

Game of Thrones: 7. The Last King
Psalm 47:1-2; Zachariah 9:9
September 2, 2018
Pastor Steve Richards

Earlier in the summer, Amanda and I took a mini-vacation to Chicago. While there, we saw the hit musical, *Hamilton*. It's now in Minneapolis and over the course of ten days, 100,000 people are expected to attend. It is the story of Alexander Hamilton and the relationships between Hamilton and the founding fathers of this nation. There is a scene near the end of the first act. The Revolutionary War has ended and now Washington, Jefferson, Hamilton and others are trying to form a new government and it is not easy. It's at this point that King George appears and taunts them in the words of this song: *What comes next. You've been freed. Do you know how hard it is to lead? You're on your own. Do you have a clue what happens now? Oceans rise. Empires fall. It's much harder when it's all your call.* This song came to mind last week as I thought about what happened with the kings of Israel. Kings and queens were not God's idea.

In the Old Testament book of Exodus, we read how God delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt under the leadership of Moses. God gave them the Ten Commandments and how they were to live in community so they would be a light to all nations. God brought them into a Promised Land, and they didn't need a king because God was on the throne. God would be their king. But the people wanted a king that they could see ("other nations have kings; why can't we have a king") God provided one king after another. But leading is not so easy. As the song says: "It's much harder when it's all your call." And it never had to be their call, if only they had let God be God – if only the kings and queens would let God be on the throne.

In this series, we looked at King David. He was a man after God's own heart. He wrote the psalms, did so many good things and yet he did one huge thing wrong when he ordered Bathsheba to the palace and then tried to cover it up by killing her husband. God was no longer on the throne; David was. Then there was Solomon. He was a wise man. He began well, built a Temple in Jerusalem to honor God. It was a way of saying God was on the throne. God is our king, but the more wealth and power he acquired, he forgot that. By the end of his reign, he enslaved his own people in order to build more for himself. Then his son, Rehoboam became king. People came to Rehoboam and pleaded for relief from the oppressive practices of his father. Rehoboam had a choice. He could have shown mercy. He could have put God on the throne. Instead, he said, "if you thought my father was harsh, just wait until you see what I have in store for you." He turned away from God. Who was on the throne? Rehoboam was on the throne, and the people rose up against him and the kingdom split in two –Israel to the north and Judah to the south. We looked at Ahab and Jezebel, two people who became synonymous with evil. They had wealth and power. Ahab had everything he wanted except one little vineyard that belonged to Naboth. He wanted to buy it, but Naboth said, "I can't sell it. It has been in my family for generations." And that should have stopped him, but Jezebel said, "Ahab, you are the king. You sit on the throne. You get to do whatever you want and take whatever you want. Kill Naboth if necessary." And Naboth and his children were killed so Ahab could have his garden. And we learned: "Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely." There was Queen Esther who was bold and courageous, saved the lives of her people, but only after Mordecai came to her and said, "You became queen for such a time as this." Who was on the throne – Esther or God? She had a choice. There was Joash who put his faith in a person more than in God, and when the person died, he fell away from God. Then Manasseh rebelled against the faith of his father and did all sorts of evil. But when he hit bottom, he repented and came back to God and God welcomed him. That's the kind of God who sits on this throne. We learned about Josiah who read the scripture and committed his life to follow God and he changed a nation.

When it comes to our lives, who sits on the throne? Is it you? Is it God? Finally, we come to the last king of Israel. Twelve years after Josiah died, Zedekiah became king, and he did whatever he wanted and what he wanted was evil in the sight of God. He turned away from God, until God had finally had enough. "How long must I put up with this? I promised David that one day a descendant would sit on the throne, but for 500 years you have kept turning away from me, doing things your own way. I've had enough. You are on your own!" It's much harder when it's all your call.

Judah was located in the middle of an important trade route between Egypt and Babylon, and Babylon wanted control of the trade route. In 586 BC, the Babylonian army entered Jerusalem. They burned down the king's palace and most of the homes. Then they burned down the Temple. They brought the king and his two sons before the people. They killed his two sons so there would be no successor. The monarchy would end here. Then they gouged out Zedekiah's eyes so that last thing he ever saw was the death of his sons. They put Zedekiah in chains and along with the people of Jerusalem, they were taken to Babylon to be slaves for the rest of their lives. And that was the last king of Israel – sort of.

God brought forth prophets who began to speak of another king who would come. Isaiah announced: **For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called wonderful counselor, might God, everlasting Father, Prince of Peace... He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.** (Isaiah 9:6-7) From exile in Egypt, Jeremiah announced: **The days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land... This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteous Savior.** (Jeremiah 23:3-4) Fifty years later, the prophet Zachariah announced: **Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey.** (Zachariah 9:9) These were the promises that sustained the people. There would be another king. Who would be this king?

