

Not of This World

By Linda Rex

November 24, 2024, Christ the King / After Pentecost—On this Sunday we reach the culmination of the events of the Christian calendar. We celebrate the sovereign reign of our Lord Jesus Christ. Here, on this day, we recognize that Jesus Christ is Lord of all, and reigns now and forever as king of kings and lord of lords. But what does that mean for those of us who live here on earth? How does the spiritual reality of the reign of Jesus Christ as Lord over all impact our everyday lives?

In the Gospel passage for this Sunday, we see Jesus being interrogated by Pilate, who is asking him, “Are you the king of the Jews?” Jesus explains that his kingdom is not of this world, because if it was, his servants would be fighting on his behalf. He is a king, he tells Pilate, born for this very reason, to testify to the truth (John 18:33–37). Even though Pilate has no interest in the truth it seems, he later attempted to free Jesus, believing he was innocent of the charges against him. But ultimately his loyalty to his own political agenda and to Rome won out, and Jesus was crucified.

What the ancient Jews at that time did not realize was that they were participating in the execution, the crucifixion, of the One who would be “the firstborn from the dead.” Jesus, as God in human flesh, would be crucified, buried, and then rise again as he predicted, to ascend into the presence of his heavenly Father, to reign forever as Lord of all.

In our New Testament passage, Revelation 1:4b–8, the apostle John offers a doxology to our triune God and our resurrected and ascended Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Our heavenly Father is described as the great “I Am”—the One who is and who was, and the One who is coming. The “seven Spirits who are before His throne” is an expression of the fullness of the Holy Spirit; the number seven has a lot of significance to the apostle John, used often throughout the book of Revelation to express completeness, fullness, and God’s faithfulness to his covenant agreement with his people. Jesus is described as “the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead and the ruler of the kings of the earth.”

Notice that John not only focuses on who God is. He then moves to who we are as God’s people. In celebrating our Lord Jesus Christ as the One who reigns in glory, John says that Jesus loves us and has released us from our sins by his blood. Throughout this book, John reminds God’s people that the source of our redemption, salvation, and deliverance is in the blood of Jesus Christ, in his self-offering on our behalf. What Jesus has done has made us to be “a kingdom, priests to his God and Father.” Notice that Jesus did not make us individual priests, but rather, a kingdom of priests—those participating with him in his high priestly intercession with his Father in the Spirit through our prayers and praise. In other words, as the Body of Christ, we are “in Christ” as he intervenes and intercedes on behalf of all humanity in the presence of his Father in the Spirit.

This means that we are already participating in Jesus’ kingdom reign even now. We live in the already-not-yet of God’s kingdom. Our prayers and praise are a participation in Jesus’ own life with his Father in the Spirit. All of life then becomes a way by which we share in Jesus’ ministry and mission in this world through witness and service, prayer and praise, as we follow the lead of the Spirit. Jesus is at work in this world, bringing about the purposes and plans of our triune God, for he is both the beginning and the end, the origin and the completion of all God has in mind for his creation. And we, as we respond to his lead, are full participants in his mission and ministry in this world.

Even though we live in a broken, evil-ridden world, and at times evil seems to be in control, the truth is that our Lord reigns supreme, and is at work making all things new. He will finish what he has begun. In Jesus, we have a true participation in all the triune God is doing to bring about redemption, transformation, and wholeness to this world.

We trust in Jesus' broken body and shed blood—the markers of our union and communion with God in Christ—and we follow the lead of his Spirit. We turn away from ourselves, our world, and our sin, and turn towards Christ, trusting in him and all he has done, is doing, and will do, to save. We anticipate with joy Jesus' return in glory because we recognize who he is and who we are in him, and we have hope. May all the world join with us in the celebration of his soon return in glory!

Praise to you, the God who is, who was, and who is to come, and to you, divine Spirit, and to you, Lord Jesus Christ, who reigns over all. Thank you for including us in all that you are doing in this world, in your life with your Father in the Spirit. May we be true reflections of your glory and love in this world as we look forward to your coming again. Amen.

“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, and 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 released us from our sins by His blood—and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father—to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. ‘Behold, He is coming with the clouds’, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen. ‘I am the Alpha and the Omega,’ says the Lord God, ‘who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.’ ” Revelation 1:4b–8 NASB

See also Daniel 7:9–10, 13–14; Psalm 93; 2 Samuel 23:1–7.