

Jesus is our King

God's ideal of a king in the Old Testament was that he was to be a shepherd for his people (2 Samuel 5:2; 7:7). Jesus referred to Himself as the Good Shepherd, "*I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep*" (John 10:11). It was part of His kingly office that He take care of His people as a shepherd. The prophet Nathan foretold that David's descendant would be *the King* whom God would send into this world. Nathan told David, "*Your house and your kingdom will stand firm before you for ever. Your throne will be established for ever*" (2 Samuel 7:16). The angel Gabriel indicated that this prophecy was fulfilled in the child born to Mary. "*He will reign over the family of Jacob for ever, and there will be no end of His kingdom*" (Luke 1:33). Jesus Himself indicated He is the King when He said to Pilate, "*You are correct in saying that I am a king. I have been born for this reason and have come into the world for this reason, that I may testify to the truth*" (John 18:37).

Jesus' work as King was different than what the people of His day anticipated. They were looking for a king who could give them free food and health care. That is why they wanted to make Jesus a king after He had fed the five thousand (John 6:15). That is why many sought Him because they saw His miracles of healing (Matthew 8:16,17). They were looking for someone to free them from Rome and make them a powerful nation like they had been under David and Solomon (Luke 17:20). Even Jesus' own disciples did not fully understand the nature of His kingdom (Mark 10:37; Acts 1:6). Jesus' kingdom, however, is not an earthly kingdom. He said it is spiritual in nature, "*My kingdom does not belong to this world. If My kingdom belonged to this world, My attendants would fight, to prevent Me from being handed over to the Jews. However, now My kingdom is not from here*" (John 18:36). It consists of His rule in the hearts of those who believe in Him. "*He answered them, 'The kingdom of God does not come in such a way that people can observe it. ²¹ Nor will people say, 'Look! Here it is,' or 'There it is.' For, indeed, the kingdom of God is in your midst*" (Luke 17:20-21).

The Bible speaks of the kingdom of God (Matthew 12:28) and of the kingdom of Christ (Matthew 16:28). The two are identical. The kingdom of Christ was given to Him by His Father. As our Mediator, it was given to His human nature. In His state of exaltation, Jesus fully and constantly exercises the authority and power given to His human nature by His divine nature. The word kingdom denotes God's or Christ's ruling or governing activity. Christ's kingdom does not consist in a group of persons or things governed. The focus is on His ruling activity.

Jesus has conquered sin and Satan for us. He has broken the power the devil had over us, which was to accuse us of our sins. Christ has sent the Holy Spirit to bring us to faith. He reigns in our hearts so that we gladly serve Him as our Lord and King. His reign as our King today is really one kingdom, but Scripture mentions three distinct spheres of His reign. Jesus' kingdom is one of power, of grace, and of glory. The kingdom of power is His governance over the universe. The kingdom of grace is His reign in the hearts of those who believe in Him. The kingdom of glory is where Christ reigns in heaven and shepherds His believers there. Reformed theology restricts the kingdom of Christ to God's elect alone and leaves all else to the Father (since the Reformed deny the communication of the properties of the divine nature to the human nature). They also desire to see a visible kingdom of Christ on earth, though Christ said His kingdom was invisible and not of this world.

As long as we live in this world, we are beset by the problems sin causes sinners living in a sin-corrupted world. Though we are sinners, we have been washed clean by the blood of the Lamb. We are clothed in His righteousness. Jesus has promised us that He will say "*Come, you whom My Father has blessed! Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the time when the world was created!*" (Matthew 25:34). Then, as Paul says, "*we shall always be with the Lord*" (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

In joyful expectation, then, we say with the hymn writer:

O sweet and blessed country,
The home of God's elect!
O sweet and blessed country
That eager hearts expect!
In mercy, Jesus, bring us
To that dear land of rest,
Who art, with God the Father,
And Spirit, ever blest. (Hymn 494:4)