

Christ the King Sunday

Revelation 19:11-16

1. The acting King

- Mark 10:42-45; Philippians 2:6-11

2. The arbiter King

*- 1 Samuel 2:10; Psalm 50:6; Romans 14:9-12; John 5:24-29;
2 Peter 3:9; Romans 6:23; Hebrews 9:27, Matthew 12:36,
Romans 2:16, 1 Timothy 4:1, 8*

3. The authoritative King

- Matthew 28:18; Ephesians 1:20-23; John 10:18; Matthew 9:6

4. The atoning King

- 1 John 2:2, 4:10; 2 Timothy 2:12

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What does it mean to be “truly great”? Many have claimed greatness, some even claim to be the “GOAT” or “greatest of all time” in their particular field. One of those who claimed to be the GOAT of the world was King Louis the Great of France – this fancy looking guy.

Without a doubt, Louis the XIV of France, or Louis the Great, is one of the most famous kings to have ever lived. But that wasn't because there was anything particularly great about his appearance. He was relatively short and plain looking. He had only a modest education and was said to have had a poor imagination. But Louis was able to overcome all these things. He had great confidence in himself and had a natural ability to run the government, so, by most standards, he was a pretty competent ruler. But, from the start, Louis was not content to just be known as competent. Louis wanted to be known as a *great* ruler – the greatest of all kings.

He had a huge collection of art and literature. He built the elegant palace of Versailles that took 35,000 workers over thirty years to complete. He accumulated great wealth. King Louis wanted to be glorious – not just great. He knew that the only way to achieve such glory was to consolidate all the power within himself, so he made proclamations that stated the King alone had sole power, and he quickly took away the power of all the great nobles of France. He boldly proclaimed, “I AM the state!” He ruled France with an iron hand and influenced the cultural and political structures of all of Europe. He was so confident of his power that he compared himself to the mightiest, brightest star – the sun, and called himself “The Sun King.”

Before he died in 1715 at the age of 72, he left specific instructions with the Bishop of the Catholic Church in France that he be buried in an ornate coffin, on top of which was placed a gold box with his heart in it. His coffin lay in state for 43 days before the memorial service was held. He insisted that at his funeral service, the entire cathedral should be dark, except for one candle positioned above his coffin to give the impression of his great power, even in death. This was to state that he was “The Sun King.”

At the memorial service in Saint-Denis Basilica, thousands gathered and waited in hushed silence, as the story goes.

Then the Bishop arose to speak. But before he said a word, he slowly reached down, and against the King's last wishes, the bishop snuffed out the candle. Then he said, “Only God is great.” And there wasn't a thing that the great and powerful King Louis the XIV could do about it!

Only God IS great! Jesus Christ is the only and great king.

As much as Louis tried to corner the market on greatness, he could never be greater than God. God's greatness excels our reach and extends beyond anything else we might call great.

Today is the last Sunday before Advent begins, which starts next Sunday. On the Christian calendar, the last Sunday before Advent is "Christ the King Sunday" – the Sunday to focus specifically on Christ as King. This Sunday sets the stage for Advent – just before we begin talking about the Baby King born in the manger, it is good for us to remember that he is indeed the Only and Ever Greatest King.

But this Sunday is a good reminder to us in America today, too. We continue to be in the turmoil of a contested election for president of the United States, despite record high voter turnout. The current president disputes the election results and has submitted numerous legal challenges to the election process. The apparent President-elect claims to be frustrated because he and his transition team feel they are being hindered from preparing to take office. The country's loyalties are split nearly down the middle. So, for those of us who are supporters of President Trump, and for those of us who are supporters of President-elect Biden, and for those of us who maybe don't care, listen to me: no matter who is president and who is not, "Only God is great!" Jesus Christ is the King!

