

Christ Our King
Isaiah 33:13-24

Over the last two weeks, we have been looking at the different offices or job descriptions that Jesus exercises. We have seen that Jesus is a prophet, who not only tells the truth about God to men – He is the truth, the fullest revelation of Who God is. Then, we saw that Jesus is a priest, offering up Himself as a perfect sacrifice to pay the penalty due to the sins of all His people, and offering up the prayers of His people to God. Today's passage helps us meditate on the fact that Jesus is our King.

Now, we Americans haven't had a king since the the English-speaking colonies seceded from the British Empire. So, our images of kings tend to be a bit romantic – we think of a long-ago time when knights wore shining armor and fair ladies wore satin gowns. For us, kings and their castles and gilded carriages are simply traditional and symbolic. Perhaps we feel a bit nostalgic for a time when things were certain enough and stable enough to be so staid.

But let's face it – we Americans are not in the least interested in having a real absolute monarch, some man whose word is law, someone who wields all political power. No, we call people who act like that tyrants, and we fight wars to remove them from their positions of power. We don't want to have anything to do with tyrannical government. We want to have input. We want to have freedoms and rights that can't be taken away.

But there's only one problem with our very American passion for freedom: the fact is that all Americans, indeed all human beings are actually living in an absolute monarchy. The fact is that Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of David is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, the rightful ruler over Heaven and Earth. For that is what all those old Christmas carols claim, isn't it? "Worship Christ the newborn King." "This, this is Christ the King, the babe the son of Mary." Now, while we might be willing to adore the baby in the manger, are we Americans equally willing to bow before a King?

Let's push this point a little further. After all, we Americans cherish our freedoms, and one of the liberties that we cherish the most is freedom of religion. We know that every American citizen has the right to believe whatever he wishes, and to follow whatever religion he chooses. We don't throw people in jail for being Buddhists or Hindus. We don't even throw Muslims in jail for teaching that the government should be overthrown, unless they first make an attempt to blow something up.

So, in our modern world of pluralism and freedom, doesn't that mean that Jesus is only the King of the Christians? Doesn't that mean His absolute authority only applies to those who recognize it? Doesn't His power depend on people's willingness to bow before Him?

Well, think about what that would mean for any other sort of king. What if a king only had authority over those who obeyed him? After all, we Americans are rightly incensed about people coming from other countries without obeying our immigration laws. Instead, we believe that everyone who comes into this country should obey our laws – no excuses and no exceptions. It doesn't matter whether you are a citizen or not – if you are in America, the law is the law and that is that, right?

And of course we Americans don't believe that people should have the option not to follow our laws just because they don't approve of the person who holds power.

Republicans have obeyed the laws during Obama's administration, and Democrats obeyed the laws when George Bush was President. Some Americans who disagreed strongly with the war in Iraq, were nevertheless willing to put on their country's uniform and go there to fight. That's what the rule of law means, and the rule of law is one of the things that makes America so stable and so safe.

Okay, so what does all that mean where it comes to King Jesus? Well, if Jesus is Who He says He is, if He really is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, there really is only one choice available to us human beings – to recognize the rule of Christ as it exists, or to deny that rule. If Jesus is Who He claims to be, there can be no place or person outside His jurisdiction. If He really is the King, can anyone, regardless of his personal beliefs, be immune from or excused from following His commands?

Look, we all know that where it comes to obeying the laws of earthly rulers, the only choices are peace or prison. Just so, if Jesus is the King of Kings, doesn't it simply stand to reason that big problems will come along with disobeying Him, just as big benefits flow from being in a right relationship with Him? Today's passage, and really all of Isaiah chapters 32 and 33 speak to this stark and sobering contrast.

First, let's look at the bad news. What can those who rebel against King Jesus expect? The Westminster Shorter Catechism says that Jesus will restrain and conquer all His enemies. Isaiah puts it in much more poetic language: "The sinners in Zion are afraid; trembling has seized the godless: 'Who among us can dwell with the consuming fire? Who among us can dwell with everlasting burnings?'" When the One comes who is like a refiner's fire, will anyone be able to stand? Will anyone be able to plead immunity from His righteous rule?

