song from Sesame Street?

"One of these things is different from the other."

Jesus' kingdom is quite different. It is not from here ... but it is for here

It does not belong to this world ... but belongs in this world

What that looks like, Jesus' kingdom as a kingdom not from but for,

varies according to time and place ... and with each unique person

and how they practice their faith, how they follow the leader - Jesus

and the leaders of our time and place

How do you live your life with dual citizenship,

a citizen of the kingdom of God ... and of these United States

## A WORD OF WARNING

The biblical world assumes one prevalent style of leadership – monarchy  
That's why we get so much talk about kings and kingdoms  
What did Jesus talk about the most – the coming kingdom of God  
Telling people to be prepared, telling parables about it

The challenge of us as followers of Jesus is to take that biblical language  
of 'king of kings' and apply it to our language or councils and boards,  
legislators and governors, presidents and supreme courts  
How does following Jesus as king of kings fit with everything else?  
Fit with all the other leaders we follow?

I'll offer a word of warning ... then let the window get in the last word.  
A warning about what scholars call 'the spirituality of the church.'  
About how we have misused the language from Jesus about his kingdom  
about when he says that his kingdom is not from this world

I've been doing ministry long enough to have visited people in their parlor  
or living room – the nice fancy room that the kids don't play in  
That's the room where you visit the preacher. Some churches  
have rooms like that in their buildings too. Like it is a space set aside  
for Jesus, for fancy churchy stuff. Jesus gets that room

Jesus is king of that room. But what about the other rooms?  
the room where you entertain your friends, the room where you pay your bills  
where you eat, where you argue and where you make up

Keeping things spiritual and just spiritual was and is a way to keep Jesus  
in 'his place.' The spirituality of the church was used to 'justify' slavery,  
to justify segregation and discrimination ... to justify keeping people  
not only in their supposed place ... but also in chains

Which brings me back to the sermon in the window  
and my habit of asking questions ... what is that chain there for?

Our forebearers didn't say anything about that in the description  
I really, really wish they had. I wish it was described in detail  
More than anything else I wish it was a chain clearly broken

I don't want anything to do with (I have to say again because I'm honest  
about history) ... Don't want anything to do with or be a part of  
a Christianity that tries to justify keeping people in chains  
a Christianity that harnesses the power of the state to discriminate  
a Christianity that is focused on conquering or crushing foreheads

## SUMMARY

Last week when I was preaching about the window that features the sacraments  
I questioned why there wasn't a depiction of bread up there with the cup  
It is the window that depicts holy communion and baptism.

My question was answered after church when Martha told me  
that the rounded image above the cup reminded her of the host,  
the wafer that gets dipped into the cup (esp. in Catholic churches)  
I think she's good a good point there

Right after Martha gave me an answer from the image for last week  
Barb did the same for this week (nice foreshadowing)  
She said, "About the three things that make this room a sanctuary,  
shouldn't a cross be one of those things"

Really good point!  
The cross is the Christian symbol that not only appears the most,  
It is what defines, what sheds light on every other symbol.  
Every other symbol is best understood in light of the cross

In this case, that is exactly what it is designed to do according to the description

*At the top of the window is the Celtic cross, the largest and main part of the Presbyterian symbol. This symbolizes Christ's victory and sin and death. The rays and color flowing downward fall upon a scepter and crown. This symbolizes Christ, the King of Kings.*

The crown and scepter are meant to be understood in light of the cross  
The cross tells us everything we need to know about what kind of king  
Jesus was and is. He's not so focused on defeating Israel's enemies then  
or your enemies now. He's about defeating sin and death  
by way of love ... self-giving, neighbor-loving, world-loving love.

That said ... I think the chain in the window is a broken one  
I took a closer to look to examine the edges of the chains  
A broken chain seems a good image, in light of the cross,  
to portray Jesus as king of kings  
and as being very much on the loose