

## “The Ruler of the Kings of the Earth”

Revelation 1:4b-8

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Christ the King

I have some *fantastic* news to share with you today. *We have a King!* And it's not Elvis!

Seriously ... Jesus Christ is the King of kings and the Lord of lords. You've probably heard that line; it's in Handel's *Messiah*. Handel got it from the Bible, specifically from the book of Revelation, and you can also find the same exact phrase in the first epistle of Timothy. Timothy calls Jesus “the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords.” *Sovereign* means “possessing supreme political power” or “supreme authority.” Jesus is *the* Sovereign, the Ruler; the supreme ruler over all the earth.

This morning's reading from the book of Revelation picks up this theme; John calls Jesus “the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.” It is that last phrase – “ruler of the kings of the earth” – that I want to draw to your attention today. There are currently 44 countries in the world that have a king or queen. In many of those, the royal leader has limited powers or just a ceremonial role – like Queen Elizabeth. It's like that in Belgium, Denmark, Spain, Japan, Thailand, Lesotho, and a variety of other countries. A few nations have an absolute monarch with vast powers – countries like Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and even the Vatican City. The majority of countries today have a prime minister, who is often appointed. Many countries have an elected president. Things were different in the ancient world; there were no presidents or prime ministers, just lots of kings and the occasional queen. In the time of Jesus there was one particular king who exercised dominion over most of the known world: the Roman Emperor. The one individual governed the lives of somewhere around 55 to 70 million people – which was about 1/5 of the entire population of the world at that time.

But *Jesus* is the “King of kings and Lord of lords.” *Jesus* is the “ruler of the kings of the earth.” *Jesus* is the “blessed and only Sovereign.” Those are *majestic* claims. Maybe our eyes and ears just glide right over those phrases, but those were *bold* statements. They challenge the absolute authority of every king, every prime minister, every president; they say to all those leaders, “There is someone who has *more* power and *more* authority than you do. Someone who has *dominion* over you. Someone to whom *you are accountable*. Someone who is going to *judge* you for the way you govern your people.”

You see how important those phrases are. King of kings. Lord of lords. Ruler of the kings of the earth. Only Sovereign. *They put every government leader in their place*. It doesn't matter if they are wise or foolish, it doesn't matter if they are humble or arrogant, it doesn't matter if they tell truth or lies. It doesn't matter if they are a devout Christian, a Christian in name only, adhere to a different tradition, or claim no religious affiliation at all. They *all* stand under the dominion of Jesus Christ – whether they are willing to acknowledge that, or not. Jesus *has* ultimate power, ultimate authority,

ultimate dominion, ultimate sovereignty, over *all* the world's leaders. They will answer *to him*.

This is *extremely* good news. This is such incredibly wonderful news that I want to jump up and shout *Hallelujah! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth!* There I go, quoting Handel again, who was quoting straight from the Bible. It's the book of Revelation again; modern translations typically say, "for the Lord God *Almighty* reigns." That is such incredibly good news – because *there is no better King than Jesus*. There is no one more wise, no one more just, no one more compassionate, no one better equipped to determine what is right and what is wrong, anywhere in the world, at any point in history.

Everything that the rulers of the world do *right* – Jesus is going to praise. Everything that the rulers of the world do *wrong* – Jesus is going to judge. Some rulers of the world do tremendous good; some rulers of the world do great harm. Sometimes the good doesn't get sufficiently rewarded here on earth; sometimes the wrong doesn't get sufficiently judged here on earth. Sometimes leaders get away with things that should *never* have happened. The classic example in the modern era is Hitler, who was single-handedly responsible for the deaths of some 50 million people. I take comfort in the knowledge that even if wicked rulers are not held fully accountability here on earth, they *will* be held accountable in the eternal realm. They will not get away with *anything*. They have to face the *judgment* of Jesus Christ.

Of course, it's not just the *rulers of the world* that are going to have to face Jesus and his judgment. It's *all* of us. Every single last one of us who draws breath here on earth, whether we acknowledge Jesus or not, will be held accountable for our words and deeds. Jesus is a *righteous judge*. The Apostles' Creed summarizes many biblical passages when it says: "he will come to judge the living and the dead." Those aren't just words. It's *Word*. Biblical truth – a truth that many people, even many who claim to be Christian, don't really want to acknowledge. Jesus is the blessed and only Sovereign.

