

AND THE KING SHALL REIGN

Christ the King

November 24, 2024

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Pontius Pilate was the Roman Governor of the province of Judaea, charged by Emperor Tiberius with maintaining peace in this volatile Jewish territory. But there had been alarming rumors spreading once again of sedition in the air. A local rabble rouser had been arrested by the Jewish authorities. He was enflaming the people. And it seemed that this powder keg situation was getting ready to explode.

On this day Pilate left the Praetorium, his residence in Jerusalem, and sat down on the judgement seat. He took time to watch this Jewish prophet brought before him. With all the tension in the air, and the threats being hurled at this Jesus, here stood a man who, for some reason did not appear to be all that rattled. In fact, he looked rather serene and confident. For a man standing accused before the power and authority of Rome, Jesus' peaceful demeanor somewhat unnerved Pilate in that moment.

Of the many accusations being hurled at Jesus, most had to do with matters of religion. But as Pilate's interrogation continued, there was one rumor his spies had fleshed out about Jesus that greatly concerned him. A rumor, that if true, would threaten the very power and control that Rome held over Judea

Pilate asked the question: "Are you the king of the Jews?" Jesus answered: "My kingdom does not belong to this world. If my kingdom belonged to this

world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.’ Pilate asked him, ‘So you are a king?’ Jesus answered, ‘You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world’” Pilate listened to Jesus confirming his fears. He was indeed a king. And yet Pilate was also relieved by Jesus’ cryptic words about his kingdom. It seemed that this Jesus might not pose a threat to Rome after all.

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Today is Christ the King Sunday. Each scripture today speaks of the reign of God and of God’s Christ. Daniel in his vision saw the Ancient One sitting on a fiery throne with wheels of fire, judging the nations. A river of fire poured out from the throne while millions upon millions stood ministering and attending to God. In the vision, one like a human being approached the Ancient One and was given authority, honor, and sovereignty over all the nations of the world so that people of every race and nation and language would obey him.

In the Psalm, the Lord, the king, was spoken of as being robbed in majesty and armed with strength, mightier than the violent, fiercest hurricane. I thought that imagery would be appropriate for us Floridians! The Psalmist proclaimed: “Your royal laws cannot be changed. Your reign, O Lord, is holy forever and ever.”

Then, in John’s revelation we read: “Jesus Christ...is the...first to rise from the dead, and the ruler of all the kings of the world . . . All glory and power to him forever and ever! Amen. Look! He comes with the clouds of heaven.

And everyone will see him— even those who pierced him. And all the nations of the world will mourn for him.”

These scriptures tell us that God the Ancient One reigns and judges the peoples of the nations from a throne of fire while a river of fire flows out from the throne. The Son of Man, Jesus Christ, is given authority and sovereignty, and is ruler and king over all the kings of the earth. He is mightier than the violent raging of the seas. All glory and power are given to him forever.

Daniel and John, the men given these visions, lived in dangerous violent times. Daniel was a captive in Babylon, a servant of the mighty and fierce Babylonian empire. The vision he saw, was imagery he could understand; imagery that revealed his God to be far superior, more fearsome and powerful than the mighty Babylonian and Egyptian kingdoms and their Gods. This realization would have been very comforting to Daniel and the Jewish people in exile.

Then there is the vision given to John while imprisoned on the island of Patmos. He, and every Christian were a small persecuted religious community, constantly under threat from the Roman Empire. His vision recorded in the book of Revelation was that of a terrifying and fierce Ancient One and the king Jesus Christ. Although the imagery may have been unsettling for the Christians, it was, overall, a comforting picture for these believers living in a violent world under violent threat and persecution.

Every image we heard today speak of a fierce and unyielding almighty God who rules in power and subdues all the people and nations of the earth, by

force if necessary. It's kind of like Jewish kids on the playground saying, my God is bigger than your God! Two thousand years ago, the imagery we see here would have naturally flowed from the minds of such ancient people. But to us in the twenty-first century, it seems a bit bloody and terrifying and dispassionate to our evolved sensibilities.

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What kind of a king IS this Christ of ours, this Son of God? Do these ancient fierce images bear any resemblance to an accurate picture of Christ the King? Or, has the true picture of Christ, as filtered through the lives of these ancient people been somewhat altered?

What does Christ the King look like and act like? As Christians, we believe that Jesus as he walked this earth, was the purest reflection of the divine being. But how accurate is the picture we have of Jesus in our scriptures? Can we confidently say that the Gospel writers, writing one to two hundred years after Jesus' death and resurrection, recorded the exact words and stories of Jesus life without any error or embellishment of the facts? Even if we had all the true and accurate stories about Jesus, which we don't, they would still have to be filtered through your life and mine, and how we perceive reality based on our upbringing, the society in which we live and our religious education.

So, if there is no way for us to drill down to the exact words and stories of Jesus and see them accurately, then is there anything we can really know about Christ the King with any degree of confidence? I believe there absolutely is. Here are some things I believe confidently, and yet even in this

confidence, I still hold what I believe with open hands, willing to change my understanding if I am given more accurate information. Here's what I believe:

- First, I believe that the King is different than much of what is portrayed in the Hebrew apocalyptic literature. Unlike their visions, the King is not selfish and self-serving. The King is also not possessive or vindictive or exclusionary.
- Second, I am confident that Christ the King is still alive today. Alive, though not in the same physical form as Jesus, the Galilean who walked this earth two-thousand years ago.
- Third, as the eternal Son of God, Christ exists separate from, and yet still dwells within our boundaries of space and time. As such, Christ the King is indeed sovereign, the divine ruler over all creation.
- Fourth, Christ the King as the Son of God is also One with the Father and the Spirit.
- Fifth, Christ's very essence is love, and as such, always acts in ways of love on behalf of all God's children.

And lastly, I believe that Christ the King walked this earth two thousand years ago in Palestine in naked vulnerability, choosing this way, in order to show us the true values of our almighty King. This naked vulnerability was seen as the divine One arrived in this world from Mary's womb, bloody, naked and fragile, and left this world spiked on a post, scarred, bloody, naked, and vulnerable. In this way, Christ the King would be the epitome of Jesus words that the first must be last and the last first, and she who wants to save her life must lose it. I believe Christ was seen more in downward mobility than upward mobility; in walking the paths of Palestine in dusty,

calloused, sandaled feet, sometimes not knowing where or when the next meal would come from.

Christ the King. This is the kind of sovereign that, I believe once clearly seen, all humanity would desire to follow and swear allegiance to.

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