

“Sir, we would see Jesus.”

Revelation 19

¹¹I saw heaven standing open, and there was a white horse! Its rider is called Faithful and True, and he judges and makes war in righteousness. ¹²His eyes are like blazing flames, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him, which no one knows except he himself. ¹³He is also clothed in a garment that had been dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. ¹⁴The armies in heaven, which were clothed with white, clean, fine linen, were following him on white horses. ¹⁵Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. He will shepherd them with an iron staff. He himself is going to trample the winepress of the fierce anger of the Almighty God. ¹⁶On his garment and on his thigh this name is written: King of Kings and Lord of Lords.



Jesus Christ is risen and ascended. He traversed time and space in order to conquer death in our place. He fulfilled the Scriptures. They raised the cross and stained it with His blood. He entered the tomb. He emptied the tomb. Jesus finished His mission of salvation and on ascension He was ready to return to a glorious heaven. He did it because He has a love for us that heals like nothing else in this world can, so that we can one day live with Him happily ever after. He is King of kings and Lord of lords, although if we tried to reveal everything about His name it would be too transcendent for us to wrap our minds around. We can only hear and keep the Word of this King. He is different than other kings.

These past months were a cultural phenomenon. Millions strong and growing, the audience for Game of Thrones gathered for one last season. It was a TV show on HBO. I didn't really watch it, but I read the reviews and checked up on it from time to time. "Game of Thrones," a show where everyone wanted to be the king. Who would end up being seated on the iron throne as king of seven kingdoms? From what I read about the last episodes, by and large the last season of Game of Thrones ended up being a rushed disappointment, leaving audiences without a sense of satisfaction.

This was what audiences wanted to crown. They sacrificed Sunday nights for years, 100-minute episodes, to crown "Game of Thrones" as their time slot. Others have crowned cult hits like "Bachelor" and "Star Wars," many episodes later often to be disappointed. The big screen and the silver screen are difficult gods to satisfy, and sometimes when you look back you realize that king you crowned, that god, hasn't done a very good job of blessing you.

Oh, I'm in the same boat. I have watched way more Minnesota Vikings games hoping for victory, and this Viking god I crowned has cursed, not blessed me, with failure season after season. Don't take me to mean we should not watch TV.

I only mean to say: It's amazing what we are eager to crown only to come away with deep dissatisfaction. Are you satisfied with the king you have crowned? People wish to make kings out of many things. Satan uses these kings to deceive you and pull you away from Jesus Christ. They're not intrinsically bad things, but good things that Satan wishes to glue to you so strongly, that it becomes a priority ahead of your relationship with Jesus. We look to other kings to give us what only God himself can give us. And lesser kings are the things in life that we think give us meaning and purpose, identity, security in the present, and hope for the future. We mix up our priorities and disorder our loves.

Are you able to identify the false kings you have crowned? If not, let me just give you a couple quick questions quick to run through. Just ask yourself these simple questions:

- What's the thing in life that gives you the most anxiety and makes you the most angry?
- What is the extra-sensitive thing about your identity that you're constantly trying to defend?
- What is the thing in your life that you're constantly sacrificing for? your time? your energy? your money, your heart, your attention?
- What is the thing in life that gets you saying, "If I could just have this one thing, I would finally be happy?" Every single human being you know has an answer to that question. "What is the thing in life – if I could just get this one thing – yes, then, at that moment, then I would finally be happy?"
- Or what is the thing in life that, if you lost it, would make you feel like, "Well my life would hardly be worth living anymore?"

If your answer to any one of these questions is something other than Jesus Christ, then really you have crowned that instead as king in your life. The thrones and crowns of our hearts are nothing but false gods. They are the good things that we turn to when we think can give us what only God Himself can give us.

You know what? Whether you are religious or not, we're all living for something. And for that matter, we're all kind of mastered by something and we're all sacrificing for something. Right now, that thing that we're sacrificing that we think is going to make us *us* is (if we're going to be honest) practically enslaving us. It's practically running our lives. And if we carry it out on our current trajectory, it could end up ruining us. However, I know a Master that, if you serve Him, He will satisfy you. But if you fail Him, He won't curse you. He'll forgive you.

David Foster Wallace said, "In the day-to-day trenches of adult life, there's no such thing as atheism. There's no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship. And the compelling reason for maybe choosing some sort of god or spiritual type-thing to worship, be it Jesus Christ or Allah, be it Yahweh or the Wiccan mother goddess, is that pretty much anything else that you worship will eat you alive."

