

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
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**Fifth Sunday in Lent, March 29, 2009**

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Hymns: 169, 176, 390, 315, 179.

Lessons: Psalm 110, – 53:12, Philippians 2: 5-11, Mark 15: 1-20.

Text: Psalm 110:1-3

Sermon adapted by Pastor R. Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Something is ironic when what actually happens is different from what was expected to happen. Jesus' life was filled with irony. We expect that God would arrive on earth in majesty, but he came in humility. We expect that God would be born the son of a king, but he was born of a virgin who was engaged to a carpenter. In the trials of Jesus before the Jewish council and before Pilate, Jesus was scornfully accused of being something that he really was. In each case Jesus answered their accusations with a simple, "Yes, it is as you say."

The truths that Jesus stood upon were prophesied long before his trial in Psalm 110. To use the words of our Savior as he stood before human leaders, we can say that Psalm 110 shows us that,

**YES, IT WAS AS THEY SAID.**

- 1. The man was God,**
- 2. The "criminal" was King.**

The Jewish religious leaders were not going to be satisfied until they had found something against Jesus that was worthy of the death penalty. They were so serious about the sentence of death that they actively sought false testimony so strong against Jesus that he would have to be put to death. The trouble was that the accusers couldn't find two false witnesses to agree with one another. Finally, the high priest decided to confront Jesus with this statement: "***I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God***" (Matthew 26:63).

Notice that the high priest's statement does not come from faith. He was not desperate or hoping with eager anticipation that Jesus might be the Christ, the Son of God, the Savior. No, those were words of unbelief. Caiaphas wanted Jesus to answer yes because then he could accuse him of blasphemy, a crime punishable by death. Caiaphas assumed a yes answer to be blasphemy because he considered Jesus only a mere human being, and for a mere human being to claim to be God was a direct attack on the majesty and authority of God.

The irony is that Caiaphas was right. It was as he said. The one standing before the Jewish religious leaders was also the divine Son of God, God himself. Throughout his ministry Jesus had claimed to be the divine Messiah, starting with his first sermon in Nazareth. Perhaps the religious leaders might have accepted this if Jesus had left his Messianic claims on a purely earthly level. After all, many of them were waiting for a human messiah who would free them from the oppression of the Romans. But in the minds of the religious leaders, Jesus went too far when he explained and preached that, as the Messiah, he was not just a human being but also God.

Jesus points that out by using the words of Psalm 110. On a certain occasion, Jesus asked the religious leaders point blank, "***What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?***" ***'The son of David,' they replied. He said to them, 'How is it then that David . . . calls him 'Lord'? For he says, 'The Lord said to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.' If then David calls him "Lord," how can he be his son?'***" (Matthew 22:42-45). The implications of Jesus' words, based on David's own words from the psalm, were inescapable. If the Messiah was only a human son of David, then why would David call him Lord? The Messiah must be greater than a mere human son of David; he must also be the Son of God.

David, who never saw Jesus, understood this better than the Sanhedrin who wants to condemn him to death. There was no blasphemy. The man Jesus was God. It was as they said.

You would think that, with all the evidence that the Scriptures and history provide us, that Jesus' claim to be divine would no longer meet such hatred. But it does. All four of the great religions in our world today—Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism—acknowledge Jesus. Three of those four religions deny Jesus' divinity. Unfortunately, the picture is even worse among some Christian theologians in the last century who have gone so far astray from the truth that for them the question is no longer “Is Jesus the Son of God?” but “Did Jesus even exist?”

The finger also needs to point at sin in our own hearts. Few, if any of us, would deny Jesus' divinity with our lips, but our hearts and lives condemn us. Flippant uses of Jesus' name in our casual and often cursing conversations are no way to express our belief in Jesus' divinity. Lack of trust or even anger at God in the midst of crises is no way to tell others that we think Jesus is divine. A routine of going to worship services only when we feel like it, or when it doesn't interfere with the rest of our lives and our fun, is no way of letting Jesus know that you think he is divine. Sins against the first table of the Law – the first three commandments – are always an attack on Jesus' divinity.

But remember why it is that Jesus is the divine Messiah. The man Jesus is also the Son of the Living God, for one purpose and one purpose only – to take away the sins of the world, even our sins against the first table of the Law. If Jesus had said, “No, I am not the Christ, the Son of the Living God, I am merely one human descendant of David among many,” then we would still be dead in our sins, and hell would be our eternal home. But because it was as they had said, because Jesus was the divine Messiah and therefore David's Lord, because this man was God, we have a Savior who truly saved us from our sins.

We also see that the “criminal” was King. The Jewish religious leaders may have been spiritually dead, but they were politically perceptive. They knew they had to get Jesus before the Roman court because only the Romans could put someone to death. They also knew that accusing Jesus of blasphemy would be meaningless in the Roman court, so they concocted a new accusation. ‘Jesus claims to be a king and is therefore a rebel and a threat to Caesar.’ They brought Jesus to Pilate as a criminal because he claimed to be a king. Pilate asked Jesus if he was a king, and for the second time during his trials, Jesus answered, “Yes, it is as you say.” How ironic, it was as they had said – this “criminal” was a king.

