

## Christ the King

A sermon by Ted Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA on Christ the King Sunday, November 26, 1995. Scripture Lessons: Jeremiah 23:1-6; Luke 1:68-79; Colossians 1:11-20; Luke 23:33-43.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

Time was, long ago, after God freed Israel from slavery in Egypt, Israel had no king and everyone did what was right in their own eyes. Eventually God gave them what they wanted. He gave them Saul, a tall, strong handsome man. Saul, initially, won many victories against the Philistines. But he was also a weak, vacillating, insecure person. Eventually God rejected Saul as king of Israel. God, then, instructed Samuel <sup>no prophet</sup> to anoint a young shepherd named David as king. But David's authority wasn't recognized for many years, until after the death of King Saul. Only then was David openly proclaimed King of Israel. He conquered the city of Jerusalem and set up his throne there. The Lord gave him one victory after another until, at his death, David's kingdom was the greatest kingdom in that part of the Middle East. Never as powerful as Egypt, Assyria, or Babylon in their hay day, but, nevertheless a respectable and powerful kingdom.

After David's death, his son Solomon reigned for many years. Solomon made Jerusalem beautiful. He built a temple for the Lord. He received tribute from foreign dignitaries. He was famous throughout the Middle East for his wisdom. But he also initiated a costly public works program that benefited only the rich and burdened the poor with taxes. The rich got richer and the poor got poorer. And, worst of all, he introduced foreign religions into his kingdom.

After Solomon's death civil war erupted. The nation was divided, north and south. The northern kingdom called itself

Israel. Most of its kings were wicked. They introduced more foreign religions - religions that worshiped sex and raw power and money. More and more injustice prevail. The poor were trampled upon while the rich lived in luxury.

The southern kingdom was named Judah. The kings of Judah sat on David's throne in Jerusalem. Some of the kings of Judah, like Hezekiah and Josiah were good kings. They tried to reform the nation. They listened to the Word of God as it was preached by prophets. But most of the kings of Judah, like those of Israel, were callous and blind to plight of widows and orphans and the poor. So the prophets spoke out against the kings and their policies. They threatened them with God's vengeance. But most of the kings ignored the prophets, persecuted them and killed them. Both kingdoms became more and more decadent until finally they were conquered. Israel was conquered by Assyria in 722 B.C. Judah was conquered by Babylon in 587 B.C. The kingdom came to an end.

But the message was passed down from one generation to another. God's conquered and sinful people began to hear afresh the words of ancient prophets. They remembered how the prophets spoke of a day when God himself would come to be their king. "He shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land."

Hundreds of years passed. Then, during the reign of Tiberius Caesar, some Galileans began to proclaim that the promised king had come, had preached, had healed, and had gotten crucified but had been raised from the dead and reigned over a kingdom that has no end. When he died on the cross Pilate placed an inscription,

"Jesus, the king of the Jews." The Yale University scholar, Jaroslav Pelikan, comments that "the title 'king' did not remain on the cross; it moved out into the world of nations and of empires". With remarkable speed, the message reached to the ends of the Roman Empire within a hundred years. God came to be our king, we crucified him but he arose and reigns over his people.

They pointed to a crucified Jew and said, "He is the image of the invisible God." Do you want to see God? Look at the cross. The cross of Christ gives us an entirely new understanding of kingdom and power and glory; an entirely different understanding of God. In this crucified Jew "all things in heaven and on earth were created... In him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things... making peace through the blood of his cross."

Jesus Christ is king. Jesus redefines what it means to be a king. John Donne, the great 17th century poet compared the work of Jesus with that of other kings. He wrote, "Kings pardon, but he bore our punishment." Jesus not only pardons us, he bears our punishment on the cross.

We often use the proper name Jesus Christ as if "Christ" were the last name of Jesus. But it's really his title. Jesus is the Christ - the anointed one - the Messiah - the King of Israel.

How does this belief - that Jesus is King - affect the way we live and think? For one thing it means that Christians become very suspicious and wary when governments require of us absolute obedience. We become very suspicious when governments and officials claim to have God on their side. The cross of Christ <sup>or require of us an obedience that belongs to Christ</sup>

reminds us that all too often governments and officials crucify Christ anew.

Jesus is king! We confess this crucified and risen Jew is Lord. Yet we are not anarchists. We pray for elected officials. Even when Rome was persecuting Christians, Christians prayed for the security of the empire and for protection of the imperial house. They refused, however, to treat rulers <sup>or policies</sup> as divine. Christians in every age have suffered martyrdom rather than treat governments and officials as divine. Christians offer obedience short of idolatry.

Jesus Christ is king. Yes! King! I know its an old fashioned word. People like us living in a democracy find kings to be an anachronism, a throw back. Kings are people who live in fairy tales. We oppose the very idea of a king. We have a tendency to recognize no law or lord but our own individual, autonomous conscience. Everyone does what is right in their own eyes. And we are reaping in society, what we have sown.

Christians believe that Jesus is king, not a fairy tale king, not a king who reigns through threats but through love. A king who reigns from the cross. Like King David who was anointed king years before his authority was publicly acknowledged, the authority of Christ is not presently revealed openly. <sup>The Kingdom of God will be a visible domain that is not of this world.</sup> But there will come a day when all people everywhere will recognize that his way is the only way of salvation.

Let us pray: God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, you gave us your Son, the beloved one who was rejected, the Savior who appeared defeated. Yet the mystery of his kingship illumines our lives. Show us in his death the victory that crowns the ages, and in his broken body the love that unites heaven and earth. We ask this through your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.