

Introduction

People of God, Two thousand years ago, the King of Glory rode into Jerusalem to the cries of “*Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!*”

“Hosanna” means “Deliver us.” And on that first Palm Sunday, the crowds welcomed Jesus as their King. The kind of king they *thought* they needed, was one to deliver them from Roman oppression. They thought him to be a political savior. A nationalist hero.

But their hopes, like Israel’s in the days of Samuel, were misplaced. Just like their ancestors, they misunderstood the true nature of their problem.

When Israel first demanded a king, they wanted deliverance from their enemies—from the Ammonites and the Philistines. But they had forgotten the deeper enemy of indwelling sin – that primal rebellion which kept turning their hearts away from God to worthless idols.

And so, in 1 Samuel 12, God gave Israel their first king.

But He also gave them Thunder, as a divine rebuke from Heaven. For in demanding a king like all the nations, they had rejected the Lord as their one true King.

Centuries later, as Jesus entered Jerusalem, the thunder returned, this time confirming Israel's true and final king had arrived – not to crush Rome, but to conquer sin. Not to deliver them from Caesar, but from Satan. Not to reign over earthly kingdoms, but to inaugurate the kingdom of Heaven. Not to deliver people from mere political oppression, but to rescue souls from sin, death, and hell.

Today, let us reflect on these Days of Thunder—to consider what kind of King we cry out for, and what kind of deliverance we truly need today. Because unless we recognize who and what our greatest enemy is, we will never call on the only King who can truly deliver us.

The People Bear Witness to Samuel's Integrity (1 Samuel 12:1–5)

Now we have been in 1 Samuel, and we have seen Saul's private and public confirmation, as well as his ordination service, which was a trial by combat against the Serpent – Nahash the Ammonite.

Samuel calls the people to Gilgal to renew the kingdom. And here he preaches his final sermon—a farewell address and covenant lawsuit rolled into one. The age of the Judges is over, and the Era of kings has arrived. Therefore

Samuel's public ministry as priest, prophet, and judge is also coming to an end.

But before stepping down, Samuel must make one thing unmistakably clear: Israel has sinned greatly in asking for a king like the nations.

In this courtroom drama, Samuel takes up every role—lawyer, prosecutor, witness, and mediator—while God is Judge and Israel stands as the defendant.

Samuel begins by putting himself on trial. “*Testify against me,*” he says. “*Whose ox or donkey have I taken?*” Had he ever defrauded, oppressed, or accepted a bribe? The people unanimously reply: “*You have not defrauded us or oppressed us or taken anything.*” Samuel had walked in integrity. He gave and never took. And before the Lord, the people confirmed it.

God's Righteous Acts and Covenant Faithfulness (1 Samuel 12:6–11)

Having established his integrity, Samuel reminds them of the Lord's faithfulness. From Egypt to the Judges, it was the LORD who delivered them—time and again. When

they sinned, He disciplined; when they repented, He rescued.

But, when Nahash the Serpent threatened Jabesh-Gilead, they didn't cry out to God to deliver them. Instead, they demanded that God give them a king like the other nations had. They rejected God as King and chose a man to rule over them instead.

Still, even in the face of rejection, the LORD remains faithful to His people. Even here in this new covenantal administration under the reign of earthly kings, God promised blessings to His people and their king if they *fear the Lord and serve Him and obey His voice, and not rebel against the commandment of the Lord.*

And notice what exactly the promised blessing is for their obedience:

"...then both you and the king who reigns over you will continue following the Lord your God."

Both the people and their king continuing to follow the LORD is its own reward. And those of you who have been following the LORD for any length of time know exactly how much a blessing that is.

“However,” Samuel says: “if you do not obey the voice of the Lord, but rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then the hand of the Lord will be against you, as it was against your fathers. And to have God’s hand against you is an absolutely horrible fate.

To confirm their guilt in asking for themselves a king and rejecting God as their King, Samuel calls for a sign. It’s the time of the wheat harvest, which means it’s the dry season—but Samuel calls upon God to thunder from heaven and send the rain.

The thunder was the sound of the Judge’s gavel. The LORD and Judge of the Covenant had given His verdict. **"In the matter of Israel wickedly asking for a king — I find the defendant, Guilty."**

Then all the people trembled, and cried out for mercy: *“Pray for us—for we have added to all our sins this evil: asking for a king.”*

A Final Warning: Follow the Lord or Be Swept Away (1 Samuel 12:20–25)

Then comes the word of grace that the LORD is universally known for. Yes, the people stand condemned. Yes, their sin is great. But the God’s mercy is greater.

Samuel does not end with judgment and condemnation, he instead ends with a call to renewed covenant faithfulness:

“Do not fear. You have done all this wickedness; yet do not turn aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart. And do not turn aside; for then you would go after empty things which cannot profit or deliver, for they are nothing.

