

In the gospel Jesus told Pilate that if he—Jesus—was king of this world, his servants would set him free. The same sort of thing happened on the cross when various people taunted Jesus and dared him to come off the cross. Jesus is king of this world, but he is king of so much more. In the scene with Pilate, he is hinting that he is playing for much bigger stakes than just an earthly kingdom. Pilate was worried about an army waiting outside of Jerusalem to come and drive the Romans out. Jesus did have an army, but it wasn't lying in wait to reconquer the Holy Land. Jesus and his army were engaged in the great spiritual battle to reclaim all of creation for God, and Jesus himself was setting a trap for the devil. Jesus was going to allow himself to die on the cross so that he could be swallowed up by death and sin and break their bonds over us from the inside out. The battle which was about to take place on Calvary wasn't about a temporal earthly kingdom but about restoring the right order to the universe and reopening the gates of heaven for us so that we can have hope of eternal life with God in heaven.

That's the big picture but big pictures are made up of little details. Just like the campaign to rescue Europe and the world from the shadow of Nazi darkness was fought in a number of smaller battles and skirmishes, the campaign to rescue all of creation from captivity to sin and death is being fought in smaller battles which each one of us fights every single day. And it is in these small battles we find another reason why Jesus refused to call on his army when he could have. As he was the cross and suffering unimaginable torment, he could have said, "I've had enough of this! I came here to save you guys but you are a bunch of jerks. My whole body hurts, I am tired and hungry and thirsty. I am done!" He could have used his own power to come off the cross and then called upon his army of angels to come and wipe out his enemies. That would be a cool thing to see in the movies but it would have meant that when we are in great physical or emotional pain and Jesus comes to us and says, "I am with you, I know how you feel," we could say: "No you don't! When the going got tough, you got going. You came off the cross. I can't do that. You don't know how I feel, so go back to heaven and leave me alone."

The letter to the Hebrews tells us "We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has similarly been tested in every way, yet without sin." The author of Hebrews is telling us that Jesus is the eternal high priest who was tested in every way. The difference between us and Jesus is that he never sinned, but he was tested in every way. Including to the point of saying "My God, my God why have you abandoned me?"

That is the lowest we can get, to believe that even God has abandoned us. Jesus allowed himself to experience the depths of that despair. At the same time, we have to remember that Jesus was quoting Psalm 22. That psalm gives the reasons why the psalmist—and in this case the psalm itself acknowledges that it was a psalm of King David—is in such depths of despair...but it goes on to praise God and it expresses complete trust that no matter how bad things are in that moment, God will come and save him. Jesus allowed himself to feel the deepest possible depths of our despair. He experienced those depths himself so that he could redeem them and teach us that no matter how dark things get, he is with us and that he will come to rescue us.

That is the type of high priest we have. That is who our king is.

Long live Christ the King!