

Jesus is ruler of all

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[0 : 00] What I mean by that is, is that if you don't pay attention to them here, they won't be found anywhere else. In other words, they're located in these few words.

The thing that strikes me, and I've been hinting at this for a couple of weeks now, and perhaps a little bit more this morning, is that as I've read through the Advent this year, especially in Matthew and in Luke and some of the promises in the Old Testament, of how struck I am, and I think you ought to be as well, by the involvement of the supernatural.

By supernatural, I don't mean paranormal. I mean heavenly bodies. I mean angels. I mean signs and wonders. I mean, if you start adding them up, you have a whole list.

There's one angel that appears to Joseph. There's a different angel that appears to Mary. There's angels that appear to the shepherds who watched their flocks by night. There's another angel that appears to Joseph, telling him to take Mary and the child off to Egypt.

And then another angel telling Joseph, well, it could have been the same angel, telling him that Herod had died and that it was safe to come back. We then have these wise men who come from the east following a star.

[1 : 24] Well, that's unusual, to say the very least. And we would assume, I guess rightly so, that their journey would have been slow, even though the actual mileage wasn't that far to get from where they were probably, Babylonian sort of area, across to here.

But I guess their journey would have been slow because they would have only been able to travel so many hours a day because stars only come out at night. So if they're following a star, the assumption is that most of their traveling is done at nighttime and during the day.

And so when we read these passages and when the star rose, it's a bit like when the sun rose.

Okay, the sun comes up in the day. It doesn't really come up.

But our perception is that it rises. And so when the star rose, I think another way of reading that is it just became nighttime. It became evening.

And suddenly the star became apparent. But nevertheless, it must have been some kind of particular type of star in order to lead these wise men all the way to Jesus.

[2 : 34] And you might remember that last year, most of the services that we did leading up to the Advent was focusing on that star that led the wise men. We spent a lot of time last year on that.

And so I sat down and I thought to myself, well, this is the only place, and we've not even mentioned yet, the Virgin Conceiving, which is the biggest supernatural event of all, that God coming into this world through the womb of a woman.

And as I said last Sunday evening, the thing that staggers me over and over again, it doesn't matter how many times I think about it, I am staggered by the fact that Jesus in the womb of Mary is still upholding the world.

Okay? He holds all things together, wherever he is, whatever he is doing. It is astonishing. It is truly amazing.

But what are we to make of all of this? Well, I came to the conclusion that if God is going to come into the world, we would assume that his entrance into the world, though humble, which it is, it's not without its supernatural involvement.

[3 : 40] I mean, look at the entrance of God into the world. It doesn't go unnoticed. Even though it's localized, it's met with supernatural events.

Angels, stars, Virgin Conceiving, glory, singing, the lot. And I guess it's a fair assumption to say that if God is entering into this world, then he comes with all the blessings that come with God.

He comes with the heavenly host. He comes with an entrance. And one wonders that if that was what it was like at his first coming, then what is it going to be like at his second coming?

One wonders. How amazing will that be in comparison to his humble, somewhat secretive birth here in Bethlehem?

I think we are meant to understand that the creator of this world lived in this world. I think that's the simple retelling that we're to see here.

[4 : 43] The God of the world came to live in the world. The God who created this world came and lived as a creation in his created order.

Jesus came into the likeness of man, flesh and bone, blood, water in his body, just like us. He grew tired.

He grew strong. He grew in knowledge. But he also grew in the pain that he would endure. The Advent is about God, the creator of the world, coming to this world.

Another thing to consider here, and there are lots of things to consider as we make our way through, is before we get to the fact that Jesus Christ is this ruler of Bethlehem, the ruler of the world, who is also a shepherd.

Even before we get to that, we need to understand the type of the world that Jesus is coming into. And Simeon helps us understand it. He is waiting, he says over in Luke 2, for the consolation, the consolation of Israel.

[5 : 50] He's waiting for something that will console him and console the whole nation. He is waiting for a type of comfort that cannot be got from the world.

And he can't get it anywhere else. He simply has to wait for it to come. And when Jesus comes, he recognizes that that is the consolation of Israel.

And that's important background information. And here's why. This is why it's relevant even now. When things go well with God's people, you forget him.

When things go well with you, and life is rosy, you forget God. God's people always forget God when life goes well. Now, they may not forget God entirely, but they forget to walk with God closely. Because good times lead to God's people often forgetting him. Now, historically, if you read the whole of Scripture, and you just take air history all the way back to Jesus Christ, time and time again, God's people, on a grand scale, have forgotten God simply when times are good.

[7 : 02] It just seems to be a natural bent that we have. When we find it easy to depend on ourselves, we depend on ourselves. When we find it easy to depend on others, or there's a level of dependency there, we do it.

