

Interactive lesson



*background picture cropped from
[https://www.pexels.com/photo/
photo-of-milky-way-574115/](https://www.pexels.com/photo/photo-of-milky-way-574115/)*

How do you define God? <Let them respond>

One way of describing God is through paradoxes. What are some of the paradoxes we know about God?

<Let them respond; e.g., creator/where from? eternal/start when? new life through dying/death>

What is a king? <Let them respond>

Have you ever heard the phrase, “It’s good to be the king”? <Let them respond; Mel Brooks History of the World Part I>

What do we think of a king doing or having? <Let them respond>

Would you call Jesus a king? <Let them respond>

What is different about how Jesus reigns compared to how other kings reign? <Let them respond>

It can be argued that we today live far more comfortably, with more freedoms and privileges than most preindustrial royalty. Which kind of king do you think we emulate most? <Let them respond>

The almighty authority over everything came among us not as the most privileged owner of stuff, but as one who served others, nurturing and guiding us toward healthier lives filled with love. Did He give up when

it got difficult? <Let them respond>

Jesus stayed with us through torture and death on a cross, and came back to show us that what we think is the end is only the beginning in God's love for us.

Like many of the paradoxes about God, it can be hard to wrap our brains around and accept it. That is where our faith comes in, our trust in the infinite nature of God and Her unfathomable caring for us.

Let us worship God and celebrate the reign of Christ today and always!

Gospel lesson

We turn now to a reading from Jesus's crucifixion. Think about our discussion of the kind of king Jesus is and how it was demonstrated in this story.



background picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/jesus-dies/>

Luke 23:33-43

³³ When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left.

³⁴ Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots to divide his clothing.

³⁵ And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!"

³⁶ The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine,

³⁷ and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!"

³⁸ There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews."

³⁹ One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!"

⁴⁰ But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?"

⁴¹ And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong."

⁴² Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

⁴³ He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

The word of God for the people of God

<Hymn “To God Be the Glory”

UMH #98>

Message: Scoffers On a Hill



Foreground picture from
<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/face-to-face-with-jesus/twenty-first-sunday-after-pentecost-year-c-lectionary-planning-notes/twenty-first-sunday-after-pentecost-year-c-graphics>

Please pray with me?

Infinite God of glory,

as we take time now to further consider today's scriptures, please

- speak Your words through my mouth,
- open our ears to hear Your message, and
- abide in our hearts,

That we may worship You as our eternal sovereign and share news of Your kingdom with all whom we encounter. Amen.



picture from
<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/face-to-face-with-jesus/reign-of-christ-year-c-lectionary-planning-notes/reign-of-christ-year-c-graphics>

We conclude our “Face to Face with Jesus” series with “Scoffers On a Hill”:

“This text may seem out of sequence. Here we are on the last Sunday of the Christian year, and we are reading Holy Week texts? And... What does it mean to speak of the Christ who reigns, or Christ the king? ...

What is clear from the gospel accounts is that

Jesus came to redefine what it means to be king.”

About a dozen years ago, I was involved in an online forum chat titled “Religion.” It involved people from all walks of life, many of whom were anti-Christian / anti-religious establishments.



picture from MMMS collection

At one point, I made a comment about how I did not understand why anyone would worship something other than the One who created everything. A self-avowed atheist replied that she did not worship anything.

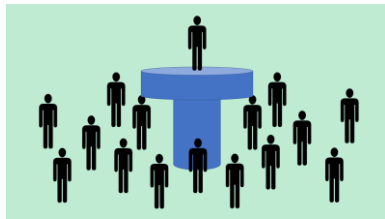
I asked her what she turned to when she was at her wits end and needed figure out what to do. She replied, “Logic.” I then argued that in my view, she worshipped logic because she venerated it above everything else as the source of wisdom.

I was pleasantly surprised when, after the atheist objected to it, others in the forum supported my position. I was also reminded of the opening to the Gospel of John, which talks about “In the beginning was the Word” through which all things were created, because the Greek “logos” used there for the “Word” is the root of the word “logic”.

It made me think about how God connects with us

personally in the ways that work best for us. For that atheist, God was present as logic, even though she did not recognize it as God.

No matter in what way God connects with us, always it is for our benefit, nurturing us and nudging us to better. Yet like a toddler throwing a tantrum or a teenager [disavowing their parent when their peers are around], we all too often turn aside from our path to the Lord. We look instead to those who seem confident, flashy, sure of what they want, and put them on a pedestal instead, doing what they suggest.



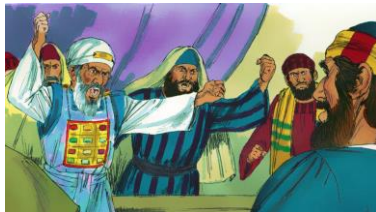
picture from personal creation

Those up on the pedestal often do not have our best interests at heart. They make decisions based on their own perspectives about what is important. They will use whatever resources they have to preserve what is most important to them - often themselves, spiting enemies at the expense of their followers.

