

Daniel 7: 9,10,13,14 John 18: 33 – 37 Revelation 1: 4b - 8

Today we celebrate the feast of Christ the King. As a celebration it's actually very new – it began in the Roman Catholic church just under 100 years ago; and it became a special day in our church calendar about fifty years ago. It's the last Sunday in the church's year – the Sunday next before Advent. And some of you will remember it as it used to be known - Stir up Sunday.

But what does it mean for us to celebrate Christ as King? Is this a step forward or a step back? Well, let's have a look at these three passages from the Bible.

I begin with the reading from the book of Daniel and I begin with a confession. As an evangelical I have always held that Daniel was written by Daniel during the time of the exile in Babylon, around 500 years before Christ, and that it gives an historical account of events that happened when the people of Judah were living in exile there. It begins with stories about Daniel and his three friends and how they were faithful to God when the pagan power of Babylon tried to force them into compromise. But it seems that there are historical mistakes in Daniel which raise questions about when it was written. And there is a focus on faithfulness in the face of pagan power which fits very well with a time three hundred years later.

So we fast forward 300 years to around 200 BC. The Middle East is dominated by the Greeks who inherited, and divided and fought over the world empire built by Alexander the Great in less than 13 years. But unlike the Persian rulers before them the Greeks wanted their subjects, soul and body; they wanted converts, copies of themselves. They spread Greek culture, they built Greek cities, founded Greek

communities, Greek gymnasiums, played Greek games, Greek thinking, Greek materialism. They had no regard for this God of the Jews. In some ways you can see this culture reflected in Britain today. Many compromised, many are attracted by a different way of thinking; a different, even an enjoyable way of living. God has no place in their lives or their thinking.

And so, there was conflict, not just between the Jews and the ruling Greeks, but within God's people, between those Jews who went over to the Greek way of life, and the fundamentalists who stood firm.

Around 175 BC a Greek king named Antiochus Epiphanes came to power in Palestine. He made it his mission to exterminate worship of God; and if necessary to exterminate any Jews who refused to submit to Greek culture and Greek religion. The Jewish people faced a persecution that was like nothing they had experienced before, or since, until Nazi Germany. The persecution came from Greek culture. It was violent. It had a clear intent – to utterly destroy the Jewish religion, the worship of Yahweh, God Almighty. The temple in Jerusalem was desecrated, a pagan image set up in the Holy of Holies. Jews were forced to eat pork, to bow before pagan images. Many were killed. Mercifully this persecution only lasted just a few short years.

Daniel speaks very powerfully to the Jewish people in the face of this intense suffering and confusion with the message – put your trust in God, and pray; keep the faith, and pray. God is the Lord of history. God is in control. That is the message of Daniel's vision – God is all powerful, God is in control, His kingdom is powerful, his saving help is near. And we see in Daniel's vision a picture of one like the Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven. This is the first time that the kingdom of heaven comes into Scripture. And who is this son of man who approaches the Ancient of Days?

Let's move on to that short extract from the trial of Jesus before Pilate. Pilate asks, 'Are you the king of the Jews?' Again we see secular power with total authority over life and death; at least that's what it looks like. But Jesus has already made his identity clear. The son of man came not to be served but to serve and to give His life... And from the book of Daniel "... and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven." Before Pilate Jesus is king, Christ is king. But His kingdom is not of this world.

The Jews in Jesus' day were looking for a Saviour; longing to see God break into history; to establish His rule. Yet they were looking in the wrong direction. They were looking for a divine lightning bolt; for God to send his angels to break into this world in overwhelming power; to bring the powers of this world to their knees. In the passage from Revelation chapter 1 we see the vision of Daniel reflected and applied directly to Jesus. Again the church seems caught in a trap – compromise and apostasy on one side; state persecution on the other. And John longs to see Jesus coming to fulfil that picture from Daniel – everyone will see, everyone will know. God breaking into history.

Fast forward 1920 years – where are we now? What do we know of Christ the king? My kingdom is not of this world. What of John's vision in revelation? Jesus is king. Jesus has been given all power. But the son of man came not to be served but to serve. What would happen if Jesus came literally in the clouds today? I enjoyed a beautiful view of the sun coming through the clouds on Tuesday morning. But how many others caught that view?

How will the eyes of the world see that Jesus is king? They desperately need to see Jesus in you and me. Jesus, as my Lord. Jesus, my king. What does that mean about the way that I live my life? Does that mean that Jesus has first call on me? Or is He an optional extra in my

life, just for occasional Sundays? What about first call on my love? On my loyalty? first call on my body? first call on my mind? first call on my soul? first call on my time? First call on my possessions and my money? My speaking and my thinking? What does it mean for me to acknowledge Christ as King?

If I think about a literal reading of John's vision in Revelation, of Jesus coming in the clouds of Heaven, how will every eye see Him. When Jesus returns it must be something far beyond anything we can even begin to imagine. John, and the many who have gone before us, although they longed for it, did not see it. Yet how many are the eyes that have seen Jesus in those who call Him king?

What about eyes that see you or me? How many eyes can see Jesus in you or me? And how many can be touched by Jesus through you or me; and through our brothers and sisters around this small globe? Jesus says very plainly, 'The son of man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many.' His kingdom is in this world, in you and me. But it is not of this world.

Christ our King has ransomed us by his blood. We are a part of his kingdom. What does it mean for you and me to own Him as our king? May every eye who sees us see something of Jesus; and may they know that He is King, and that His blood was shed for them.

So as I finish let's go back to Stir Up Sunday; and let's pray together the special prayer for stir up Sunday with just two extra words added at the end: **"STIR up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people; that they, plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works, may of thee be plenteously rewarded; through Jesus Christ our Lord and King. Amen."**