

Freed to Serve My Forever King

Revelation 1:4b-8 (NIV)

Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, ⁵ and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, ⁶ and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen. ⁷ “Look, he is coming with the clouds,” and “every eye will see him, even those who pierced him”; and all peoples on earth “will mourn because of him.” So shall it be! Amen. ⁸ “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.”

If you ever seen the movie Braveheart, your heart swells a bit thinking of the climax where William Wallace gives his speech: “I see a whole army of my countrymen here in defiance of tyranny. You have come to fight as free men, and free men you are. What would you do with that freedom? Will you fight?” One soldier says, “Fight? Against that? No, we will run; and we will live.” And Wallace answers, “Aye, fight and you may die. Run and you’ll live -- at least a while. And dying in your beds many years from now, would you be willing to trade all the days from this day to that for one chance, just one chance to come back here and tell our enemies that they may take our lives, but they’ll never take our freedom!” And the army cheers. And we have our answer as to whether it is better to live as a free person knowing that your freedom will ultimately lead to your death or to live forever as a subject of a king? Today, we re-consider this question, as we celebrate the last Sunday of the church year: Christ the King Sunday.

What do we mean when we say that Christ is our King? Do we just like the idea of Jesus being “the ruler of the kings of the earth,” (verse 5) that he keeps all those other people out there, all those other governments and nations, in check since we have no control over them so that we can breathe a little easier as our enemies will be kept in line by Jesus, that my God can beat all the rest of you up? When we say that Christ is our King, do we picture Christ as a mighty, powerful warrior King, someone like King David, someone who doesn’t just command troops but is out fighting on the front line, in the mud and the blood and the dirt of the trenches with us? When we say Christ is our King, do we mean that we live to serve him, that we fight for him, that we would lay down our lives to protect him, that we always accept his rule no matter our personal thoughts or feelings – an undying loyalty to him?

In our western world, we are often taught that freedom is always preferable to being under the rule of anyone else. To be under someone else’s rule is restrictive, like fastening a yoke around my neck that I need to throw off because it chafes me, it’s irritating, it hurts. I don’t like to be ruled by others because I have suspicions about those in power. They are faulty and flawed like me. They’ll withhold information if it doesn’t suit them. They don’t always have my best intentions in mind, especially when I see them take actions or make laws that negatively affect me or hinder me. So, give me freedom to control my life and my destiny.

Do we take this same attitude with Christ as our King? Do we feel restricted when we hear all those laws that God puts in place, all those expectations he has of me as his subject in his kingdom, of how I am to always make him a priority in my life (not me first), that everything I do would honor him, that I would serve him with my time, my talents, my treasures, that I would never give in to temptation and instead deny myself, restrict myself in service to him? I don’t want to deny myself my desires. Does he really have my best interests in heart or does he want to suppress me and my freedom? Is Christ my King only when I need him, when I face overwhelming adversity, health complications that I can’t fix, financial situations that I can’t dig myself out of? Is Christ my King or is he more of a genie that I rub the lamp and have him appear to grant me my wishes instead of having him rule my life?

As we think about a life of service to Christ our King, we should step back for a minute and see what Christ does as our King. John opens his book of Revelation by saying that Jesus is “the faithful witness.” (verse 5) Jesus spoke truth. He testified of the prophecies that had come before him and explained how he was the fulfillment of them. He showed God’s Word to be true, and he himself kept all the words he spoke, which means that he will never let us down by failing to keep a promise that he has made to us. He spoke of his death and his subsequent resurrection from the dead just three days later, and he did just that. His resurrection from the dead proved that God the Father had accepted his Son’s payment for the sins of the world. His rising from the dead is a preview of how God will raise us on the Last Day. This is what makes Christ “the firstborn from the dead.” (verse 5) After rising from the dead, he then ascended into heaven to be seated at the right hand of God. Not so much a physical place of sitting, but a title, a position of power. Christ rules over all things, all creation, all nations, all people. Nothing happens unless he allows it to happen. Nothing is outside of his control and his power. He truly is “the ruler of the kings of the earth.” (verse 5)