For the Lord will not forsake His people, for His great name’s sake, because it has pleased the Lord to make you His people.

This is the beauty of the covenant. The Lord disciplines us when we sin, but He does not cast us off. The LORD judges His people, but He does so in order to bring us to repentance in order to restore us to Himself.

Because God’s covenant mercy is tethered to His name, and His name is bound to His glory, and His glory is seen in His faithfulness to His promises, we are assured that the Mercy of the LORD endures forever. For it is chiefly here – in fulfilling His covenant promises and showing mercy to His people that God receives maximal glory.

So Samuel lays plain the terms of the covenant: Mercy for the obedient and condemnation for the rebellious. He says: *“Fear the LORD, and serve Him in truth with all your heart, for consider what great things He has done for you. But if*

you do wickedly, you shall be swept away—both you and your king.”

That final word—*swept away*—is a foreshadowing of things to come: Israel and Judah will in fact do wickedly, and so God will send the floodwaters of Assyria and Babylon to sweep away both people and king alike into Exile.

Thunder in John 12: God Speaks Again from Heaven

Fast forward a thousand years from the days of Israel’s first King to the days of Israel’s final King. And heaven thunders once again.

It’s the time of Passover in Jerusalem. And the crowds were growing. Many had come to Jerusalem, not just to see Jesus, but also to see Lazarus, who was living proof that Jesus had power over death. Now on account of Lazarus, many Jews went away from the Pharisees and the chief priests and believed in Jesus. So in their desperation, the chief priests plotted to kill both Jesus and Lazarus.

Meanwhile, the crowd that had witnessed Lazarus’s resurrection kept spreading the word. Their testimony fueled the excitement that was in the air as Jesus entered

Jerusalem. The people welcomed Him with palm branches, and shouting,

“Hosanna!” “Please, deliver us!” “Save us, now!” “Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord. Even the King of Israel!”

The Pharisees, watching this unfold, said to one another, *“You see, you are accomplishing nothing. The whole world has gone after Him.”*

And then, in that moment, some Greeks are seen going after Jesus! They approach Philip saying – *“Sir, we wish to see Jesus.”* Philip tells Andrew, and together they bring the request to Christ.

The arrival of the Greeks signals the turning point in history. The King of the Jews is about to become the King and Savior of the world. Jesus knows the time, and says: *“The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain.”*

Knowing the weight of His impending death, Jesus prays aloud: *“Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify Your name.”*

And then it happens. A voice from heaven answers in thunder: *“I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.”* Jesus says, *“This voice has come for your sake, not mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out.”*

Just as in the days of Samuel, when thunder fell to confirm Israel’s guilt in rejecting the LORD as Israel’s true King, so now thunder falls again. But this time, the thunder is a judgment that confirms Christ’s kingship, and is also God’s judgment against the “the Ruler of this world” – the Devil.

At the cross, God rendered judgment against the Serpent who had deceived, blinded, and oppressed the nations and led them in rebellion against the LORD. In rejecting God, Adam chose to live under the Serpent’s dominion. But at Calvary, the Father declared the Serpent guilty and cast him down from his place in Heaven, stripping him of his authority and power to deceive the nations.

When Jesus was lifted up on the cross, the Devil was cast down from Heaven. Through Christ’s death, resurrection, and ascension, our Lord Jesus took His rightful place as the true Ruler of the world.

Thus Jesus Himself said, *“When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to myself.”* The nations, once lost in darkness and longing for deliverance from the king of their own choosing, now behold in the cross the long awaited King and Savior who delivers us from our greatest enemies.

And just as the first thunder came during the wheat harvest, so now this second thunder heralds a greater harvest. Jesus declares, *“Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone. But if it dies, it bears much fruit.”*

By His death, Christ sows Himself as the seed of a new humanity. Through His resurrection, He becomes the first fruits of those who will rise. From every tribe, tongue, people, and nation, He will reap a harvest—ransomed from bondage, reborn under His reign, and raised in His likeness.

Unlike the reign of the Serpent, the rule of this King is marked by peace, freedom, and eternal life in the love of God. He is the deliverer we need, for he saves us from the greatest enemies of our soul – our own indwelling sin, and the Devil.

Two Kings. Two Thunders. Two Verdicts.

The thunder crash in Samuel's day was a judgment against Israel's demand to be delivered by a king who could not deliver, and who would only enslave. They wanted a ruler like the nations, which is why they were so quick to make a treaty with Nahash the Serpent:

He takes their sight, he takes their dignity, and he oppresses and enslaves. God thundered from heaven against Israel to make it plain—in choosing Man as king, they had rejected God as their King, and actually chose the Serpent.