The very last book of the Bible, Revelation, describes Jesus this way – please stand with me while I read this:

"Then I saw Heaven open wide—and oh! a white horse and its Rider. The Rider, named Faithful and True, judges and makes war in pure righteousness. His eyes are a blaze of fire, on his head many crowns. He has a Name inscribed that's known only to himself. He is dressed in a robe soaked with blood, and he is addressed as "Word of God." The armies of Heaven, mounted on white horses and dressed in dazzling white linen, follow him. A sharp sword comes out of his mouth so he can subdue the nations, then rule them with a rod of iron. He treads the winepress of the raging wrath of God, the Sovereign-Strong. On his robe and thigh is written, King of kings, Lord of lords.
(Revelation 19:11-16, tmt)

Thank you – have a seat. Jesus is *the* King. Now for a lot of people, the idea of kings and kingdoms makes us think of tyrants or dictators or strange men in frilly fur coats like King Louis. Of course, unless you've moved here from another country, none of us Americans have ever lived under a king. Maybe to you a king is like a character from a fairy tale or a movie, with a positive image, or a negative one, or a comical or even cartoonish image. Maybe the best you can do is think of that creepy large-headed Burger King guy. Regardless of what we think of, Jesus Christ is not just *a* king; He is *THE* King. And we need to get a better understanding of that. SO let's start by seeing that Jesus Christ is...

1. The *acting* king.

I don't mean that he is someone who "acts" like a king but isn't really. He is a king who acts on his kingship. He is a king of action. You can learn a lot about a king by the way he behaves, and the same is true for how Jesus, the King, acts. While Scripture makes it clear that Jesus is King, Jesus' earthly ministry was not one of military might or oppressiveness or of gathering great wealth. Usually if someone is a king, he must prove it by his might and by his money. Jesus certainly could've exerted his power, but he chose not to. His reign is one of peace, liberation, love and service. Jesus turned the whole concept of kingship and rulership upside down:

Jesus got them together to settle things down. "You've observed how godless rulers throw their weight around," he said, "and when people get a little power how quickly it goes to their heads. It's not going to be that way with you. Whoever wants to be great must become a servant. Whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave. That is what the Son of Man has done: He came to serve, not to be served—and then to give away his life in exchange for many who are held hostage." (Mark 10:42-45, tmt)

Jesus knew the popular images of kings and lords and he didn't just reject them, he thoroughly redefined them. In Jesus' Kingdom, in order to be a ruler of all, a person must be a servant of all.

Jesus didn't order his subjects to serve him; Jesus showed the way by being a servant to others, from the very beginning. The story of Christmas is an example of Jesus' redefining what it means to be a king. The Bible says:

He always had the nature of God, but he did not think that by force he should try to remain equal with God. Instead of this, of his own free will he gave up all he had, and took the nature of a servant. He became like a human being and appeared in human likeness. He was humble and walked the path of obedience all the way to death—his death on the cross. For this reason God raised him to the highest place above and gave him the name that is greater than any other name. And so, in honor of the name of Jesus all beings in heaven, on earth, and in the world below will fall on their knees, and all will openly proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:6-11, gnt)

Jesus is the King, yet his actions as king are different than the way we think a king should behave. Before the birth of Christ, and even since then, no royalty would *ever* dare to show their humility. For most, that would be too human; too common. I think that's why Princess Diana was so beloved – she seemed like a normal person, not a royal.

But Kings have parades and entourages to draw the focus toward themselves. Author Philip Yancey points out that when Queen Elizabeth visited the US over 40 years ago, she brought with her an enormous amount of staff and things. Among them:

- 4000 pounds of luggage (4 outfits for every day she was in America)
- 40 pints of plasma
- Her own hairdresser

- Two personal valets
- An official photographer
- Two personal secretaries

And a whole bunch more. The cost of her trip was twenty million dollars. Compare that to God's visit to earth: it took place in an animal stable, there were no trunks full of robes and no attendants to wait on him. There wasn't even a place for the baby king to lay down except in a feeding trough called a manger. In fact, the event, which divided history and our calendars, went by unnoticed at the time except for a few smelly shepherds who heard an angelic ruckus and came by for a visit.

Jesus is a different kind of king.

God the Son, King of all creation, humbled himself to become human - one of us. And even though he would never die of natural causes, he chose to served and shared the ultimate fate of his imprisoned subjects: he died (more on that in a minute).

Not only is he the serving king by his actions, he is also...

2. The arbiter king.

Jesus' role of King is closely tied to his role as arbiter, which is another word for "judge." Now, Jesus as judge is something that you don't hear about much in churches these days - I'm not sure many of us like the idea a whole lot. But Jesus as judge is in our very creeds - our statement of faith. Here are some excerpts from the church's historical statements of faith:

We believe in the resurrection of the dead, that the bodies both of the just and of the unjust shall be raised to life and united with their spirits—"they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation."