And God, though thought of, is not truly dependent on. It seems that all the way through Scripture, that every time God's people forget him, there is an absence of two things in particular.

There's an absence of two things in particular. Sorrow and conflict. No sorrow and no tension. No sorrow and no conflict. And then all of a sudden, God's people forget him.

So what are we to do? We don't want sorrow, and we don't want conflict. But neither do we want to forget God. Okay? We don't want sorrow to remember God, but it seems that the world needs a healthy dose of things not going very well for God's people to remember him.

It seems that God's people can't cope without trouble in this world in order to bring them back close to God. We think that we can stay close to God when everything is rosy, and yet the history of God's Word teaches that God's people don't seem to be able to manage that.

[8 : 17] In fact, the way it works is like this. The way you deal with things in your life and the way I deal with things in my life, if we're not staying close to God, works on the manageable to the unmanageable.

So here we are living life, and it's manageable. And it's manageable. And it's manageable. And then one day we wake up, and it's not manageable. And we're not too sure how it went from the manageable to the unmanageable, but we are sure that now it is unmanageable.

And it's in that moment that we begin to realize that in all those days where we thought it was manageable, we were not actually depending on God. We were depending on ourselves. Okay?

The reason why it went from manageable to unmanageable is because we were not depending on God, but depending on ourselves. So when the manageable becomes the unmanageable, it's fine, I can deal with it, I can cope.

And then all of a sudden, I can't cope. Or it's manageable, and then all of a sudden, it's not manageable anymore. I cry out to God. God, help me.

[9 : 22] I need you to intervene. And God, in his grace and in his mercy, does so. But God's always been there ready to intervene. God's always been there ready for you to depend on him.

But God knows, just like we know in reflection, that when things go well with us, we forget God. And so we shouldn't be surprised that at the time Jesus comes, he comes into his own land when there are different rulers.

God does not rule, well, God does rule the land of Judah and Bethlehem and the world. But historically, locationally, the Romans are here.

The Greeks have been, the Persians have been, now the Romans are here. Herod is not even a good king. Herod, if you read the story through, wants Jesus dead.

So it seems to me that when you consider what it takes for God's people to wake up and realize dependence on God, it doesn't take a life to go well. It takes almost desperate, sorrowful, conflict circumstances.

[10:29] And that is what Jesus is born into. In other words, God's people have got to that stage where their manageable lives are now unmanageable.

Where the nation that was once manageable is now unmanageable. So let that be a lesson to you. Let that be a lesson to me. As you sit here this evening and you think, yeah, I'm managing everything, you shouldn't be.

Your dependence should be on God as you manage everything. Because when the manageable becomes the unmanageable, you then have realized it too late. Too late. So the temptation is when your life is going well, you are tempted to forget God.

But don't court sorrow, don't court conflict to remember him. Just remember him in the good times. So here we have Simeon in Luke 2 waiting for the consolation, waiting for the comfort.

He's waiting for God to come in and take over because we've made a mess of it. We don't know what to do. We don't know what to do next.

[11:35] And it seems to me that the whole nation feels the same way. Earthly consolation doesn't last. It wears off like a novelty.

It has initial effect, but then soon enough, we need something else to replace that initial consolation. How nice it is when someone comes over to us after we have gone through perhaps a bad period and for a day they've comforted us.

They've taken us out. They've bought us a cup of coffee. They've spoken to us. And all of a sudden, they've lifted our spirits. And it's been wonderful. But then, you're at home at night on your own and suddenly, you're lower than what you were before you went out at the beginning of the day.

Earthly consolation, though good, though beneficial, doesn't always last. What we need is a source of consolation that keeps us strong, even in the midst of sorrow and conflict.

And that's what Simeon has on his mind when he says, I am waiting for the consolation of Israel. I'm waiting for something that will cause a change that will remain changed.

[12:40] I'm waiting for something that will bring a change that won't then reverse a few moments later or a few days later. I'm wanting something that will come and that will last.

And that's only Jesus. He's only at peace when he sees Jesus. He says, now that I've seen Jesus, now I can depart in peace. Why? Because now I understand that the consolation that I've been waiting for, the salvation that I've been waiting for, the peace that I've always wanted, is actually in a person.

And that person is Jesus. That person is also described, before we move on to the ruler, which we read from Isaiah 9, as the wonderful counselor.

So here's the second point, wonderful counselor. When we think of counselors, we may have one view in our mind of an earthly counselor.

Perhaps it could be an addiction counselor, a bereavement counselor. It could be a number of different specialized counselors. And they all serve their purpose. But their words, however incredibly beneficial to the people that they speak to, don't rule.

