

CHRIST THE KING

Listed in any history book among the greatest leaders that the world has ever known would be the name, Augustus Caesar. It was Augustus Caesar who fixed the limits of the Roman Empire. It was during his reign that the PAX ROMANA, the peace of Rome, that lasted for over 200 years was initiated. It was he who ordered the building of roads linking the great empire and allowing rapid access to subordinate governments. It was he who gave Rome its constitution, creating the office of emperor and investing in that office unlimited power, though he never used the title emperor himself. The age of Augustus was a bright spot in literature and the arts. It was the era that gave the world Virgil, Homer, and the great historians. Augustus was truly a great ruler.

Is it not ironic then that 2000 years after the reign of Augustus Caesar, he is mainly remembered because every year at Christmas time, we read these timeless words: "In those days, a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed." Among those to be taxed, of course, were Mary and Joseph of Nazareth. Augustus Caesar would truly be shocked to realize that during his reign was born One who was far greater than he. John, in the Revelation, called this one, Jesus Christ, "the Faithful Witness, the First Born of the Dead, and the Ruler of the kings on Earth." In short, this was the one who had been anointed King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

It was a minor official in the Roman empire, Pontius Pilate, who first asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus obviously convinced him that he was. We often see engraved on crosses the letters INRI. They stand for IESUS NAZARENUS REX IUDAEORUM, Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews. These were the words that Pilate ordered written at the top of Jesus' cross. Pilate could have ordered these words in sarcasm. We don't know what was in his heart. We do know what was in the hearts of the disciples, though. There was no sarcasm. Peter would write later in his epistle, "We actually saw his majesty with our own eyes." King of Kings. Lord of Lords. That blessed saint of the sixteenth century, Teresa of Avila, always referred to Jesus as "His Majesty," and so He is. After 2000 years, his stature has not diminished.

When the Turks took Constantinople, they plastered over the mosaics of Christ in the great cathedrals. With the centuries the plaster has cracked and the image of Christ shows through. Regardless of how much secular man plasters over the image of the Christ, he will shine through. Christ the Victor. Christ the King. His kingdom is unshakable. E. Stanley Jones once wrote, "I saw as in a flash that all man-made kingdoms are shakable. The kingdom of communism is shakable. They have to hold it together by purges, by force; they cannot relax that force or it will fall apart. The kingdom of capitalism is shakable. The daily fluctuation of the stock market, shows that the kingdom of capitalism is shakable. The kingdom of self is shakable. Center yourself on yourself as the center of your

kingdom and the self will sour and go to pieces. The kingdom of health is shakable. Radio and TV blare constantly with supposed health remedies to hold this physical life together, but in the end we all die. Everything is shakable except one- the Kingdom of God, the one and only unshakable kingdom.”

What does it mean to say that Christ is King of this world? doesn't it say, first of all. That THIS IS AN UNFINISHED WORLD? This world is certainly not the kind of world christ desires. If truly he is King, there is some unfinished business. Someone tells about a bumper sticker that reads like this: THE RAT RACE IS OVER. THE RATS WON. Ogden Nash put it this way: “Progress may have been alright once, but it went on too long.” Gil Stern, in The Wall Street Journal, analyzed it this way: “It's finally happening. The new color TV sets have sharp pictures. Now real life is getting blurred.” George Bernard Shaw wrote: “If the other planets are inhabited, they must be using earth as an insane asylum.”

This world is an unfinished world. If christ is king, there is still some unfinished business because the world is made up of people and people are unfinished. Dr. Robert Miller tells about his five-year- old son. Robert and his wife were worried about their son Al. They needed to visit their friends at the funeral home to offer their support to them at the time of their bereavement. But they had been unable to find a babysitter for their children. So they decided to take the kids with them. Before they left Dr. Miller bent down close to Al and explained what the expected behavior was for this solemn occasion. He said “Al, you're going to have to be just as good as you can this evening.”

The four of them went to the funeral home. When they first arrived Al mimicked the sad behavior of the adults. But not for long. When Dr. Miller looked around at one point, he observed his son standing in the middle of the room twirling his jacket above his head as if he were about to lasso someone with it. He grabbed his son by the arm to pull him aside and whispered fiercely, “Son I thought I told you to be just as good as you can be tonight.” The little boy tearfully replied, “But Daddy, I am.” And he was right. He was being as good as he could be. This is an unfinished world and we are unfinished people. Even at our best we are not all that christ intends for us to be. But listen, into this unfinished world has come the King.

