

"King"

Gen 1:28; Is 45:9; Eph 1:9-11-22; 3:10

08/02/26

Prayer

God reigns as a sovereign king. He is the supreme, independent, monarch with absolute power, who makes all the laws, and answers to no higher authority. This is how scripture describes our Lord. But He is more than this too.

All summer long we've unveiled different aspects of God's heart and we've noted that, in order to get a complete picture of who God is, we can't just look at one attribute or description. Like pixels in a photograph, stones in a mosaic, or brush strokes in a painting, a full understanding of God requires us to see how each individual piece informs the others.

While God is the Sovereign King who rules, God is also the shepherd who guides and the Father who loves. It is important to know each description in detail and important to see them together. Today we will take a detailed look at what it means to say that God is King.

This will be a challenge for anyone who has been raised in our fiercely independent American way. This nation's founders insisted that checks and balances be put on power. Our culture assumes that no singular individual has the right to tell us what to do.

The closest connection many Americans have with the idea of a king is found in fairy tales. Something that happened "a long time ago in a land far, far, away." Or perhaps our closest connection could be found in Great Britain.

Great Britain has a constitutional monarchy, meaning King Charles III is the official Head of State, but political power is held by an elected Parliament and a Prime Minister. While this is a monarchy, it is far less than the sovereign king found in scripture.

For us, the idea of a sovereign king—a singular being who has total control, makes all the laws and answers only to himself—is repugnant to us and so we assign it to the realm of harsh dictators and despots. Someone who is distant, unapproachable and uncaring.

But Sovereign King is one of the images scripture uses to describe who God is and it makes logical sense. As the Creator of all things, God has the full authority to determine what is right, what is wrong, and how things work together. As Isaiah said (45:9),

⁹ "What sorrow awaits those who argue with their Creator.

Does a clay pot argue with its maker?

Does the clay dispute with the one who shapes it, saying, 'Stop, you're doing it wrong!'

Does the pot exclaim, 'How clumsy can you be?'

Like a potter with clay, God has the full authority to declare what He wants to see in His creation and how His creation should function. His plan appears early in scripture.

The first chapter of Genesis reveals how God gave everything its own space to exist and rule. The greater light governs the day and the lesser light governs the night. Aquatic life has its domain in water. Birds are in the air. Animals and plants are on the ground.

Humans were different. As the only ones made in God's image, they were given dominion over every space and every creature. They were given the responsibility and authority to govern everything God created and to do it in God's name. In other words, they were to care for it in a way that reflected God's desire.

As long as they did what their sovereign king wanted, then this is a very good creation. In the middle of the garden was the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Even though they were already made in God's image, that wasn't good enough. They wanted to be like God and decide what was right and wrong for themselves.

So they ate from the tree they were told not to eat from so that they could gain an authority that was not theirs to possess. This rebellion against the Great King is punishable by death, and so death and decay were injected into God's good creation.

From that moment to the present day the question has been, who will willingly submit themselves to their sovereign king, the one who made us, cares for us like a shepherd, loves us like a father and longs for us like a lover? He is the gentle, humble king who does justly and loves mercy. Who will willingly submit to him?

This is hard because it requires us to entrust our lives into the hands of another and our own experience tells us that one person holding all authority is not a good idea. But God is not just a sovereign king. He is a *perfect* sovereign king.

Psalms 92:15 proclaims that the LORD is just and there is no evil in Him. Job 34:12 declares that God will not do wrong and will not twist justice. Habakkuk 1:13 said that God is too pure to look on evil and He cannot tolerate wrongdoing. The Apostle John said "God is light; in Him there is no darkness at all." In God there is no evil, no wrong, no hidden flaw. God is perfect, and He is perfectly good.

This kind of being is totally foreign to our experience and so we are hesitant to trust. Yet, when we take the time to ponder who God is in all His fullness, we begin to change from the inside out. We find ourselves shifting from the attitude of "never" to the question of "what if" and then one day to the declaration, "my king and my God."

To relate to God as our king means we learn to obey him in every area of our lives. It is an incremental growth over time, a lifelong process that requires us to surrender everything found in three parts of our lives.

First, think of **your identity**. This is who you are. We will call this your soul. The key resource is time and attention. What gets your time and grabs your attention? Whose attention do you want to grab?

Surrender here centers on accepting what God says about you while rejecting all other efforts to support your sense of value. The end result and the question we ask is this: Are we growing in our reflection of Christ's stability and confidence in His Father's love? Do we trust what God says about us or do we seek to shore up the areas that we think are weak and need our help?