If we take that seriously – if we are willing to accept the truth that the *only* person whose opinion about us *truly* matters is Jesus Christ himself – then we would be wise to spend some time thinking about what kind of people Jesus wants us to be. What is it that Jesus truly values? What kinds of qualities does Jesus truly want to see in us? What kind of lives does Jesus truly want us to lead?

Thankfully, we get some very clear answers to those questions from the lips of Jesus himself. When he was asked "which commandment is the first of all?", Jesus gave two answers. The first answer was this: "love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength" – that is, with every fiber of your being. What we should care about most of all is *not* whether we feel happy, or how much money we have, or what other people think about us, or our job, or our hobbies, or the things we like to do in our free time, or the dream vacation we'd like to take, or the causes and issues we care about, or even our families. What we should care about most of all is our *Maker*. Our *Savior*. Our *Redeemer*. Our *Lord*. That should be our first and greatest priority, and it should impact absolutely *every* aspect of our life, every *day* of our life. It should affect our understanding of our own self-identity, our decisions about what to *do* with our life, how to spend our time, what to do with our money, how we go about making decisions, and so much more. God should be our *Rock*, the very bedrock and foundation of our life. Every other aspect of our life should be rooted and grounded on that solid rock.

The second answer Jesus gave was this: "love your neighbor as yourself." The way you want to be treated by other people – *that's* the way you should treat everybody. Our "neighbors" aren't just our friends, our co-workers, our family members, the people we know with similar interests and values, or our literal "neighbors" down the street. Our "neighbors," Jesus said quite clearly, also include the

people who *are very different* from us. The example Jesus used was a Samaritan. Samaritans were of a different ethnic stock than Jews. They worshiped a different god. Jews considered them “unclean” and “untouchable.” They looked down upon them, despised them, *hated* them. They held deep prejudices against them. Jesus was saying: *that’s wrong*. You shouldn’t *hate* people who aren’t like you. You shouldn’t look down upon them, despise them, hold deep prejudices against them. You should *love* them. You should treat them the same way *you* want to be treated. Now I can say those words, but we really need to pause to consider their implications in today’s world. For we now live in a country where if you say the wrong things, believe the wrong things, hold the wrong positions on certain issues, you can get treated *horribly*. Numerous superintendents, school board members, health professionals, election officials, elected officials, and even educators have been receiving a multitude of *death threats* in recent weeks and months *simply because they have been trying to do their job*, and do it responsibly. This is what America has come to. Flight attendants go to work every day wondering if *today* is the day they are going to get punched in the face. “*Love your neighbors as yourself.*” That’s what Jesus told us to do. That kind of love is *seriously* lacking in our country. We are *very far* from the teachings of Jesus.

If we want to know more about what our Sovereign Lord asks of us, the next passage we should probably look at is the Ten Commandments. You remember them. “You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. Observe the Sabbath day, and keep it holy. Honor your father and mother. You shall not kill. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. You shall not covet anything that belongs to your neighbor.” Hopefully you learned those in Sunday School when you were young. Hopefully you still try to follow them as an adult. These commandments spell out in greater detail what it means to “love God” and “love your neighbor.” But we all know how often these basic commandments get violated. Most of the headlines in the news, and most of the things that tear families and communities apart, result from people breaking these God-given laws.

Beyond that, there are many other things that Jesus tells us to do or not do. One of the most explicit passages is found in Mark’s gospel. These are words straight from the mouth of Jesus: “it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.” (Mark 7:21-23) That’s a pretty clear list of some behaviors Jesus wants us to avoid. He *will* judge us for these things. That means, for example, that all the people who have caused great havoc and mayhem and sometimes death these past couple years by deliberately spreading false information and lies – they might escape judgment in this world, but they will *not* escape the judgment of Christ. My sister-in-law is a nurse in a Covid unit; she has had to treat many patients dying from a disease they have been brainwashed to believe doesn’t exist. Those who misled them *will* be judged.

Here’s the thing. *We have a king!* The King of kings and Lord of lords, the ruler of the kings of the earth, the blessed and only Sovereign. *Those words have meaning*. And it is *incredibly* good news, at least for those who care about the values of Jesus. Christ the King *will* hold us *accountable*. That really ought to give us pause. The values and standards of Jesus are pretty clear. The Bible is also clear that it’s not just *Christians* who are going to be judged. It’s *everybody*. Look around; there is so much *evil* in this world. It *should not* be that way! When Jesus comes back – it’s *not going* to be that way, any longer. Christ will come, to judge the living and the dead. That is *good news*. So, *Alleluia* and *Amen!*

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