Let's take an example and say the thing you're living for is your **career**. You may have a performance-based identity, which means that your whole sense of self and sense of well-being is the based on the grades that you get in school; or the accomplishments and credentials that you get at work; or the money that you accumulate in the bank (since that's the world's best measuring stick for whether or not somebody is successful). Along the way you have to work very hard and you need to make a tremendous amount of sacrifices to get to that advanced career. You might sacrifice your health and you might sacrifice close personal relationships. One day you find yourself lying in a hospital bed and you get yourself ready to die, and you're trembling because you have no idea that this uncertainty about what's on the other side. And you look back and you think none of it was worth it. What did all that get me in the end? What did my credentials get me in the end? What did my career advancement and my sacrifices get me in the end? At that point the god you crowned and served for so long will absolutely curse you.

Or maybe your god is **beauty**. People make tons of sacrifices to be beautiful. Almost all food, almost anything that tastes good: all carbohydrates; all sugar; all fat; all anything. You know what? It's a big sacrifice. But the thing that keeps you coming back is the intoxicating feeling of being able to fit into those pants again. Or the compliments from people about how good you're looking at that time. Maybe that's enough to drive you and keep pushing you forward for a while—crowning and serving that god. One day, the wrinkles come. There's makeup and more makeup, and eventually makeup can't cover it anymore, so you need to get procedures. You get tucked and pulled and injected and everything. Eventually you do it all and you sacrifice it all. Finally you're old ... and you look old. That god that you crowned and have been serving all your life has finally completely failed you.

Or maybe you're not as vain that it would be beauty, not that self-centered that it would be career. You don't need all that stuff, but you want to be **safe**. The meaning and the purpose of life is that you just basically want to be secure and comfortable and safe. So you sacrifice everything for that, and it becomes your life pursuit and your identity. But inevitably in life something comes along and it compromises either your own safety or health or your child's safety or health. The thing is, if your safety and health and wellbeing is your identity and life's pursuit, then, immediately when you lose it, you not only become unsafe; but you've completely lost your identity and you've lost the meaning and purpose in life.

This is what other kings (that is, false gods) do. They are good things until you crown them. They promise you so much and they bless you so little. They're deceptive and they're ineffective and they're empty. The ancients functioned the exact same way. They were sacrificing for beauty and fertility and sex, career and prominence and wealth, war and politics and health, and all that other stuff. The only difference between the ancients and us is that they were actually self-aware enough to call those gods.

False gods always promise more than they deliver and they take more than they can give. What if there was a God who would actually give more than He would take? What if there was a God incomprehensibly better than advertised? What if there was a God who actually trades your sins and failings and gives you His righteousness? What if there was a God who loves you enough to go through an infinite amount of hell to bring you to an eternal heaven?

There is a God. It is the God who came down from heaven and earth in order to rescue humans. His name is Jesus and He never really leaves. Wherever Jesus Christ is preached and acknowledged, He now rules in us from God's right hand, and He Himself is present with us here in our hearts. He rules in His kingdom here on earth in such a way that He exercises power, might and authority over us and over all our foes. He helps to free us from sin, death, the devil, and hell. His resurrection and ascension is our consolation, life, salvation, and righteousness.

Now ... Jesus is a different kind of King. We learn in our text things about Him. He is a rider on a white horse. Even the non-religious world demonstrates a longing for some Being like Him who will love us enough to come down and rescue us from the terrors of life ... and take us safely back to live with Him in His kingdom. The difference between us and them is you actually know this King by name. He is Jesus, too wonderful to really grasp, the Word of God. He makes only just war, ultimately a bloody war on our spiritual enemies; that is, our sins and death and the devil. He has all-seeing eyes on fire. He wears crowns.

We know that Jesus was forced to wear the crown of our sins on the cross. It was made with thorns and bitter hatred for Him. Then, after Jesus lives, in the book of Revelation Jesus begins with one garland on His head. Eventually there are 24 elders who lay their crowns at His feet. Later, the great dragon and the great beast out of the sea arrive with seven crowns and ten crowns, claiming to be God, desiring to be worshiped. That is where we are now. But in the end, just before Jesus destroys the beast and casts the dragon into the lake of fire, we see Him here, with many crowns. Is one of them yours? This word for crowns is not a garland or gold, but a *diadem*, meaning divine worship from everyone. Is one of them yours? All authority in heaven and on earth is give to Jesus. Don't you, too, wish to glorify and worship Jesus and ...

CROWN HIM WITH MANY CROWNS

Amen.