

Citizens of the Kingdom

Christ the King

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As we celebrate Christ the King, we remind ourselves this day that he is the ruler of all and overall. The ultimate outcome of the cross and resurrection is reclaiming his authority over fallen humanity. Through this, we populate the kingdom; citizenship denied by the sinful nature of humanity is now open and available to all humankind – to those who choose to belong (through faith).

But membership in the kingdom is restricted to those who live by its rules, to those who demonstrate the characteristics of the kingdom, man or woman. These are those who live like Jesus, our great king. The kingdom has its conditions and is open only if we are prepared to live by them. This may not be correct, for we do not choose to live by them, but rather, we live according to rules when we allow the Holy Spirit to change us to be like Jesus. The faith journey is about transforming ourselves, either slowly or otherwise, into Jesus' likeness. Our living out of the Christian life is not a question of effort but obedience. Or we are speaking of submission. This is the essence of the day. When we say of the Kingship of Christ, it is a reminder that whatever the sense of friendship that we experience with Christ, we are always to remember that Christ is King – And this is not some television or Hollywood royalty or the smiling images of the Belgium Prince that visited the state in the past few days. The King has absolute power over the subjects – the power of life and death.

There is no more telling parable than that which forms today's gospel. It is a stark reminder that those who qualify for the heavenly reward need to embrace the message of the Gospel but to see its outworking in the individual's life. Works will not guarantee us heaven, only faith, but the actual test of faith will be seen in the outworking of our lifestyle. The King presides at the end of time, settling up accounts and sorting out eligible and those who have failed the test—sheep to one side and goats to the other. There are going to be winners and losers. And what is it that is the basis of all this?

The judgement comes based on action. It is the action of the believer that measures the impact of faith on the individual. The true believer will be conforming to the wishes of the King. Their actions will reflect the will of the King – they will remember the character of the king. Faith is not about getting the correct set of beliefs or about believing what is said to be the right thing – the true believer is the man or woman of action – acting on those beliefs – Feeding the hungry, refreshing the thirsty, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, caring for the sick, visiting the prisoner. These are not acts in themselves, not a checklist of what to do to get into heaven, but the characteristic actions of the compassionate person, touched by God's Spirit and viewing the world through Jesus' eyes. Our service to the king is to care for those whom he loves. To reach out with hands of love to those who have a need.

The question that then comes from this is, what of me? Here is the standard; here is what is being sought– but do I measure up? Am I? Feeding the hungry, etc? It boils down to this. Is my presence impacting those in need around me? Now, I am not talking about the usual community things we do – the hospitality to family and friends. This is not what Jesus is speaking of. We do these things that are true, but finding Christ in the stranger is the difficulty. We are to go outside of our comfort zone, outside our circle, to reach out in Christ’s name. This may be a type of evangelism, but the reality is that we are allowing others to encounter Christ. Sometimes, we might meet their needs, but at other times, we expose the other to the love of God, the love of Jesus that took him to the Cross.

Sadly, many Christians do not discover this level of faith. We live in the narrowness of our little world and our comfortable faith and fail to see the challenge of the outside world. God gives us the hungry and the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the prisoner and the sick, not because he cannot feed them, but because they are the key to becoming like him. They are God’s gift to us. But not only as individuals, they challenge us as a church. They should be the reason we are here. If we are to look at our programmes, are we doing these things? Feeding the hungry, refreshing the thirsty, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, caring for the sick, visiting the prisoner. Our fundraising, working bees, and worship are to support these things and should not be ends in themselves. As we become a community that feeds the hungry, refreshes the thirsty, welcomes the stranger, clothing the naked, cares for the sick, and visits the prisoner, we will become a place of nurture and touch the lives of those around us. Let us take a moment to consider how we might please our King.

AMEN