E. Stanley Jones once told a story about a custom of the people on the island of Formosa hundreds of years ago to offer human sacrifices. A kindly emperor, however, by the name of Goho, changed all that. According to his law, only animals, not humans, were to be sacrificed. But there was a terrible drought and the crops failed altogether. Once again the people clamored for a human sacrifice. Goho said, “Very well, tomorrow morning at dawn go into the forest and find your victim for sacrifice. He will be tied to a tree and wearing a red robe. Strike him for he is your sacrifice.” Early in the morning the men rose with their clubs and found things to be just as Goho said. There was the sacrifice tied to a tree and wearing a red robe. They rushed forward and slew him. When they pulled the robe and uncovered the face,

they were horrified to see it was Goho, their own beloved emperor. By his death, Goho was able to do what his law could never do; change the hearts and minds of his people forever. Never again were human sacrifices offered. And on Formosa, the red robe became a symbol of a changed life. Men discarded their dingy robes and put on red ones as if to say, I am Goho's person. They became known as persons of the robe.

That's who we are my friends. Persons of the robe. The writer of Hebrews call us kings and priests, a royal priesthood. This is an unfinished world. But into this unfinished world came the King. He made the ultimate sacrifice in our behalf. And now he has commissioned us to be soldiers in his army. Priest in His ministry. To see that this unfinished world becomes the kingdom over which He can reign forever.

A newspaper story some time back, recorded the grim incident of a police officer shot and killed in the line of duty. His greatest desire before he was killed was to see his family's back yard completely landscaped, a desire he never saw fulfilled, because of the bullet that ended his life. Some of his fellow officers, donated their time and money to complete the work. Because it was the policeman's desire to finish the project it became his friend's desire.

The application to those of us who love Jesus Christ is clear. What he loved and desired, we should love and desire and work to complete. His work is to see lost men saved and built up. His work is to see this world redeemed. His work is to see this unfinished world be brought to completion. We who love him are called to complete the task.

Helen Keller once said, "The world is moved along not only by the mighty shove of its heroes, but also by the aggregate of the tiny pushes of each honest worker." That's who we are and that's what we are called to do.

There was once a farmer who had two mules. One was named Willing and the other was named Able. However, Willing was willing but was not able. Able was able but was not willing. The farmer didn't get much work done. Christ needs people who are willing and able. And the ironic thing is that when we subordinate our desires to His desire, when we enlist as privates in His army, when we serve as priests in His temple, which is the world, when we give ourselves in His service, it is then that we are lifted up. In losing ourselves we find ourselves. That is the nature of his kingdom.

A noted author was talking with a friend about two of their greatest countrymen. Of one they said, "He makes everyone around him seem smaller. That is his greatness." But then they decided that the other was even greater because he made everyone around him feel great. In subordinating our desires to the desires of Christ, in becoming less than we might desire to be, the ironic thing is that he lifts us up and makes us greater. As John says in Revelation, he who is the ruler of kings on earth loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father. This is an unfinished world and it is we who have been called to bring it to completion. This is not to say that the kingdom of God will be brought in by our efforts. It is christ who builds the kingdom, but he builds it through those who are receptive to His word. That is you and me.

Bailey Smith tells about seeing on national news a story with which many of us are familiar. It was just after the bombing of the American Embassy in Beirut. Two hundred fifty Americans were killed in that bombing, many were wounded. On national television, there was a picture of General Paul Kelley leaning over a young marine. This young marine had been blinded by the explosion. He had a tracheotomy in his throat, thus he could not see or speak. But as General Kelley bent over him, he reached up and touched the four stars on the general's shoulder. Two days later, the marine had a birthday. General Kelley brought those four stars as a present to this young soldier. The General said, "Son we are so proud of you for what you have given for your nation." The young man couldn't speak but he motioned for a pencil and paper. On the paper he wrote two words- two words that appear on the insignia of the Marines. SEMPER FIDELIS, always faithful.

Will we be able to wear that insignia on our uniform when we stand before the throne of christ? Christ is King, but we live in an unfinished world. He has come into this unfinished world and provided a way by which it might be redeemed. We are called to be His priests, His princes, His ambassadors, His ministers. St. Paul writes, "God was in christ reconciling the world unto himself, and giving unto us the ministry of reconciliation." Yet there is much to do. Can he count of us? Do we have written on our hearts, Semper Fidelis? Are we a people of the robe? Are we completing our friend's work? Christ the King, Christus Rex. Yes he is. That truth elevates our lives, and our work as well, as we seek to serve him.