586 years after Zedekiah, God sent Jesus into this world, and he became the true last king. He was unlike other kings. He was born in a cave in Bethlehem. His parents were poor peasants. This king fled as a refugee to Egypt when 3 kings from Persia warned his parents that Herod would kill any threat to his throne. He moved to a little village of Nazareth. Nothing good had ever come out of Nazareth. This king worked as a carpenter, then at the age of 30, the same age that David became king, Jesus entered his hometown synagogue to announce: God's kingdom has come. When he touched the blind, they received their sight. The lame could walk. The sick were healed. He told stories how God is like a shepherd with 100 sheep and when one is lost he leaves the 99 to find the lost one. God is like a loving Father and when a child rebels and turns away, the Father waits, never gives up on his child, always waiting to welcome the child home. This king searched for the least, the last and the lost.

I remember a year ago last Sunday, Amanda and I had lunch together and then I asked what would you like to do, and she said go to the Humane Society. And I thought, Oh-oh. But she was quick to add, "But I just want to look." But when we got there they had puppies. Puppies that had been shipped from Oklahoma because they were not wanted. They needed someone to rescue them. And who would rescue a puppy? We all come to a point in our lives when we need someone to rescue us. We all are in need of adoption. Jesus came to save the lost, the forgotten, those not wanted – to bring us home, to be safe with God on the throne.

The last week of Jesus life, he decided to enter the city of Jerusalem. Did he enter the city on a white horse surrounded by an army? That's how other kings entered the city. Instead, this king entered on a donkey. He came humbly and spent the week teaching and pointing out the hypocrisy of those in positions of power. He associated with the lost and unwanted, not the powerful. And by the end of the week, they crucified him, and it seemed it was over.

Years ago, I remember hearing Tony Campolo speak. He described the preacher in his home church would delivered a sermon in which he repeated one line over and over again. That one line became the title of a book that Campolo wrote. That one line was this: "It's Friday, but Sunday's coming." It was Friday and Jesus was dead on the cross, but Sunday's coming. Friday says that's just the way things are, you can't change things in this world. But Sunday's coming. Friday was the people of Israel, ready to give up, they had lost everything. They had lost their property, their family, their homeland, and their future. But Sunday's coming and God had not given up on them. Friday says there's trouble in this world and we don't have the right people doing the right things and it's only going to get worse, but God says, Sunday's coming. We all have our Fridays when it seems it's over – we've lost our health, we've lost relationships, we've lost employment, we've lost our finances, we've lost the possibilities we'd been holding on to. But you see, we've been sitting on the throne. Friday and we're ready to give up. But the gospel tells us, Jesus is on the throne. It may seem like Friday but Sunday's coming. The Kingdom of God is at hand.

I choose to place my citizenship is in the Kingdom of God, and it doesn't matter what the forces of this world say. Jesus is the one true king, and I'm going to live into the will of God in this new day. It's Friday, but the Good News is Sunday's coming. And when Christ penetrates your life, when his love takes over your life – how do you know when God's on the throne?

You wake up every morning ready to say: Lord, I surrender my life to you. Today I will serve you and honor you. Help me to love as you love and to live in a way that will please you. I give my life to you. Amen.

Grow, Pray, Study for Week of September 2, 2018

Weekly Prayer: Almighty God, through the years you worked through the lives of many faithful followers, and even when they failed, you never failed to offer grace, forgiveness, and love. Today, your work goes on, and you ask us to join you in it. Open our eyes and our hearts to see you, and to see the people all round us that you love and seek. Help us crown you the king of our lives, and carry your hope to the world. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Monday, September 3

Scripture: 2 Kings 24:18-25:7; Jeremiah 23:5-6

Zedekiah was 21 years old when he became king, and he ruled for eleven years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Hamutal; she was Jeremiah's daughter and was from Libnah. He did what was evil in the LORD's eyes, just as Jehoiakim had done. It was precisely because the LORD was angry with Jerusalem and Judah that he thrust them out of his presence. Now Zedekiah rebelled against the Babylonian king.

