

Rejoice...in your Shepherd-King!

When God took a shepherd boy named David and anointed him as King, the divine irony wasn't lost on the Israelites. What David had done for his sheep, he'd now do for them. He had rescued, protected, provided for sheep; now he'd rescue, protect, provide for the people of Israel. So from then on, the Israelites called their kings "shepherds" – God's appointed representative to ensure they were taken care of both physically and spiritually.

Only the shepherds hadn't been doing their job. The last four kings from David's line were unbelievers. Instead of taking care of the flock, they led God's people astray after other gods. Ezekiel describes the result as a dark and cloudy day when God's flock was scattered. Spiritually scattered, lost in sin and unbelief; but also physically scattered by the Babylonians, who ravaged the flock and carried the survivors into captivity.

But there, God through Ezekiel promised his people something remarkable: God himself would come and shepherd his people. Where Israel's kings failed, God would succeed. He would gather his scattered sheep and lead them home and care for them. And 70 years later, he did! He led a believing remnant home from captivity. But God's promise looked far beyond that day. He says a second "David" would come as a Shepherd-King. God himself would become one of David's descendants to rule and shepherd *us*.

And boy did we need him. Because we, too, were scattered on a dark and cloudy day. When the devil got our first parents to wander into sin and become lost, he scattered us all. Born in sin, we too were lost and separated from God, with wandering hearts that only take us further from him with each sin. Like lost sheep perish without a shepherd, we were destined to perish forever.

But God kept his promise. And 500 years after Ezekiel, Jesus came to be your Shepherd-King. David before him was willing to risk his life to protect his sheep from wild animals; but great David's greater son, Jesus, gave his life to rescue you from your sins. On a cross, he shed his blood for all of your wandering ways and saved you from their punishment. And he sought you out when you were lost and brought you to faith in him, washing your sins away and bringing you under his care.

Ezekiel reminds you of how perfect that care is. Although his flock is scattered all over the world, Jesus has his shepherd's eye on each one, and he personally cares for you through his word. He calls you back when you stray and restores you with forgiveness. He binds up your wounds when you are hurting and strengthens you when you are weak. He protects you from danger and nourishes your soul with the message of his love and makes you lie down in peace.

He knows what you need even better than you do, and never fails to give it in his word. Rejoice under the care of your Shepherd-King!

¹¹“For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. ¹²As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. ¹³I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land. ¹⁴I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign LORD. ¹⁶I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice. ²³I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. ²⁴I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the LORD have spoken.

Rejoice...in your suffering King!

He hardly looked like a King. There before Pilate stood an already beaten and bloodied Jewish man who called himself a King. But Jesus definitely didn't fit the part. Where was his land? His army? His royal attire and royal attendants? Even the few followers he had had abandoned him! Some King. Pilate wrote off his claim as that of just another Jewish spiritual kook.

And Pilate's soldiers used it as an excuse to have a little fun with him. He hardly looked like a king. So why not make him look more kingly, they thought? They ripped the clothes off him and draped him in one of their own scarlet robes. They twisted some thorns into a crown and pushed it into his scalp. They put a wooden staff in his hand. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they laughed, bowing down in jest, spitting at him, hitting his head time and again with the stick in his hands.

He hardly looked like a king. But you and I know the truth about him, and that's what makes this scene so tragic. He is a King. He is *the* King – the Creator of heavens and earth, the Lord of all mankind! The King of heaven comes to earth, and look what man gives him! He deserves their life's obedience, and they give him a death sentence! He deserves the finest crown and noblest scepter, and man gives him thorns and a stick to beat him with! He deserves their highest praise, and they give their vilest insults! He deserves to be seated on the grandest throne, and they seat him on a criminal's cross!

Yet there is a similarly tragic scene that plays out in all of our lives. You could say it's more tragic. Because we know who this King is, and yet we still don't treat him as such. He deserves our heart's highest devotion, and we consistently fail to give it. He deserves the best of our offerings, but we give him what's left. His word deserves our utmost attention, and we're too busy or our minds wander. He deserves our life's obedience, and we fall so utterly short. We know he's our king, but a look at our life, and you couldn't blame someone for saying, "He hardly looks like your King."

But look more closely at Jesus as they beat him, mock him, crucify him. He is the King – with a snap of his fingers, he could have put an end to their cruel games. Demand they give him what he deserves. Sweep them away with the punishment they deserved. But he doesn't. He suffers silently, willingly. Because this is why he came. Not to get what he deserved, or give us what we deserved, but to suffer what we deserved, so he could give us what we do not.

He wore a robe of scarlet for you, to give you a white robe of righteousness. He wore a crown of thorns for you, to give you a crown of glory. He bore the mocking of sinful men for you, so that you could receive God's praise. He took your sin to give you his forgiveness. He died for you, so that you might live. He suffered your hell, and gives you heaven instead.

He didn't look like much of a king as he suffered and died. He looked more like a common criminal. But you see it, don't you? This is Jesus at his most Kingly, because it was all for you and for your salvation. Rejoice in your suffering King. And let your life show that he's yours!

²⁷ Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. ²⁸ They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, ²⁹ and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand. Then they knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said. ³⁰ They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. ³¹ 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.

Rejoice...in your victorious King!

Your King didn't stay dead. I know, you know that already. But the Corinthians needed the reminder. After all, what they saw seemed to indicate the opposite. They had seen people die – even fellow believers. They hadn't seen any of them come back to life again. And so they started to think that people rising from the dead was the stuff of fairy tales – that there is no such thing as resurrection. That maybe Jesus didn't even actually rise.

So Paul in the verses just before our final lesson had to tell them: A dead King does you no good! If Jesus came to defeat your enemies of sin, death, and the devil, and died in the fight...but stayed dead? Then he lost! Then your sin still hangs over your head, the devil still has you in his clutches, and death will make that permanent.

No, Paul says, **Christ has indeed been raised from the dead.** Your King lives! Your sin couldn't overpower Jesus; on the cross, he overpowered sin and paid for every last one. Death swallowed Jesus, but it bit off more than it could chew; Jesus gutted death from the inside out by rising again. And he beat the devil, too – after he rose, he did a victory lap down hell's main street to prove it was so.

Jesus didn't stay dead. We know that, but like the Corinthians, we need the reminder. Because what we see seems to indicate the opposite. Jesus conquered sin for us, but we still struggle against it every day and feel its guilt when we lose. Jesus beat the devil for us, but he doesn't stop tempting us – and we still fall daily for his traps. Jesus beat death for us, but death still brings hurt into our lives when it takes those we love – and one day will take us, too. Jesus won, but we don't see that – and it can leave us feeling like we're still the losers.

So can we hear it enough? Your king didn't stay dead. He won – and through faith in him, that victory is already yours. Sin still plagues you, but God forgives every last one for Jesus' sake. Death still awaits you, but through Jesus, eternal life is already yours – and you too will be raised. The devil still tempts you, but through faith in Jesus, you're no longer in his clutches. You rest secure in the hand of your living Savior.

And one day, Paul says, you'll see with your own eyes that it's true. You'll see Jesus return on the clouds in glory, and the enemies he's defeated will forever be crushed under his feet. The dead in Christ will rise, never to die again. The devil will be locked in hell, never to bother you again. And sin will be so far removed from you that you won't even remember it anymore.

Rejoice in anticipation of that day. Rejoice...in your victorious king!

²⁰ But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. ²² For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. ²³ But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. ²⁴ Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. ²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death. ²⁷ For he "has put everything under his feet." Now when it says that "everything" has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. ²⁸ When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.