

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Jesus as King, Lord and Head: King

One of the most significant subjects in the Bible, particularly in the Old Testament, is that of God's King. Whilst Israel didn't actually have a king until well on into their history; the fact that there would be a king is prophesied by Jacob in the very first book of the Bible. In Genesis 49:10, before Israel as a nation even existed, we are told that "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah". Of the twelve sons of Jacob, Judah is here marked out as the royal tribe from whom the kings of Israel would be born.

I believe we are taught in the Bible that there are three distinct spheres of authority where the Lord Jesus Christ is supreme. He is the supreme King; He is the supreme Lord of all; and He is the supreme Head. I also think that we learn from Scripture that His Kingship is associated with His birth. The wise men asked in Matthew 2:2, "Where is He that is born King of the Jews?" The fact that Jesus is Lord of all is linked to the truth of His resurrection from the dead. "To this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that He might be Lord both of the dead and living" (Romans 14:9). In Ephesians 1:20-22 we read "Which [God] wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet and gave Him to be the head over all things." God willing we will explore the fact that Jesus Christ is both Lord and Head over the next two weeks. Today we are going to look at what the scriptures teach about the fact that the Lord Jesus is God's chosen king.

Our idea of what a king should be is coloured by the monarchs we have learned about in history. There have been those who were great warrior kings, who used their tactical skill and bravery to secure their kingdoms. There have been those who as great administrators used wisdom and diplomacy to consolidate and expand their influence. There have also been those rulers who were weak and corrupt, and who through their incompetence have squandered kingdoms. But whether great or insignificant, they have all without exception passed away and their kingdoms have fallen. Will God's king and His kingdom be any different?

The story of God's king spans most of the Bible. We learn a lot about what will characterise this kingdom in the Old Testament, but are introduced to the King in the New Testament. And we have yet to see His kingdom in a public and visible way.

When the wise men arrived in Israel after many months of travelling, they asked in Matthew 2:2, "Where is He that is born King of the Jews?" Matthew starts his Gospel, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, clearly establishing the royal lineage of the Lord Jesus back to David, and then further back to Judah and Abraham. The question of the wise men was entirely valid; Jesus was indeed "born king of the Jews." However in His lifetime here, He was not universally acknowledged as such. Indeed, He was publicly rejected as king. In the first chapter of John's Gospel we read, "He came to His own, and His own received Him not" (verse 11). We could go further and say that not only was He not received, the nation made a definite decision to reject Him.

The Lord Jesus told a parable in Luke 19 about a rich landowner who left his land in trust to his servants and went away into a far country. These same servants sent a messenger after him saying, "We will not have this man to reign over us" (Luke 19:14). Again at the time of the trial and crucifixion of the Lord Jesus they declared "We have no king but Caesar" (John 19:15). Of course, we know that Pilate wrote the emphatic statement as a title on the cross, "This is Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews" Whilst Pilate was almost certainly mocking the desperate state of the nation of Israel, it was also a statement of absolute truth. The true king of Israel, crowned with a crown of thorns, was dying an excruciating death on a Roman cross.

What had gone wrong? Was everything lost? The Lord Jesus had said in Luke 11:20, "But if by the finger of God I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God is come upon you" and again in Luke 10:9, "The kingdom of God is come near unto you." For a few short years, largely within the confines of the land of Israel, the incredible benefits of God's kingdom were experienced by countless individuals. The hungry were fed, the heart-broken were comforted, the diseased were cured and the dead were raised back to life. Days before His crucifixion, Jesus was hailed as the expected redeemer and deliverer of Israel. They had cut down palm branches to strew on the roads; they had laid down their garments in His path, and cried "Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that comes in the name of the

LORD; Hosanna in the highest!" (Matthew 21:9). Now this same crowd was watching the man who had brought them so much blessing and hope dying on a criminal's cross. They were the ones who had cried out to Pilate, the Roman governor, "Crucify Him" (Mark 15:13).

So was everything at an end? The two disciples who were walking back to their home in Emmaus certainly thought so. Had God's kingdom failed before it had even begun? Certainly not! God is never taken by surprise, never thwarted in His plans. Centuries earlier, in Psalm 2 the Holy Spirit had written about a time when the nations and kings of the earth would "take counsel together, against the LORD and against His Anointed" but in the middle of the Psalm, God says "Yet I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion" (Psalms 2:1-6). In spite of all the schemes of men and Satan, God still intends to set His King on the throne! It will be the greatest and most glorious kingdom ever seen on earth.

There is however a kingdom of God on earth at the present moment. There are those who in their hearts and lives acknowledge the claims of the Lord Jesus Christ, - those who when they pray, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10) are determined that in their own lives that prayer will certainly be true. This challenges me a lot. If we recall the story of Mephibosheth in 2 Samuel 19, we will remember that David, the rightful king of Israel, was in exile, having been overthrown by his own son Absalom. Mephibosheth couldn't follow David into exile because of his severe disability, but he did not forget for one moment that his king was rejected. We read that he didn't wash or shave, or attend to his injured legs all the time David was in exile. He was making the clear statement that he was mourning King David's overthrow. A very courageous thing to do whilst still living a short distance from the new rebel king!

