

The Kingdom of God session 8: The King and the Kingdom

Imagine you are a good king (or queen) in the medieval sense. What are your duties and responsibilities?

Jesus as king

The Bible clearly portrays Jesus as king.

1. Matthew's Gospel begins with the genealogy of Jesus which takes him back to David and Solomon. Why is that important?
2. Read **Matthew 2:1–12**. Although this is a well-known story, there is a lot going on here at depth.

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

"But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel."

Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

- What does this passage tell us about the relationship between the terms of 'Messiah' and 'King'?
 - What do we learn about the task of a Messiah/King?
 - What you think Matthew is expecting us to see as the significance of 'the star', the exotic (and very non-Jewish) Magi, their gifts and their attitude to the child?
 - We read in the next passage that Herod chose to do his best to kill the child. Is this no more than the irrational lashing out of a paranoid psychopath?
3. It is clear during the Gospels that with time Jesus increasingly makes open claims to be the king of Israel. Nevertheless for most of his ministry his claims to kingship are subtle. Why might this be?

Note John 6:14–15: After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, 'Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.' Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

4. What is Jesus king of when ...
 - He exorcises demoniacs?
 - He stills storms and walks on water?
 - He multiplies fish and bread?
 - He heals the sick?
 - Let's his disciples take and eat grain on the Sabbath?

- Throws corrupt traders out of the temple?

5. Read **Matthew 21:1–9**

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.”

This took place to fulfil what was spoken through the prophet:

“Say to Daughter Zion,
 ‘See, your king comes to you,
 gentle and riding on a donkey,
 and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’”

The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,

“Hosanna to the Son of David!”
 “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”
 “Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

and **Luke 19:37**

When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen:

“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!”
 “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

- Every Gospel records this entry into Jerusalem and it is clearly an action of Jesus to fulfil the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9. What messages is he sending to the Passover pilgrims watching his entrance?
- How would this action have been seen by the Romans?

6. After his arrest Jesus is summoned before the Sanhedrin, the supreme religious court of Israel. He was silent through the various allegations until finally he is asked a question under solemn oath which he had to answer. Read **Matthew 26:62-66**.

Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, “Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?” But Jesus remained silent. The high priest said to him, “I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God.”

“You have said so,” Jesus replied. “But I say to all of you: From now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.”

Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, “He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?” “He is worthy of death,” they answered.

Using his favourite term for himself – the Son of Man – Jesus declares formally who he is to those who are the leaders of Israel.

- What is he claiming about himself?
- How is that claim viewed?

7. In the account of Jesus’ trial before Pilate the idea of kingship is very important. Read the following passages from John and Matthew. Read the following

John 18:33–37: Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?” “Is that your own idea,” Jesus asked, “or did others talk to you about me?”

“Am I a Jew?” Pilate replied. “Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What is it you have done?”

Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.”

“You are a king, then!” said Pilate.

Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.”

“What is truth?” retorted Pilate. With this he went out again to the Jews gathered there and said, “I find no basis for a charge against him. But it is your custom for me to release to you one prisoner at the time of the Passover. Do you want me to release ‘the king of the Jews?’” They shouted back, “No, not him! Give us Barabbas!” Now Barabbas had taken part in an uprising.

John 19:1–3 Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They clothed him in a purple robe and went up to him again and again, saying, “Hail, king of the Jews!” And they slapped him in the face.

John 19:12–16: From then on, Pilate tried to set Jesus free, but the Jewish leaders kept shouting, “If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar.”

When Pilate heard this, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge’s seat at a place known as the Stone Pavement (which in Aramaic is Gabbatha). It was the day of Preparation of the Passover; it was about noon.

“Here is your king,” Pilate said to the Jews.

But they shouted, “Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!”

“Shall I crucify your king?” Pilate asked.

“We have no king but Caesar,” the chief priests answered.

Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified.

John 19:19–22: Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek. The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, “Do not write ‘The King of the Jews,’ but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews.”

Pilate answered, “What I have written, I have written.”

Matthew 27:41–43: In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. “He saved others,” they said, “but he can’t save himself! He’s the king of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’”

- What does Jesus claim about himself?
- Who, at least superficially, seems to agree with his claim? Why?
- Who disputes it?
- What significance can you see in the title above the cross?

8. We haven’t got space to pursue the theme of the kingship of Christ through the New Testament. Two passages must suffice. Read **Philippians 2:6-11**

Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
rather, he made himself nothing

by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!
Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

- This passage describes what you might call the 'story of Christ'. How would you summarise it?
- What is Christ's status now?

9. Finally read Revelation 17:14:

They [God's enemies] will wage war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will triumph over them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers.

- What does this tell us about the king and the kingdom?

10. Finally, if Christ is our king....

- What duties do we owe to him?
- What responsibility does he have for us?
- How should that change our lives?