But there's even more that Christ does as our King. Modern kings know a few of their subjects, but they don't know them all, let alone have personal feelings for each of them. But Christ the King loves each and every single one of us. He knows us each by name. He has each of us individually in mind as he serves us. He loves you personally. He loves you so much that he "has freed us from our sins by his blood." (verse 5) He knew of the slavery to sin that you and I were born into – a slavery that we could not smell or taste or touch. You and I were bound in the chains of everlasting death and servitude to our sinful nature and the devil. But by his sacrifice, by the shedding of his blood, he has removed those shackles. We are no longer slaves to our sinful natures because Christ has freed us from our sins. We are not bound to sin, no matter how tempting. We are not controlled by it any longer. By this same sacrifice Christ our King has also freed us from the eternal consequence of our sin. Instead of eternal life in hell, we now have eternal life in heaven because Christ our King has freed us from our sins by his blood.

Because Christ has freed us from our sins by his blood, he "has made us to be a kingdom." (verse 6) You're not an island. You're not left alone. You are part of something so much bigger and greater than yourself, even greater than your own family. You are part of this kingdom of people that belong to God, who call Christ "King." He is the one who serves us. He is the one who protects us. He is the one who gives us his law for our betterment, for our good as we are his kingdom.

Not only has Christ made you to be a kingdom with him as your King, but he also has made each of us "priests to serve his God and Father." (verse 6) Our King has given us a purpose, valuable work to be done. As his priests, we offer our bodies as living sacrifices to him. We serve him in everything we think, say, and do. We declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness and into his wonderful light. We proclaim the freedom from our sins that Christ our King has secured for us and the kingdom that he has made us a part of.

Also, John explains to us that Christ as our King does not change because, as Christ himself says, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty." (verse 8) He has always been the King. He will always be the King because he is God along with the Father and the Holy Spirit. No one could rule better. No one else will ever care for us the way that God does. No one will ever usurp him from the throne. You and I will never need another king. He is our forever King.

At this point, let's ask again: Is it better to be free from Christ's reign and be bound to the chains of sin which will drag you to eternal death or to live as the subject of Christ and his kingdom knowing that he has freed you from sin, still cares for you individually in all these ways we just talked about, and gives you life forever in his good reign? We know it is better to have Christ as our King, but a part of us wants to be completely independent and free to do whatever when we want. A part of us still wants to throw off this title of being a subject in Christ's kingdom. I don't want to run off and do crazy things, but I want to be free to do so.

This is having one foot in on this idea that Christ is my King but the other foot out the door ready to leave his kingdom and his rule whenever I fancy to. We do this because, honestly, we want to be our own kings. So, we hold Jesus at arms' length, saying at one time that I am committed to being with him and serving him as my King to another day when I buck against his rule because I just want to be free. If you tried doing that to your spouse or your best friend, they wouldn't they accept that behavior? Neither does our God. We selfishly want our freedom from all rule. By doing so, we pierce God with our words as we refuse his kingship over us.

But that does not stop Christ from doing all the things he does. He is still "the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth." (verse 5) He is still the one who loves you personally, who "has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father." (verses 5-6) He has rescued us from hell. If we try to live life free of him, we will not be a part of his kingdom but instead will experience sadness and mourning when Christ the King returns.

Is it better to live free or to live as a subject to a king? When it comes to Christ, being a part of his kingdom, being his subject, is always better than having our own personal independence. Christ as our King has freed us from our sins by his blood. That freedom that he won for us frees us to belong to him instead of to ourselves. With Christ as our King, when he comes with the clouds on the Last Day and "every eye will see him, even those who pierced him"; and all peoples on earth "will mourn because of him," (verse 7) we will not mourn because we know that Christ our King is victorious. His victory never fades. His reign never ends. We are freed by his blood to serve him as our forever King. Under his reign, we will live in peace and safety forever. Amen.