

The Paradox of Royalty

November 2021

Today is the last Sunday of the Christian year before we move into Advent and a time of awaiting the coming of the Christ Child. This Sunday is given the title “Christ the King Sunday” or “The Reign of Christ Sunday” when we think about what it means to call Christ “The King of Kings”

In this world of republics, it is interesting to note how many countries still have a royal monarchy who are loved and respected. According to Google there are 28 countries including Britain, Denmark, Sweden, Netherlands, Japan, Norway, Jordan, Luxembourg, Cambodia, Malaysia, Belgium, Spain, Tonga and the United Arab Emirates.

And as we look back over the pages of the Bible and over the stretch of time in history we see all sorts of kings – some unbelievably bad and evil and some upright, noble and sincerely trying to do the right thing for his or her people.

And there is one common factor with all of these, even the righteous ones – they were human. In one way or another they all displayed human characteristics and were fallible. Unfortunately, Some let the power go to their heads and became totally self-serving despots.

There is a paradox that comes with being a monarch.

If we look up the dictionary for the definition of “paradox” we find the following

“A statement or situation that seems to say opposite things and yet is perhaps true – a person or thing having qualities that seem to be opposite.”

And so we come to the paradox of royalty.

On the one hand a monarch need to be removed from the hurly burly and argy bargo of politics, and the daily thrust and parry of party versus party, of one pressure group against another. A monarch needs to be removed from all of this and not seen to be partisan in any way towards any political cause. He or she needs to be above all of this!

Yet on the other hand they need to be in touch with the people. To be one of them. To feel for them and understand their needs problems and worries. To be approachable. To listen to them.

A monarch should not be removed and yet he or she needs to be removed somewhat. Here is the paradox!

To be removed and yet not to be removed. To be distant and yet to be close.

Jesus was certainly one of the crowd. He related to them and they flocked after him. He reached down to the women who had no status, the poor and the dispossessed, the lame, the blind and deaf, the lepers, the hated Samaritans and even the despised tax collectors. He was accused of eating and drinking with “sinners” and he had no time at all for the scribes and pharisees who saw themselves as very much removed and above the common populace.

Jesus was so close to the crowd that he was arrested for insurrection and subversion, tried and hung on a cross because he lived to show his friends the one and only true God; not the pumped up religiosity of the Scribes and Pharisees nor the cold hard might of Caesar and the Roman Empire.

And so, because of all this, he was mocked and ridiculed – made to wear a crown of ugly thorns which pierced the skin and made him bleed profusely. Because of this he was crucified in place of Barabbas a murderer and hung between two thieves on a stark and very bleak cross on Calvary.

Indeed, Jesus was very much one of us!

In the intriguing interview, we read in John’s Gospel, Pontius Pilate asks of Jesus “You are a King then?”

Jesus replies

“You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born and for this I came into the world to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me”

Pilate has never met anyone quite like Jesus of Nazareth. He knew about kings, some powerful, some brutal, (Pilate himself was very brutal) some building their empires and kingdoms at all costs. But he has never met anyone quite like Jesus of Nazareth. Pilate is not quite sure who is in charge but he senses that Christ is indeed a King. In a final acknowledgement he puts a notice on the cross Jesus of Nazareth – King of the Jews. When goaded to replace it with “He said he was the king of the Jews” Pilate stuck to his guns.

But Pilate didn’t get that quite right! He is not just King of the Jews but he is King of all Kings and of all people. Because he lived and died we can come to know God with an intimacy never before imagined.

Many say that Christ was just a very good man; a seer, a prophet – rather like Ghandi, Confucius or Buddha. That would be comfortable and not too confronting!

He certainly was “one of us” and experienced all the triumphs and tragedies of daily living that we know so well.

But everything inside me cries out “But wait, there is more, much more”. There was something very very unique about that strange Galilean – the likes of whom we have never seen before or since.