No, Isaiah makes quite clear in the verses right before today's passage that there will be no good news for those who are loyal to any other king, for those who trust in anyone or anything else. None of the false gods in which they have put their faith will do them any good. Job, clothes, status, beauty, talent, wealth – all will be useless on that day. Isaiah puts it this way: "You conceive chaff; you give birth to stubble; your breath is a fire that will consume you. And the peoples will be as if burned to lime, like thorns cut down, that are burned in the fire."

But this news that is so bad for those who rebel against the King is at the same time wonderful news for those who are loyal to Him. For if Jesus restrains and conquers His enemies, that necessarily means He also puts our enemies to flight. For if we are on Jesus' side, the very people who oppress us and persecute us are actually ranging themselves in opposition to the Almighty King.

Thus, on that great day of the Lord, that great day of judgment, just as God's enemies will be confounded, God's people will be comforted. On that day, God says, "You will see no more the insolent people, the people of an obscure speech that you cannot comprehend, stammering in a tongue that you cannot understand." This was wonderful news for those in Isaiah's day who were being oppressed by foreign powers. It remains good news for Christians today, not only for those who suffer at the hands of bombers and ISIS thugs, but for American Christians who increasingly find ourselves to be alienated from a culture which is ever more hostile to our God and our King, from a society which increasingly speaks with a voice foreign to us. Yes, the enemies of Christ may seem to have the upper hand today, but they will one day bow the knee to King Jesus, whether they want to or not.

And the good news is that on that day, the news will be as good for Jesus' loyal subjects as it is bad for His enemies. This is how Isaiah describes the peace, the plenty, and the security that await the believer: "He will dwell on the heights; his place of defense will be the fortresses of rocks; his bread will be given him; his water will be sure." Best of all, the people of God will enjoy the presence of our Lord and of His Christ forever. Isaiah says, "Your eyes will behold the king in his beauty; they will see a land that stretches afar."

Thus, the royal authority of Christ is at the same time a blessing to His people and a curse to those who defy Him. Isaiah explains this using nautical imagery in verses 21 and 23. To God's people, He is a broad river or stream, bringing the water of life to our thirsty souls. To God's enemies, He does not allow their proud ships to sail where they want to go, but instead, their masts will not stay in place and their sails will not spread out. The same river that is a blessing to us is a source of frustration to them.

And it is right in the middle of this nautical contrast that we oh-so independent Americans find these striking words: The Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our King. Only by submitting to His rightful authority over us can these three truths be good news. Only then can we also say that the Lord will save us.

And that's the point, isn't it? If we want to be on the good side of Jesus on the day of His coming, we need to be one of His people today, obeying His laws, respecting His judgments today. That's why Isaiah talks in verse 15 about the need for us to be righteous, to speak upright words, to refuse to accept bribes or other dishonest gain. That's why we must not even listen to those who brag of their evil deeds. That's why we must close our eyes to wickedness of all kinds, rejecting the ways of those who oppose King Jesus.

But that's just the problem, isn't it? Which of us has truly been consistent in our allegiance to King Jesus? Who among us hasn't abandoned His law at different times, in different parts of our lives? Which one of us can claim that we have been truly righteous in His sight? No, if the enemies of God will get what is coming to them on the great day of the Lord, and if the enemies of God are those who disobey His commands, we are all in big trouble, aren't we?

That's why we need King Jesus to do one more thing for us: we need Him not just to subdue our enemies, but to subdue ourselves. We need Him not just to show us our sin and to show us our need for a savior, but to bring our wills into line with His own. In short, we need Him to save us.

Yes, Jesus saves us as our prophet, by shining the light and the truth of God into the darkness of our confusion and sin. Yes, Jesus saves us as our priest, dying the death that our sins deserve, showing us not the wrath we should receive, but the grace we so desperately need. But it is as our King that Jesus saves us by applying the great work of His salvation directly to our disobedient and defiant hearts. Isaiah puts this so plainly: The Lord is our King – He will save us.

And because our King saves us, saves us even in spite of ourselves, those who dwell with Jesus won't be sick with our sins anymore – we will be forgiven our iniquities. He will consider us to be righteous, not because of what we have done but because of what He has done on our behalf. And thus we will have nothing to fear on that great day when He comes again with glory to judge the living and the dead.

Jesus the Prophet has spoken the truth to us. Jesus the High Priest has laid down His life for us. Jesus the King demands our allegiance and offers us pardon and forgiveness. Will you hear the truth? Will you trust in His sacrifice? Will you acknowledge His authority and accept His pardon? Will you therefore be in a position to celebrate His coming?