

Jesus as King

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[0 : 0 0] Thanks very much, Ross. And it'll be worth keeping that passage open in front of you as we look through it this morning. The three offices of Jesus, prophet, priest, and king, that's what we've been looking at in the run-up to Christmas over the last few weeks, these December Sundays, these roles that Jesus came to take on and to fulfil as the anointed Christ who came that first Christmas. And we're at the third and final stage of that this morning, looking at Jesus as king. And as we draw close to Christmas, just eight days, eight days in case you needed reminding of that, this is probably, I would say, fair to say the title of Jesus that we hear the most about. We've already sung, joy to the world, the Lord has come, let earth receive her king. Hark the herald angels sing, glory to the newborn king. Or angels from the realm of glory with its chorus, come and worship, worship Christ, the newborn king. And I'm sure there's others as well. So plenty in the carols about Christmas being all about the coming of the king. And really that is very appropriate. That follows the biblical pattern. Because actually so much of the Old Testament, that's the part of the

Bible written before Jesus, is about the role of a king. And more and more and more, the anticipation of the true king, of the ultimate king to come. And that is what our passage is about that we're looking at this morning from the prophet Isaiah. A really well-known Christmas passage, a great passage to look at this with kind of Christmas just a week away. But written hundreds of years in advance of the first Christmas, and yet looking forward and all about this king who is to come. The one who, as it says in verse 7, will sit on the throne of David. David, the great king of the Old Testament. And the one who will come and sit on his throne and rule over a perfect, eternal kingdom. This passage is all about that king, Jesus himself, who comes as that king. Jesus, who in the very first verse of the New Testament, Matthew chapter 1, verse 1, is introduced as the son, the descendant, the heir of David, and to his throne. And so all about Jesus, the king, this morning. Now if you're sitting here, and politically, the idea of a king is not something that that thrills you, if you're one of the people in this church who are not going home to kind of posters of Charles III on your wall, that's okay. I know some people who could sort you out with some of those. But no, the whole point of what we are looking at here is that we're not going to be speaking about a political king. We want to see we're speaking about something far bigger and far greater and far better than that when we look at Jesus, the king. So what does it mean then? What does it mean that Jesus is king? What does Jesus do as king? We're going to look through that in kind of three stages, three things here promised by Isaiah, and then we'll look into the life and the ministry and the words of Jesus to see them fleshed out and fulfilled, and why this gives us so much reason to celebrate the arrival of Jesus as king at Christmas. So first off is this, Jesus is the king who brings joy in the darkness. The king who brings joy in the darkness. There is a reason, isn't there, why these are popular, why these are great verses that are so often read at Christmas. There's a real majesty to them. There's a real beauty to them, and there is this real joy to them, isn't there?

And that joy is made all the starker, that joy is made all the brighter by the darkness that this chapter doesn't try and hide away from or deny. These verses don't read, do they, saying, well, everything was fine, and then a king will come just kind of as the cherry on top. I know these are verses, which as we read, they begin speaking about anguish, about contempt, about darkness.

And straight away, one of the greatest things about the Christian message, the message of the gospel, and perhaps it comes into focus even more around Christmas time, as Ross was just mentioning in his prayer there. One of the things that is so unique about the gospel is that we don't need to choose a kind of an unrealistic happiness that bears no resemblance to real life on one hand, or a kind of dark and cynical approach to life which offers no hope and doesn't risk getting excited about anything on the other. Instead, the Bible offers us this brutally realistic picture of life, the suffering that comes, the sinfulness of the human heart, ours and other people's, the pain that brings. The Bible is realistic about all of that, and yet it also promises and encourages us to dare to hope for joy in the midst of that. It says there can still be joy, there can still be rejoicing. That's the incredible and unique message of the Christian gospel, joy even in the darkness. And how does that happen? Well, we see here, don't we, in this passage, it happens through the King. And that joy comes because a King comes. Now we're going to see then specifically two things here that this promised King will do, that Isaiah speaks about, that Jesus does, that are laid out in these verses. But it's good, first of all, to just focus on the result of these. Or that through them, God is promising joy to his people. Joy, even though things can be tough.

