

## 'Christ the King' Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2020

Sermon: based on Matthew 25:31-end

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Today is the last Sunday in the Church's calendar, and we use it to celebrate the future – the reign of Christ the King.

This passage from Matthew's Gospel is unique – no other gospel has a similar account – and it comes at the end of a chapter ominously entitled (in my NRSV Bible) "Signs of the End of the Age". Which has made the chapter meat and drink for contributors to Twitter, Facebook and other social (sometimes antisocial) media!

The Kingship of Christ is one part of what is normally considered his three-fold role – prophet, priest and king – as prophesied in the Old Testament.

Prophet? -

"The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people." [Deuteronomy 18.15]

Priest? -

"You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." [Psalm 110. Jesus used that very psalm to explain that the Messiah is not David's son.]

Melchizedek was a priest who believed in one God and was also King of Salem (possibly Jerusalem) and who blessed Abraham – see Genesis 14.18-20. He thus provides the necessary link between Genesis and the New Testament – it was Melchizedek who sort of starts the ball rolling for the history of Israel.

And the rest of Psalm 110 – I'll leave you to read it – is in essence a prediction of Christ's Second Coming. And that neatly brings us back to today's theme.

Jesus' role of prophet was fulfilled during his time in the flesh – incarnate – here on Earth. There are many examples in the Gospels – the whole of Mark 13 is just one instance, with the whole of this chapter in Matthew a second.

And such prophecies include the foretelling of his own return: "Then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory." [Mark 13.26]

In his prophetic role, he often spoke of what he would accomplish as priest.

Priests had (have) two main roles: firstly, they were appointed to speak to God on behalf of the people – to make intercession. Jesus promised to be always there as our intercessor.

Secondly, priests were to offer sacrifices – offerings to God. Jesus offered himself.

So you can see that Jesus' priestly role is both past, present and, as his prophecies assure us, also in the future.

King? –

“and you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,  
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah,  
for from you shall come a ruler  
who will govern my people Israel”  
[Matthew 2 verse 6]

There is much in the Bible about the end of this age and the Second Coming of Christ, when he will rule as King of this Earth.

We have here a dilemma. On the one hand, the conservative Christian who believes that mankind is irretrievably sinful, so that Jesus' return is inevitable. On the other hand, the liberal Christian, who believes that it is humankind's task to enlist God's help in pulling itself out of sin and into the Kingdom of God (Heaven).

Where do I sit?

Well, it would be lovely to think that humankind was capable of finally overcoming its own capacity to sin and thus save the need for a final judgment on itself. But as a statistician, I believe the odds of that happening are exceedingly small.

In the meantime, one can see in our media genuine efforts to bring about the abolition of poverty, or more compassionate government to suppressed peoples, or new medical advances to remove the fear of dreadful diseases.

But alongside such news, we can also hear of evil deeds that make us despair that mankind has learnt anything at all in the two thousand years that have passed since Jesus told us that the rules by which we should live are simple enough:

- a) Love God with all our hearts and all our minds and all our strength and
- b) Love one another as he loved us.

Which brings us to the sheep and goats! One can interpret the import of this passage in a variety of ways, some orthodox, others less so. For me, I suggest we should keep it simple!

For Jesus has, in the simplest of terms, commanded us how to behave by practising mercy to the poor and suffering.

“Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me”

Or, as James in his letter, written “to the twelve tribes in the Dispersion” (and you can read this painted above the nave arch in St Mary's Preston):

**“Be doers of the word, and not merely hearers”**