

# Advent of Christ's Reign

## Daniel 7:9-14; John 18:33-38; Revelation 1:4-8

Today is a special day as we participate in the baptism of one of our young people. We have celebrated that she has made Christ Jesus Lord of her life. It is fitting, that today is also set aside to celebrate Jesus Christ as King. This morning we heard a profession of faith in Christ. We witnessed baptism as a celebration of crowning Jesus Christ as Lord and King. Most gathered here have made that same profession of faith. We have followed our confessions with Baptism, but what difference has it made in our lives? How does confessing Christ as Lord and King set us apart on this side of eternity?

The apocalyptic language of Daniel's vision is strange to our ears. We are not used to theology wrapped in the guise of battles among mythical creatures that sound more like monsters than heavenly beings. Daniel's words sound at times grotesque, yet they refer to realities that are far from grotesque or mythical. Utilizing figurative visual symbols of his day, Daniel paints the picture of the supremacy of God's authority and the dawning reign of Messiah.

The picture here fails to capture the fullness of what that Messianic reign would be, for language always fails to express the fullness of reality. He paints a picture, however of the meaningful portion of Messiah's advent to a people suffering in exile. God would yet overthrow the power structure of their world to inaugurate the reign of one whose authority would never end. Far beyond the tumultuous political realities of intrigue, war, and grabs for power, the Son of Man's reign would be stable and lasting. While worldly rulers sought power for self, but the Son of Man would serve in humility.

Bob located missionaries in Mexico, having decided to leave the US for financial reasons. He showed up one day looking for a place to stay. Our colleagues took him in until they could find him a rental apartment that he could afford. Bob had severe problems, especially related to alcohol. He became very sick, immersed in despair and alcohol. Neighbors were complaining about the stench. When the landlord called for eviction, Bob could not get out of bed. I was called to help. While I disinfected the apartment, showered, and dressed Bob, neighbors watched from safety. Without help, Bob would have died in bed. Claiming Christ as King required meeting Bob's needs as Jesus would also have done. Do we allow self get in the way of serving Christ Jesus?

Pilate's dialogue with Jesus contains more questions than answers. At the end of the dialogue, however, Pilate understood what the disciples had not fully grasped. Jesus' kingship would not follow the patterns of power in the political world. Jesus' claim of kingship demanded a response, but not the kind of response evident in human power struggles. That was Rome's concern. Would this Jesus be a threat to Roman political domination? With that question settled, Pilate had no more concern over Jesus. That is precisely, however, where his concern should have begun. Knowing that Jesus as King desires our full allegiance, what do we do with him? Do our lives reflect Jesus as King and Lord?

Angel accepted Christ at Vacation Bible School. He brought his sisters to church, then his mother. His father was a bigger battle, but Angel worked on him until he came as well. Angel's grandparents were against his involvement with these Baptists. They told him that he needed to choose between Jesus and themselves. Angel reported that Jesus had died for him and saved him. He loved his grandparents, but if he had to choose between them, he would choose Jesus. At 7, Angel understood the Lordship of Christ. What would others see by looking at me?

I was asked to teach the Book of Revelation at a church in Porto Alegre. I didn't really want to. I had grown up hearing all sorts of wild ideas regarding this book and did not want to have to deal with all the hype and hoopla of unwarranted speculation about issues with no bearing on living a faithful Christian witness. When I began preparing and studying for the class, however, I found message of significance I had never before encountered.

John wrote to believers under persecution. They were living in a context that made faith in Christ a difficult reality before legal claims over their allegiance, worship, and actions. The Jerusalem temple had been destroyed, and with it the agreement whereby Jews were exempt from offering sacrifices to Cesar in lieu of sacrifice on behalf of Cesar. Failing to offer sacrifice to an effigy of Cesar was deemed an act of treason. The state required participation in the cultic rituals as a matter of imperial security. For believers, such was idolatry and a betrayal of their faith in Christ Jesus. Claiming the Lordship of Jesus Christ meant standing against the demands of state, laying their lives on the line.

John begins his missive to believers facing questions of integrity in their faith with a reminder of the true character of Christ's sovereignty. This was a reminder that faith was not to be overcome by fear of physical power over the body. Faith is about allegiance to the eternal lordship of Jesus Christ. Our response to accepting Christ as Lord and King must recall what Christ has already done on our behalf. We claim that Christ died to grant us life through eternity. John says it should not matter that we die to profess allegiance to Christ as Lord and King. What allegiance can compete with Christ as King?

In John's context, perhaps it was a simpler thing to understand the cost of discipleship and the meaning of claiming the Lordship of Christ Jesus. John wrote as though these were black-and-white issues. Either one accepted Christ Jesus as one's only Lord, or one rejected him. Either one was faithful, or one was unfaithful. Either one joined the faithful witnesses of Christ Jesus, or one worked against the true Lord and King of the Universe. There were others voices than John's, however.

There were more moderate approaches to faith. Some suggested one go through the motions of sacrifice to Cesar to satisfy the political powers. Some suggested pretending not to be a believer, for Rome just did not understand the real issues or the character of the Lordship of Christ. John's response was perhaps too simplistic for many. He said either we stand with Christ in integrity regardless of the consequences, or we are effectively denying him. This response was not a pleasurable course of action. It could get one killed, and did. It sent John to exile. It made him live to a different beat. Does my life profess a difference due to the faith I claim?

Daniel's words looked forward to the coming reign of Christ. Jesus' words to Pilate looked ahead to a fullness of his reign the disciples did not yet comprehend. John's words look beyond the bounds of this world to the spiritual reality of Jesus' identity. We are preparing to enter the season of Advent—a time of anticipating Jesus' coming. Will we prepare our lives for Christ to fully receive Jesus as Lord, King, and Savior?

We call Jesus Lord and King. We profess faith in Christ. We crown him sovereign in words and worship. Beyond our worship routines, however, what would making Christ Lord of our lives look like? Are we willing to give our all in order that Christ Jesus might live through us without reservation? If we are servants of the King, we are to live as Jesus himself, giving all that others might live.

—*Christopher B. Harbin*