And I think that's such a good place for us to start with this passage. It's a good thing to lay out, such a good thing to keep at the front of our minds at Christmas. And particularly as we approach the end of the year. If it feels like joy isn't something that you feel is possible, perhaps that this year has been too hard, that the disappointments have been too many, or that the hurt has been too deep. Great to see in this passage that Jesus comes as the King, not to a perfect world, not to those who have everything sorted and saying, here is your joy as a reward. But Jesus is the King who comes into the darkness, to shine light, to increase joy in the midst of the hardship of that life. Jesus promises those great words in John's Gospel, chapter 10, verse 10, I have come, that they might have life and have it abundantly. Jesus comes promising joy as the true King that the whole of the Bible has been leading towards. The good news that the King of God's kingdom has arrived. So then let's look, carry on, at the two kind of main elements, I suppose, that Isaiah lays out of what it means for Jesus to be the King.

[7 : 18] And in each time, through that, why that means he's a King who brings joy. Well, number one, we see here it is because Jesus is the King who defeats our enemies. We're looking here at verses 4 and 5 now, the King who defeats our enemies. Just listen to kind of the military language in these verses.

For the yoke of his burden and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire. These tend to be the verses where when people are reading this passage around Christmas, we just sort of speed up ever so slightly. You know, we like the light coming into the darkness. We like verse 6, for unto us a child is born. And we just kind of accelerate slightly through this bit with the blood and the battle tumult in the middle. Although Ross didn't do that, so that's good. But these are the bits, sometimes we're not quite sure what to do with these verses. Why are they in the middle of this lovely Christmassy passage? And yet actually, these verses are of key importance. These verses do contain that military language, that battle talk.

You know, not because we're kind of moving between metaphors, either a king or a warrior, but because Isaiah is speaking about a warrior king. In the time Isaiah was written, one of the key things that the king did was fight your battles for you. That's not really the same now, is it? I wouldn't be particularly confident sending out kind of King Charles for a fight anywhere. I didn't fancy his chances. But when Isaiah was written, that was the kind of expectation of the kings. You wanted a strong king. You wanted a king who would fight for you. You wanted a king who was able to win those battles that you couldn't win. And here we see Jesus, this warrior king who wins, the king who defeats our enemies. The picture in Isaiah is of a people under oppression. It links back to the people's slavery in Egypt at the start of Exodus. It specifically mentions as well that the day of Midian, from God's people being an occupied people back in the book of Judges.

And it's saying that just like in those times, once again, the enemy will be defeated. That rod of the oppressor broken by this king who's going to come. It says, therefore, all this apparatus of war can be burnt, disposed of because it's no longer needed, because the king has won the victory. This promised king, this king to come that Isaiah is speaking about, is the king who defeats our enemies. And that is what Jesus came to do. Jesus came as God's king.

He came to win this victory. And what's fascinating how when we turn to the gospels in the New Testament, people both kind of got that, and yet also they kind of missed the point at the same time.

[10 : 35] In John's gospel, after the feeding of the 5,000, it says this, perceiving then that they were about to come and take him, that's Jesus, take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself. And we might wonder, well, why doesn't Jesus want them to make him king? Isn't that why he came?

Isn't that what we're talking about? Well, it's because at this point, the people still don't understand the enemy that Jesus has come to defeat. The people are wanting to make him king in order that he could be this political ruler who will deal with the Romans. The people are still wanting this political liberation. And yet the rest of the gospel accounts, the rest of the New Testament make it so clear that that was not the victory that Jesus came to win. We see where Jesus' focus is, and actually his whole life is fixed upon, his focus is the cross. And it's actually at the cross where we get perhaps the strongest concentration of the kingly language and picture around Jesus. Later on in John's gospel, we're told that the Roman soldiers right before the cross staged this kind of mock coronation of Jesus, a purple cloak, a crown of thorns, and they salute him, hail king of the Jews. He's crucified under a plaque that reads, Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews. And of course, it's all supposed to be ironic.

It's supposed to be mocking Jesus in defeat. He said he's a king. Well, look at him now. And yet actually, the real irony is that it's the cross where Jesus' kingship is ultimately displayed.

As it is at the cross where he wins the victory and defeats our ultimate enemy of sin and death, because there he pays the penalty for our sin. And there he dies in our place.

And three days later, rises again the proof, the evidence of his victory. Jesus the king defeats our enemies. He wins the battle that we were unable to win by defeating sin for us.

