

CHRIST THE KING

Rev 4:1-8; Jn 18:33-37

Alfred Toynbee, in his monumental work on the history of the world, writes this near the end of it, ‘When we began this work, we found ourselves looking at a great parade of marchers. But as it passed, the marchers all fell, one by one, by the wayside. And now, only one marcher remains, growing larger and larger with each step.’ And that one marcher is Jesus Christ. Indeed, He is the King of all kings.

Today, on this ‘Christ the King’ Sunday, we stop to ask ourselves afresh, how should we be living today as the subjects of Jesus the King? I want to do that for three different areas of life, starting with our individual lives. What does it mean to have Jesus as King of our lives?

Each of us has a kingdom – an area over which we have authority. We have the freedom and the authority to choose what to think about, what to say, what to do. Some people have a far greater area of influence and authority than others. But we all have some domain, some kingdom, where we are the supreme ruler, so to speak. Even a prisoner in jail is free to think as he wishes, to choose what he wants to say, and do, albeit in the confines of his cell.

But as Christians we affirm the truth that the ultimate King is Jesus. So how do those two things fit together – our rule over the domain of our lives and the fact of Jesus’ ultimate rule over us? Ideally, they should overlap exactly. So the things I choose to think are the things that Jesus would think; the things I say would be what Jesus would say; the things I do would be the things Jesus would do. That doesn’t mean that I lose my freedom and authority; it simply means that I choose to align my decisions and choices with those of Christ.

I’m reminded of the words of the hymn: Breathe on me Breath of God, fill me with life anew; that I may love what Thou dost love and do what Thou wouldst do. Breathe on me Breath of God until my heart is pure, until with Thee I will one will to do and to endure.

That doesn’t mean I must become exactly like Jesus. There is only one Jesus and He has lived his earthly life. No one can replicate that exactly. But it does mean that I must live my life as Jesus would live it if He was me. I need to ask, ‘How would Jesus live my life if He was a minister in Leatherhead at this time and also a husband, father, grandfather. You need to ask, ‘How would Jesus live if he was you –in your position at work or as a housewife, a citizen of this community, a member of this church.

My ‘kingdom’ needs to come under the rule of God’s Kingdom. In the Lord’s prayer we pray, ‘Your Kingdom come, Your will be done...’ Where God’s will is done God’s kingdom comes. To the extent that I am doing God’s will, to that extent God’s Kingdom is being manifested. Conversely, to the extent that I am failing to do God’s will in my life, to that extent the kingdom of darkness is being extended. Jesus said, ‘You are the light of the world.’ Where our light is shining, the darkness is being driven back; if our light fails to shine, we are part of the darkness.

On this Christ the King Sunday we ask ourselves again, ‘To what extent am I allowing Jesus to be the King in the kingdom of my life; in the areas over which I have control and in which I have choices I can make.

I want to move from there and consider the fact that Jesus is also King of the Church; the Head of His body. Sometimes we can make the mistake of identifying the Church with the Kingdom of God. But the Kingdom is so much bigger and broader than the church. What is more, it is possible that parts of the church are not part of the kingdom. Where the church is not being what it should be and is not doing the will of God, to that extent it is outside of the Kingdom. When the Church supported the violence of the Crusades and the Inquisition or the violence of Apartheid, it was outside the will of God and therefore extending the kingdom of darkness rather than the kingdom of light.

But it doesn't have to be as extreme as those atrocities I've just mentioned. Where a church splits, it is outside of God's will and so retarding rather than extending God's kingdom; where a church becomes inward looking and ignores the needs of the world it is failing in its duty of developing the Kingdom of God.

When it comes to what a church does or doesn't do, we need to remember that it is Christ's church, and as with our personal lives we need to do His will and not our own. I need to remember that this is not my church, as the minister, not your church who are the leaders; nor our church as congregation. It is His church and we need to be careful not to allow our own desires and fancies to eclipse the bigger picture of God's purposes and plans.

On the positive side, it should be a great relief to us all to know that the Church is ultimately in the Lord's hands and not ours. The scripture says, 'Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it.' The Church is His bride and He is not going to abandon her. The church is in his hands and we can trust Him with it. We still have a duty to play our part within the Church, but in the end, it is He alone who will ensure its survival. Individual congregations may come and go, but the worldwide Church of Christ will remain.

The third and last aspect of Jesus' Kingship is His Kingship over the world and indeed the universe. We often hear the lament, 'What is the world coming to?' The simple answer is that the world is coming to its conclusion in God, in God's time and in God's way. We hear in Revelation, 'I am the first and last; the Alpha and the Omega.' The universe had its origin in God; it will have its consummation in Him too. What starts with God ends with God too.

In terms of the end of the world and the Second Coming of Jesus you may have heard the terms 'pre-millennial', 'post millennial' and 'amillennial'. A friend of ours reckoned there is another option – 'pan millennial' - it will all pan out in the end! And that is very true – it will pan out, in God's way and in God's time. We don't have to concern ourselves with those details. Rather, we need to concern ourselves with God's rule and Kingdom now, so that when He returns or when we go to be with Him, we can rest in the knowledge that we have been part of the extension of his Kingdom; that we have been part of extending the light and not the darkness.

A story is told about Robert Louis Stevenson when he was a young boy. As he looked out of his room window one night, he saw a man lighting the gas lamps along the street. 'Mommy, come and look; there's a man punching holes on the darkness'. It's our responsibility and privilege to 'punch holes in the darkness'. They may be small holes, but even a small hole can let in much light. And ultimately Christ's light will dispel all darkness.

I end with other words from the Book of Revelation, words which look ahead to the final consummation of all things; words which appear in the Hallelujah chorus. 'The kingdoms of this world are become the Kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ and He shall reign forever and ever, amen.'
'Hallelujah' indeed.