



Pastor Ken Nelson's Sermon

SERMON – 4TH ADVENT
LUKE 1:39-56 & MICAH 5:2-5A
DECEMBER 17, 2021

“JESUS OUR KING”

A wonderful Christmas anthem by Jimmy and Carol Owens poses a question...*“How should a king come? Even a child knows the answer of course, in a coach of gold with a pure white horse. In a beautiful city in the prime of the day, and the trumpets should cry and the crowds make way...that’s the way that a king should come...Even a commoner understands, He should come for His treasures, and His houses and lands. He should dine upon summer strawberries and milk, and sleep upon bedclothes of satin and silk...that’s the way that a king should come.”* And when you think of kings and queens both storybook and real with their parades and palaces and coronations, I would say they were not far from the mark.

The ancient civilizations of the world went that image even one better – Egypt considered their kings “a god” or at the very least a “son of a god.” The king’s will was divine will. Other countries of the ancient world considered their kings human but who enjoyed the authority and support of the gods. The people’s welfare, maintenance of security, the administration of justice, favorable weather and freedom from epidemics were expectations of kings in those days (much like presidents now days I suppose!) But if a king’s performance suggested they were out of touch with the gods, the king could be removed and often were by rather unsavory methods!

It was amid this sort of belief and custom regarding kings that the nation of Israel came into being. Early on, the writings of Israel infrequently referred to God as their king. After what Pharaoh king of Egypt did to them who would want to regard their king as a god or God their king! But in the Psalms and prophets like Jeremiah, references to God as king of Israel were more frequent. By this time Israel had (unwisely) chosen kings of their own. So, the psalms and prophets contrasted the wretched behavior of those kings with God, who as Psalm 23 says, was a shepherd king, leading people kindly but securely and inviting his subjects to a banquet table *“prepared before their enemies”* where cups of goodness and mercy would overflow!

So, when in Micah 5 it says that one day *“out of Bethlehem...will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel whose origins are of old, from ancient times”*, and that this ruler *“will shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord...and they will live securely”* the prophet is making a most dramatic announcement. The only one who could do such, if Psalm 23 be their guide, is God. Micah says that from Bethlehem, someday, God will come and rule his people by living among his people. A king who is truly God...a God who becomes his people’s king.

And when in Luke 1 Mary, the Mother of our Lord, offers up exquisite praise to God in her famous “Magnificat”, she includes the statement that *“rulers are going to be brought down from their thrones.”* Mary is quite sure the prophesy of Micah is about to be fulfilled – seven hundred years after the fact, but still fulfilled. But what about us? Do you ever wonder when Mary’s prophesy is going to be fulfilled?

When will these rulers “be brought down?” Christians acclaim Jesus our Prophet, Priest *and* King. He is a prophet, for we acclaim he speaks with the authority of God. He is a priest, for we acclaim on the cross he atoned for our sins – not just offering a sacrifice but becoming one, as our lesson from Hebrews declares. But how are we to understand Jesus as king?

On a personal level we can, or at least would like to say, ‘*Jesus rules (guides) my life.*’ We can say ‘*Jesus protects me, encourages me, comforts me.*’ Through personal prayer and devotional Bible reading we can say ‘*Jesus leads me beside still waters and restores my soul.*’ In worship, we can say ‘*Jesus takes my enemy Satan, who accuses me constantly of being a sinner and a failure, and shows the evil one who and what kind of person the Lord sets down at table and fills the cup of forgiveness to overflowing.*’

Yet do not our songs of this season declare Jesus’ our king? “*Joy to the world, the Lord has come, let earth receive her king*”, “*prepare the royal highway, the King of kings is near*”, “*hark the herald angels sing, glory to the newborn king*”. But still so many “rulers” in this world for better but also for worse, exert their will over us - men and women who have no, or very little regard for God moreover. We know in the end they are all just “*pretenders to the throne*” but we’re not in the end yet, are we?

What is Mary saying of God, when she declares, “*he has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble?*” Her son took her words to heart. There are few things Jesus said so much as “*the kingdom of heaven*” has come. Mary speaks her praise to and on behalf of “*the humble.*” The qualities of the kingdom of God and of our King Jesus could take several sermons to name. But I believe the best assessment of Christ our King and his kingdom comes from looking at the sort of folks he calls into his kingdom and, as Revelation 21 says, will one day be pleased with to dwell. Those are who Mary says God “*magnifies*”...the humble, who wait on a promise, and who do not let delay derail their faith in the king. You believe your king once lay hid in a virgin’s womb, and that his kingdom is often hidden today. But it has come, if largely within us. But that is enough for us even as we see little other evidence of it around us.

Edmund Steimle, a Lutheran pastor and radio broadcaster, said; “*I suspect that if we in the church are going to heard by those outside the church, we’d better make it crystal clear that our faith includes our experience of God absent as well as present, that we know, as they do, what it means to live in a world which gives precious little evidence of the presence or reality of God. Maybe then they’ll listen to us...for a change.*” The faithful ones in Scripture, starting with the mother of our Lord, are they who are certain our king is coming, who ready themselves for his coming, but whose faith largely shows forth in how willing they are to wait.

How should a king come? I’ll let another great hymn of the church, this one by Philipps Brooks, tell us how...“*Silently, silently, the wondrous gift is given. For God imparts to human hearts the blessings of his heaven. No ear may hear him coming, but in this world of sin, where meek souls will receive him, still, the dear Christ enters in.*” Blessed are you who have and hold Him there. AMEN