

THE CHRIST OF THE KINGDOM

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SCRIPTURE: I Corinthians 15:19-28

If in ~~this life~~ only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order; Christ, the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.

The Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David, and he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.

Every kingdom must have some ruling force or personality, some head, some king. The kingdom of God is no exception to this rule. God is a great King. He rules over all the vastnesses of space, over many kingdoms besides the kingdom of this world. Worldly rulers occupy and rule by his sufferance, for as the Psalmist says: "God is the king of all the earth." The kingdom of God is God's kingdom, and God is its King. But as God created the worlds through the instrumentality and power of Christ, the Son so has he delegated to Christ the power and authority to rule over those things which he has created until they shall have served their purpose, until the kingdom of God has been perfected and all its enemies have been destroyed. Then Christ the Son shall return the kingdom to the Father, that all things might be under his feet.

We have pointed out previously in this series of sermons that Israel was chosen as a servant nation through which the theocratic government of God, the Great King, was to be demonstrated to all the other nations of earth as an example. Israel was to be the earthly representation of the kingdom of God, over which God ruled through his spokesmen, the prophets, assisted by the judges. It is a matter of well-known history that Israel as a kingdom failed to realize these goals set for her by Jehovah. The expectation of a Messiah who should come to reign over the perfected kingdom became merely the expectation of a military or political conqueror who by supernatural means should overthrow Rome and restore the glory of the monarchial kingdoms of David and Solomon. Therefore when the Messiah did come the people of Israel failed to recognize him and rejected him; and lost for thousands of years the preeminence and dominion which God had once entrusted to them as a nation.

There are many references in the Old Testament to Messiah as a King -- many more than we shall have time to notice here. The 9th chapter of Isaiah says of him: "... the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace, there is no end" Jeremiah, Zechariah, and Isaiah all make frequent reference to the "Righteous Branch" or king of David's line, who shall reign and prosper and execute justice and judgment in the earth. When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the wise men came seeking him who was born King of the Jews; and when Nathaniel met him after his baptism, he hailed Jesus with the words, "Thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel."

It may be said by some that Jesus never made any direct claim that he was King of Israel, but there can be no doubt that he recognized not only his own Messiahship, but his kingship. Though it may be true that he never proclaimed himself as king with trumpets and fanfare, he many times accepted as his rightful due the prerogatives of kingship and the adoration and obedience of his subjects. He took some pains to fulfill exactly Zechariah's prophecy: "...Behold, thy King cometh unto thee . . . lowly, and riding upon an ass." When Pilate asked him point blank: "Art thou the king of the Jews," his reply was "Thou sayest," or as we might say it in modern slang, "You said it," meaning "Certainly."

Jesus was accused, tried, condemned, and executed because of his claims to kingship -- claims which conflicted with the expectations of the temple hierarchy and the authority of Rome. The Roman soldiers crowned him with a crown of thorns, clothed him in a purple robe -- the symbol of royalty -- and gave him a reed scepter; then mockingly they bowed to him and cried, "Hail, King of the Jews." The sign above his head on the cross proclaimed him as "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." Below him those over whom he had come to rule wagged their heads and mocked him saying, "If thou be King of the Jews, descend from the cross now."

By what right does Jesus claim to be King? What claim does he have on our allegiance? He is King first by right of creation. Through his instrumentality and power the world and all things therein were made. Through his power man was created and placed on earth. Through rebellion and disobedience man fell from his first estate, and became subject to Satan's kingdom, to the kingdom of death. Jesus again proved his right to kingship by coming to earth in human flesh, by maintaining such perfect control of that flesh that he lived without sin though tempted in all points as we are tempted. Having no sin, he was not subject to death as we are; yet he laid down his life in order that by his almighty power he might conquer Satan's kingdom of death for all who would believe in his name and have faith in the power of his resurrection. Because the name of Jesus is the only name given under heaven whereby men may be saved because he is our only hope of life and immortality, he has rightful claim on our allegiance to him as King. Because he came as the servant of all; because he gave himself for all; because he suffered for all; because he provided deliverance for all who would own him as king, we acknowledge him as King and Lord and Savior.

The Kingdom of God is the Kingdom of Christ. We live in expectation of that day when those who will not live by the laws of the kingdom will come under judgment, when the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ. We live in expectation of the day when he shall be hailed as King of Kings and Lord of Lords: when every knee shall bow to him and every tongue confess that he is Lord, and that his judgments are just. We look for the day when all things that offend shall be gathered out of his kingdom, when the last enemy, death, shall be destroyed.

We believe that God has already moved through the prophetic ministry of Joseph Smith to restore to earth the priesthood which administers with authority in inducting people into the kingdom; to restore the church which preaches the doctrine of the kingdom and prepares the way for its coming; to restore the simple, pure, and saving ordinances, doctrines, and principles of the kingdom. We believe that the day is fast approaching when the Christ of the kingdom shall return to earth to judge all things; to gather out all things that offend; to put down all rule and authority and power; to put all enemies under his feet; to destroy the last enemy, death, by the resurrection of all men for judgment; and finally, to deliver up the perfected kingdom to God the Father, that God may be all in all.

Yes, Jesus was and is the Christ, the promised Messiah, the Son of God, the King who shall reign in righteousness. Our entrance into his kingdom depends on our acceptance of him as King and Ruler and Lord. One who fails to accept him as King, one who is in rebellion against him as King, can have no place in his kingdom. Your worthiness to dwell in his perfected kingdom -- and mine -- will depend on our attitude towards Christ the King, to his laws, his doctrines, his authority, his church. May we all be found worthy of an abundant entrance and an eternal place in this kingdom over which Christ reigns.