**Scripture Lesson: Colossians 1:11-20**

11May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully 12giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. 13He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, 14in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. 15He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; 16for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. 17He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. 19For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

**Sermon “Gratitude for Christ the King”**There is a website called Listverse that will give you the top 10 list of anything you can think of. From 10 things that make Australia fascinating to 10 bizarre things you should know about sausage. It can be a helpful and insightful tool at times. Since it is Christ the King Sunday I went on to see what was considered the top 10 Greatest Monarchs. Here is part of their list: Suleiman I of the Ottoman Empire Reign: 1494 – 1566. Suleiman was also known as Suleiman the Magnificent, and he reigned as Sultan of the Ottoman Empire for 69 years, longer than any other Sultan. At that time the empire encompassed most of the Middle East and Southeastern Europe. Suleiman made educational, legislative, taxation and criminal reforms ushering in a golden age for his people.

James I of England Reign: 1603 – 1625. James was the first king of both England and Scotland. Under his rule, the two kingdoms were united. Literature and the fine arts flourished under his reign, including the printing of the King James Bible. During his rule, international trade through the British East India Company increased dramatically.

Meiji of Japan Reign: 1867 – 1912. When Meiji became Emperor of Japan at the age of 14, Japan was a primitive and isolated country. By the end of his reign, Japan was an industrial powerhouse. Meiji was a key player in making Japan a major world superpower.

Cyrus II of Persia Reign: 559 BC – 530 BC Cyrus II, also known as Cyrus the Great, ruled Persia for 30 years. During his reign, the Persian Empire encompassed much of the Middle East, including Iran, Israel and Mesopotamia. Under Cyrus’s reign, human rights were greatly improved, including the release of the Israelite exiles back to their homeland.

Victoria of the United Kingdom Reign: 1837 –1901.Queen Victoria was ruler of the United Kingdom for 67 years. During her reign, the British Empire expanded to encompass one quarter of the land on the Earth, making it the largest empire ever. The United Kingdom flourished under her reign, with the Industrial Revolution taking place. Victoria lent her name to the Victorian Era, a time when the United Kingdom’s power was at its height.

When we look at these monarchs, we recognize that what this list uses to determine greatness was based on their benevolence. In other words, because of their rule, life was better for their people.

In this country, we do not have a king that rules over us. In fact the founding fathers were adamant we were not to have a king, a ruler over all, rather we were created for democracy, a governing of the people, by the people, for the people. That has been our way. So how are we to understand the language of kingship when it comes to Jesus Christ? This is after all Christ the King Sunday. The day the church acknowledges who is our ruler, our advocate, who works for our benevolence. How do you and I understand that? I think this letter to the Colossians is a good start.

Here’s the background, Paul is in prison, and he receives word that the church of Colossae was practicing some questionable religious acts. One was they were worshipping heavenly powers associated with the stars. They believed that it was the stars that had control over their destinies. You could say it was an early form of astrology. And it was causing problems in the life of that church. So how does Paul handle it, he writes to them and uses language they could share in common, in order to help them respond well to the truth of the gospel. He writes *may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully 12giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. 13He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, 14in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.* Notice Paul is trying to steer them away from focusing on stars and astronomy, and centering in on Jesus, whom God has given to us to rescue us from our darkness, to be redeemed, given new life with light. For that, we are to give thanks.

We are also to give thanks that in Christ the invisible God has been made visible. *15He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; 16for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him.* The point Paul is stating is, creation is not something to be worshiped, rather it worships its creator, and all things were created to enhance Christ’s glory.

*17He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything.*

The one who created it all continues to sustain it all. And so in him all are reconciled with God. *19For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.*

Paul does a nice job of saying, in a polite way, your worship, your devotion should be to Jesus, not the stars. He created those stars, just like he created each of us, and we were created to be reconciled with him who creates, who serves, who sacrifices, who redeems.

Paul wants to make it clear to the Colossians that Christ is not just one more among many competing approaches to life, Christ is to be at the very center of everything. He is to be of primary importance in the lives of his followers, in other words, not just something we think about on Sunday morning, or when someone asks us what church we go to, but a center that shapes our whole life turning our hearts and minds from the various ways of the world to the reign and will of God, which was at the heart of Jesus' message.

Ultimately Paul is issuing this challenge- What is it that we allow to rule over our lives? For the Colossians it was the belief that the stars held their lives for ransom. The stars dictated what would be.

What about you and I? What do we allow to rule over our lives? Is it our jobs? Is it money? Or fear or worries?

Or maybe, just maybe, do we welcome Christ to be the center of all that we do, all that we are? In other words, Can we look at all areas of our lives and agree with this statement: This allows Christ to have first place. Our work, our words, our actions, our relationships. That’s what it means to have Christ as your Benevolent King, the one who has: *rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son* A kingdom of reconciliation and love. A kingdom of the will of God. A kingdom in which the cost is nothing to us, just welcome and receive, welcome and be redeemed, welcome and give thanks.

Alvin Schmidt a professor of sociology gathered information to demonstrate what a powerful influence Christianity has had on Western Civilization in his book*: How Christianity Changed the World*. He claims the Christian faith has contributed enormously to the overall well-being of humankind. Consider the issue of health care. Prior to Christianity, the Greeks and Romans had little or no interest in the poor, the sick and the dying. But the early Christians, following the example of Jesus, ministered to the needs of the whole person. The first hospital was built by St Basil in Caesarea in 369. By the Middle Ages hospitals covered all of Europe and even beyond. Nursing also sprang from Christian concerns for the sick, just think of Florence Nightingale, for example, and the formation of the Red Cross.

Education was transformed. While important in Greek and Roman culture, it really took off under the influence of Christianity. The early Greeks and Romans had no public libraries or educational institutions – it was Christianity that established these. And Christians offered education for both males and females and individuals from all social and ethnic groups. And Christians led to the rise of the modern university.

Another example of the Christian influence, consider the issue of work and economic life. The Greeks and Romans had a very low view of manual labor, and so it was mainly the slaves and lower classes that were forced to toil with their hands while the non-slave population lived primarily for personal pleasure. But the Church changed all this. Jesus of course was a carpenter’s son. Paul was a tentmaker. Thus, work was seen as an honorable and God-given calling. The value of hard work, and the sense of vocation, soon changed the surrounding society, the development of the protection of workers and workers’ rights. All leading to a profound effect on modern day capitalism.

There are many, many other great achievements mentioned in this book from politics and democracy to modern science, as well as the arts. The bottom line is, because of the benevolent reign of Christ, and those who welcomed him to rule their lives, life was made better for all people. Many of the freedoms and benefits we enjoy in our modern-day culture is directly due to the influence of this one man, Jesus Christ, and so today, we should give thanks to him.

For the past month I preached this sermon series on Gratitude, and I spoke about being thankful for what God has given in saints and their everlasting life, giving thanks for the faith of a soldier who believes in change for the better. But I wanted to close this series out with this: Gratitude for Christ the King. Christ above all, and at the heart of everything is the reason to give thanks. Because of his rule, life is better for us, because of his rule, life is better for all people.

**Let us pray:**

Imagining your reign can be difficult, dear Lord. It is difficult to picture a world governed by your justice and righteousness alone when often times we settle for kingdoms of our own making. Correct and forgive us. Free the limitations of our imaginations, that we may envision your greater good and celebrate your reign on earth as in heaven through Jesus Christ. Amen.