Second, think of **your body**. This is the way your soul interacts with the rest of the world. The key resource is energy and activity. What do you spend our energy on? What activities occupy your hands?

Surrender here centers on choosing to relate to the rest of creation—especially people—in a way that reflects God's desire. The end result and the question we ask is this: Are we growing in our reflection of Christ's actions, attitudes and emotions?

Finally, think of **your possessions**. These are the things over which you have control, material goods, money and wealth. How will you use these limited resources?

Surrender here centers on perspective and longing. Perspective. Do you see yourself as an owner, or a steward? Longing. What does your heart long for and why? The end result and the question we ask is this: Are we growing in our reflection of Christ's example of using things and loving people?

Surrendering every part of who we are, what we do and what we have takes time because our own efforts to control are often hidden from us. Even after we see them, we don't want to let them go! This is a struggle for everyone.

In the Lord's Prayer we ask for God's kingdom to come and for His will to be done on earth even as it is in heaven. God's kingdom is the realm of God's control and it is made up of people who seek to do God's will. But God is not the only one with a kingdom. We have one too.

Our kingdom is the area over which we exercise our control. For some, that could be a company. For others it is what takes place in your home and family. Your kingdom may be in your apartment and the way you spend the time you have. Many in their older years find their kingdoms shrinking in size. The issue is not the size of our kingdom. The issue is who is in control? How much of our kingdom are we willing to surrender control over to Christ?

As humans made in God's image, we have the desire to rule and so we create our own kingdoms. We've eaten from the tree and so think we know how to run our lives better than God does.ⁱ

The challenge for us is to replace what we think is needed with what God reveals we need. The challenge for us is to release our desire to call the shots, and trust the King to show us the way.

The question of kingship comes down to authority. Who has authority in our lives? To whom do we give our allegiance? I think this is the crux of the issue for all people. If someone has trouble with the idea of surrendering to God, ask them what they do surrender to because we are all serving something. No human is sovereign.

If you are not serving God, you are serving someone or something else. And I can guarantee that that person or thing does not know what God does, love like God does or act for your good like God does. This brings up a painful topic.

When I look at my life and the world there are times when I am tempted to think God's not doing a very good job. The carnage caused by natural disasters and human sin can make it seem like the king is not paying attention or is not as strong as he claims. How do we make sense of this?

We could take some time to talk about how God uses pain to highlight the depth of our need and so draw us to Himself. We could consider how God uses adversity as a catalyst for real spiritual growth. Someday it would be good to have this kind of discussion. For today, let's take the attention off of us and put it on God's plan. Let's let scripture pull back the curtain so that we see some of what is going on in the spiritual realm.

Ephesians 1:9-11

⁹ God has now revealed to us his mysterious will regarding Christ—which is to fulfill his own good plan. ¹⁰ And this is the plan: *At the right time* he will bring everything together under the authority of Christ—everything in heaven and on earth. ¹¹ Furthermore, because we are united with Christ, we have received an inheritance from God, for he chose us in advance, and *he makes everything work out according to his plan.*

Note verse 10. "At the right time God will bring everything together under the authority of Christ." That right time has not yet come which means that everything is not yet together or unified under Christ's authority. Some things remain rebellious.

God's kingdom has come and His will is being done wherever people have surrendered to His rule. But not every being has surrendered. This is a temporary condition. One day, at the right time, everything in heaven and earth will be unified under Christ.

In this interim period between what is and what will be, Christ's authority is present but not everyone submits to it. That's why the last part of verse 11 is so important. Our perfect, sovereign king makes everything work out according to His plan.

Your sovereign king is also your loving father and faithful friend. No matter what happens in your life, God will use it as His Plan A. When a circumstance develops or a challenge appears God will never have to revert to Plan B or wonder what He will do next. Everything will conform to the purpose of His will in your life and in this world.

Through every circumstance we face, God works for His glory and our good. He can do this because He is a perfect sovereign king. This requires from us a new way of thinking. And that is just what Paul prayed for them.

Starting in verse 17 he prays that God would give them spiritual wisdom and insight so that they might come to know God more fully and to know the hope to which they have been called. The more fully we know God and what He has done for us, the more fully we realize just how secure we are in Christ and how temporary this world is. Paul continues his prayer in verse 19.

Ephesians 1:19-22

¹⁹ I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power ²⁰ that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms. ²¹ Now he is far above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else—*not only in this world but also in the world to come*. ²² God has put all things under the authority of Christ and has made him head over all things for the benefit of the church.

