

³⁵ The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is God’s Messiah, the Chosen One.”

³⁶ The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar ³⁷ and said, “If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.”

³⁸ There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

³⁹ One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!”

⁴⁰ But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? ⁴¹ We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.”

⁴² Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

⁴³ Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

You have a King. Your King Cares.

I’ve had food poisoning a few times in my life. It’s not fun. It leads to a miserable stomach wrenching experience hugging the porcelain throne wondering what I ate. It’s at that moment when I remember what I ate - the hot dogs. They had only sat out overnight and part of the day... The problem however is that, “I see food, I eat food,” and only later do I regret the decisions made on an empty stomach. But they looked fine. No mold, no rot, no smell, nothing, in fact they tasted delicious. That’s often the case with food poisoning. You can’t see it, but you can certainly tell when you have it. But can anything ever look so bad and yet be safe and even beneficial for us?

Jesus certainly falls into that category of something you’d want to stay clear away from. He’s beaten, flogged, mocked, and crucified. He has a track record of people wanting to kill him. That can’t be good for your health. But if you look close you’ll see your king, the God and creator of this world suffering at the hands of his creation in order to save. That’s the kind of King you have. You may not feel that way with all the problems of life. You may be sick to your stomach and ready to die, but Luke assures us, “You have a king and he cares.”

That’s not the kind of king Israel wanted. They an idea that when the Christ appeared he would remove the Roman Oppressors and restore his people to power. They had such high hopes. Jesus rode into Jerusalem just days earlier as

king but now he stumbles under a cross on the way out. Jesus' disciples are probably sick to their stomach but it wasn't the Last Supper that made their stomachs turn. It was the cup of suffering that Jesus had taken upon himself. This cup was full of abandonment, capture, and crucifixion between two criminals in a place reserved for Barabas.

The people stood watching him in judgement, sneering, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is God's Messiah, the chosen one." The soldiers join in with the same taunt, "Save yourself." and finally even the criminals mock him, "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" They use the same words as Satan during his temptation in the wilderness, "*If you are the Son of God then, throw yourself down, worship me, turn these rocks into bread* (Luke 4), save yourself, save us..." If you are the Son of God, if you are the Christ: Prove it.

They had so much hope for him but that was not why he was there. Jesus could have saved himself. He could have come down from the cross. That's not the selfish king that we have. He was only thinking of others. That's what makes the crucifixion so outrageous. Outrage is proportionate to the innocence of the victim. You shouldn't feel sorry for me if I intentionally eat food covered in mold from the back of the fridge on a regular basis. But if I ate something you served me and got sick - you might feel bad. When the innocent suffer the outrage increases. The crucifixion is outrageous. Jesus is the perfectly innocent Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, never did anything wrong. The people willingly admit he saved others. He helped others with his miracles. He was always looking out for others. Even on the cross he forgives them, consoles Mary, and comforts a criminal. Talk about selfless. They mocked him

That's not the kind of king this world looks for either. Often the case is that we look for something that appears good on the outside and yet hours after eating it's not what it seems. So many look for a religion that looks good on the outside, a god that will solve all their problems, or that by dropping to our knees in prayer that God will bless us and make our nation great. That's not the kind of king we get. That's not our God. That's not Christianity.

The King we see suffers. But you might not like the sight of it. Why? Because he suffers for us and for our sin. But if we minimize our sin, God's wrath over sin, or even blame others then I feel better about myself. It's not that bad and I'm not that bad. We can blame the criminals crucified along with Jesus, blame others like the soldiers and the Pharisees. We can even blame God, "*The*

woman you put here with me, she gave to me and I ate." That's why I'm sick. That's why I suffer. It's not my fault.

We mock God when we ask for proof that he is King. When we call for him to save his church – and save us. Jesus is rejected. The church struggles, loses ground, and false teachings still prosper. Jesus is mocked. Save yourself - save us. Not only by those outside the church but even those near to him. Jesus' disciples abandoned him. We do too when we join the crowd, keep quiet, or even question God, "If you are my King – save yourself, save me! Prove you're there and that you love us." The criminal's words incriminate us, "Don't you fear God? We get what we deserve."

Jesus could have turned away. He had every right to do so. "They deserve what's coming. Let their blood be upon their own heads! Why should I have to suffer in their place?"

But then Jesus is no ordinary criminal on a cross. He is the king who drinks a cup of poison, a cup of suffering to save his people. He is a king who allowed his creation to crucify him. He is a king who has come for criminals and the utter dregs of society. He was offered wine vinegar to kill the pain but Jesus wanted to remain in control. Jesus was in control of everything.

He doesn't need our sympathy. He doesn't want us to feel sorry for him. This is exactly where he wanted to be. Jesus is not a pathetic victim who got in over his head. Jesus said, "*No one can take my life from me but I lay it down*" (John 10:18). God dies in your place. Jesus is not a king who kicks back and expects to be served. He is a king who gave his life, a king who listens to his subjects mock him, "You're not our king," a king who allows himself to be stripped of everything, his clothes, his crown, his life. Even in all of this he remains in control.

He remains in control so he could be there for a condemned criminal, who comes to his senses and sees the obvious outrage, a sign, "King of the Jews," the innocence and the compassion of his king and he requests, "*Remember me when you come into your kingdom.*" That's outrageous.

Jesus allowed a thief, justly condemned to see with eyes of faith what kind of king he is. Jesus makes a promise to him, "*Today you will be with me in paradise.*" There is tremendous comfort in death especially for a crucifixion that could last for days but the comfort that Jesus brings isn't death but life. There are no conditions, no strings attached, no purgatory or a place to purge the poison from you but paradise. This is a promise made to one crucified, one who has not

lived a decent life, one without anything to bring to God. He wasn't taken off the cross, he wasn't promised the best life ever, but Jesus brought hope and life eternal. This is the King – he saved others and he can save himself but he remains on the cross for you and me.

If Jesus weren't God that promise wouldn't mean much. But Jesus is God and he has the authority and power to act on behalf of God and his will is in line with God's will - who asked his son to take your cup of poison as well. He didn't get sick, he died for all the times we've looked for another king to bring us glory, for all the times we've asked him to prove his love - we're forgiven. He took our place. He rose promising us not a better life tomorrow but redemption today. He nurses us back to health with his Word and Sacraments.

He gives us another cup to assure us that he cares and this cup is filled with promise not poison. If you want proof that he cares look to the cross, look to this cup. Come before his throne of grace: his cross, see him crowned in glory. That's the God who cares for criminals. Heaven will be full of them. Rejoice in your king. Find comfort in your savior. Speak well of him to others.

Will life get easier? Maybe, Will you conquer your struggle against sin, not until the day you die but even then you remain a child of God. Will food poisoning kill you this Thanksgiving – maybe, but I hope not. The problem however is, "I see food, I eat food," and the woman God put me with makes great food. Thank God not only for the material blessings, or the people, the family, the friends, but thank God that you have a king who cares, he cares enough to take the poison of sin upon himself, suffer, die, rise, and serve you with his promise. Amen.