

## *To God Alone Be The Glory*

In the year 1407 the Ming Dynasty of China began work on their imperial palace. It still stands in central Beijing. I've read that it remains the world's largest palace. It contains almost 10,000 rooms covering an area equivalent to 140 football fields. For almost five hundred years 24 Chinese emperors lived in this palace with their families and servants.

The Chinese people called this palace *The Forbidden City*. It had that name because commoners and even uninvited nobility were forbidden from entering. The emperors made sure of that! A moat twenty feet deep and walls thirty feet high surrounded the palace.

The Forbidden City. What a stunning example of the glory of earthly kings! When an earthly king has made it big, he shows off his power. That's what Nebuchadnezzar's hanging gardens of Babylon were all about. That's what Solomon's Palace of the Forest of Lebanon was all about. An earthly king wants everyone to know, "I'm better than you. I have more power, more money, more servants, more luxury, and more resources than you. I am the most glorious king there ever was. You are not worthy to be in my imperial, majestic presence!"

But then we turn to the King of kings and Lord of lords. In today's Gospel we see Jesus. He too was in a palace. But this palace was in the hands of Pilate, the Gentile governor who had just sentenced Jesus to death. The Roman centurions were whipping Jesus, beating him, mocking him, torturing him. Then they crucified him. No concern for inhumane treatment of prisoners back then.

As you think of Jesus in this scene, does the word 'glory' come to mind? How about words like 'shame, defeat, disgrace, humiliation'? Is it uncomfortable to think about Jesus' suffering and death? To ponder it? On this Christ the King Sunday, we didn't come to take a quick look and then avert our eyes. No, we understand what happened here. We are not ashamed to gaze at Christ. We love him. We worship him. We glorify the Christ because here, surrounded by his enemies—stricken, smitten, and afflicted—we see why our King gets all the glory. God's Word teaches us to proclaim, **CAN THERE BE A KING AS GLORIOUS?**

Of course, in order to say this we need a radical shift in our definition of 'glory.' In Jesus' dictionary, the Bible, he defines glory this way: "*You know that the rulers of the Gentiles*

*lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many”* (Matthew 20:25-28).

So you see Jesus is more glorious than any of the Chinese emperors in the Forbidden City. He is more glorious than any pyramid-constructing Pharaoh. He is more glorious than Louis XIV in his palace of Versailles. And if the USA had a monarch, Christ would be more glorious than s/he. Jesus is the most glorious king because he is the greatest **servant** of all. By sacrificing his life on the cross, Christ did what no other king or queen could ever do for their people—he rescued us! We were all headed for hell. He gave us eternal life in heaven.

Granted, our text does not make Jesus look glorious to most people. <sup>27</sup>*The governor’s soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. <sup>28</sup>They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, <sup>29</sup>and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him*

*and mocked him. “Hail, king of the Jews!” they said. <sup>30</sup>They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. <sup>31</sup>After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.*

Such irony! What the soldiers said to Jesus in mockery was actually true! Jesus is the King of the Jews. He’s the King of the Gentiles too. Jews and Gentiles—that’s everyone!

And don’t you find it amazing that Jesus let all this happen? He could have used his almighty power to give those ignorant Roman soldiers a zap much stronger than a Taser. He could have quietly slipped away from them and escaped. But no, Jesus endured great shame because he is the most glorious king, the servant-Savior of us sinners.

Sometimes I think: “What if those Roman soldiers had known whom they were mocking and beating and torturing? If they had known Jesus really is God, they never would have abused him.” And that might be true.

