

I sometimes wonder how our three boys will turn out. What kind of boys will they be? I guess all parents wonder how their children will grow up. Will they be great. What will people call them 30 years from now? "President Atkinson?" "General Atkinson?" "Doctor Atkinson?" "Reverend Atkinson?" I'm sure that every mother holding her baby on her knee dreams dreams of who and what her little girl or little boy will become. Unfortunately those dreams are never fully realised and yet we discover we love our children just as much anyway. They don't have to be great. Few parents, though, dream the kind of dreams that King David had for his son, Solomon or the Virgin Mary for her little boy. "I will establish his kingdom. I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son."

Let's take a little closer look at the promise God made to King David through the prophet Nathan concerning one of David's sons. I'm sure David like all parents wondered about his children and how they would be when they grew up. And I'm sure that he ate up the words of Nathan. I'm sure that he asked Nathan to repeat that prophecy. I'm sure he wrote it down carefully word for word and pasted a copy of the prophecy in Solomon's baby scrap book. "I will raise

up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men. But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever."

It's very obvious that this prophecy had to do with David's son Solomon. When David died Solomon sat on his throne just as Nathan had said. Solomon built the temple which the Lord spoke of as "a house for my name." God established Solomon's kingdom by giving him peace. In his old age Solomon sinned against the Lord by falling into idolatry and, according to the prophecy, the Lord punished him by dividing the kingdom at his death so that his son ruled over only a remnant of Solomon's kingdom. The Lord punished Solomon and his dynasty but did not withdraw from him His grace.

But the time came eventually when the last descendant of David was carried away into Exile where he died. The

empire of Babylon conquered and destroyed Jerusalem and the temple in 587 B.C. Never again did one of David's descendants sit on the throne of the nation of Israel. When the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary there had been no king from the line of David for nearly 600 years. You would have thought that the dream of a kingdom that would last forever would have died but it didn't. Instead of dieing, it thrived. The people of God refused to believe that the hope was false. They continued to believe the promises of God in the darkest night. They looked for their king to come, their annointed one, the Messiah, a descendant of David whose kingdom would never fail.

History tells us that the king of their hopes and dreams never came. Rome ground Israel into the dust. Every time their hopes were heigtened by some charismatic leader they were soon dashed. In A.D. 70 Jerusalem was destroyed ~~once more~~ by Rome, the temple destroyed, the sacrifices brought to an end. Again in A.D. 120 following the rebellion of the false messiah, Bar Cochba, Jerusalem was destroyed. There was no conquering David to claim the throne.

But the Christian church from its very beginning dared to claim that these prophecies of a messiah were fulfilled by Jesus of Nazareth. He was the promised king. In the

words of the angel Gabriel found in Luke's Gospel, "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end."

Some people today say that all this talk about a king reigning forever is foolishness. It's irrelevant. Kings are out of date in an age of science and technology and space travel. Kings are only figure heads today. We live in a democratic age of presidents and prime ministers; or, as in Poland and many other nations in an age of totalitarian dictators. Kings are nice to read about in fairy tales but who needs them today?

Some students of scripture frankly deny the truth of what our Scripture lessons claim. Nathan's prophecy to David was simply not true they say. History proves it false. They say the message of Gabriel simply reflects the pious hopes of Jewish people in the time of Augustus Caesar some 2000 years ago. And as we read the Gospels it is obvious that Jesus did not become an earthly king nor did he want to be a political Messiah. When they would have made him king, he would not have it (John 6:15). One of the temptations that Jesus faced at the very outset of his ministry

was the temptation to become a kind of political or military Messiah. But he firmly rejected that temptation.

The NT, I believe, preaches entirely a spiritual and eternal kingdom comprised of men and women, together with their infant children out of every nation, tribe, and tongue. Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world." Christians recognise the risen the risen Christ as their King, reigning now. As Paul says, "He hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son." The church is the visible expression or manifestation of his kingdom in this world. In a new and marvelous act of adoption God has brought the nations into the family of Jacob. Those of us who were not the people of God by birth, have become the people of God through faith in Christ. We are the heirs of the OT promises of God. What Israel was in the OT, the Church is in the NT, the visible expression of the kingdom of God on this earth. As Paul says, we are the Israel of God. And as Peter writes, "Ye are a chosen generation, a holy nation, a peculiar people." Think of what that means. It means, "I have a King." My longing for monarchy is satisfied in Christ.

As Christians we sing,

Hail to the Lord's Anointed;
 Great David's greater Son!
 Hail, in the time appointed,
 His reign on earth begun.

Or, again, at Christmas time we sing,

What Child is this, who, laid to rest,
 On Mary's lap is sleeping?
 Whom angels greet with anthems sweet,
 While shepherds watch are keeping?
 This, this is Christ the King,
 Whom shepherds guard and angels sing:
 Haste, haste to bring Him laud--
 The Babe, the Son of Mary.

Here is a King who reigns, not 60 years as Queen Victoria reigned; nor a thousand years as Hitler had hoped the third reich would reign; but forever, "and of his kingdom there will be no end."

The great question for us, then, is this. Do you recognise his sovereignty? Do you bow to His authority and to the authority of His Word? Are you as concerned to know and obey his laws as you are to know and obey the laws of the U.S. or Canada? I remember my father telling a story about a man he met during WWI in France who was a Fiji-Islander. My father asked him what nationality he was. ^{With great pride} He instantly replied, to my father's amusement, "I am a loyal subject of the king of England." Can you who are an American or a Canadian say as proudly and confidently, "I am a loyal subject of the king of heaven?"

The Westminster Shorter Catechism declares, "Christ executeth the office of a king in subduing us to himself." Is King Jesus subduing you to himself? Is He subduing your mind so that you can say with St. Paul that you are "bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." Is He subduing your emotions so that you can say that "the peace of Christ rules in your hearts." Is He subduing your will so that you can say, "Not my will but Thine be done."

David H.C. Read of the Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York City once used this illustration. "If you were to enter an unruly class in a school where there was complete confusion, the first thing you would say is, 'Who's in charge around here?' Well, if any interrogator, any prober of your soul, any journalist, any angel, or the Devil himself, were to peer into the turmoil of your thoughts, ambitions, fears, and hopes, and ask, 'Who's in charge around here?' can you simply answer, 'Jesus Christ?'" "Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth." "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever."

AMEN