

Only slaves and criminals could be crucified. And no one who was a Roman citizen. Three men are led out to the place called The Skull that morning. Two of them are criminals. But what about the third? Jesus was a free man and not a slave. No master owned Him. This leaves just one possibility. He must be a criminal.

Yet Pilate did not find Him guilty of any crimes, nor did Herod. Even so, Jesus is put onto a cross, and the charge convicting Him is placed above His head: *“This is the King of the Jews.”* So, apparently, not just slaves and criminals could be crucified, but kings as well.

Pilate put that inscription there. But it is only half right. *“This is the King,”* is true. But not *“of the Jews.”* That is far from the whole truth. Jesus is simply The King. The King above all kings. The King of kings.

But not just of kings. Watch Him and listen. He prays for those who beat Him and crucify Him. He does not curse them with His dying breath. Jesus is the King of love. He loves more than friends and family. He loves His enemies.

Jesus is a king. Pilate got that right. So, who are His subjects? A king must be the king of someone. There is a man. He could be that someone. But he is a thief, a criminal. He is on a cross next to Jesus. Yet this thief respects Jesus as a king. He does not mock Him, as does the other thief, with the words, *“Save Yourself and us!”* He simply turns to Jesus and asks to be remembered in His kingdom. And Jesus says Amen to his prayer. Amen is Greek for *truly*. *“Amen, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.”*

Now we understand. Jesus is the King of criminals, of thieves and robbers, of worthless sinners. For this criminal names Him as king, his king. And Jesus acts as this robber’s king by giving him a place in His kingdom.

Is Jesus your king? There is no place in Jesus’ kingdom for those who are righteous in their own eyes, who refuse to admit that they are criminals, thieves, adulterers, murderers, and so on, who are unwilling to confess that they are as sinful as that worthless sinner hanging next to Jesus. Jesus did not speak to the other criminal. But you know that He would have had that man, also, confessed his sin and turned to Jesus. Jesus did not speak to the soldiers who were crucifying Him. He did not speak to the chief priests and rulers of the people who were mocking Him. But you know He would have had them, too, confessed their sin and asked to be remembered.

*“Remember me,”* said the one criminal. This word *remember*, in the Greek, means *remember for good, remember with mercy*. This thief believed that Jesus was this kind of king A king of goodness and mercy. A king who forgives, who forgives even the worst of worthless sinners.

Jesus is your king because He gave you a place in His kingdom when you were baptized. And no one can take that place away from you. Your baptism places you with that criminal next to Jesus who confessed his sin and asked to be remembered. And to you, also, Jesus speaks. In your baptism He speaks words of promise, of grace and mercy.

Remember your baptism. Jesus does. Not a day goes by in which He fails to remember you with mercy. Jesus remembers that you are His dear child, baptized into His death and resurrection. He remembers, not the sins you have done, but that He suffered and died for you. He remembers praying from the cross for His Father in heaven to forgive you. And you are forgiven, my friend. Your King made this a certainty.

Not many kings would die for their subjects. Jesus does. For you, He lived, suffered, died, and rose again. And thus, we enter this holiest of weeks with our King. He rides on a donkey for the purpose of being nailed to a cross for sinners like us. Amen.