

## His Kingdom Is Out of this World!

A sermon based on John 18:33-37.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Who doesn't love the occasional, good cliché...that one statement you know that particular person is going to say...it's their go-to phrase. Becky would probably say mine is "I wouldn't worry about it." Or, "just drink some water," since that seems to be my solution/cure to any health issue she's having.

Sportscasters are known for all the clichés they use on air. Packer fans would recognize this if they're listening to Larry MacCarren on the radio, "And there is your dagger." Dick Vatale, famed college hoops announcer, is known for his catch-phrase, "It's awesome, baby!"

Cliches are fun...until they become well-worn and annoying. I saw a list online of the top 20 cliches we'd rather not hear from sportscasters ever again. Here are a few, "Just out there having fun," "And boom goes the dynamite," "They gave \_\_\_\_\_ a taste of their own medicine," "He just wanted it more." Well, one I was surprised wasn't on the list was "out of this world." "This guy is playing out of this world. He is lights-out!" "The team's season was out of this world. Their run was incredible." "That game...that one play was out of this world. You had to see it to believe it." WABC 7, an ABC affiliate in NYC, for 20-some years, even had a sports reporter who had a weekly sports segment, entitled "Out of this World."

Out of this world. Yes, a phrase that can be overused, but in the right context, it can describe something truly incredible, impressive, maybe even teetering on borderline impossible and unbelievable.

I wonder if that's what Pilate thought as Jesus was standing before him. The charges had been brought. The Jewish religious leaders hated Jesus, were dead-set on seeing him dead, but even they knew telling Pilate they wanted to kill Jesus because he claimed to be God was not going to fly. So, they said he was setting himself up as a rival to Caesar.

Was Jesus a threat to Roman power in Palestine? Hardly! One glance from Pilate was enough to show him that a dangerous rebel existed only in the imaginations of Jesus' enemies. Here was no king! Those charges were only the result of their jealousy and their hatred.

So you can imagine his line of questioning Jesus was more in jest, really just looking to get an innocent guy off the hook, so, come on Jesus, give him something to work with here. Jesus gave him the truth, ***"My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews...You are right in saying I am a king."***

And we understand what he meant. This is Christ the King. His kingdom is heaven. So his kingdom is not of this world...his kingdom is out of this world...literally. It's different from kingdoms here. I don't know that I need to go into how messed up they can be and are today. But not Christ's kingdom. It's amazing. It's incredible...even though we know very little about it.

Now, Scripture gives us a few details – no hunger, no thirst, no tears, no sadness, no pain, but perfection, serving Jesus in eternal glory. But, as for the rest, it's fun to imagine, isn't. Martin Luther once described it this way in a letter to his 4-year-old son, Hans,

**“Grace and peace in Christ, my dear little son! I am glad that you are learning well and praying hard. Keep it up, my boy, and when I come home, I will bring you a nice present. I know of a lovely, pleasant garden where there are many children. They wear golden jackets and gather rosy apples under the trees, and pears, cherries and purple and yellow plums. They sing and skip and are happy. And they have pretty little ponies with gold reins and silver saddles.**

**I asked the owner of the garden whose children these were. He answered, “They are the children who like to pray and study and be good.” Then I said: “Good man, I also have a son. His name is Hans Luther. Couldn’t he come into the garden, too, and eat the rosy apples and the pears and ride such fine ponies and play with these children?” The man replied: “He may, just so long as he likes to pray and study and be good. His friends Phil and Justy may also come with him, and they will have whistles, drums, and fifes, and dance and shoot with little bows and arrows.”**

**Next the man showed me a fine, large lawn in the garden all ready for dancing, where golden whistles, fifes, and drums, and nice silver crossbows hang from the trees all over. But it was still early in the day, and the children had not yet eaten. I wanted to see them dance, but I just couldn’t wait any longer. So I said to the man: “My good man, I must go at once and write my dear Hans all about this and tell him to pray, study, and be a good boy, so that he may also come into this garden. But he also has an Aunt Lena [Katie’s Aunt Margaret] whom he must bring along. “That will be all right,” the man said. “Go and write him about these things.”**

**So, dear little Hans, work hard and pray well and tell Phil and Justy to say their prayers and study, too, for then you will enter the garden together.”**

Now, the garden, of course, is a children’s vision of heaven, and the owner of the garden, God himself.