Even those with good intentions are prone to getting full of themselves and their own views, and can wind up hurting the very ones who support them most. When that leader is supposed to be directing people toward God, they can instead wind up driving people away from the most important relationship in their lives.

People back in biblical times did the same thing. Jeremiah talked about bad leaders as shepherds who destroyed and scattered the sheep of the Lord's pasture. Jesus is the Good Shepherd, who fulfills God's promise to provide righteous leadership for the people: one who gathers people back to God and cares for them with wisdom and justice - people need that!

Zechariah in his prophecy spoke of enemies and those who hated the people. In his letter to the Colossians, Paul talks about the power of darkness in the world. Sin, evil, and hate were so prevalent in Jesus's day that it led to slaughter on a cross of the Innocent one, conviction of [the Messiah who was redirecting the people into healthy relationship with God] by the very leaders who were supposed to already be doing that!



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/apostles-persecuted/>

When those [who are supposed to be holy leaders] reject God's teaching and undermine the community of God's people, is it any wonder that those who learned from them would scoff at the truth?

Jesus was mocked by temple leaders, by soldiers, and even by another person getting crucified, all of them telling Him to save Himself. They scoffed at the idea that any leader, let alone the Son of God, would

willingly be hurt. Only one looking to God with an open, repentant heart could see and accept the truth.

God walks among people today as the Holy Spirit working through those with open hearts. As self-avowed Christians, the general public looks to us to learn about God. What are we teaching them?

We can (and often do) point to mass media and obvious charlatans, laying blame at their feet for how the unchurched view God. But actions speak louder than words, and each of us interacts with many people. How are we demonstrating the truth for them to learn?

Jesus proclaimed the love of God clearly and boldly, through what He said to but also in what He did for the people He encountered. Unlike the warring kings of this world, He did not foster hate and revenge sin; He did not force or hurt others. He led with love and invitation, healing and helping, a drive for everyone to live more fully in the grace of God – even in the most painful and terrible of situations.



background picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/jesus-dies/>

Jesus's followers did not have to put Him on a pedestal; his enemies took care of lifting Him up on a cross. Instead, Jesus's cross became a pedestal on which God lifted up all of us, all of humanity.

Confronted with that grace, people responded in love and praise for God. It was the paradox of leadership through service and self-sacrifice in support of all people, an upending of [the traditional leadership view where the common people served and sacrificed for the leader]. And we are called to emulate Jesus.

So when you go forth today, do not fall back into worldly mannerisms. Make sure you follow God's lead, not public opinion. Remind yourself daily through prayer and meditation on God's Word of what is truly important. Let our awesome Savior lead you to proclaim God's glory through your actions, helping and nurturing others to live in God's love.

Let us now praise our true sovereign and affirm our faith in the reign of Christ with

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UMH #880

We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,

of one Being with the Father;
through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation

he came down from heaven,

was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary
and became truly human.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.

On the third day He rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;

he ascended into heaven

and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory

to judge the living and the dead,

and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,

who with the Father and the Son

is worshiped and glorified,

who has spoken through the prophets.

We believe in the one holy catholic* and apostolic church.

We acknowledge one baptism

**universal*

for the forgiveness of sins.

We look for the resurrection of the dead,

and the life of the world to come.

Amen.

<Doxology>

<Offertory / Pastoral Prayer>

Let us pray:

Almighty, Creator God, we humbly bring our gifts to you this day.

On Calvary's cross, your son redefined for the world what it meant to rule, what it meant to be a king.

In his life, teaching and interacting with people, Jesus redefined what it means to give in a way that pleases God.

May we in this season live and give in a way that reflects the reign over us and the one who lives within us.

In the exalted name of Christ, we pray.

(above prayer from <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org>)

- Lord, please help {these members of the body of Christ whom we lift up} with Your healing touch and comfort:
 - **Aaron Miller** - heart concerns (but cancer free now!)
 - -
 - -
 - -
 - -
 - -
 - -
- Thanks for
 - **Milan Mahaney** - better now, asks prayers for mom Lois
 - -
- Hold those who cannot be with us in Your loving embrace until we see them again.

- Family far off
- Travelers
- Lord, please help the people of Ukraine who yet struggle with war in their homeland.
- Guide our Leaders - local, state, federal, international, and especially of Your church.
- Send Your Spirit to address world/social problems
 - end bigotry, dismantle racism, reform systems persist
 - bring world peace

All these things we pray as You taught us to pray,
<Lord's Prayer>

<Hymn "Jesus Shall Reign" UMH #157>

<Benediction>



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Knowing Christ as your Lord, go into the world proclaiming God's reign even when (especially when!) you encounter scoffers.

Seek to be face to face with Jesus and ask for God's wisdom, that you may bring the message of hope and love, of justice and peace, to all you meet.

Let others see the love of God, the face of Jesus, and the power of the Holy Spirit within you. Amen.