We believe in future judgment in which every person shall appear before God to be judged according to his or her deeds in this life. We believe that glorious and everlasting life is assured to all who savingly believe in, and obediently follow, Jesus Christ our Lord; and that the finally impenitent shall suffer eternally in hell.¹

Right now, Jesus is the eternal, all-powerful Lord, and King, and someday he will return to judge everyone, and everything will submit to Him. These are some the of the things the Bible says about him:

Those who oppose the LORD will be shattered. He will judge with thunder against them from heaven; the LORD will judge the ends of the earth. He will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed. (1 Samuel 2:10, niv)

The heavens proclaim his righteousness, for God alone is judge. (Psalm 50:6, niv)

¹ Manual, Church of the Nazarene *Articles of Faith*, Article XVI, paragraphs 16-16.2, pgs 35-36, 2017-2021

For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living...we will all stand before God's judgment seat. It is written: "As surely as I live," says the Lord, "every knee will bow before me; every tongue will acknowledge God." So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God. (Romans 14:9-12, niv)

Jesus said, Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life. Very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man. Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned. (John 5:24-29, niv)

Jesus Christ is the arbiter king, meaning that he is the judge. But unlike human judgments, Christ looks at the heart and does not judge by human standards. Our justice seeks *retribution*, but Christ's judgment seeks *restoration*. Human justice is repayment and incarceration; Christ's judgment is about repentance and salvation. That's why the Bible warns us time and again about Jesus' return. In fact, Advent is about remembering how people were waiting for Jesus' first coming, and that we are now waiting for his second coming. That's why the Bible tells us that God is holding off on Jesus' promised return as long as he possibly can in the hopes that as many as possible would repent and be saved:

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9, niv)

God wants you to come to him *before* you have to face his judgment. He's warning you in order to restore you to right relationship with him, and so that you don't have to face his judgment.

His justice is not like ours. In the name of justice, some Americans have initiated some ridiculous lawsuits. Here are a few examples:

At a boxing match a fan drank too much, got into a fight and ultimately fell down a flight of stairs. His family wanted "justice," so they hired a lawyer and sued. Included in those they sued was Ticket Master, the company that sold the man the ticket to the boxing match. The people won.

Then there was the man who bought a four-seated plane. In order to rig the plane so he could fly it from the back seat, he removed the pilot's seat, along with all its safety equipment. The plane crashed and the man died, and the man's family sued the company that designed and built the plane. The family won a million dollars, even though the man altered and deliberately misused the original equipment.

In another case a young woman was injured when her fiancé deliberately smashed into her go-cart as they were finishing up their ride around the track. So the woman sued...the owners of the race track. The court ruled that the young man who actually ran into the woman was 85% responsible, the young woman herself was 14% negligent and the theme park was 1% involved. However, in the interest of “justice,” the theme park was required to pay the entire cash settlement.

Shifting responsibility and blaming others for our stupidity is common in today’s legal system, but that won’t hold water when Jesus judges us. Someday we will all stand before the truly righteous judge who will accept no excuse and will tolerate no legal loopholes. On Judgment Day you won’t be able to sue anyone or blame anyone else for your sins. You will be called to account for every sin you have committed – and you can be certain that your sins will condemn you to death (Romans 6:23).

But don’t despair! Although you won’t be able to blame anyone else for your sins, right *now* today someone else will take the punishment for them; you still have time to accept God’s free gift of pardon: it is called salvation. Jesus Christ the King died on the cross to pay the penalty for your sins. He did it, not because some clever lawyer was able to pin your sins on him – he willingly took your sins and died for them *because he loves you*. He died, so you could live. (Hebrews 9:27; Matthew 12:36; Romans 2:16; 1 Timothy 4:1, 8)

Jesus is the acting King, the Arbiter King, and he is...

3. The ***authoritative king***.

We are used to democracy where everyone gets a vote. In fact, the accusation is that there are many people who get *more* than one vote! You know what they say: vote early, vote often! But as officials count and recount ballots for the presidential elections, you don’t get a vote when it comes to Christ. “Due process” and “the majority rule” can do good things, but there are times when those systems make mistakes or are taken advantage of. Jesus is not subject to votes. God is what we call “wholly other” – he is completely different in his form and function and thoughts and existence than we are. Yet he has chosen to reveal himself in history and become one of us in Jesus Christ. Still...

