



Sermon 22.11.09 Christ the King
John 18.33-39

If I asked you to close your eyes and think of a King, who would come to mind?

King Juan Carlos of Spain? George VI or Henry VIII of England? Or this King perhaps... (*a quick burst of Elvis!*)

I went to a show by an Elvis Presley impersonator recently – he was brilliant and very convincing, but in the end... a fake!

MOST human rulers disappoint in the end. This should not surprise us if we have read 1 Samuel 8, with all its dire warnings. (*Note: the people weren't just making a positive choice for a different form of government – they were rejecting the rule of God.*)

'KING' may therefore seem a bit of a negative image to use of Jesus. What are we saying about him? That he is demanding? Despotic? Domineering?

NO, he wasn't like that at all! There is also a much more positive imagery of Kings in parts of the OT. It is clearest in Psalm 72.

This Psalm was written for Solomon, son of King David, and was a prayer for him to be an IDEAL King. The Psalm also clearly goes beyond any human king in its scope – it is a MESSIANIC PROPHECY, looking forward to a FUTURE SON OF DAVID who would rule God's people with righteousness and justice:-

Before we look at the Psalm, I want to say a little bit about this word JUSTICE¹. For us, bringing justice usually means punishing somebody for a crime or offence. But this is NOT what justice means in the Bible, where justice means 'making things right', it means caring for others, it means bringing an end to inequality and exploitation of the poor. We sometimes think of justice and mercy as opposite aspects of God's character, but in the Bible justice and mercy are one and the same thing. This is clear throughout the prophets (*see Isaiah 1.17, Jeremiah 21.12, Zechariah 7.9*) and it is very clear in Psalm 72's portrait of the ideal King:-

The writer (perhaps David himself?) begins by praying

*Endow the king with your justice, O God, the royal son with your righteousness.
May he judge your people in righteousness, your afflicted ones with justice.*

He goes on to prophesy that this ideal King will:-

- Bring prosperity
- Defend the afflicted
- Save the children of the needy
- Endure for ever (v5)

¹ This explanation of the Biblical meaning of justice comes from Derek Flood's paper *Understanding the Cross: Penal Substitution vs Christus Victor* which can be found at <http://sharktacos.com/God/>



- Nurture and nourish his people (especially the most vulnerable)
- Bring peace
- Treat every life as precious
- Restore the reign of God in the hearts of all people

This is a very different and positive definition of King, but who can reach this standard?

John 18 The conversation with Pilate

This brings us to Jesus's conversation with Pilate...

P: Are you the King of the Jews?

(Jesus must answer truthfully, but this depends on what Pilate means by his question)

J: Is that your question or someone else's?

(If it is Pilate's question it means 'are you a rival to Rome?' If it is the Priests' question it means 'are you claiming to be the Messiah?')

P: Am I a Jew? Your own people handed you over to me. What is it you have done?

(Jesus understands the Jews are trying to persuade Pilate that he is a political threat)

J: My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.

P: You are a King then!

J: Yes, but not the kind of King you are thinking of. Members of my kingdom are people who seek truth. People who want to find God instead of running away from him and following mere men. These seekers of truth, when they hear my voice will recognise it and listen and be obedient.

P: What is truth?

In the end, Pilate chose not to be a seeker of truth and a subject of Jesus. Jesus was executed and raised back to life, proving he is the TRUE KING.

Not a fake. Not a despot.

Jesus is the Saviour, healer and restorer. He is the hope of all people, especially the enslaved and others who are at the bottom of the pile in human society. He is the bringer of JUSTICE.

Two final illustrations to help us think about what this means for us:-

1. Chess

In chess, the King is the most important and valuable piece. He cannot be taken and the opponent's aim is to trap the King in 'checkmate' so that he can no longer move. At the start of the game the King is in a position where he can't move unless at least one of his other pieces moves first. In fact for the King to defeat his opponent he needs all of his pieces to be working to the best of their



individual capability, each piece unselfishly moving in harmony with the others, and with awareness of the enemy's strategy, to achieve the greater good, the victory of the King.

2. Robin Hood

The legend tells how Robin Hood and his merry men live under the oppressive rule of the false King (John), "but they can laugh merrily because they know that the present system is not the last word. They know that the true King (Richard) is coming, and that things will one day be different. From time to time they remind the false powers that their rule is temporary and bogus, by acts of rebellion that recall the true King. They also whisper around the good news that things don't have to be like this. The King is coming, in fact he has already landed, and others can begin to live joyfully in the light of this coming Kingdom as well."²

There is another King, whose coronation didn't take place on a throne, but on a cross. A King whose justice is expressed not in punishment but in mercy. A King whose yoke is easy and whose burden is light. May we, his loyal subjects, seek and serve him with joy, until he returns to make all things new.

² Graham Tomlin *The Provocative Church* (SPCK 2002)