

The Reign Has Begun

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[0 : 00] Well, I'll tell you right now, I won't try to follow that children's talk in any way. Won't live up to it. I want you to have page 234 in your Bibles out in front of you, Revelation 11.

And we are in the midst of a very short sermon series on hymns in the book of Revelation, going backwards, just to keep you on your toes. And we're on Revelation 11, starting at verse 15 there. And there are some very familiar words that this opens with. The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.

If you have heard the Handel's Messiah, you are humming something in your mind right now, because those are from the Hallelujah Chorus. I thought it would have been great to have the choir sing that verse for me in the sermon.

It would have been an impressive feat. But I do want to talk a little bit about Handel's Messiah as a way to look at this passage, because the words to that oratorio are written by a man named Charles Jennings.

[1 : 12] Jennings was a faithful, biblically-minded Christian who was also a very, very fine scholar. And in his life, he was very concerned about a movement, a theology that was gaining much popularity in England.

And that was the belief called deism, that said that God created the universe, and then he just let it run its course and had nothing to do with human history.

And as a biblical Christian, Jennings believed that the very opposite is what has actually happened through Jesus Christ, that Jesus is the center of human history, that God has come into it, has crashed into the world to rescue us, and that there is a fundamental change that has taken place because of Jesus' death and his resurrection.

Now, he wanted to get this message out to society, and he figured probably the best way was not to write a theological paper on what it means that God has broken into history.

So, instead, he decided that that message should be put into music. And so he very carefully, and no doubt with much prayer, God has compiled a group of scripture texts that trace and outline God's work of salvation throughout the Old Testament and New Testament.

[2 : 40] And it's marvelous how each part builds on the other, that there's an unfolding of God's revelation that comes in the collection of passages.

And then what he did was he sent the collection of readings to his good friend George, George Handel, whom he admired greatly, and asked him if he would set them to music.

Well, when Handel read the collection of verses, he was quite moved by them. And you may know that he wrote it in very short time.

He wrote it in 24 days, the oratorio called Messiah. It was a tremendous success when it was introduced almost a year later. And, of course, millions of people over the last 266-odd years have heard God's word in Handel's Messiah, have heard how God actually is in charge of human history. And so I think that in the end, you would have to call Jennings a very creative and effective evangelist. God blessed that work. And it's interesting that as Handel finished the Hallelujah Chorus, a servant came in as he was writing.

[3 : 55] And Handel has just completed that part. And Handel was reported to say, I did see all of heaven opened, and the great God himself.

And that is exactly what we are seeing in our reading today from Revelation 11. God is opening heaven to us. We are seeing things that are not perceived by human sight or understanding.

So when verse 15 says, The seventh angel blew his temple, there were loud voices in heaven saying, The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever.

This has nothing to do with conventional wisdom. Very few people believe that Jesus will reign over creation forever. Very few believe that the kingdoms of the world have become the kingdom of Jesus, that he rules today in a way that we cannot see with our eyes.

It's especially difficult to accept this truth that is revealed, because evil often seems to have the upper hand in creation. And so Jesus' reign must be revealed.

[5 : 08] Look back at, I'm going to have you look back at two more sections. Look one page back, page 233, left, or the right column, chapter 10, verse 7.

Chapter 10, verse 7, says, In the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, and that's the one we're hearing in our passage, the mystery of God, as he announced to his servants the prophets, should be fulfilled.

And what that's saying is that the mystery of God is revealed in that statement that we heard, that he shall reign forever. The mystery of God is something that has been hidden from the world, but is now revealed.

And there is something that is mysterious, that we cannot understand with our human minds, and that we need to look at chapter 5. Because there's two things that we need to understand about Jesus, that have to be revealed.

And that's in chapter 5, page 230. And again, it's the second column, verse 9, page 230.

[6 : 24] Now there are 24 elders who are in our passage as well, and they sing a new song. And it says this, It says, Worthy art thou to take the scroll and to open its seals, for thou wast slain, and by thy blood didst ransom men for God.

From every tribe and tongue and people and nation he has made them a kingdom of priests to our God, and they shall reign on earth. Well, what is being said here is that it is the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, who actually is the one who is the king.

Jesus liberated people throughout the world from their sin and from the power of evil, as we talked about last week. But there is more. In looking at verse 13, right at the end, And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and the sea and all therein saying, To him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and glory, honor and glory and might forever and ever.