Our true King is also rejected and unwanted. In a sense He is in exile, or as the Lord Jesus said in the parable, "gone into a far country". Is my life, my priorities and ambitions a testimony to those around me that I am living for a different day and a different King? One of the saddest things that can happen is for us to dishonour our Lord Jesus by what we do or say. How often through the centuries have wars been fought in the name of religion. Millions have died through these wars and many more have suffered great loss and hardship. There is never any justification in Scripture for a so called "Holy War" of this sort to be fought in the name of Christ or His kingdom. Indeed, Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight" (John 18:36). We learn that our warfare is not fleshly or physical but rather spiritual: "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12).

If God's kingdom today is a spiritual, unseen thing, it is nevertheless true that one day Jesus Christ will return to this earth to reign publicly as the "King of kings and the Lord of lords". His kingdom will be magnificent, righteous, prosperous and will never be weakened or overthrown. When the disciples had watched the Lord ascend back to heaven, they were told by the angels who appeared to them, "This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

The next great event Christians will experience will be when we are caught up suddenly and without warning "to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:17). This is sometimes referred to as the Rapture, a word which literally means 'snatching up'. There then follows a period of time, some seven years, the last half of which is characterised by tremendous upheaval and trouble - a time often referred to as "the Great Tribulation" or the "time of Jacob's trouble" as Israel will suffer intensely during these years. The Lord Jesus warns of this in Matthew 24 and gives guidance as to how urgently people will have to act in those days if they are to escape. In Luke 21:25-28, we read the words of the Lord Jesus. "There will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of heaven will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near."

When Israel is surrounded on all sides and there seems to be no possible deliverance, it is then that the prophetic words of the angels will be fulfilled. The same Jesus who had been received up into heaven will return to earth, - not now as the rejected, crucified King, but with incredible majesty, power and glory. He will deliver His people Israel, judge His enemies and introduce a reign of unparalleled prosperity and peace. If we think back to the last time our Lord was seen leaving Jerusalem by the crowds who had gathered to watch, He was carrying a cross, His back bleeding, with a crown of thorns on His head. He was about to die like a criminal. When He returns, the scene is very different. It is described in Psalm 24:7: "Lift up your heads, O you gates! And be lifted up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in." The return of the King will be majestic beyond our ability to imagine!

The Lord Jesus warned in Matthew 24:23 that many would claim to be the promised Messiah and some would be deceived. He also told us that there would be no mistaking His own return as the true King. "For as the lightning comes out of the east, and shines even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (Matthew 24:27). In Revelation 1:7, we are told that "every eye shall see Him" and in 2 Thessalonians 2:8 we read about the

lawless one who will be revealed “whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming” It will be a dramatic, highly visible and unmistakable event.

Having returned to the earth at the Mount of Olives as prophesied in Zechariah 14:4, the Lord Jesus enters the city of Jerusalem, finally acclaimed by His people Israel as their true King. The verse I have quoted from Psalm 24, “Lift up your heads, O you gates! And be lifted up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in” indicates the joy and triumph that will mark the event. It is clear from other scriptures as well that Israel, and Jerusalem in particular, will have a pre-eminent place then in the government of world affairs. It will be the place where the Lord sets up His throne and reigns for a thousand years. This period of time is clearly spelled out in Revelation 20.

Do you ever look around about you at all the things that seem so unfair and wrong and wonder who in the world can possibly sort things out? Do you wonder why so many millions of people go hungry each day and why so many western nations have a serious problem with over eating? How can we manage to send men to the moon and space probes to the furthest reaches of our galaxy and yet we cannot provide clean drinking water for so many people on our own planet? Do you open the newspapers and read stories about the abuse of innocent children and wonder why we cannot protect them? So often the wicked go unpunished and justice is overturned. Who can put things straight?

We have every reason to be concerned about the future of our planet. We have squandered its natural resources, and polluted its waterways and atmosphere. Quite possibly, it is now beyond the wit of man to reverse the process of destruction that we have started. I ask the question again, “Who can put things straight?”