And the Bible won’t let me leave it there either for I read in its pages a message that is quite confronting. A claim I can hardly ignore, a claim I need to deal with!

So we read in Matthew,

The high priest said to him “I charge you under oath by the living God tell us if you are the Christ – the Son of God”

“Yes it is as you say” Jesus replied, “But I say to you all: in the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven”

And there are endless references in the letters of Paul such as in Philipians

“Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave him the name above every name – that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord”.

And in Colossians

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation”

And so the Son of Man is also the Son of God – the only begotten Son of God as the Creed says. If I make a chair or table or a patchwork quilt it is not of the same stuff as I am – it is wood or metal or fabric or whatever. But if I beget a child, he or she is of the same flesh and blood, the same genes, many of the same characteristics – the same essence. The Bible tells me that Christ was of the same essence as God Himself – One with the Father – Son of God.

- If this is so and the power of almighty God was flowing into the life of Christ and resonating with him, it is not surprising that unusual, wonderful and surprising things happened when Christ was around. Wonders and signs that we call miracles.
- If this is so we have a wonderful opportunity of coming to know Almighty God through Christ. Christ gives us a picture of God in focus, in human terms, just like the lens of a camera can focus an image of the grandeur of nature onto a film. Within the limitations of being restricted to a flat piece of plastic, this image can convey truthfully the glories and awesome wonders of nature. Within the limitations of being human, Christ conveys to us the glory, majesty and awesome wonder of Almighty God.
- If this is so then, as the Bible says, Christ will have a very special place in eternity and in rising above death on that first Easter morn he is alive, now and forever.
- If this is so, I can believe his promises and know that this life - these few meagre days – some 25 thousand of them – is not all there is. There is the glory of eternity also awaiting us and he has prepared a special place for us.
- If this is so I should fall on my knees and worship him for he is indeed King. Nothing else can be as important – nothing!
- For he can put me in touch with my inner self – the real me!
- And he can put me in touch with Almighty God

Although reigning in the heights of heaven amazingly he continues to be close to us in so many ways.

He is not remote and can be our constant companion day by day. Because he knows what it is to be human, he understands disappointment loneliness,

frustration and all the things that can drag us down – but also the joy of loving, sharing, caring celebrating and creating; all the things that can be uplifting.

He can lift our spirits because his gospel tells us that we are important. No matter how small we feel, no matter how we may have screwed our lives up, no matter how shattered we might feel due to crippling circumstances he is there to tell us that God loves us with an individual love; as if we were the only ones in the entire world to love. That can lift us up and give us new esteem.

So we see the paradox in action in the life of Christ. There are indeed two crowns; a crown of thorns and a royal diadem as we sing in the hymn

All hail the power of Jesus' name
Let angels prostrate fall,
Bring forth the royal diadem
And crown him Lord of all.

Amen

“When I Think of a King”

When I think of a king, I think of one born
With luxury found everywhere
But my Saviour's bed
Was in just a cow-shed
That was crude and dirty and bare

When I think of a king I think of a monarch
Who resides in a palace – in state.
But Christ was to roam
Without palace nor home,
Nor any of the things of the great.

When I think of a king, I think of someone

Who wields authority and power from above.

But my King kneels low

So that all can know,

Another power – the power of love.

When I think of a king, I see someone grand

In front of a vast cheering crowd.

But rather than cheer,

They surged forward to jeer

My Christ who was stumbling and bowed.

When I think of a king I see one who is proud,

Riding high on a prancing white steed,

But though it seems crass,

My King rode an ass,

And stooped down to all those in need.

When I think of a king I think of a crown,

Glorious and rich to behold,

But my King was born

To a crown of sharp thorn,

Instead of the jewels and gold.

And yet I am told that this same Jesus Christ
Has authority over all things.
The whole of the world,
And the universe unfurled.
He is King over all other kings.

And so I am faced with this power of love,
In Christ it's a love we can know.
But I'm still at a loss
When I see Christ on a cross,
And find out just how far love can go!

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