Jesus had already hinted at his kingship when he told the Sanhedrin, ***“In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.”*** Matthew 26:64.

Jesus didn't look like much of a king, standing there bound before the courts. What king would offer no defense on his own behalf? What king would have no army to come to his aid? What king would let himself be humiliated? But then again, Jesus never did look much like a king. He was born in a barn; he lived in obscurity most of his life; his closest followers were fishermen; he even rode triumphantly into Jerusalem on a donkey. It takes the words written by David to show us that things are not as they appear: ***“The LORD says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.’”*** Even before Jesus' enemies were defeated, God the Father had invited him to sit at his right hand. Sitting at the right hand is a position of power and authority. In other words, what we see with our eyes—a humble and humiliated defendant—is different than what Jesus actually is—a King who wields the power and authority of God himself.

We see little glimpses of that in Jesus' life: the angels announcing his birth, his commanding the weather and driving out demons, healing the sick and raising the dead. But the greatest display of Jesus' divine power was really right in front of the Sanhedrin and Pilate – his humble submission to his Father's will that he should die for the sins of the world. Jesus chose to suffer; he chose to be condemned to die on a cross; he chose to be forsaken by his Father; he chose to give up his life; he chose to rise to life three days later because, by those actions, Jesus the King would make all his enemies a footstool for his feet. In that suffering, death, and resurrection, Jesus shattered the power of these enemies: the devil and sin and death. If only the Sanhedrin had listened to David, they would have believed in their hearts what their eyes could not see – it was as they said, this “criminal” was King.

As David continues to describe Jesus' rule, however, we see that there are two camps under his rule—those who live unwillingly under his rule and those who live willingly. ***“The LORD will extend your mighty scepter from Zion; you will rule in the midst of your enemies.”*** Jesus' rule began small. First it was a handful of disciples. Then it was a few thousand on Pentecost. From there the gracious rule of Jesus, with peace and forgiveness in the hearts of those who believe, has spread throughout the world. More and more his kingdom of grace spreads here on earth.

Right in the midst of the enemy's territory, King Jesus extends his gracious rule. And a time is coming when all those who still side with the enemy will also submit to Jesus' rule. In fact even the enemy himself will be forced to acknowledge Jesus as King. Paul says to the Philippians, ***“Therefore God exalted him [Jesus] to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”*** Philippians 2: 9-11. Jesus' enemies won't submit willingly, but on judgment day everyone will have to confess that it was as they had said, Jesus was and is King.

When that day comes, it will be too late. On judgment day all will bow the knee to Jesus the King. Though Jesus' enemies will bow the knee, they will bow in horror not in honor. The grace of King Jesus for those who love him means defeat and punishment for those who hate him. When David writes about Jesus' victory over his enemies, centuries before it would even happen, he is sounding a warning. When Jesus announces the same victory, before the Sanhedrin, he is sounding a warning. When a sermon proclaims Jesus' total victory on the Last Day, you are hearing a warning. Repent! Flee from foolish notions about taking Jesus seriously later. Run away from loving this world. Stop ignoring the King's offerings of grace to your heart.

The bad news is that we often like spending time in the enemy's camp. Sometimes taking Jesus seriously is just too inconvenient for what king Me wants to do. Sometimes the pleasures this world has to offer seem more appealing than the tribulations King Jesus gives me in this life.

The good news is that King Jesus came to suffer and die to defeat our sinful nature, crush the head of Satan, and undo the world's stranglehold. The good news is that King Jesus ascended into heaven because he promised to send his Holy Spirit from there, who by his power makes us willing to respond to Jesus' call. Believers gladly bow the knee to Jesus. Believers gladly engage in his battle, taking on enemies of the gospel with the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, feet fitted with the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God (Ephesians 6). On the Last Day we will bend the knee in honor, not in horror, for Christ the King will take us triumphantly to our eternal home in heaven.

We can speak confidently as subjects of Christ's kingdom only because Jesus first won the battle. He fought the battle for us in front of the Sanhedrin and in front of Pilate—unwilling to give in to the temptation to make his power visible. Instead, he was willing to suffer for our sins. Jesus fought the battle on the cross – unwilling to give in to the temptation to come down from the cross and save himself. Instead he was willing to bear the cross and save us. Jesus fought the battle when, by his grace, he shared his forgiveness with you in Word and sacrament or in just the bare Word as he freed you from the deadly grip of the devil and claimed you as his own. Indeed, Jesus didn't just want to be King, he wanted to be your King.

We don't know if any of the religious leaders who stood as Jesus' accusers ever came to realize the irony of their accusations. Our hope is that some did. A day is coming, however, when they all will. When Jesus comes again in the glory of God as the King of the universe, they will see that it was just as they said. And on that day, all members of God's kingdom and co-heirs with Christ will remember the words of David and of Jesus and say, “It is just as they said.” Amen.