But what a lovely place. What a seemingly impossible place, almost too good to be true... like the Garden of Eden...a paradise one could only experience in a dream. And honestly, that’s what it should be...just a dream. Because heaven is truly out of this world...and it should be out of our grasp.

Here’s why. Notice what Jesus said about his kingdom? In a worldly kingdom the servants of that kingdom fight for their king and his kingdom. Jesus’ servants are not fighting for him, however, because, just as Jesus and his kingdom are out of this world, so are his servants.

Unless you’re talking about these servants...you and me. We are his servants here. But, even as believers, what kind of servants are we? Remember how Peter tried to put up a little bit of a fight when Jesus was first being arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, as he chopped off the priest’s servant’s ear? We don’t have to take up arms for Jesus. We do get to take up his Word and defend Christ our King by sharing his Word with others. We get to stand up for our faith in Jesus and let others know we belong to him. Are we eager, happy, willing to do that? Do we do that?

Or, making it even more basic, servants fit for Christ’s kingdom are characterized by righteousness and obedience...all the time. Always obeying God’s representatives. Always watching what comes out of your mouth. Always putting others and their needs ahead of selfish attitudes. Always having pure and loving thoughts. Never getting mad. Never being greedy.

Really, we could just walk through the 10 Commandments, say, “Obeying these...that’s the mark of a true servant of Christ,” and what would our self-evaluation have to be? I’m not fit to be his servant. I’m not fit for his kingdom. I’m not fit to stand in his presence, not even now. As incredible and out of the world Jesus is, and his kingdom is, the truth of his Word – the **“there is no one who does good, not even one,”** the **“all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”** – that truth reminds me I’m not. I’m not incredible. I’m not righteous. I’m not fit for heaven.

Whatever your image of Christ’s kingdom is, it seems almost too good to be true, especially since we don’t deserve it. Am I right?

Then it’s a good thing his kingdom is not of this world. It’s different. It’s different from this worldly kingdom, where the prevailing thought is you have to prove you belong. Humanly speaking, we don’t belong in heaven.

But we’re going there...because it’s out of this world...and even more importantly, because our King is out of this world. But he came to our world to testify to the truth. He is on the side of truth. He is the truth...the way, the truth, and the life.

And here’s the truth: Jesus didn’t come to establish an earthly rule. He didn’t come to be popular. He didn’t come to accumulate wealth. He didn’t come to bring glory to himself or his followers here on earth. And he didn’t come to make life easy for everyone on his side.

He came to do what any good king would do – fight to protect his own. We, his servants, have been bombarded by sin and Satan. In regards to righteousness, we were failing. But Christ our King came and did what you’d expect a leader to do. He led the fight. He defeated Satan by resisting every temptation and by living a perfect life for us. He defeated sin and hell by not allowing Pilate to let him go free (although he was innocent) so he could take our place in hell on the cross to pay for our sin. He removed all of our guilt, made us perfect and clean, and innocent before God by sacrificing himself. And finally, he defeated death by rising from the dead on Easter morning.

Martin Luther writes in his explanation to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Article of the Apostles’ Creed: **“All this [Jesus] die that I should be his own, and live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness, just as he has risen from death and lives and rules eternally. This is most certainly true.”**

That’s the truth. Christ our King has made us the kind of servants fit for heaven through his life, death, and resurrection. Christ our King has opened the way to the kingdom of heaven to us through his life, death, and resurrection. What he’s done, has never, can never, will never be replicated. We don’t need it to. Heaven is our dream come true!

Heaven, Christ’s kingdom, is simply out of this world. It’s incredible. It’s beyond our imaginations. Best of all, through Christ our King, it’s ours!

As Jesus stands before Pilate, we know. Yes, he is a king. Never could there be a king like Christ, our king. Beyond all comparison is the rule he exercises in time and in eternity. Incomparably great therefore is also our joy in worshiping him even now as we await his triumphant return to transform our worship in faith and under the cross to worship in sight and in glory.

Until then, we're his servants here. We're going to serve him here. We're going to live for him here. We're going to fight for him here. We're going to worship and praise and thank and glorify him here...practice for heaven! And, finally, we're going to live in peace with eager anticipation for the day we join Christ our King in his "out of this world" heavenly kingdom! And that's no cliché. That's our reality in Christ our King! Amen!