Christ is far above any ruler or authority in this world or the world to come. This world is that interim period where Christ reigns, but not all submit. The world to come is when God's kingdom is fully established with all things together under Christ.

Right now, we see God's kingdom displayed through the little colonies He has created all around the world, we call them churches. These are communities of grace that seek to live under the rule of their perfect, sovereign, loving king.

When we pull back the curtain we see how God's plan is bigger than we first realized. We see how God's perspective reaches far beyond our own. Let me stretch our thinking with the final verse, Ephesians 3:10-11.

¹⁰ God's purpose in all this was to use the church to display his wisdom in its rich variety to all the unseen rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

¹¹ This was his eternal plan, which he carried out through Christ Jesus our Lord.

When it comes to the difficult things happening in our lives and in our world, God is still working out His plan, conforming all things to the purpose of His will. That plan is far greater than we expect. Can we trust that he is working for His glory and our good, even when we may not understand how He is doing it?

Surrendering to God will look different for each of us and it is always a life-long journey, but it is a journey we all must take. I thought it might be helpful to hear about someone else's journey for a moment so I've asked Franki Kung, one of our elders, to share his story with us.

Franki's story

Rob asked me how I view a king.

To me, a king is the focal point of our purpose, identity, and allegiance.

I grew up in colonial Hong Kong, and perhaps because of that, I used to associate kingship with systems designed to control people and take away their freedom.

But as I've grown in my experience of following Jesus, I've come to realize that having Jesus as the Lord is nothing like that. In fact, it is in my experience serving Him, surrendering to Him, and learning to obey Him that I've found real joy and freedom.

It's a freedom that comes from embracing *His purpose* for me as the reason I strive, and *His love* for me as the reason I live.

There are many ways to unpack that, but today I want to share a couple of stories about how Jesus entered my life as King and offered His narrative to replace mine, giving me freedom from "the world" and, sometimes, even from myself.

Teenage Altar Assistant in Hong Kong

When I was a teenager living in Hong Kong, I served as an altar assistant at an Anglican church. Around that time, my dad had an affair again and eventually left our family.

I remember one Saturday afternoon, I was scheduled to prepare the church for the next day's service. Unlike our church, Anglican services involve many rituals and symbols: different-colored banners for different occasions, and a carefully prepared altar with matching silk cloths and silver vessels.

That Saturday, for various reasons, my teammates all canceled at the last minute. When I arrived, I realized I was the only person responsible for preparing the entire sanctuary.

My heart felt disappointed, burdened, and, honestly, angry at God. I thought:

My family is falling apart. I don't even have time to take care of things at home. Why am I spending my Saturday doing work nobody else wants to do?

Bitterness and exhaustion started creeping in. I just wanted to finish the job and leave as quickly as possible.

Just when I was ironing a silk altar cloth (very fancy), in the middle of my frustration, I sensed a voice. It wasn't audible, but it was gentle and undeniably clear in my mind:

"You are not here as a guest. You're mine."

It stopped me in my tracks.

I looked around; it was empty, and I thought, *Guests don't prepare the house for a gathering. Only family does.*

I realized that serving wasn't really about getting the work done. I belonged here. I was home in God's family. I was His. My King had called me. He wanted me. He was inviting me to serve Him.

His loving narrative replaced my bitter story.

Since then, even when I was working alone, I've come to treasure the intimacy of enjoying and communicating with Jesus.

Have you ever seen one of those engraved silver vessels before? I spent a lot of time with them. I remember using a cloth (not the fancy one!) to polish all the little grooves in them, a task that often felt repetitive and time-consuming. But week

after week, I was surprised by how quickly the tarnish returned. Through that simple, repetitive act of polishing, God reminded me of my need for regular repentance and His never-ending mercy.

Called to Serve on Session

Many years later, I moved to West Lafayette for work.

Being a pre-tenure professor was very demanding. I was trying to meet many expectations at work: research, teach, get funding, work long hours while building my social support from scratch, and adjusting to living in quite a different environment than I was used to.

Looking back, I think I was a little depressed in my first year.

After a while, and almost without noticing it, the story that occupied my mind became something like this:

"I'm here to survive. Stay focused. Work hard. Get tenure."

But that wasn't God's narrative for me.

One day, the leadership discovery team at our church reached out and asked whether I would consider serving as a ruling elder.

My immediate reaction was: "What? No. way."

I didn't think I was qualified, and I definitely didn't think I had time.

