

*“Give thanks for Jesus being our King” 2 Chronicles 34:1-7 / John 18:33-37 (11/24/24)*

When Sooho was a baby, Sunwoo and I wanted to give him healthy food. We hoped not to give him sweet candies or sugar food. After Sooho grew up enough to have some interest in eating something, he asked us to give him something that we ate. Even though he could not talk, he could use short words to ask us about food. He wanted to eat everything that we ate. He was also interested in the food we ate, including ice cream, chocolate, coke, and coffee. Every time he asked us to give him those sweet foods, we told him, “Wow, it is so spicy!” or “It is only for adults.” Once he saw our spicy actions and heard the word “adult,” he did not ask us about the food anymore.

Sunwoo and I were happy because we believed we were raising Sooho with healthy food. However, the issue happened after the pandemic, and he started to talk. After the pandemic, he could have social relationships with other babies. Then, he saw that other babies were eating ice cream and chocolate. He realized that ice cream and chocolate were not spicy, and he could eat them. After he saw other babies, he started to cry for sweet treats. So, eventually, we gave him sweet treats, and he became a big fan of ice cream and cookies.

There are people who did the same thing as Sooho in the Bible. They are

the people of Israel. In 1 Samuel 8:4-7, “So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. They said to him, “You are old, and your sons do not follow your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have.” But when they said, “Give us a king to lead us,” this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the Lord. And the Lord told him: “Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king.” Kingship in Israel was not God’s plan. God knew God should be their king, so probably God did not give a king to the people of Israel while the other countries had a king. Israel hoped to have a king like the other nations. They might be jealous of other countries that have strong leaders.

However, God listened to the people of Israel and gave them a king. From this event, the faith of Israel was greatly affected by their kings. When a king had good faith, Israel was faithful to God. When a king did what was evil in the sight of God, Israel was also corrupted. When the people of Israel asked for a king, they might have expected their king to lead them to abundance and power. However, unfortunately, probably God had already known this; most of Israel’s and Judea’s kings were not good before God. If we look at the history of Israel from the first king to the last king, only a few kings did the right things before

God. After their division of the kingdom, there were no faithful kings in northern Israel and only a few faithful kings in southern Judea.

When I was studying a Bible teaching course in Hawaii, my leader trained us to read the Prophet's writings connecting to Kings and Chronicles. And I realized that the kings of Israel and Judea seriously did not listen to God. I could feel God's heart really struggling with the people and kings of Israel and Judea. I was really upset about the kings in the Bible.

Today's Scripture, 2 Chronicles chapter 34, is one of the few pages in Bible history that records the work of good kings. Josiah worked many good things before God to restore Judea. He destroyed idols and restored worshipping God in Judea. However, his great work did not continue for a long time. The next king after Josiah was taken into Egypt, and the next king, Jehoiakim, did evil again. The faith of Judea that Josiah restored could be continued even in one generation. Depending on how kings did before God, Israel and Judea were also affected by their kings.

Then, now we should think about who our king is. Who is our king? I believe our King is Jesus. In today's Gospel Scripture, Jesus said, "You say that I

am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.” Jesus said he was the King. He is a King who testifies to the truth. So that Jesus never guides us to do evil things before God. Jesus is God who incarnated into this world. God became our King through Jesus Christ. Jesus restored the kingship of God that Israel rejected in 1 Samuel. Our King Jesus is with us now and guides us to live as the people of God.

For me, after I invited Jesus as the King of my life, Jesus made my life free. When my family believed in another religion, my family’s life had a lot of limitations. When we purchased furniture, we brought that furniture carefully because we believed evil spirits could come into our home with the new furniture. My parents did not bring me to the funeral because they believed ghosts could follow us after the funeral. My auntie, my mother’s sister, does not eat any birthday food because she believes she will be sick if she eats birthday food. So, she did not attend my father’s 70-year-old birthday party last week. After my family believed in Jesus, after we invited Jesus as my family’s King, we realized that all the myths my family believed were not reasonable. We became free from the fear of myths.

It does not just happen in my culture. In Europe, before the Reformation, people went to the church to worship God and received communion every week. However, people also carried totems and charms to protect themselves from evil spirits. They were so dedicated to the church, and they believed they would die or be cursed if they did not receive Holy Communion on Sunday. They went to the church and believed in Jesus. And at the same time, they did everything to protect them from evil spirits. They probably knew in the knowledge that Jesus was the King who could make them free, who protected them, who guided them to God, but they did not invite Jesus as their King in their hearts.

We should invite Jesus to be our King in our hearts. I am not talking about the protection from evil spirits. I believe that our lives are entirely different depending on who we choose to be the king of our lives. In the present day, we do not have a human king of history who has power and authority, but many temptations in our lives come into our hearts to be our kings. So, we should be aware of inviting Jesus as our King.

Then, how can we know that we serve Jesus as our King? How can we know if we invited Jesus as our King in our hearts? We could know it through gratitude.

Last week, I attended the ICD meeting at Sun Prairie. My nephew studies in a high school 30 minutes away by car from Sun Prairie. I knew how studying abroad alone was challenging at a young age. So, I visited him to encourage him and have dinner with him after the first day of the ICD meeting. He could not eat Korean food in his school. So, I took him to a Korean restaurant in Madison for dinner. He ordered a lot of food and devoured the food that he ordered. He made my wallet thin, but I was happy because he was joyful and happy while eating the food. Also, he expressed a lot of thanks to me. “Uncle, thank you for visiting me tonight.” “Uncle, thank you for bringing me to this Korean restaurant.” “Uncle, thank you so much for this food. I am so happy. It is so delicious.” “Uncle, thank you so much for everything today.” Through his gratitude, I know he truly accepted my encouragement and service on that day. His expression of gratitude touched my heart.

While I was preparing today’s sermon, I looked back at myself. ‘Am I giving thanks to God for being my King?’ ‘Do I thank God for Jesus being my king in my heart?’ ‘Am I taking it for granted?’ I believe “Jesus being our king” is not for granted. Jesus came to us to be our King. Jesus suffered and was humiliated to be our King. Jesus came to us again after he was resurrected to be

our King. We should give thanks to God for Jesus being our King. Through this Christ King Sunday and Thanksgiving this week, I hope we can express gratitude for Jesus being our King. Also, I hope God guides us to live as God's people who serve Jesus as King. Amen.