Jesus said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”
(Matthew 28:18, niv)

Make no mistake: we have not elected Jesus to be president and God’s creation is not made up of registered voters. There are no referendums on God’s will and there is no chance of recalling him if we don’t like the way he does things.

That’s why this reality of Christ as Lord and King is sometimes difficult to us who live in a democratic society where the focus more and more seems to be a selfish priority on each of our own individual rights. In His Kingdom we surrender all of our rights to Him. The Bible reminds us:

(God) raised Christ from death and seated him at his right side in the heavenly world. Christ rules there above all heavenly rulers, authorities, powers, and lords; he has a title superior to all titles of authority in this world and in the next. God put all things under Christ's feet and gave him to the church as supreme Lord over all things. (Ephesians 1:20-22, gnt)

He is a King, but Christ is a different kind of King: all-powerful, but also all-loving. He is all-merciful and in a loving relationship with his creatures and creation through his church. We must submit to Jesus as our Lord and King, true. But it is a submission that brings with it liberation and freedom from sin and its slavery. Life under King Jesus is full of abundant blessing and resources.

Jesus has authority, yes, but he does something different with it. He used his authority to give up his life. He said:

No one takes my life away from me. I give it up of my own free will. I have the right to give it up, and I have the right to take it back. This is what my Father has commanded me to do. (John 10:18, gnt)

Jesus chose to do that for us because it was the only way to completely deal with our sins, and that is something that he also has the authority to do:

I, the Messiah, have the authority on earth to forgive sins. But talk is cheap—anybody could say that. So I'll prove it to you by healing this man." Then, turning to the paralyzed man, he commanded, "Pick up your stretcher and go on home, for you are healed." (Matthew 9:6, tlb)

Jesus has ultimate authority, and ultimately forgiveness is what he does with it when you accept Him.

If you searched through the New Testament for the word "king," you'd find some very interesting results. The vast majority of the references to Jesus as King occur during the passion narratives in the Gospels – in other words, the most times Jesus is called King is when he is being arrested, tortured, crucified, and died. Jesus' kingship is proclaimed multiple times while he is on the cross. Even though his resurrection proves his ultimate authority, the cross is still a primary defining point of Christ's Kingship.

That's because, lastly, Jesus is the...

4. atoning king.

The King has made atonement – paid the price – for us! His actions, arbitration, and authority all lead to this. Jesus Christ became human and willingly died a horrible death on the cross to release his subjects from captivity. The King of this world, the King of the Universe, the Lord of Glory made this ultimate sacrifice out of his love for the world, even though it's a world that is constantly in rebellion against him. The Bible says that:

(Jesus) is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. (1 John 2:2, niv)

The King himself is our atonement! That's how much he loves you:

He loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. (1 John 4:10, niv)

The King of the universe gave up his life for you so that you could live; so that you could have an eternal relationship with God. That's atonement.

Christ's kingship on the earth is not like a king with a jewel-encrusted crown in purple robes on a gold throne, holding a heavy scepter and demanding subservience. No, he is the crucified King with a crown of thorns, hanging half-naked on a cross of shame to set US free from our slavery, so that we can live like kings. The Bible says that his subjects – his people – will one day rule and reign with him! (2 Timothy 2:12)

Now, he will either prove himself King at the *end* of your life when you face his judgment, or you can accept him as King in your life now and enjoy all that we've talked about and more. Is he king of your life?

In the Berlin art gallery in Germany there is a painting by the famous artist Mengel that is only partially finished. It is supposed to be a painting of King Frederick of Germany talking to his generals. Mengel painstakingly painted the generals first around the outside of the painting. The King was left until last, leaving a bare patch in the middle of the painting with the background of generals. But Mengel died before he could finish the painting. So there is a painting full of generals but no king.

We can spend so much time putting all the generals of our lives into place; material possessions, personal desires, ambitions, all kind of things that may even be important. But we leave the King of Kings out of the picture, and sometimes until it is too late. How many people die without putting Christ into the very center of the picture of their lives?

The painting of our lives will never be complete without Christ being the King in the center. Don't be so busy with the "generals" of your life that you leave out the most important person: King Jesus Christ. That is why he came to earth.

Pray: for people to accept Christ.

If you have already accepted Christ, let me tell you something: people are dying in horrible numbers due to this virus. And they die every day. Many of them without Christ and without hope after they die. It is imperative for you and me to show them God's love by acting as the King's servants, and introducing them to King Jesus Christ.