So in the ninth year of Zedekiah's rule, on the tenth day of the tenth month, Babylon's King Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem with his entire army. He camped beside the city and built a siege wall all around it. The city was under attack until King Zedekiah's eleventh year. On the ninth day of the month, the famine in the city got so bad that no food remained for the common

people. Then the enemy broke into the city. All the soldiers fled by night using the gate between the two walls near the King's Garden. The Chaldeans were surrounding the city, so the soldiers ran toward the desert plain. But the Chaldean army chased King Zedekiah and caught up with him in the Jericho plains. His entire army deserted him. So the Chaldeans captured the king and brought him back to the Babylonian king, who was at Riblah. There his punishment was determined. Zedekiah's sons were slaughtered right before his eyes. Then he was blinded, put in bronze chains, and taken off to Babylon.

The time is coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up a righteous descendant from David's line, and he will rule as a wise king. He will do what is just and right in the land. During his lifetime, Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. And his name will be The LORD Is Our Righteousness.

Observation: Last week, we concluded with the story of King Josiah who was faithful to God his entire life. When Josiah died, he was succeeded by a series of kings that the writer of 2 Kings described as doing "evil in the eyes of the LORD." Finally, Zedekiah became king and both the actions of the king and the state of affairs in the nation of Judah went from bad to worse until God decided to withhold God's protection. It was as if God was saying, "If you persist in wanting to do things your way, let's see how that works out for you." As today's scripture indicated, it did not end well for Zedekiah or the nation of Judah.

Application: And yet, the prophets spoke of a new king who would come, a very different kind of king. Notice how Jeremiah used royal language to point to a great future hope for God's people. We know that king by the name Jesus Christ. How does the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus still bring hope today?

Prayer: Lord, I believe in you: increase my faith. I trust in you: strengthen my trust. I love you: let me love you more and more. May others see in me the hope that you have brought to my life. Amen.

Tuesday, September 4

Scripture: Matthew 2:1-11; John 12:12-15

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in the territory of Judea during the rule of King Herod, magi came from the east to Jerusalem. They asked, "Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We've seen his star in the east, and we've come to honor him." When King Herod heard this, he was troubled, and everyone in Jerusalem was troubled with him. He gathered all the chief priests and the legal experts and asked them where the Christ was to be born. They said, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for this is what the prophet wrote: You, Bethlehem, land of Judah, by no means are you least among the rulers of Judah, because from you will come one who governs, who will shepherd my people Israel." Then Herod secretly called for the magi and found out from them the time when the star had first appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search carefully for the child. When you've found him, report to me so that I too may go and honor him." When they heard the king, they went; and look, the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stood over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were filled with joy. They entered the house and saw the child with Mary his mother. Falling to their knees, they honored him. Then they opened their treasure chests and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

The next day the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. They took palm branches and went out to meet him. They shouted, "Hosanna!

Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessings on the king of Israel!" Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written, "Don't be afraid, Daughter Zion. Look! Your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt."

Observation: During the reign of King David, God had promised that there would be a Messiah (the final king) who would come from the line of David. This was the hope of the people as we read the message of Jesus' birth. Unlike all other kings, Jesus was born a King. Matthew wanted us to see that people of all nations acknowledged Jesus as "king of the Jews" and came to worship him as Lord.

Application: When it came time for Jesus to enter the city of Jerusalem, did he enter on a white horse to indicate his supremacy and readiness to assume the throne? He came in humility, surrounding himself with the least, the last and the lost. What does that tell you about the God whom we serve? How does Jesus' life inspire you to live with humility and service?

Prayer: King Jesus, I worship you as my first beginning, I long for you as my last end, I praise you as my constant helper, and I call on you as my loving protector. Help me to be for others as you have been for me. Amen.

Wednesday, September 5

Scripture: John 18:36; Revelation 21:22-22:6

Jesus replied, "My kingdom doesn't originate from this world. If it did, my guards would fight so that I wouldn't have been arrested by the Jewish leaders. My kingdom isn't from here."

I didn't see a temple in the city, because its temple is the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb. The city doesn't need the sun or the moon to shine on it, because God's glory is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. Its gates will never be shut by day, and there will be no night there. They will bring the glory and honor of the nations into it. Nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is vile and deceitful, but only those who are registered in the Lamb's scroll of life.

Then the angel showed me the river of life-giving water, shining like crystal, flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb through the middle of the city's main street. On each side of the river is the tree of life, which produces twelve crops of fruit, bearing its fruit each month. The tree's leaves are for the healing of the nations. There will no longer be any curse. The throne of God and the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. Night will be no more. They won't need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will shine on them, and they will rule forever and always. Then he said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place.

Observation: The political leaders of the first century looked at Jesus and did not see someone who had any resemblance to a king. How could he be a king if he had no kingdom? Jesus was brought before Pontius Pilate, who asked how he could be a king. Jesus replied that his kingdom was not the kind of kingdom with soldiers to fight for it. It was not built or maintained by military might. Then in the reading from Revelation, the writer described the final kingdom as a garden where Jesus would reign forever.

