

Jesus as King

Liam Gallagher of the rock group Oasis, once said in an interview: I don't pray and I don't go to church but I'm intrigued by it. I dig it. I'm into the idea that there could be a God and aliens and incarnation and some geezer years ago turning water into wine. I don't believe when you die, you die. All the beautiful people who have been and gone – Lennon, Hendrix – they're somewhere else, man. Whether its here or whether its there they're doing some musical thingummyjig. They got to be somewhere else, haven't they?"

Well yes they have but my thoughts, this morning are on this geezer years ago turning water into wine! Advent starts next week and no doubt we will be singing Charles Wesley's hymn, "Lo, he comes with clouds descending". Wesley surely took the words from Revelation 1:7 'Look! He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail. So it is to be.' Hence in the hymn: Every eye shall now behold him, robed in dreadful majesty, we who set at naught and sold him, pierced and nailed him to the tree, deeply wailing, shall the true messiah see. In Revelation this is a vision of the time when Christ will return to earth, all nations on earth, kings and princes will worship him, all worldly powers be subject to him. Wesley embellishes the words to say that the whole world would adore him on his eternal throne.

Here the language is about power, glory, claiming the kingdom, about thrones and nations being subjected to Jesus the King. Other Victorian hymns describe the Lord Jesus in heaven's glory. "Lord, enthroned in heavenly splendour" tells of all of heaven and earth with loud hosanna worshipping the lamb who died – risen, ascended, glorified. Caroline Noel, wrote: 'At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, every tongue confess him King of Glory now. Truly this Lord Jesus, shall return again, with his Father's glory, with his angel train. For all wreaths of empire meet upon his brow and our hearts confess him King of Glory now'

This is some geezer who, years ago, turned water into wine at a family wedding. But I wonder how comfortably you sit with the image of Jesus as the King of Glory, with the vision of a whole world worshipping him, and at his name, every knee shall bow? The Victorians liked it. In their Christian theology, this theme brought hope and comfort in a life of real hardship and constant fear. Seeing Jesus as King of Glory is one way of seeing the geezer that Liam Gallagher spoke about in his interview.

In the Bible we are exposed to many images of Jesus. Jesus is the Messiah, the Door, the Anointed One, the Son of Man, Son of David, Son of God, the Bridegroom, the Vine, the Lamb of God, the Shepherd, the Resurrection and the Life, the Word, Lion of Judah and Immanuel. In addition to all this, in Colossians, Paul describes Jesus as "the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation," "the head of the body, the church," "the beginning, the firstborn from the dead," and "the fullness of God."

Yes Jesus is King! But what of his kingdom! Tony Campolo, in his book: *Let Me Tell You A Story* tells of the minister of a large inner-city congregation in America who established a soup kitchen in the basement of his church to help feed the many

destitute and homeless people who hung around that part of the city. Over time these people started wandering into the 11am service at the church. The upper-middle-class members who worshipped at the time felt unhappy about this and one of the deacons (or lay leaders) of the church said to the minister: “Do these people have to be here with us? Can’t we provide a special service just for them?” The minister replied, “Well I think everybody should have a chance to meet Jesus face to face.” “Of course,” said the deacon, “everybody should have a chance to meet Jesus. I think they should have the same opportunities to meet Jesus face to face as we all do.” The minister responded abruptly, “I’m not talking about THEM! I am talking about YOU”.

Much food for thought for the deacon and his upper-middle-class folks! The minister was clear. You meet Jesus face to face in these homeless and destitute people who happened to wander into the 11am service. In a similar context, Tony Campolo refers to his tour of a friend’s inner city church that also a vast social ministry including a soup kitchen. They turned up just before noon to overhear the kitchen crew huddled together praying before the kitchen opened. Among the prayers was one offered by an elderly African-American woman who simply said, “Lord, we know You’ll be comin’ through the line today, so we pray that we will make you welcome!”

Only yesterday I read these words from Bishop John Pritchard’s book, *Living Jesus*: “The domestication of Jesus is the Church’s continual temptation. The impact of Jesus on the Church can be severely restricted and diminished if we find him too radical and to be asking too much. We settle too easily for comfortable, foam-rubber Christianity and a faith where Jesus is more a friendly pet than an untamed tiger. But if we try to tame this divine tiger we’ll all be losers. Fortunately the tiger will always reappear in some other part of the jungle.” This tiger is Jesus the King.

Liam Gallagher’s geezer that turned water into wine is King but he was a different king from the moment he was born. He never conformed to any images of kingship, with earthly glory and power. He wasn’t born in a royal palace, or into a royal family, but was born to very ordinary parents. He didn’t even fit in with his family, for he did things that even they found difficult or embarrassing. He was regarded as an odd but dangerous risk by the religious authorities. Jewish law always included the poor, and gave particular attention to widows and orphans. But Jesus actually talked to the poor and the destitute and preached that the kingdom of God was for them. This was no kingdom that anyone had come across before. Jesus, the King was always found on the edge, with people living on the edge – choosing to spend his time with people who felt weak, downtrodden, oppressed, outcast and forgotten. When on earth Jesus was completely committed to those whom nobody valued, respected or cared about. And he still is because that’s his kind of kingship.

This completely confused the Jews and the Romans. Jesus as King was a risk to their authority, just as Herod was terrified that a baby prince had been born who might threaten his own position. And so at Jesus’ trial, Pilate asked Jesus outright, “Are you the king of the Jews?” And they could not get their heads around the idea of a Servant King! How is possible to have a king who washes people’s feet, who cares nothing for earthly power? How can anyone follow him? Why would anyone want to?

At Jesus’ crucifixion there are no royal robes, just an almost naked body, no jewels in

the crown, just thorns, no trappings of power, just nails, no throne just a cross, no court or servants, just two criminals sharing his fate and an assorted crowd of soldiers and onlookers eager to stand around gawping and to mock. There is a sign, 'King of the Jews' but this sign denotes a different kingship. Through Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection Jesus is King but his kingship is one that can meet my deepest and most innermost needs and yours too, the needs we often dare not even admit or face up to ourselves. It is a kingship that allows me to say, 'thank you Jesus for your friendship, for sitting beside me, for being there and challenging me in the good times as well as when the going gets decidedly tough as it often and invariably does. Those soup kitchen helpers prayed that they would be ready to meet Jesus in the queue with the homeless. Maybe those members of that inner city congregation will realise that Jesus has turned traditional kingship upside down. Do we? In Bishop Pritchard's words 'we are dealing not with a friendly pet, but an untamed divine tiger.' This King calls out to us to offer ourselves to Him - that 'at his name, all our knees will bow and our tongues confess that he is Lord' Maybe then we can sense the difference he can make to our lives.

Without really knowing or believing what he was saying Liam Gallagher, in his interview, referred to the geezer, who years ago turned water into wine. But we know ABOUT HIM and he invites us to get to KNOW him. We know that he is a King who is never in your face. He always gives us freedom to choose yet no matter how much we slip and slide, duck and dive and shudder away from his calling he will keep on inviting us to share in His upside kingdom. It is up to us as to how, when and where OR if we respond.

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