

Bible Tuesday for Christ the King Sunday, 2018

The Feast of Christ the King was instituted by Pope Pius the XI in 1925 in an effort to call Christians out of the secular world back into the world of the sacred. The Feast of Christ the King was moved to the last Sunday of the liturgical calendar in 1970. It is liturgically marvelous and apt to proclaim on the last Sunday of the church year that Jesus has the final word, that God always has been, is now, and always will be King.

Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14

As I watched,

thrones were set in place,

and an Ancient One* took his throne;

his clothing was white as snow,

and the hair of his head like pure wool;

his throne was fiery flames,

and its wheels were burning fire.

¹⁰ A stream of fire issued

and flowed out from his presence.

A thousand thousand served him,

and ten thousand times ten thousand stood attending him.

The court sat in judgement,

and the books were opened.

¹³ As I watched in the night visions,

I saw one like a human being*

coming with the clouds of heaven.

And he came to the Ancient One*

and was presented before him.

¹⁴ To him was given dominion

and glory and kingship,

that all peoples, nations, and languages

should serve him.

His dominion is an everlasting dominion

that shall not pass away,

and his kingship is one

that shall never be destroyed.

The prophecy of Daniel in this section is against the Babylonians, Medes, Persians, and Greeks, all middle eastern powers that ruled over Israel. This section of Daniel is a vision which he has during a night's sleep. The format of the vision copies the format of many middle eastern myths, where the head god holds court with great and lesser deities reporting to him. Daniel prophesies that Yahweh is this head God, with a human being or "Son of Man" being presented to God. That human being is rewarded with rule over all humanity forever. Jesus identifies himself as "Son of Man" in all four gospels and New Testament writers associated this passage of Daniel with Jesus.

Psalm 93

The Lord is king, he is robed in majesty;
the Lord is robed, he is girded with strength.
He has established the world; it shall never be moved;
² your throne is established from of old;
you are from everlasting.

³ The floods have lifted up, O Lord,
the floods have lifted up their voice;
the floods lift up their roaring.

⁴ More majestic than the thunders of mighty waters,
more majestic than the waves* of the sea,
majestic on high is the Lord!

⁵ Your decrees are very sure;
holiness befits your house,
O Lord, for evermore.

This psalm is a remake of a poem about Baal claiming his throne after he defeats the depths of seas. Throughout the Bible, we find pieces of sacred literature from other cults remade to sing Yahweh's praises. The psalm begins by stating that Yahweh is also king, king of all the deities of all religions. Yahweh is "robed" with royal robes. The psalmist acknowledges Yahweh is from everlasting to everlasting, eternal and beyond human comprehension. The psalmist sites creation and its activity as evidence of God's supremacy. God is so powerful and majestic that God has defeated the immense power of roaring crashing waves and tsunamis. Because Yahweh has defeated the powers of chaos and brought about creation, Yahweh declares His Law. God's Law is interpreted as a sure sign of God's divinity, as if the Law was a sign of perfect logic and justice, therefore must come from a god.

Revelation 1:4-8

John to the seven churches that are in Asia:

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, ⁵and 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, ⁶and made* us to be a kingdom, priests serving* his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

⁷ 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.

⁸ 'I am the Alpha and the Omega', says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

John of Patmos is writing to congregations to whom he ministered before being exiled to the island of Patmos. He chooses seven congregations to write to, because in Hebrew culture, seven is the number for fullness and completeness. In other words, John does not intend that this prophecy be restricted to these seven congregations, but rather that they share this is all congregations to whom John was known.

John refers to God many times in Revelation as “the one who is and who was and who is to come”. This is a title given to the Roman Caesars as a conference upon them of eternal divinity upon their coronation. John reclaims that title from human rulers to acclaim God, the only one whom it truly describes.

This passage is chosen for Christ the King Sunday because of its description of Jesus. Because God resurrected Jesus to eternal life, Jesus is proclaimed “the firstborn of the dead”. Paul’s letter to the congregation in Philippi quotes a very early Christian hymn which sings, “Jesus, who is equal with God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited but became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore... at the name of Jesus every knee should bend in heaven, on earth, and beneath the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God, the Father.” Here John of Patmos cites this same theme, proclaiming Jesus the ruler of the kings of the earth.

Because Jesus freed us by his sacrificial death, we are now all “priests” who serve Jesus. Here is one of the passages that Luther and Jon Huss used to develop the teaching of “priesthood of all believers.”

“He is coming on he clouds...” – It was Hebrew tradition that just as Elijah left the earth in a fiery chariot, (aka a fiery red sunset or fiery red sky), that God’s agent would return to earth on the Last Day, or Day of the Lord, on the clouds. Here God’s agent is identified as Jesus, since he is identified as “the one whom they pierced.” All the nations of the earth will wail because Jesus’ judgment will decry all faithless behavior and worshiping of false gods.

Alpha and Omega, the first and last letters of the Hebrew alphabet, signs of the beginning and the ending of all things.

John 18:33-37

Then Pilate entered the headquarters* again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, ‘Are you the King of the Jews?’³⁴ Jesus answered, ‘Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?’³⁵ 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?’³⁶ 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.’³⁷ 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.’ Pilate replied, “What is truth?”

This passage is from Jesus' trial before Pilate before being handed over for flogging, and ultimately, for crucifixion. In John's gospel, Jesus is presented in very kingly, in control, more God than human. In Mark, Jesus says almost nothing to Pilate. Here, Jesus debates with Pilate and challenges his authority. What Jesus makes clear in this interrogation is that Jesus is indeed a king, but that Jesus' kingdom is not on earth. Yet, when Pilate tries to pin Jesus down with, "You are a king then?", Jesus evades the question and preaches about being the good shepherd.

"Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." This is a continuation of a theme in John, that what makes a disciple is not that one is Jewish or that one follows the Law but rather that one believes what Jesus teaches and thereby believes "into" Jesus. Jesus alone speaks the truth because Jesus alone is straight from the Father and is indeed the Father. "I and the Father are one." "If you have seen me, you have seen the Father."

While the Jewish authorities who have handed Jesus over to be crucified are doing so because Jesus claims to be "Messiah", "Christ", "Son of Man", that is not what Pilate asks. Pilate asks, "Are you the king of the Jews?" If Jesus is King of the Jews, then he is an affront to Herod, who is not actually a Jew but rather an Edomite. The Roman Empire put Herod on his throne and has reason for him to stay there. Jesus' claim to be a king from another world could get him executed as a threat to Roman power. In the gospel of John, Jesus is eventually executed to satiate the Jewish authorities and prevent a riot in Jerusalem during Passover.

Pilate does not know the Father nor does Pilate know Jesus or believe Jesus' teachings, so Pilate does not recognize truth.