But in John's Gospel, the voice of the Father thunders from Heaven confirming that He has established Jesus as King. Jesus came to glorify God's Name, not by taking from the people like the other kings, but rather by giving up His life to deliver the world.

Christ came not to take their sight, but to give sight to the blind, not to bring disgrace on us, but to give grace to us, not to oppress us, but to set us free us from the tyranny of sin and Satan.

Christ the King went to the cross to deliver God's people from the ancient Serpent and cast him out of heaven. As Revelation 12 declares:

“Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren... has been cast down!”

Yet just like their forefathers, the people of Jerusalem were still blind to the spiritual war unfolding before their eyes, unfolding in their very hearts. The true King stood among them, teaching, performing miracles, casting out demons, and raising the dead. And though the people hailed him as their King who would deliver them, in a week's time he would be crucified, for the crime of being the King of the Jews.

Pontius Pilate would even ask them, *“Shall I crucify your King?”* And echoing the sin of Samuel's generation, when they rejected the Lord as their king, and chose one who could not deliver, they said, *“We have no king but Caesar!”*

They repeated the same sin all over again. They rejected God as their King and they demanded a king like all the other nations. Give us Caesar. Give us Rome. Give us Satan. Give us Barabbas. Give us anyone else besides Jesus. *Because we will not have this man to reign over us.*

And so often we say the same things, people of God. We reject Christ our King by *“turning aside after empty worthless things that cannot profit or deliver.”*

People of God, you cannot cry out “Hosanna!” – “Please, deliver us!” to Jesus, and also look to other worthless things to deliver you.

Nothing else can deliver you.

- NOT Your good works
- NOT Your moral outrage
- NOT Your bank account
- NOT Your politics
- NOT Your intelligence or emotional insight
- NOT Your gifts or talents
- NOT Your race, ethnicity,
- NOT Your gender, or social status
- NOT Your network, and list of people you know
- NOT Your theological tradition or spiritual experiences
- NOT Your homeschool method or curriculum
- NOT Your bookshelf, your podcasts, or your knowledge
- NOT Your head coverings
- NOT Your self-sufficiency
- NOT Your education

- NOT Your moral superiority
- NOT Your business acumen, portfolio, retirement plan, or net worth

None of these can deliver you.

The question is not whether you will have a deliverer, but **which one you will trust**. And that choice reveals what you believe your deepest need to be.

So—what is your greatest need?

Your greatest need is not going to be answered by politics, money, influence, self-esteem, or knowledge.

Your greatest need is **deliverance from the guilt of your sin before the judgment seat of a holy and righteous God.**

In Samuel's day, the thunder declared Israel guilty for rejecting the Lord as King. In Jesus's day, the thunder shook again—this time, **bringing judgment upon the Serpent, casting him down by the power of the cross**, so he could no longer accuse the people of God.

But what does that thunder say to you today?

Before the judgment seat of God, we stand guilty. Every rebellion, every idol, every misplaced cry for some empty powerless deliverer who cannot save—all of it condemns us.

Scripture is clear: **“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”** (Romans 3:23). No good work, no earthly king, no personal effort can erase that verdict. **“The wages of sin is death”** (Romans 6:23), and apart from Christ, we face eternal separation from the God who alone is Life.

That thunder is also the sound of the Devil’s judgment, and his condemnation. Christ has silenced every accusation of the adversary. **When Jesus died on the cross, He took the judgment we deserved and defeated the accuser once and for all.**

We now have an Advocate before the Father—Jesus Christ the Righteous. And He is the propitiation for our sins. Like the greater Samuel, He prays for us sinners, and His prayers are effective for our salvation, because He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through Him, since always lives to make intercession before the Father.

Where thunder once shook the courtroom with the sound of our guilt, it now resounds with the declaration of Christ’s victory and our righteousness. **When the enemy accuses us, Christ steps forward as our Defender.**

The charges are real, but He answers them with His blood. The verdict was once death, but He speaks life over us. He

is the righteous one who stands in our place, offering His shed blood as the as our defense.

Therefore God's judgment in thunder no longer condemns those who trust in Jesus; it declares **We are righteous.**

So, choose whom you will serve this day. Will you continue to trust in empty worthless things that cannot save you? Will you cry out, "Hosanna!"— to Caesar, Self, or the Serpent? Or will you cry Hosanna! to Jesus—the only King who can truly deliver?

Confess your sins, people of God. Trust in Jesus Christ the Righteous. Lay the guilt of your sins at His cross. And let the thunder of God's judgment speak peace over your soul, for the verdict is clear: in Christ, you are forgiven, in Christ you are delivered, in Christ you are set free from sin, death, and the Devil. In Christ you are righteous! Amen.