Out of curiosity, though, I still showed up for the interview. It was virtual at the time, so there I was in my little screen box, expecting everyone to eventually realize that I wasn't the right person and that pre-tenure time wasn't the right season for me to serve.

But as I listened and prayed, I gradually sensed a different narrative emerging.

God brought me back to that experience from my teenage years. I remembered the sweetness of surrendering to my King and the joy of serving Him. That memory began to outweigh my concerns.

So eventually, I said yes.

Since then, God has provided mentors and opportunities to help me grow both spiritually and professionally. I've been surrounded by wonderful brothers and sisters on Session and staff. God has used them to encourage me and shape who I am.

Through them, I've experienced greater freedom in living physically on earth while spiritually enjoying the reality of His kingdom. They've helped me see the university as my mission field and discover gifts God has already placed in me for serving Him. Then, three years ago, it was time to apply for tenure, essentially a permanent position at the university.

Truthfully, by then I wasn't that concerned about the outcome of the tenure process anymore.

In fact, I found myself excited about the possibility that, if I didn't get tenure, maybe God had something completely new and exciting for me next.

But, well... that didn't happen -- I got tenured, and I'm still doing the same job :)

In that season, God replaced my original narrative of survival and performance with His narrative of joy and freedom:

If tenure means a permanent position, there is nothing more permanent than the eternal life that Jesus offers to us in His Kingdom.

God's narrative reminds me that my true tenure is in Him.

Conclusion

I turned 38 this year, and as I get closer to the age my father was when he left my family, I sometimes couldn't help but wonder what story he was telling himself when he made that decision.

But when I compare my earthly father to my heavenly Father, who's revealed perfectly through Jesus, I'm reminded again of God's everlasting love and faithfulness.

He is a King who never leaves. He never stops loving us. And I'm grateful my forever home is in His kingdom.

Through the stories I've shared today, it's clear that there have been times I've struggled to let Jesus be King.

But what has helped me experience the truth of Christ's Kingship is embracing His grace at work in me, the same grace that is at work in all of us.

A kingdom is a place where a king rules.

Jesus said that His kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36), yet we can experience His kingdom even now when our hearts are transformed by His presence (Luke 17:21) -- when His truth replaces our false narratives and sets us free.

If our heart is a kingdom, and if we pause to ask ourselves today, who is ruling there?

Whose story are we living by?

Is it God's narrative?

And if not, what is driving us?

I've mentioned a few ways we can grow together and participate in the life of our church family. If you're exploring how Jesus may be calling you to serve, whether in hospitality, leadership, or other areas, I encourage you to keep an eye out for our next Thrive class if you haven't taken it yet. And if you'd like someone to talk about where God may be leading you, I'd love to listen, chat, and pray with you.

Praise be to God.

Not our narrative, but God's. Not our will, but His. Nothing more. Nothing less. Nothing else.

In the Old Testament God revealed Himself as the one, true, sovereign king. Adam and Eve rebelled against Him. He revealed Himself as king over His chosen people, but they demanded that they have a human king instead. In the New Testament God came to us in human form as Jesus, the Christ, which means He is God's anointed King.

The words Messiah and Christ are royal titles. Jesus the Christ is God's anointed King who has come to rule over all creation. He is the perfect human who has fulfilled God's original intent. Through Him both people who surrender to Him along with all creation will be redeemed. To surrender to Him requires that we put our faith in Him. But what does this mean?

The Greek word *pisteuo* can be translated as faith or belief. But whenever that word is connected to a king, it also carries the obligation of allegiance. So faith in Jesus is an acknowledgment that He is who He says He is followed by a life that reflects that belief (living in God's kingdom where His will is done in your life and your world. Surrendering control of your kingdom to Him).

We are saved by placing our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ in such a way that our belief in who He is changes the way we live. To have faith in Christ is to place one's allegiance with Christ. He is the perfect, sovereign king. The one to whom we can entrust our lives.

Prayer

Loving Father, I pray that you will give us the Spirit of wisdom and insight so that we might know you better, that we might come to understand who you are and what you have given to anyone who is in Christ. Clarify our understanding. Deepen our experience. Grow our trust that we might find our true life and true freedom in you.

As our King, you are the one with whom we align our hearts. As our faithful friend, you are the one with whom we can share our hearts. And as the one who loves us passionately, you are the one to whom we can give our hearts. We surrender our kingdoms to you this day, confident that you will work for your glory and our good.

ⁱ Our conclusions about the best way to run our lives have been shaped by our identity, formed by our body and built by the relationship we have with our possessions. These are the things we think are true about the way the world works, and necessary for us to survive and thrive.