

**Christ the King**

As we draw near to the end of the year we come upon this Sunday that many Christians for years have called “Christ the King” Sunday. The tradition is actually fairly recent in the church’s history. It began in Rome in 1925, first with Roman Catholics, then eventually adopted among a number of Protestant churches. In the face of rising totalitarian regimes in Europe at the time - fascism in Italy, Nazi-ism in Germany, Communism in Russia - regimes that demanded the complete and total allegiance of people, the Christian church proclaimed that we must owe our whole allegiance to Jesus Christ. This belief has roots in the very earliest history of the Christian faith. When early believers proclaimed Him king they faced the wrath of the Roman emperor. The notion that Christ is king over all is found in the confession that Peter made to Jesus: *“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”*

When Peter said, *“You are the Christ,”* he was saying, “You are the Messiah” the one whom the O. T. prophets foretold would come as Savior. But Peter didn’t stop there, he added: “the Son of the living God.” And with those words, Peter declared that Jesus was God in the flesh - Jesus was the only person to completely unite divinity and humanity into one person. So, as one in substance with God the Creator, Christ is one with the Father as Sovereign of the universe. *“The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together,”* Col. 1:15-17. *He is Lord of all, and if He is not, then He is lord of nothing.* It all begins and ends with Him.

**The Boss of Life**

Who calls the shots in your life? [If you’re a married man you better get the right answer.] Seriously, though ... who makes the important decisions that affect the direction of your life? Many of us like to think that we are masters of our own fates and we steer our own ship. That’s certainly the message our culture nurtures among us - and to some extent it is true, for we are, each one of us, a unique, one of a kind masterpiece, and have free will to decide for ourselves. Yet, we soon discover that there are people, organizations, governments, and factors that crowd out our freedom to decide for ourselves the direction our lives will take. The “isms” of the 20<sup>th</sup> century crowded out the individual and made the state the ultimate boss, seeking to control the lives of its people. The very worst expression of this kind of relation is slavery ... subjecting the person to the complete control of something or someone other than his/her Maker, the only God. These

totalitarian types of governments are still with us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, slavery still exists in the world, and those controlling ideologies still lurk in our body politic. But it's nothing new ... they're all the same old fallen, sinful human attempt to be king of all, in place of the true king: Jesus Christ. Even today to proclaim Jesus as king of kings is to challenge the rulers and ideologies of this world.

But He is unlike all the others that demand your attention and loyalty – and maybe that's why we do not readily acknowledge Him as our boss ... the One who can call the shots for our life direction. He was, after all, executed along with common criminals. *"Above his head they placed the written charge against him: THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS"* Matt. 21:5. What kind of king is this?

Here's what Scripture answers: *"Say to the Daughter of Zion, 'See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey,'"* Matt. 21:5. Jesus is a boss quite distinct from any you will ever meet. He does not seek to lord it over you, or look over your shoulder at every turn, nor does He seek to extinguish your personality, your uniqueness – you are a one of a kind masterpiece. He only seeks to shape you to be a true "chip off the old block," to be recognizable as God's own child.

### King Over All

The story of the Bible tells of the coming of this king then tells us what kind of king He is. It was all witnessed and experienced by real people who were with Him when He walked this earth. He is recognized even today as king by those who trust Him for their lives. The Bible tells us that He is king at His birth – a heavenly sign stood watch over Him and wise men came from afar to see this newborn king. He is king in His resistance to the evil one's temptations, as he fasted and prayed in the desert before showing himself to the world. He is king in His preaching and miracles – *"The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law,"* Mark 1:22. He is king in His suffering and death – *"... he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed,"* Isaiah 53:5

He is king in His resurrection from the dead – St. Peter said it: *"God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it ... Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah"* Acts 2:32, 36.

He is king at His ascension and He is seated in heaven where He will judge the living and the dead. *"For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead,"* Acts 17:31.