Application: How is God's eternal spiritual kingdom different from earthly kingdoms – even the nation in which we live today? In what ways are you already living as if God's kingdom has come? Recall the values and life of humility and service that Jesus lived.

Prayer: Lord God, guide me by your wisdom, correct me with your justice, comfort me with your mercy, protect me with your power today and always. Amen.

Thursday, September 6

Scripture: Mark 8:34-38

After calling the crowd together with his disciples, Jesus said to them, "All who want to come after me must say no to themselves, take up their cross, and follow me. All who want to save their lives will lose them. But all who lose their lives because of me and because of the good news will save them. Why would people gain the whole world but lose their lives? What will people give in exchange for their lives? Whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this unfaithful and sinful generation, the Human One will be ashamed of that person when he comes in the Father's glory with the holy angels."

Observation: This wasn't what Peter and the rest of the disciples had in mind. They may not have thought of Jesus as a military leader, but they certainly didn't think of him going straight to his death. As Charlie Brown once said, "winning ain't everything but losing ain't anything." Jesus seemed to be saying he was going to lose. Worse, he was inviting them to come and lose alongside him.

Application: Today's reading makes clear that following Jesus is the only way to go. Following Jesus is Mark's definition of what it means to be a Christian. Jesus is not leading you on a pleasant walk in the park, but on a walk into danger and risk. What (if anything) have you "lost" or given up in order to follow Jesus? What (if anything) have you "found" or gained in being a disciple?

Prayer: Dear Jesus, I offer you my thoughts: to be fixed on you; my words: to have you for their theme; my actions: to reflect my love for you; my sufferings: to be endured for your greater glory. Amen.

Friday, September 7

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 4:1-7; 1 Peter 3:13-16

This is why we don't get discouraged, given that we received this ministry in the same way that we received God's mercy. Instead, we reject secrecy and shameful actions. We don't use deception, and we don't tamper with God's word. Instead, we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God by the public announcement of the truth. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are on the road to destruction. The god of this age has blinded the minds of those who don't have faith so they couldn't see the light of the gospel that reveals Christ's glory. Christ is the image of God. We don't preach about ourselves. Instead, we preach about Jesus Christ as Lord, and we describe ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. God said that light should shine out of the darkness. He is the same one who shone in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in clay pots so that the awesome power belongs to God and doesn't come from us.

Who will harm you if you are zealous for good? But happy are you, even if you suffer because of righteousness! Don't be terrified or upset by them. Instead, regard Christ as holy in your hearts. Whenever anyone asks you to speak of your hope, be ready to defend it. Yet do this with respectful humility, maintaining a good conscience. Act in this way so that those who malign your good lifestyle in Christ may be ashamed when they slander you.

Observation: Paul wrote this letter, concerned that the Corinthians might have supposed he regarded himself as the head of the organization. Rather, he was a servant, an assistant, someone who introduced people to the one at the top. "We don't preach about ourselves. Instead, we preach about Jesus Christ as Lord..."

Application: What does it mean to you to make Jesus the "lord," "ruler" or "king" of your heart? Dallas Willard suggests that following Jesus means to "want what God wants." What is an example in your life of deferring to God—of choosing what he wants over what you want?

Prayer: O Lord, my God, I want to do what you ask of me, in the way you ask for as long as you ask, because you ask it. Amen.

Saturday, September 8

Scripture: Psalm 24:1-2; Psalm 89:8-11

The earth is the LORD's and everything in it, the world and its inhabitants too. Because God is the one who established it on the seas; God set it firmly on the waters.

Who is like you, LORD God of heavenly forces? Mighty LORD, your faithfulness surrounds you! You rule over the surging sea: When its waves rise up, it's you who makes them still. It's you who crushed Rahab like a dead body; you scattered your enemies with your strong arm. Heaven is yours! The earth too! The world and all that fills it— you made all of it! North and south—you created them!

Observation: Psalm 24 was written either for the occasion when King David brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem or for a festival commemorating the event. The Ark of the Covenant was a gold box that contained the Law of Moses. It was considered the actual "throne" of God. The words of both psalms announced who "reigns."

Application: If "the earth is the Lord's," how does this alter your thinking and your actions about things that you tend to think you "own"? What is one thing you might handle differently as you think of God as its true "owner," and yourself as a caretaker on God's behalf?

Prayer: O Lord, open my eyes and my heart to see you in the world around me. Help me crown you the king of my life, and carry your hope to the world. In Jesus' name, Amen.