

A Sermon for DaySpring

By Burt L. Burleson

“Christ the King”

John 18: 33-37

November 23, 2003

I was channeling surfing last week and found myself listening to the Cowardly Lion singing. Remember the scene in the Wizard of Oz? Dorothy and her companions have made it to the Emerald City and it's time for the lion's solo. For a moment he imagines himself regal and brave and he sings about what he would do if he were king.

“If I were King of the Forest... I'd click my heels and the trees would kneel and the mountains bow and the cows cowntough. And the sparrows would take wing, if I, if I, were king.”

Things happen because a King says so. King's get to say the way things are in their kingdom, don't they. That's the whole point of being king. You're in charge and you get to make up the rules... edicts... things that happen, **“by decree of the king.”**

It'd be great, wouldn't it... being king in your own kingdom? What would you do if you were king?

I know what I'd do. I'd be busy making all sorts of decrees. Hear ye, hear ye. In my kingdom... everyone gets two months of vacation.

In my kingdom... there is no spam.

... there are no negative political ads.

... no commercials repeated during prime time.

... and there are no anchovies on pizzas. It's forbidden.

In my kingdom, hear ye, hear ye... **“the Yankees have to sit out a year every time they win the pennant... by order of King Burt.”** (Nice ring, huh.)

King Burt says, **“Retailers may not play Christmas music until after Thanksgiving.”** Oh, and a praise chorus may not be sung for more than two minutes... and if the singer uses the word “worthy” more than twice, it's **“off with her head.”**

What would you decree?

“No homework allowed?”

“National... ‘slap your boss’ silly day.”

“Teenagers must do the dishes every night.”

“And no one can wear neck ties.”

That's what happens in a kingdom... someone says the way things are.

Pilot understood that. In the Emperor's world, things worked a certain way. Caesar ruled the realm that Pilot lived in... and Pilot ruled Judea by extension. Pilot was in charge of this Southern province where Jerusalem was. It was as an important and volatile area then as it is now. Geographically strategic... full of political zealots and plenty of religious passion to boot. Pilot was in charge of keeping the peace, the Pax Romana.

In the Roman world, if a province was cooperative and easy going, the senate took care of it, but in places like Judea... the Emperor was in control and the Emperor had appointed Pilot to the position a few years back.

Pilot was unpopular. He'd been too tough at times and really insensitive to the Jewish faith. The people had complained to Rome plenty and Pilot had some bad reports in his personnel file.

Pilot knew how things worked in this Kingdom.

In this Kingdom... the one of the world...strength and power ruled. Whoever had the most and the biggest weapons... the most intimidating soldiers... ruled. Pilot had plenty.

In his world, the person with the position ruled the roost.

The one with the right title.

The one who can inflict the most damage...
who can do violence.

That's the way his kingdom works. Most kingdoms have worked that way... because Kings have tended to make it so. Kingdoms always reflect a king.

Pilot knows this world like the back of his hand... It's his world. There were rules for his realm just as there are rules for our realm.

What are they? Sometimes it's hard to see to see and say. Things are so ingrained... so much a part of the fabric and psyche. It's hard to see them. What are the rules in our realm.

Someone has decreed in this Kingdom that the one with the most toys at the end of the day wins... surely it's so... Why else would we shop till we drop when our closets are already full?

Someone has declared busyness of great value... mandated more of everything.

Someone has declared that this Kingdom is ruled by meritocracy... by merit. You get what's coming to you... only what you've earned. It must be so... why else would we have such a difficult time giving and receiving grace.

It's a Kingdom of separation... Some ruler said it, **"Take care of you and yours."** **"We"** only means you and those who look, think, and live like you do.

It's a Kingdom of comparison. Some monarch put up mirrors so we can see how we're doing in relationship to each other. That's how you know if you matter in this kingdom.

That's the way this realm is ruled. Hear ye, hear ye.

"Dress for success."

"Fill the calendar and the resume."

"Wear a power tie and eat a power lunch."

"Do some power lifting and some power buying and play power ball and power games."

Those are at least some of the rules of the realm. We don't think much of them... they're too much a part of us.

These kinds of values rule this kingdom in which we live. From boardroom of Enron to your own backyard. That's the way it's been decreed in this world. That's the way this kingdom, in which we live, works.

“Are you a king?” Pilot asked the question of Jesus. **“Are you?”** And while Jesus doesn’t ever call himself a king, he’s accustomed to using the monarchical metaphor. **“I have a kingdom but it isn’t of this world.”**

“There is a realm over which I rule but... but it isn’t like this one. It’s not from this one... doesn’t derive it’s rules from this world. It’s altogether different.”

Jesus lived in another Kingdom... a very different one. It’s citizenry is not there by constraint... but by grace and because of a journey. People somehow just find themselves there and once they are there, they never want to leave.

This is a kingdom where everyone knows that the only way up is down. It’s a realm where the only way to take hold of life is by letting go of it... where the only way to receive is by giving. It’s a place where losing means finding and dying means being born... and where fear has no foothold because there’s too much love and those two never coexist.

In this kingdom... people do not see walls, they see connections.

They don’t see separation they see oneness.

They don’t see boundaries, they see transcendence.

And when they look at one another, they see the basic innocence and goodness of all and forgiveness is always the result even when they’ve been wounded or hurt.

In this kingdom people feel as light as a feather no matter what is taking place around them. They are not driven by anything but are present to everything. They are so easy to be with and that rampant conversation within has been stilled by a great awareness.

They are awake.

So committed to the truth.

They see the way things really are.

That’s the Kingdom Jesus talked of and it’s the Kingdom we see reflected in who he was what he said. He said it was a Kingdom that was already within us and that it was “at hand,” within our grasp. He taught us to pray that it would happen to us now, on earth as it is in heaven.

Sometimes we see it or we taste it... and it’s so different... so amazingly different and like Dorothy in Oz, knowing she is no longer in Kansas, we say with great curiosity and joy, **“looks like we’re not of this world anymore, Toto.”** What a wonderful world.

On Christ the King Sunday this is our affirmation... it is our celebration. We have followed Christ on a narrow path and this is where he has led us... to a Kingdom that is different; a realm that is governed by something bigger. It’s reality... it’s real... and it is our salvation. This is what Christ came to show us.

One of the great images of the eschaton... of Kingdom... is a banquet table. It’s laid out for everyone and everyone has all they need. This is the Kingdom within you. It’s a bountiful gift... it’s everything... it’s all you need. You have been given all you need... it’s already yours. Come, take all of it and eat.