You see what's being said here is the king is the one who was slain. The one who looks as though he is defeated on a cross, actually dies for the sins of his people to release them, and rises again in such great power that he is the one who reigns over all things.

And so you see, the reign of Jesus is not something that only takes place in the future when Jesus comes in glory for all the world to see that he is ruler. It is a present reality that's based on the Lamb of God being slain for us and rising again on that first Easter day.

[8 : 06] And that's why the context of our passage in Revelation is not at the end of the old creation, on the day of the second coming of Jesus. It's actually in the midst of chaos in creation where there is violence and there is natural disaster and immorality.

These things are described in the chapters preceding ours. And it's in the midst of this that the Lamb of God, who is also king, is revealed to us.

And you know, that truth is the gospel. That truth is what changes our lives forever. And we know this because of the first sermon that Peter preaches.

The first time he preached the Christian message, he said, let all the house of Israel therefore know that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.

And at this point in the sermon, there is action. The hearers, it says, are cut to the heart and they say to Peter and the rest of the apostles, brethren, what shall we do?

[9 : 16] And Peter said to them, repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you shall receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

The Lordship of Jesus changes us, brings us to repentance. And so this sermon of Peter's is for us today. We are actually called to reform our lives around the fact that by the resurrection Jesus reigns and now and forever.

You see, Jesus is Lord of all creation whether a person trusts him or not. But when you accept his Lordship, when you place your hope and trust in him, that actually changes your whole orientation of life.

It is what causes you to repent, which is what Jesus preached when he preached the good news of the kingdom, the work of the Holy Spirit. That's why Jesus says, repent for the kingdom of heaven is

near.

So it's very good for us to look at what it means to know that Jesus reigns forever. I want to look at the reaction of the 24 elders in verse 16 because they show us what it means to be changed, to repent, to be utterly transformed by the kingship of Jesus Christ.

[10:42] Now we don't know for sure who those 24 elders are. It's very likely that they are the 12 tribes of Israel representatives and the 12 apostles, which represents the old Israel and the new church.

we do know that they are representing the people of God. They are clearly people that have their lives centered around the great truth that Jesus reigns.

And so, in verse 16, as soon as they hear the reign of Jesus proclaimed, what do they do? They fall down and they worship.

They are literally floored by the wonder of that truth that Jesus reigns forever and ever. Literally, their lives are shaped by that truth and they fall down together.

They agree together on the truth of what is said and they together express that it is the center of their lives. It is the truth that they bow down to, that they can do nothing but worship Jesus Christ who is our King.

[11:49] So by their actions they are saying very clearly God rules their lives. And this is what the church is meant to be about. It is about hearing God's truth, about His rule and His kingship and helping each other to shape our lives around it, to pray for each other, to allow the Holy Spirit to bring us to repentance and to find the way that this truth actually changes the way that we live, the way that our lives look.

And so I think that it is a very good Advent exercise for us to sit down and to ask ourselves how is my life shaped by the truth that Jesus reigns forever?

You know, do you make your business decisions from that reference point? Do the things you say and do in your personal relationships, whether they are with your family or your friends or your colleagues, do those relationships reflect the fact that Jesus is your Lord?

Do the priorities in your life, your hopes and your desires, do they reflect the priorities of King Jesus? These are the questions of worship and in a sense the 24 elders are being tested.

What does it look like to know that Jesus is Lord? Well, they fall down in worship. Eugene Peterson, I think is helpful to us here.

[13:16] He's a very creative thinker and he describes a life not centered on the lordship of God and he compares that life to a vast shopping mall which is very helpful coming into the week before Christmas.

He says, people who do not worship live in a vast shopping mall where they go from shop to shop expending enormous amounts of energy and making endless trips to meet first this need and then that appetite, this whim and that fancy.

Life lurches from one partial satisfaction to another interrupted by ditches of disappointment.

There's a life without the king at the center of your life, he's saying.

And you know, the world is looking for a center to life. That is why this incessant looking for what will bring satisfaction. And the 24 elders have actually found their satisfaction and true joy in the great truth of the lamb on the throne.

And that is why we, this is what we were made to have as our center as well. This is what we were created for. And that's why a life of worship is a great gift to us.

[14:31] And this is what the elders are revealing to us. Well, this leads to the second response because the 24, not only do they worship, they are deeply thankful to God for his reign.

And so they say in verse 17, we give thanks to thee, Lord God Almighty, who art and who was, that thou hast taken thy great power and begun to reign.