Psalm 72 is a wonderful Psalm! It was written by David for his son, Solomon. David was the greatest warrior king of Israel and Solomon the most glorious king of Israel. Solomon’s reign is a little picture of the peace and prosperity that will be enjoyed when Jesus reigns as King. Let’s read some of it: “Give the king Your judgements, O God, and Your righteousness to the king’s Son. He will judge Your people with righteousness, and Your poor with justice” (verses 1-2). Drop down to verses 4 to 8: “He will bring justice to the poor of the people; He will save the children of the needy, and will break in pieces the oppressor. They shall fear You as long as the sun and moon endure, throughout all generations. He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass, like showers that water the earth. In His days the righteous shall flourish, and abundance of peace, until the moon is no more. He shall have dominion also from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.” I’ll read verse 11 to the end of the Psalm: “Yes, all kings shall fall down before Him; all nations shall serve Him. For He will deliver the needy when he cries, the poor also, and him who has no helper. He will spare the poor and needy, and will save the souls of the needy. He will redeem their life from oppression and violence; and precious shall be their blood in His sight. And He shall live; and the gold of Sheba will be given to Him; prayer also will be made for Him continually, and daily He shall be praised. There will be an abundance of grain in the earth, on the top of the mountains; its fruit shall wave like Lebanon; and those of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth. His name shall endure forever; His name shall continue as long as the sun. And men shall be blessed in Him; all nations shall call Him blessed. Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, who only does wondrous things! And blessed be His glorious name forever! And let the whole earth be filled with His glory. Amen and Amen. The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended.”

It is clear from this magnificent Psalm and from many other scriptures that the reign on this earth of Jesus Christ as King will introduce a time of the most amazing blessing. In a limited way, the effects of His kingship were seen when He first came to earth: He cared for the oppressed; He healed the sick, fed the hungry and healed the broken hearted. When He returns to reign at Jerusalem, there is the possibility that the whole earth will feel the immense benefits of His reign. Verse 16 of Psalm 72 reads, “There will be an abundance of grain in the earth”. In Isaiah 35:1 we read, “The desert will blossom like a rose” and in chapter 32 of the same book, that there will be “rivers of water in a dry land”. The fertility of the earth, partially lost as a result of the curse and the fall of Adam, will be largely reversed. There will be “bread enough and to spare”!

Jesus will also reign as a completely fair and righteous King: “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of Your kingdom. You love righteousness and hate wickedness” (Psalm 45:6 and 7). Even the most fair and just of judges is hampered by an imperfect knowledge, and swayed by appearances and preconceptions. For the first time ever, a king will reign in righteousness. One who has perfect knowledge and understanding and who is not swayed by fear or favour. When things are put right righteously, then true peace will follow. Today most peace keeping attempts, whilst admirable, do little more than paper over the cracks. Wrongs are very rarely put right, past injustices are not often reversed and so there can never be true peace. The wrongs that have been suffered, if not addressed justly, will continue to fester and cause resentment. God doesn’t work in this way. The wrong is put right, the injustice dealt with, and evil and wickedness punished. In Isaiah 32, a chapter I have already referred to, we read, “The work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever” (verse 17) This is God’s way, righteousness first then peace, and consequently a peace is secured that will endure.

Yet another effect of the reign of my Saviour here on earth will be that harmony in nature will be restored. "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them" (Isaiah 11:6). At the beginning of Creation there were no hunters and no hunted, no prey and no killers. This will again be the case, a beautiful world in harmony, because the Lord God omnipotent reigns.

What a fearful price the nation of Israel has paid in rejecting its Messiah, its true King, the centuries of suffering and bloodshed that have been endured because at Calvary, Barabbas the thief and murderer was chosen over the Prince of Peace! Yet we who have trusted in the Lord Jesus have been introduced to something far better. Yes, we are in His kingdom, but we also form part of His bride, the object of His deep unchanging love. We will be the complement and companion of the Lord Jesus for all eternity, the joy and satisfaction of His heart!

When will this all happen? We don't know! The Scriptures are quite clear that only the Father knows. What we do know is that it certainly will happen! In 1 Corinthians 15:25, we read that "He must reign". In Psalm 2 we read, "I have set My King upon My holy hill of Zion." I long for the day when Jesus Christ reigns on the earth: "For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea" (Habakkuk 2:14).

In Isaiah 9:7, we read "Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice." In Revelation we are clearly told that this reign lasts one thousand years. Is there a contradiction here? No! At the end of the thousand years of peace and plenty, Satan will again rise in rebellion against God, and there will be those who, in spite of enjoying the amazing benefits of God's kingdom will rebel with the Devil. This rebellion will be summarily judged by the Lord Jesus. In 1 Corinthians 15:25-26 we are told, "For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death." When the Lord Jesus has finally put an end to all rebellion and subdued all His enemies, "He delivers the kingdom to God the Father" (1 Corinthians 15:24). The kingdom which has lasted for one thousand tremendous years, doesn't end, is not overthrown or superseded, but is handed by the Lord to His God and Father. It marks the end of time. God makes all things new, a new heaven and a new earth, and we are introduced to eternity.

As Christians, we can indeed rejoice in the prospect of a future day when our Lord and Saviour will enjoy His rightful place as King of kings. But let us show today, by our obedience to Him, that He reigns already in our lives.

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