[12 : 59] The Bible speaks about us being slaves to sin. But Jesus brings that liberation. Paul, in his letter to the Colossians, writes about how God disarmed the rulers and authorities, and speaking there about the spiritual realm, the reality of evil and sin, which in our natural state has this hold over us and our world.

But it says God disarmed them and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in him. That is, in Jesus Christ, the king on the cross.

Jesus, as our king, has done what we cannot do through the cross. He's defeated our ultimate enemy of sin and death. We have no greater need.

And Jesus has fulfilled that need as king to make forgiveness possible. And it is important that we remember that. And again, this is one of these things that can feel like the basics, but it is actually the fundamentals that we never move beyond.

It's so important that we remember that that is our greatest need. And that is why Jesus came. Because actually, it's easy for us to be like the people of Jesus' day, where, yeah, we accept Jesus as king, but we want him to be a king like this.

[14 : 13] Or we want him to be a king who will do that for us. And we think, well, this is the victory we really need from Jesus. We want him to be the king who will give us the victory of good health. Or the king who will win the victory to make an easy life for us.

Or the king who will shape my life and my situation just the way I would like it to be. And yet Jesus is clear. The Bible is clear.

The victory Jesus came to win was a far greater victory. And was a far greater need. The eternal victory over sin and death itself.

That he has done that. That the resurrection is the proof of that. That he is the victor. And because he has won, people can celebrate. Because he has won, his people are freed from the consequences of sin, of death, of separation from God.

That is why there is joy. That is why there is rejoicing. Because of what Jesus, the king, has done. And that means that if Jesus is king, then what is our response?

[15 : 16] Well, our response there is to trust in him. That we would trust Jesus, the king, as our savior. That we would accept that victory that he has won.

That we can't win ourselves. That we can't undo the things we've done wrong. We need Jesus to do that in our place. And we trust in his victory, which is sufficient for us now and forever for our forgiveness.

Jesus is the king who defeats our enemies. And so we trust in him. And we can have that joy, even in the darkness, that Isaiah promises. So there is the first part of this king's role that Isaiah kind of highlights in these verses.

That we see fulfilled in Jesus, the true king. His victory over our enemies. That ultimate enemy of sin and death. Well then the second aspect we found here, verses 6 and 7.

And here we see the king who rules his people. Having defeated our enemies, the king now rules. And actually this is perhaps a bit of a challenge for us.

[16 : 21] If we stop and we think about it. As western people in the culture we live in, we are suspicious of people ruling over us. There was an Ipsos poll this year that reported that trust in politicians has fallen to its lowest level in 40 years.

You might ask what happened 40 years ago. Well that is when the polls began 40 years ago. So the lowest levels there have been. And I'm sure there's plenty of good reasons behind that.

But broader than that as well, we live in a world where our individuality is emphasized. Where the world says, you know, we don't want people to rule over us.

We want to be free to do whatever we want to do. Certainly the idea of a religious authority. Where God is not just there as a helper or a friend.

But where God is there as a king who rules. That is a challenging concept for us. That is not what people, that is not what we necessarily think that we're looking for.

[17 : 26] But remember what we've been saying here. Isaiah is writing here that this is a king who brings joy. And maybe that's an easier fact for us to grasp with a king who defeats our enemies.

We get it. A king who brings freedom, release. We celebrate that. But what about one who having done that then comes to rule over us? How does that bring joy?

Well let me read those verses again. Verses 6 and 7. The last two verses of our passage. This is all about Jesus ruling from the throne. And yet just take in as we look through these words.

What an incredible picture it paints. What an attractive picture it paints. For to us a child is born. To us a son is given. And the government shall be upon his shoulder.

And his name shall be called. Wonderful Counselor. Mighty God. Everlasting Father. Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace. There will be no end.

[18 : 27] On the throne of David and over his kingdom. To establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness. From this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

You see the Bible's answer to suspicion of rule over us. Or the Bible's answer even to real time where there has been abusive rule over us or others.

The Bible's answer is not no rule. The Bible's answer is always this perfect rule. And we hear that note ringing throughout those verses, don't we?

A rule that brings perfect peace. A rule that upholds justice. A rule of righteousness. A rule that is eternal. A rule achieved by God himself.

A rule of righteousness. This incredible promise. A declaration that this son given. Ultimately this baby born. That that first Christmas will be a king.

