

**THE PRAYER OF THE DAY** Lord Jesus Christ, You reign among us by the preaching of Your cross. Forgive Your people their offenses that we, being governed by Your bountiful goodness, may enter at last into Your eternal paradise; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

**THE GOSPEL LESSON** Luke 23:35-43 (*The King shows mercy to the thief crucified with Him.*)

35 The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, 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 Christ? 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, "**I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.**"

INTRO - Have you noticed? We are a year away from the next Presidential election and campaigns for president already being earnestly run. Many on all sides of the issues are poising themselves to look good, to appeal to voters for possible election. So, I have a question for you. What kind of leader would you elect? Or, **what kind of leader are you willing to follow?**

I have a personal conviction in this area. I want to follow a leader who leads by example, a leader who leads with his life, not with his words, or his or her image.

I. Today we are presented with a leader whose example leads in a seemingly unorthodox way.

A. Have you noticed? The Jewish leaders and people mocked Jesus by calling Him a king.

1. In verse 37 the soldiers mocked Jesus by calling Him King. As he is on the cross they taunt "**If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.**"

2. The Roman governor, Pilate, in verse 38 put a sign over Jesus' head perhaps taunting the Jews as well as Jesus. The sign read, **THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.**

3. Even a criminal recognizes a king. "**Jesus, remember me when you come into your KINGDOM.**"

B. But, how many leaders have you seen willingly beaten and executed for telling the truth?

1. Jesus does not seem to be exerting power you might expect from a ruler. Instead He is concerned with humility rather than power. He works at doing the job of His Father. He serves with obedience and righteousness, and it cost him his life.

2. Jesus does not seem to be worrying about his image. Instead, he is concerned for people. Look at the examples of loving others rather than Himself.

A. You know the story. When the Jews and soldiers nailed Jesus to the cross He prays even for his enemies, '**Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.**

B. You know the story. As he suffers, naked, bleeding, in pain, he looks down from the cross and worries about his mom. He says to John and Mary, **‘Woman behold your son.** And to John, **Behold your mother.**

C. And, when a criminal, who admits he has committed crimes deserving crucifixion admits his sin and asks the king to remember him, saying, **"Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."** Jesus responds to a guilty criminal with love and concern and mercy for this least child of God, **"I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."**

C. If Jesus were an earthly king, His political advisors would not have recommended this concern for righteousness over power, and this concern for love over image.

1. Jesus did not just preach obedience and love He was living it, even to his own sacrifice.
2. As king, Jesus was leading by example.

II. Politics can have a good name, or a bad name. There are some who actually seek office to serve. But, there are others who seek office for the power and the glory for themselves. What makes Jesus so unusual is that he already had the power and the glory that others seek.

A. Jesus is indeed the king or ruler of the universe. As God he is creator and he is ruler of all. All glory is due Him.

B. But, today’s picture shows the amazing example of a leader who really cares and works for the good of His people.

1. The almighty makes himself humble so that he can take our punishment and death.
2. The king of Glory forsakes His glory, so he can care for his enemies, his followers, and the lost.
3. Jesus, the Son of God gave himself up because he knows our ultimate need, our need of eternal life. He died and rose to win for us what we could not win for ourselves, **BECAUSE HE LOVES US.**
4. When we turn to him in faith, He gives as a gift what we can’t win for ourselves.

III. So, please also notice the people of Jesus time recognized a leader who didn’t just order others around, but lived His convictions. Many actually followed.

A. We are told of the soldiers, that when Jesus died the centurion, the leader of the soldiers, confessed, **‘Truly this was the Son of God.’** The recognized one who led by conviction.

B. The *disciples* followed this amazing king and leader, serving Him as He had served them, to the point of giving their lives.

C. And *This criminal*, even from the cross he recognized truth and love, and he followed.

1. In the face of Jesus’ truth and righteousness, the criminal confesses the truth of his sin. **41 We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong."**
2. In the face of Jesus humility, the criminal turns in trust to a man dying with Him, asking, **"Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."**
3. This man, whose life was so sinful, becomes an example of repentance and faith for us to follow, because he was touched by the sacrificial obedience and love of Jesus.

CONCLUSION - There is a well known advisor of business men and leaders named Franklin Covey. A number of years ago he encouraged people to decide what kind of work they had to do and to spend their valuable time appropriately. One of his books is called ‘First things First. He said, there

are different tasks in life and at work. There is routine work, there is urgent work, and there is important work. If we spend our time doing only the routine, or that which seems urgent for the moment, these two will crowd out the important, and important work will never get done. He encouraged people to choose every day to intentionally do what is important.

You know I recently returned from the Holy Land. It is amazing to walk where Jesus walked, to see inscriptions in stone that bear the names of people in the Bible such as Pontius Pilate, to see places where Jesus taught, and prayed, and are cared for others, where he died and rose. I must say that seeing all this I have come home with a conviction of what is really important in life. What is more important than anything is that I know this king and savior the thief got to know, and that **I follow Him**, not with my words, but with my life. What is really important is that you know that Jesus, the king of kings loved you so much he died on the cross for you, and that you follow this leader. The thief gives us a glimpse of the proper way to follow this leader, by confessing our sins, and then trusting Him, even when it seems there is no hope.

As you follow Jesus, his words to you will be, **today you will be with me in paradise.**" As you hear these words of love you can follow in confession and faith, in obedience and love. Perhaps in this coming election year others will follow you to the King of Kings.