But then how do we make sense of our behavior? You and I know who Jesus is. Yet we abuse our King just as surely as those soldiers abused Jesus. Okay, so we don’t whip Jesus or

pound thorns into his head, but we do mock him. It's one thing to notice that your attention has drifted during worship and then refocus on the message: after all most sermons and church songs are not as exciting as a ball game or a roller coaster ride. But if we speak our worship words with insincere hearts, we are mocking Jesus. We're basically saying [sarcastically], "Okay, Lord. I'm sitting here. But I'm just going to take my mind and go over there for a while. This service isn't doing anything for me today." Do you ever call Jesus 'Lord and King' one hour, and then a few hours later your heart is far from him? That's what's going on when we Christians treat our governmental leaders disrespectfully. Our heart is far from Jesus when we believers cheat, take things that we don't have permission to take, use naughty language, or harm the reputation of others by how we talk about them. This dishonors Christ—each is a form of hypocrisy. If we withhold our help from church, or our offerings, because we are upset about something, but we don't go talk out the problem, we are saying, "Jesus isn't really my king! I don't have to stay unified with my fellow believers like he commands. I don't have to be part of the effort to get the gospel out to everyone." If we know that there is no such thing as

luck but that all blessings come from God as he chooses to send them, how can we then knock on wood as if knocking on wood will either prevent bad luck or keep the good luck flowing? To knock wood for luck is another way to deny Christ the honor that we owe him.

But the greatest mockery we insult our King with comes when we puff up with pride, thinking, "I know I'm a sinner, but I'm not that bad of a sinner. Sure, I worry but I don't get spastic. Sure, I'm not completely pure sexually speaking, but I've never committed adultery. Sure, I've told a few fibs, but I'm not a pathological liar. Sure, I lose my temper once in a while, but only my words turn into fists. Sure, I get a little tipsy, but I'm not really drunk." Fellow believers, whenever we peer into the mirror of God's law and try to make ourselves look even a little bit good, we are basically saying, "I really don't need Jesus to be my total Savior. I'm not really a completely depraved sinner. I don't need 100% of my life to be covered by the holiness of Christ." (Contra: 2 Tim 1:9.)

Implying that we don't need Christ 100% of the time to be 100% of our Savior makes us worse than those Roman soldiers. They acted in

ignorance. About them Jesus prayed: “*Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing*” (Luke 23:34). But you and I? We sin with full knowledge. We know that Christ is true God, begotten of the Father from all eternity. So what hope do we have when we dishonor Christ while knowing better? Do we really think that Jesus is going to say, “Father, forgive them, even though they knew what they were doing”?

Why, yes! That’s exactly what he does! “How can Jesus just forgive us?”

Glory. The glory of his grace. The glory of his undeserved love. Jesus didn’t escape from Golgotha. He endured the shame of the cross, the pain of the cross, the damnation of the cross. He did not deny the cross its ugliness. He embraced it and made it the crown of his glory. No wonder we decorate our homes with a symbol of death (the cross). No wonder we like the sign of the cross made over us when we are being reminded of God’s forgiveness. Christ is our King. As our King Jesus had sworn himself to protect the lives of his subjects for eternity. That’s what he did when he went to the cross. He was the Good Shepherd.

He is the exact opposite of earthly kings. Chinese emperors locked themselves in the Forbidden City as if to say, “We are better than the

commoners. No commoner ever dare come into our presence.” When the Japanese princess married a commoner about 15 years ago, she gave up her royal status.

When Christ the King decided to marry the sinful Church to himself, he did not give up his royal status, but he did set it aside for about 34 years of life on earth. By dying on the cross he could say to sinners, “Although I am the glorious God of all the universe, I have come to be a servant of all. I have come to sacrifice my royal life for unworthy commoners. I do this so that every common sinner can come into my presence and be royalty with me. I have declared that the halls of my Father’s house are no longer a forbidden city for sinners. Instead, my royal blood has opened up the gates of heaven. Now I am welcoming my people from every tribe, nation, and language on earth. And for one joyful eternity I will accept their praise, their glory, and their worship. And they will be glorious with me.”

So you see, it doesn’t really matter today if we proclaim Jesus as ‘Christ on his cross’ or ‘the Lamb on his throne.’ As soon as we ask: CAN THERE BE A KING AS GLORIOUS?, we know: no king has ever had or will ever have greater glory than Christ our King.