

Who Is and Who Was and Who Is to Come  
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**Revelation 1:4b-8**

<sup>4</sup> Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, <sup>5</sup>and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, <sup>6</sup>and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

<sup>7</sup> Look! He is coming with the clouds;

every eye will see him,  
even those who pierced him;  
and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail.  
So it is to be. Amen.

<sup>8</sup> ‘I am the Alpha and the Omega’, says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

**John 18:33-37**

<sup>33</sup> Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, ‘Are you the King of the Jews?’ <sup>34</sup>Jesus answered, ‘Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?’ <sup>35</sup>Pilate replied, ‘I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?’ <sup>36</sup>Jesus answered, ‘My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.’ <sup>37</sup>Pilate asked him, ‘So you are a king?’ Jesus answered, ‘You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.’

The closest monarchy we have at hand is the British monarchy and what do we know beyond royal baby watch? I, myself, can say “not much.” And the most I recall from grade school history class is that it was dangerous to be married to Henry VIII. I wanted to know more about what it means for Jesus to be called “king.” What might Pilate have meant when he asked Jesus if he was the king of the Jews? What did it mean to the early Christians to call Christ the King? What does it mean to us who celebrate a day designated Christ the King?

To answer the first question, about Pilate, I turn to Professor Robert A. Bryant for an answer. He said “The title of ‘king’ is loaded with political – insurrectional – meaning for the Romans, who have little tolerance for any king but Caesar. As Rome’s chief authority in Palestine, then, Pilate is pressing Rome’s full authority against Jesus when he asks the question.”<sup>1</sup> Jesus returns Pilate’s question with his own: “Who told you? Is it you that is threatened by me or someone else?” When Pilate replies that he

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<sup>1</sup> *Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 4*, p. 335.

heard it from Jesus' own people, Jesus tells him that his own kingship is not of this world. Professor Bryant continues, "On the surface, Jesus asserts that his kingdom presents no threat to Roman rule and power. As the previous context of John and the other Gospels reveal, however, Jesus' rule and kingdom are profoundly subversive to any worldly authority that demands allegiance over loyalty to God."<sup>2</sup>

The early Christians of whom we read made Christ their king by pledging their loyalty to God over worldly authority, even the authority of the temple priests and teachers. In the language of the Encyclopedia Britannica, "Monarchy...results from the wish of a society – be it a city population, tribe, or multi-tribal 'people' – to groom an indigenous leader who will properly represent its historical goals and advance its interests."<sup>3</sup> We know the people of Israel were seeking, watching for, a messiah, someone to save them, to represent their goals as a people, and to advance their interests. Admittedly, Jesus came to advance what was in their best interest, although it looked little or nothing like what they thought their interests were. On a much broader scope, Jesus is our indigenous leader, as God who looks like us. And with us as well, Jesus advances what is in our best interest, although we may have other ideas and desires about what that should look like.

So we call Jesus the Christ the King, King of kings as we hear in our reading from Revelation and Handel's Messiah. We pledge allegiance to Christ alone, which makes him our absolute monarch. I turn to the New World Encyclopedia for more explanation. "In an absolute monarchy, the monarch rules as an autocrat, with absolute power over the state and government – for example, the right to 'rule by decree, promulgate laws, and impose punishments.'"<sup>4</sup> This may make you queasy at first but remember how it is that **Jesus** rules by decree, the laws which Jesus promulgates, the punishments he imposes. He decrees "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."<sup>5</sup> His two commandments are these: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength... You shall love your neighbor as yourself."<sup>6</sup> The punishments he imposes? "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always accuse, nor will he keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities."<sup>7</sup> This is how Christ rules.

The New World Encyclopedia also points out that "a monarchy is a form of government in which supreme power is absolutely or nominally lodged in an individual, who is the head of state, often

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 337.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.britannica.com/topic/monarchy>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Monarchy>

<sup>5</sup> John 14:6

<sup>6</sup> Mark 12:30-31

<sup>7</sup> Psalm 103:8-10

for life or until abdication.”<sup>8</sup> There is no chance of abdication and for life is for the one who is and who was and who is to come – eternal. The gospel of John opens with “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.”<sup>9</sup> When we celebrate communion we affirm that “every time we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim Christ’s saving death until he comes again.” Who is and who was and who is to come is firmly in place as king for eternity.

Under Christ’s eternal authority, eternal guidance, we live. We pledge our loyalty to God above all worldly authority. Pastor and Professor Tom Long affirms that, in Revelation, “Naming Christ as ‘the ruler of the kings’ . . . assures the reader that no earthly power, regardless of how toxic, can ultimately loosen the grasp of Christ upon his followers.”<sup>10</sup> We turn again to Professor Bryant who explains Christ’s rule by stating, “Not only does he relate his kingship and the kingdom to the purpose of his birth, but he claims that his kingdom is also present – in part – upon the earth. The reign and rule of Jesus are present wherever anyone accepts the truth of his identity and witness.”<sup>11</sup> Put these two together and we, who accept the truth of Jesus’ identity and witness, are called to boldly resist earthly powers, even the most toxic, in favor of Christ.

What this looks like is simple, not easy but simple. “Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’”<sup>12</sup>

Let us pray: Hold us tightly, Christ, that we might follow you and not this world. Amen.

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Monarchy>

<sup>9</sup> John 1:1-2

<sup>10</sup> *Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 4*, p. 331.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* p. 337.

<sup>12</sup> Matthew 25:34-40