He is king of the past, the present and the future. **Is He king over your time; your working hours?** Christians bow to Him, the Son of the living God, as king over all creation and the peoples and nations of the world. That's a stupendous claim. And the reality of that claim, the authenticity of those who bow before him, begins close to home, so close that it begins like this: Is He king of you and your life?

**Is He King over your relationships? Is He king over your family?** "I sure wish I had a better relationship with my father, my mother, brother, sister, coworker etc." The real question is how's your relationship with Jesus? Many keep Him at a distance because He leads you to uncomfortable, inconvenient questions and revelations about your own character and how that affects your relationships. But He is good and can make you and your relationships better.

**Is He King over your money and spending?** "Gee, I wish I had more money." Who hasn't said that? If you had more what would you do with it? What are you doing with your money now? Are you giving to God now, as He directs? If not, what are you spending your money on now that prevents you from giving more to God? The strangest thing happens when you put God first with your money: you always seem to have enough to live on.

**Is He king over your behaviors, including sexual behaviors?** "Oh, but you don't understand that's just the way I am," or "I just can't help it." ***"For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin,"*** Romans 6:6. Christ, our King, does not override our free will. So what's it going to be: bondage to our old nature, or living our identity as new creations in Christ Jesus?

If to Christ our Lord is given all power in heaven and on earth, purchased by his precious blood, then not one of our faculties is exempt from his empire. He must reign in our minds. He must reign in our wills. He must reign in our hearts. He must reign in our bodies and in our members.<sup>1</sup>

My real identity is in Christ who draws me to pursuits of His purposes and shapes my character for eternal significance. How about you? Can you say, "I am a one of a kind masterpiece, being made perfect through Christ, for God's grand and everlasting purposes?"

## **King For All**

Why did I include that reading from the Gospel of Matthew? It contains Jesus' own description of the final judgment and how the king of all creation will judge people. While humans continue to try to make the world right by organizing, categorizing, and electing, the Sovereign of the universe is at work in and among men, women, and children to get them right with God. That's what Jesus has done for us.

On that final day He says, ***"Before him will be gathered all the nations*** (παντα τα εθνη), ***and he will separate people from one another as a shepherd***

**separates the sheep from the goats...** ["Nations" (εθνη) is a translation of a Greek idiom referring to all the different races and peoples, including the Gentiles or non-Jews. Jesus is saying to his audience, "Don't think that God's grace is limited to those who belong to the tribe of Israel. In fact, salvation belongs to those who hear and respond to my words, regardless of what race or nation they come from." The salvation of God offered in Christ is not limited to our tribe either. The goats do not heed his call, while the sheep know His voice and follow.]

**While we focus on the excluded goats** and wonder if we measure up, **Jesus is looking at all of humanity.** So great is the love of the sovereign Christ that his saving grace is offered to all who will follow and serve him. [In this passage he calls them his "brothers" - αδελφων - vs. 40).] We aren't born into it. We don't really earn it. We become family with Him when we recognize Him for who He is - sovereign of the universe - and allow His character to seep into our souls that we too may serve "*the least of these*" as though our very nature to do so. Just remember:

1) **We are not called to be Christ himself, but to be His.** He's in charge.

2) **We are accountable for our lives.** The key is this: God's grace saves us *then* transforms us. If you are not being *transformed* by Him you are being *conformed* to the world's mold (Romans 12:2). At the end of the year, just as at the beginning, Jesus Christ is king over all "**...far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the age to come,**" Ephesians 1:19-21.

On the Final Day Christ is both Judge and Redeemer. He is the Word of judgment and the Word of grace. He is the One to whom we seek to measure up to and the One who forgives us when we don't. He bids you to enter His kingdom. Don't wait until it's too late. He *is* Lord over all.

**"He is before all things, and in him all things hold together," Col. 1:15-17.**

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<sup>i</sup> Paraphrase of Pope Pius XI, *Quas primus*, §33, Libreria Editrice Vaticana (1925).