[13:51] And another thing an earthly counselor can offer is that they can't back their words up. In other words, you can tell somebody, you can map out how change would happen in their life.

You can say, these are the danger areas, these are the implications, these are the motivations of a defaulted heart. You can map out all these things biblically. But then the trouble that you have is then left to the person.

When we understand Jesus is a wonderful counselor, we are meant to understand that though the works he speaks are wonderful, he can back every single one of them up.

Why shouldn't we mess with God? Well, because when he says something, he can back it up. Why should we take the Bible seriously? Well, because God can back every single one of his words up. When Isaiah speaks of Jesus as being this wonderful counselor, what he's actually saying is, is that when he says something, he can back it up. He rules in a wonderful way, he rules with great counsel, his words are ruling words.

[14:57] Every word of his can be backed up. And therefore, we take the Bible seriously, it's the word of God, we take Jesus seriously. Because when he speaks, we know that we're dealing with someone who can back every word up.

But Isaiah does say that he is a wonderful counselor. And therefore, you've got a good idea of what's going to come out of his mouth. Okay, he's not just a counselor, he's not a dictator, he's not just the Lord, but he is the wonderful counselor who is Lord.

He is the wonderful counselor who is the ruler of Israel and the world. And therefore, wonderful should give us a clear indication of the type of words that are going to come out of his mouth.

The type of message that is going to come from this wonderful counselor. But here's the thing, what he says doesn't just go because he's God, it goes because he has the power for it to be so.

I've used this illustration before, the difference between creative words and descriptive words.

When I say the word sunshine, I'm describing. But when God says the word sunshine, he makes it happen.

[16:10] Okay? God's word, God backs his word up. They're not descriptive in the same way arrows are. They are life forming. They are change happening. When God says something, and it was so, and it was so.

And we shouldn't forget that. That when we come to Christ, who is the wonderful counselor, his words change things. Change things in our lives, change things in this world.

His word is as the world will be eventually. And these are the things to trust in. He is the ruler, but he is the wonderful counselor.

So when God says what he will do, how can we trust him? Well, because he's the counselor. When God says these things will happen in the future, how do we know? Because he is the wonderful counselor.

And that means that when God speaks, he can back the words up. Okay? They're not empty words. Every word is backed up. Let me put this in a slightly different way.

[17:12] If God only decided to save one person out of the whole human history, let's just say for a moment that he allowed this world to exist for another 100,000 years.

not another 100,000 years because it's not existed for 100,000 years, but you know what I mean. That was a Freudian slip. Terrible one at that. So it's existed so far.

My conviction is that God created the world in six literal days and the seventh day he rested and the world would be 6,000 plus years, whatever it may be.

So if you add another 6,000 plus years on or however many more years onto that that you want to and you have all these people born throughout all those generations and you ask this one simple question or one statement, if God only saved one person at one point in all that history given the fact that not a single person on earth deserves to be saved because their sin is offensive towards God, if God only did it for one person throughout the whole of human history, God could still be called a wonderful counselor.

God could still be called the wonderful counselor full of mercy if he only did it for one person because not a single person rightly deserves mercy when they have offended another party and our offense is towards God but here we sit saved, forgiven and God saved thousands before us and he's going to save thousands after us and here we sit.

[18:56] He didn't just do it for one, he did it for us and a whole load more. God is truly the wonderful counselor. He doesn't just speak, he backs every word up.

So we come then to ruler, shepherd. Again, you'll notice here in Matthew 2, it says, and you, O Bethlehem, the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah.

Why? Well, because Jesus comes from there. For from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.

One of the things that we're meant to see here is that God rules but he rules by leading which is a very unusual way of perhaps ruling. you would imagine that if you're a ruler that whatever you says from the throne, whatever you says from your position of power, people ought just to do.

The trouble is is people just don't do that and that's because people can recognize the difference between following an instruction and following a person. How many of you live your Christian life saying, I follow God's laws?

[20 : 10] Well, hopefully that should be true but you don't speak like that. You say, I follow Jesus. And yet here you are having never followed Jesus on earth but you describe your Christianity as I follow, well you ought to, as I follow Jesus Christ.

And the reason you describe Christianity in that way as followers of Jesus is because he is the ruler shepherd. And that's crucially important. We get to see Jesus living his life on earth through scripture.

We get to see the highs, the lows, we get to see him tired, we get to see him in pain, we get to see him in sorrow, we get to see him deal with religious people and with irreligious people. We get to see him deal with people who want to continue in sin and we get to see him deal with people who want to repent of their sin.

We get to see Jesus almost in every possible situation. The one thing that we don't get to see Jesus in, interestingly enough, apart from one place, is his praying life.

They're recorded for us and one wonders how they're recorded because Jesus always prayed on his own. I mean, I find that staggering. Jesus always prayed, never did he pray with his disciples, not once.