And what this shows to us is there is incredible gratitude to God because he has decided to take over the kingdom of the world. It seems as though this is something the 24 have longed for.

And they sing about it. What a wonderful thing it is for them to see God take over the kingdom of the world. They speak what is in their heart. Joy overflows and they speak about it. They speak with thanksgiving.

And so again, we're seeing the reign of Jesus shaping speech, shaping thought. And there's a challenge for us because we live in a culture of entitlement. We've been shaped to believe that we deserve the best.

[15 : 36] And the unfortunate result is that as Christians, we tend to be complaining people even though we have so much to be thankful for.

We are critical of the failings of others and we often are unaware or we are forgetful about the reign of Jesus. In my last church, we were talking about this at a Bible study how complaining often seems to be something prevalent in churches.

And one woman who is fairly new to the church said, you should do what we did at a conference I was at. It was an educational conference. Often there was complaining at these conferences and critiquing.

And they made a rule at the beginning of the last conference she was at, a two-day conference. And they said, well, you are here for every critical remark you make. You have to make ten remarks that are positive.

You have to talk about ten things that you are grateful for, things that you think are great. And she said it really cut down the amount of criticism happening in that conference.

[16 : 43] I think she said there wasn't that much talking either. But David Short is thinking of implementing this for 2008 for St. John's. And it wouldn't be such a bad idea because gratitude is the mark of somebody who knows the rule of God.

Very simply. joy comes from knowing what is happening by God's great power. Thankfulness comes by hearing of God's work of salvation in his world and knowing that he is bringing all things one day to be perfectly under the lordship of Jesus.

So thanksgiving comes from noticing what is God doing? What is he doing in the lives of his people? We increase our thankfulness as we focus on his reign.

So thirdly and finally not only did 24 express their thanks to God and speak about it not only are they actually floored and undone by the wonder of the truth of his reign and worship him but they are also very clear about judgment.

Look at verse 18 it says here that the nations raged but thy wrath came they're singing about this and the time for the dead to be judged for rewarding thy servants and the prophets and saints and those who fear thy name both small and great and for the destroying of the earth.

[18 : 07] What you have here are two things two sides of judgment you have praise of God's people and you have the destruction of all that is opposed to God of all that rages against God and this is a very helpful thing for us at Advent because Advent is a time where we look at judgment Advent is a time for us to refocus the eyes of our hearts and one of the ways it does this is by making us very aware that Jesus is going to reveal all things and the things that are of God that which he knows is right and which is opposed to him will be made clear and the 24 know this everything that rages against God will be judged all that is of God will be praised and this is something that we as Christians ought to be really clear about that all that is done to serve the Lord God in our lives will be made known God will praise us for it that's what that reading from 1 Corinthians 4 said in judgment

God will commend us he will praise us and we ought to live for that reward to strive for what is praiseworthy in God's sight to be ambitious for his kingdom and all those who are well known and those who are hidden who serve God in this way will know God's reward and it will be greater than anything we could think of here on earth but also because of the other side of judgment because all that is opposed to God will be destroyed one of the great ambitions God gives us is that we would be concerned about the eternal destinies of those around us that we would love those who do not know him and his kingship that we would pray for one another as we take the courageous step of speaking about our thankfulness to the king and that's why it's important for us to pray about the mission that Rico Tice is going to be leading in May to begin now to pray for people that they would know

Jesus as their Lord and the one who died for them so judgment gives us this calm urgency it motivates us to be about the work of his kingdom now the closing verse verse 19 really brings this all together because what it says there is what it means that Jesus is king is that heaven is open verse 19 God's temple in heaven was opened and there are two things that we see we see the ark of his covenant within his temple and we see flashes of lightning and voices and peals of thunder and earthquake and heavy hail so we see God's power and his control over all the forces of the world all that is good and all that is evil we see that perfectly in judgment and we also see that God reveals in the ark of his covenant a symbol that says God is faithful to his promises that God has in fact broken into our world to rescue us in Jesus

Christ that he is our God and that he is with us forever this is what the ark of the covenant means and this is what it means to have Jesus as our king and I think that the genius of Handel is that in his music the words echo over and over again and he shall reign forever and ever those words ought to echo in our own minds and to shape us and our thinking to know God as the one who truly is worthy of all worship the one that we should be thankful for in our minds and in our speech the one who will praise us for what he has done for what we have done in service to him and that he will do away with all that is opposed to him and those words ought to create in us joy and repentance for one reason only that we might glorify the one who is king forever and ever amen