

In Berlin Cathedral there was a grand, magnificent pipe organ. On a particular Saturday afternoon, the sexton was making one final check of the choir and organ loft high in the balcony at the back of the church. As he was making his inspection, he was startled to hear footsteps echoing up the stone stairway behind him. He thought the doors were all locked and that no one else was in the church. He turned to see a man in slightly tattered traveling clothes coming toward him. "Excuse me, sir," the stranger said. "I have come from quite a distance to see the great organ in this cathedral. Would you mind opening the console so that I might get a closer look at it?" The sexton at first refused, but the stranger seemed so eager and insistent that he finally gave in. "May I sit on the bench?" This time the sexton met the stranger's request with an absolute refusal. "What if the organist came in and found you sitting there? I would probably lose my job!" But again the stranger was so persistent that the cathedral custodian gave in. "But only for a moment," he added. The custodian noticed that the stranger seemed to be very much at home on the organ bench, so he was not completely surprised when the man asked him if he might be permitted to play the organ. "No! Definitely not!" said the sexton. "No one is allowed to play it except the cathedral organist." The stranger's face fell, and his deep disappointment was obvious. He reminded the custodian how far he had come and assured him that no damage would be done.

The sexton looked around at the empty cathedral. He was sure there was no one else around even to hear what was going on. So finally, the sexton softened once again and told the stranger he could play the instrument, but only a few notes and then he would have to leave. Overjoyed, the stranger pulled out some stops and began to play. Suddenly the cathedral was filled with the most beautiful music the custodian had ever heard in all the years he had spent in this cathedral. The music seemed to transport him heavenward.

In what seemed like all too short a time, the shabby stranger stopped playing and slid off the organ bench. As he started to walk away and down the stairway, the sexton cried, "Wait! That was the most beautiful music I have ever heard in the cathedral. Who are you?"

The stranger turned for just a moment as he replied, "Felix Mendelssohn." The cathedral sexton was alone now in that great stone edifice with the beautiful organ music still ringing in his ears. "Just think," he thought to himself, "I almost kept the master from playing his music in my cathedral."

How often do we keep the Master from playing his beautiful music in our cathedrals? Do we keep Jesus from working his wonders in our lives almost daily just because we refuse to allow him entrance into our hearts? There's a childhood game that some of you may have played that in today's world would probably not be politically correct. It's called "king of the hill" or, taken to the next level, "king of the mountain." I used to play it at school. The object of the game is quite simple. You stand on top of a hill, a mound of dirt or gravel, or anything that is elevated from the ground around it, and you throw, push, or bump everyone else off. The longer you can stay there without getting pushed off yourself, the more powerful you prove to be.

There can be several approaches to this game in order for it not to become too boring with the biggest kid always on top, always the "king." Sometimes two players will team up and throw everyone else off and then take turns being "king of the mountain." Sometimes it's all in the footwear, depending on the "mountain" you're trying to hold, and the most gripping shoes or boots will help you hold your ground. Sometimes you might just hit the ground and wrap your arms

around the “big guy” while you wait for others to attack and throw him off while you are keeping him off balance. Then you jump up and push your rescuers off along with him.

It’s not a game for the kind-hearted or for those with a strong ethical belief in friendship. When you play “king of the mountain,” it’s every person for himself or herself. You want to stay on top for as long as you can, and that means keeping everyone else off.

In the Epistle from 1 Peter chapter 3, the fifteenth verse says, “In your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord.” I get a visual picture of a game of “king of the mountain” going on inside of each one of us. Jesus tries to stay on the throne of our lives, but there is always somebody else trying to throw him off the mountain. There is always something else trying to take his place in our hearts. We might say that Jesus is on top, our number one priority, but then we knock him off on a daily basis, allowing the lordship of a variety of things to take over our lives. And so it becomes a daily battle: a struggle to be the “king” of our own mountain.

Peter’s message to Christians is to “not be intimidated” by the world around us. We are “not to fear” what others fear, but are to be ready at all times “to defend” the hope that we live in. Our outward actions, what we do and what we say, begin inside of us and develop in our hearts. If we hold Jesus in high esteem on the inside, it will show on the outside.

Time and time again, throughout the New Testament followers of Jesus are called upon to live a life that does not conform to the surrounding cultural norms. We are asked to keep Jesus and his example in his rightful place and not to let anything take his place on the top of the mountain in our hearts. When we do that, it forces us to do things that go against the grain of our society. We do not seek what we feel we deserve, but what we believe God wants for others.

Family is a God-given gift to each of us, but family should not push Jesus off the throne of our hearts. Patriotism is fine and honourable, but love of country cannot overshadow the love of Jesus Christ. It’s nice to have nice things: a house, a car, furnishings, and toys for our leisure time. But I don’t read anywhere in scripture that these are to be priorities in the life of a Christian. Material possessions should not take the place of Jesus in our hearts. We all like to have friends and to be popular with others. So, we often give in to the requests and lifestyles of our friends. But when we put our friends on top of the mountain, there’s no room for Jesus and we have to push him off once again.

There are all kinds of things that interfere with Christ’s lordship in our lives, and those things can change depending on the stage of our lives we are in. Sex, addictions, greed, hatred, anger, relationships, jobs, ambition, and the list goes on and on. Sometimes the lord of our life can change on a daily basis. Jesus might be there for a while, but like an ongoing game of “king of the mountain,” he is pushed from dominance to allow some other lord to take over.

Peter tells us that through baptism we are saved — saved in the same way that the waters of the flood saved Noah and his family. The same waters that destroyed all the rest were used to save those eight people. He says that baptism is not the same as cleaning dirt from the body, but rather an appeal to God for a good conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Martin Luther made reference to his baptism each morning as he would remember who was the Lord of his life and who had saved him. He made the sign of the cross on his forehead as a reminder

that he was marked with the cross of Christ forever. So even though he believed he was saved by Jesus' death on the cross, he knew that each day was a new day and that there were other lords in the world fighting for the throne in his heart. And so it is with us. Though the battle was fought years ago on that hill outside of Jerusalem, and won by Jesus of Nazareth when he became the "King of the mountain" once and for all, the little skirmishes still go on in our lives each day. Other lords still fight the fight for our souls and try to push Jesus off the mountain of our lives.

We are inundated with rivals to Jesus each and every day. We need to be renewed in our faith, and in our hope, and in our baptism... each day. We need to allow Jesus back where he rightfully belongs, on the throne of our lives to be Lord and Saviour over us.

When Jesus is on the throne, it shows in every area of our lives: in how we speak to others, in how we act toward others, and in how we live our lives privately. Everything about us points to Jesus, the Lord of our life.

According to an old legend, a man became lost in his travels and wandered into a bed of quicksand. Confucius saw the man's predicament and said, "It is evident that men should stay out of places like this." Next, Buddha observed the situation and said, "Let that man's plight be a lesson to the rest of the world." Then Muhammad came by and said to the sinking man, "Alas, it is the will of God." Finally Jesus appeared. "Take my hand, brother," he said, "and I will save you."

Do you really want anyone but the Master sitting upon the throne of your life? Like the sexton in my opening story, how close do we come to sending him away without giving him the chance to play beautiful music in our cathedrals? Now some of us cannot make music of any kind, and others of us can play chopsticks, if we're lucky. But none of us can duplicate the works of the Master, nor can we find substitutes to take his place. There is only room for one King of the Mountain. And that means all of the others must be pushed off. Who, in your life, will stand alone at the top?

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