[21 : 22] Jesus never had a prayer meeting with his disciples. Even in the garden of Gethsemane, they prayed there and he went off and prayed in a further part of the garden. And yet we still have those prayers recorded for us through the Holy Spirit written down for us.

The point is, is that we follow someone who has lived life in this world. And we see what his life looked like and that's why we follow him. He is the ruler, but he is the shepherd ruler.

Let me try and put this a slightly different way. Every now and then, when you're out and about, you might see these walking buses that schools have. Perhaps they're leaving the school when they're going to another location.

And it's always humorous. It shouldn't be humorous, but one wonders how two teachers, one on the front and one on the back, can keep 30 or 40 children in a straight line on a busy road.

But there they go and they manage it. But I've often looked at it and thinking, how does that happen? And here's why. Because I know children can't follow instructions.

[22 : 30] And I also recognize that you can be in a walking bus and you may not have any idea where you're going. Right? You don't know where to stand from where not to stand.

You don't know where to walk from where not to walk. You've been told where you're going but you have no idea how to get to where you're going from where you are. But what you do know is how to follow.

How simple it is to follow the person in front of you. Children, understand, follow me. Do as I do. It is an instruction, instruction, but it's an instruction put down to its most basic and simplest level.

Follow me. And so when God describes the ruler of this world as a shepherd, he is indicating to you, follow me.

He doesn't give you a list of instructions though there are instructions. He doesn't give you a bunch of laws though there are laws and God's laws to be obeyed. The way that he expresses all of that is for a person he calls you to follow.

[23 : 38] Follow me. You are God's walking bus through the earth. That's how simple it is. Okay? You don't have to think too much. You do have to think.

But God has made it super simple. You follow the person in front of you. Paul said, follow me as I follow Christ. Be like me as I'm like Christ. Okay? Pick out godly people, follow them, but follow them only if they're following Christ.

God is indicating here as he's indicated in the Old Testament that God's people are sheep. And, you know, I married a farmer's daughter and so I've got to see a lot of cows and sheep over the years.

And it's true what they say about sheep. They are stupid, for want of a better word. They get lost by eating.

I don't know if you've ever stood in a field. Well, you probably haven't, but let me just explain it for you, my boring life over the time I did. I wanted to know how sheep got lost and so I decided to stand in a field one day looking at what sheep did.

[24 : 46] And do you know what they do? Head down and they nibble the grass. And they nibble, they nibble, they nibble, they nibble, and before too long they're in another field. And they nibble and nibble and then they're off. Okay?

They don't look where they're going. They're interested in what satisfies their basic need and they go for it. And God, rightly or wrongly, rightly of course, calls us sheep.

But he calls Jesus our shepherd. Why? Because the temptation we have to go astray is an obvious one. Why? Because when life goes easy, when the grass is green, we nibble our way, are led astray, and go astray from God.

And here we have Christ as the ruler shepherd. Not lording it over you, but simply causing you to follow. He knows. He knows that instructions are there.

But the simplest way for you to follow Christ is to follow Christ. We are all like sheep and gone astray, and the shepherd has come to get us.

[25 : 56] Follow Jesus. He is the ruler who is shepherd. The ruler of all, but the shepherd of all. So here's the conclusion.

Having considered all these things, that Jesus is the wonderful counselor who can back up his words. Having considered that Jesus is the consolation, the one who can bring true consolation to us that lasts.

And also understood that Jesus is the ruler who is also shepherd, but ruler of all. You cannot be tempted by being allowed to think that Jesus is the Lord of your heart.

The world will not mind if Jesus is the Lord of your heart. The world will not mind one little bit if Jesus is the Lord of the church. What the world rejects is that Jesus is Lord over all.

That he is the ruler of all. So while you follow Jesus personally, never reduce it to the personal. That while Jesus is your personal savior, never make Jesus your private savior.

[27 : 04] Okay? Jesus is Lord. He is ruler. But he's not just the ruler of your heart. He is the ruler of all. The birth of Jesus is God declaring to the world that the ruler has come.

But he is a wonderful ruler who counsels us with his words and consoles us. And what that means is this. That when a person truly comes face to face with the power of God, if I can put it that way, truly comes into the presence of the power of God, what they see is a baby lying in a manger.

What they see is a homeless man dying for the sins of men, women, boys, and girls. That's what they see when they encounter the power of God.

So don't reduce Jesus to the private level. Don't reduce Jesus to only your heart level or only the church level. Jesus is Lord of all.

He is the ruler of all. But he is also the shepherd who is the wonderful counselor who can back up every word. Amen. Amen.

[28 : 38] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[30 : 35] Thank you.