[19 : 29] Who will sit on the throne. And that is good news. That will bring in a perfect future. Again, that's why the Old Testament is looking forward to this king so much.

They had plenty of bad kings. And yet they knew that the solution was the perfect king to come. the king of God's kingdom, the one who will bring in God's rule and the perfection that has been promised. And Jesus then arrives. And as we've seen in the last couple of weeks, his first words in Mark's gospel, the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand. The son of David has come. The king is there. And it is this privilege then, knowing the goodness of his rule, to be able to submit to that king and through that to find our place in his kingdom. Jesus as king is our savior. That means we trust in him as he rescues us by defeating our enemies. But Jesus as king is also our Lord. That means submitting to him in every aspect of life. And that we cannot have Jesus as our savior without also then having him as our Lord. And what does that look like? Well, God has told us how we're to live in his word. The Bible, hasn't he? The Bible is the words of the king for us to submit to his royal charter, as it were. Not to be taken lightly, not to pick and choose the bits or the parts we agree with or that fit around our lives. But also to accept the bits that are hard for us to grasp or that challenge us or that cause us to reshape our lives and our priorities and make tough decisions. We thought of one example earlier for those with children, to bring them up knowing the Lord, saturated in scripture, knowing that following Jesus, having him as their king is the most important thing in their lives. The Bible doesn't just present that as a parenting tip.

That's the instruction from the king into what our primary responsibility is if he's given us that role of parents. Another example could be Jesus' command to love our neighbors as ourselves.

With that explanation then Jesus gives that our neighbors include those who are very different from us as well as those that we know well. That they include those who have wronged us as well as those we find easy to love. And again, Jesus doesn't just give that simply as advice, but he speaks those words as the king. He sends us out saying, that's how the people of my kingdom live. That is what it means to submit to me as king, to love others as yourself.

That is the law of the land as it were, for those who are Jesus' people, for those who are part of God's kingdom. And it's good not to duck that challenge here. Living with Jesus as king in every area of our lives is challenging. It involves tough decisions. It means we stick out because we have a different ultimate authority than the world around us. But again, that's why it's so important that we remember this is the same king who came to save us. This is the king who died in our place to defeat our enemies that he might be our savior. This is not a hard taskmaster, but this is a loving king with a loving rule for our joy. That actually we get to be his people through what he has done. That great privilege of living that hour in every aspect of life, not to earn his favor and not to earn our place, but because he has won it for us. Jesus is the king who rules his people. And so we are able to, and we're called to joyfully submit to him. But lastly, just as we come into finish, we also see in this passage of Isaiah that it's much bigger than Jesus just ruling over us as individuals, isn't it?

[23 : 48] Jesus as king means being king, being lord over our lives, but he also comes as lord over all things. As it says there in verse 7, of the increase of his government and of peace, there will be no end.

Jesus arrives as this universal king, bringing not just a few of us, not just his gathered people under his rule, but also looking ahead to Jesus reigning over all things for all time, from this time forth and forevermore. Really the point is this, that as we follow Jesus as king now, even though that can be challenging, even though that can make us stick out, even though that can be different from the world around us. But as we do that now, we are living in anticipation of the time when his perfect rule over all things will be recognized by everyone and everything. Christmas is exciting. Christmas brings joy because God has sent his king. Jesus has come. And one day Jesus will return and bring in the fullness of that perfect kingdom once and for all. We don't experience perfect peace, perfect justice, perfect righteousness right now. Not in our own lives and not in the world that we live in.

And yet that is what is promised when Jesus returns. And that is our destination if we are his people and he is our king here and now. Again, Christianity is able to offer a more realistic view of the world than any other way of approaching our universe. It is brutally realistic about the challenges and yet still is able to offer a perfect hope in the midst of that because the king has come bringing light into the darkness. He's defeated our enemies through his sacrifice on the cross.

He rules over his people as we live for him, submit to him in his strength and for his glory. And we return to bring his perfect universal eternal rule that we live in anticipation of and are able to have joy because we are certain of. And that great news there in that final line of our passage. How do we know that? How can we be certain of that? How can we have that confidence?

Well, it's because it's not down to us. But as Isaiah promises, as God speaks through his prophet, the zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. God will fulfill his purposes for his glory, through his king, Jesus Christ, that we might have the joy and the relationship with him that we were made for.

[26 : 40] Let's pray together.