



Christ the King

This is the transcript of a genuine radio conversation between a US naval ship and Canadian authorities off the coast of Newfoundland in October 1995

Americans: Please divert your course 15 degrees north to avoid a collision.

Canadians: Recommend YOU divert YOUR course is degrees to the south to avoid a collision.

Americans: This is the captain of the US navy ship. I say again, divert YOUR course.

Canadians: No, I say again, divert YOUR course.

Americans: This is the aircraft carrier USS Lincoln, the second largest ship in the US Atlantic fleet. We are accompanied by three destroyers, three cruisers, and numerous support vessels. I demand that you change your course 15 degrees north, that's ONE FIVE degrees north, or counter measures will be undertaken to ensure the safety of the ship.

Canadians: We're a lighthouse. Your call...

Funny how authority can go to some people's heads. So it is good this Sunday to remember where true authority lays. For this Sunday is the last in the church's year, and is known as 'Christ the King'. What a glorious title that is. For we worship Jesus as king of kings and lord of lords. We do truly give all the glory and honour to Jesus.

But a king implies a kingdom, and we know Jesus talked constantly about the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God. These two expressions mean the same thing. Looking in a dictionary we see that a kingdom is often defined as political or territorial area ruled by a sovereign. And a kingdom is an area over which rule or control is exercised.

The idea of the kingdom of heaven originated with the Jewish people in the latter period before Jesus came. It was an expectation or hope that in the future God would restore the throne of David. It would be the direct intervention of God to restore his people the Jews fortune and liberate them from the power of their enemies. It was very much associated with the coming of the Messiah.

When Jesus came Israel was under Roman occupation and rule. True the Romans installed governors like Herod, but they were very much figureheads. The real power was that of Rome. Some like the zealots were prepared to use force to throw out the Romans. It is into this situation that Jesus is born.

But even though we know he is a king, he was not born in a palace but in a stable. As the song said:

*From the squalor of a borrowed stable,
By the Spirit and virgin's faith;
To the anguish and the shame of scandal
Came the Saviour of the human race!*



It is surprising how few Christmas cards feature any nativity scenes. They all seem to be full of snowman and father Christmas etc... However, if you do find one with a stable scene, it will usually picture it as antiseptically clean and Joseph and Mary's clothes will be spotless. But the stable where Jesus was born would have been a dirty, smelly and probably full of drafts. Into this situation was born the king of kings. There was also the shame of Mary a virgin conceiving Jesus. We know this was by the Holy Spirit coming upon her. But the people she lived amongst wouldn't have known this.

When some 30 years later Jesus starts his ministry his message is all about the kingdom of heaven.

Many evangelicals present the Christian faith as all about salvation and eternal life. 'Believe on Jesus and receive eternal life', is the message. And eternal life is all about the promise of going to heaven when we die. It seems to be very much looking to the next life at times. Now there is nothing wrong with the message and salvation in itself. As one, who accepted Jesus as my saviour, when I was 16, I know I have eternal life. I know that one day I will stand face to face with God in heaven.

But as Matthew writes in his gospel:

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. Matthew 4:23

Notice that it was the good news of the kingdom that Jesus preached rather than about eternal life. Jesus was very much concerned with the here and now. Notice also that he not only preached the good news but he demonstrated it by healing the sick. It is a great shame that we as the church have lost the ability to pray for the sick in such a way that we see them being healed. I say this as much to myself as to any one else. How we need the power of the Holy Spirit to heal the sick; to cause the blind to see and to see people being set free. For if the world around us saw the church healing the sick and setting people free, they might want to come and hear the good news of Jesus and the kingdom of God.

It is great that some Christians are seeking to regain God's power and love to heal the sick. Christians from about 6 churches in Chelmsford are running what is called 'Healing Rooms'. And on Tuesdays from 8:00 to 9:30 PM and on Wednesdays from 3:00PM to 6:00 PM they are open in the Christian Growth Centre on the Widford Industrial Estate. So people both Christians and non-Christians can go there for healing prayer. I have been myself and asked for prayer for healing.

Remember, the Jews thought the kingdom of God would be a future event, heralding in the rule of God in Israel. These ideas were very much for the physical restoration of Israel with a king like David in charge and no more foreign slavery.

But we have seen how Jesus though he was the king of kings was not born in a palace but born in a stable. Going before him is John the Baptist, dressed in camel hair clothes and living in the desert of Judea. This was not so much a desert as a very wild and desolate place, with not much there. John was no princely figure dressed as he was and living on a diet of locusts and wild honey.¹

¹ Matthew 3:1-6



But what was his message? He says:

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near”. Matthew 3:2

So the kingdom of God is not far ahead in the future but is close and near to them. And the entrance to this kingdom is through repentance.

Repentance is a word that even some Christians misunderstand. It doesn't mean grovelling in sackcloth and ashes with lots of woe is me type language. The root of the word means to change one's mind or to turn around.

You see sometimes I find myself going in the wrong direction and facing away from God. The things I am doing are not pleasing to him. But then the Holy Spirit whispers in my heart and brings correction. It is interesting to note that God doesn't nag or whine at us and lay guilt heavily upon us. I find God's correction is gently given but cut's right to my heart. I then realise that I am not facing in God's direction, and I am not pleasing him. So I make a choice in changing my mind. I say you are right Lord and I am wrong. I now choose to turn around and face in your direction again and go your way.

When Jesus starts his ministry he takes up the same theme. For we read in Matthew's gospel:

From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near”.
Matthew 4:16

When Jesus sends out his disciples in pairs, he says to them:

“As you go preach this message, ‘the kingdom of heaven is near’”. Matthew 10:7

The Pharisees, with their mind set of this being in the future ask Jesus when the kingdom of God would come. Jesus says:

“The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is within you.” Luke 17:20-21

Here we see the great truth that not only was the kingdom of God here but it is within us. The kingdom was not an external area like Israel under God's authority and rule, but was people whose lives are given to God and therefore under his authority and above all his love.

What Jesus is effectively saying is that because I have come to earth, that which God promised is here and you can enter into it. We know that Jesus had to die and rise again to make all this possible. In a few weeks we will be celebrating Christmas, and the absolutely mind blowing truth that God entered into our world in the form of a baby in a stable. As the song I played said, ‘At the dawning of Immanuel’. We I am sure know that Immanuel means God with us. Jesus is indeed the king, who we can celebrate. But just as wonderful is that because of all that the kingdom is now here on earth. Jesus wants to live in us through his Holy Spirit. So that we can cry Immanuel, God is with us. We have Jesus in our lives. The kingdom is indeed here and in us.



Whilst we have eternal life and one day will go to heaven to live with God for ever, the place Jesus wants us to focus on is the present. Remember in the Lord's prayer we say:

'Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven'. Matthew 6:9

As someone said the gospel is not so much about us getting to heaven, rather it is bring heaven down to earth. As we celebrate, Christ the King let us remember his kingdom is here with us. His kingdom is within us, if we are indeed accepting Jesus as our saviour and living in him through the Holy Spirit. Remember, it is through our faith that we are saved and brought into the kingdom of God. As Paul writes to the Colossians:

For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Colossians 1:13 - 14 NIV

Isn't it great to realise that we have been transferred from the dominion of darkness at the beck and call of Satan and brought into the kingdom of the Son.

Some people in churches think that they have earned this by joining the church or attending regularly. Some even think if they try to be good that this is enough. But Paul clearly writes to the Ephesians:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God not by works, so that no-one can boast. Ephesians 2:8 - 9 NIV

So the entrance to this kingdom is through our faith in Jesus. It is not we have done but what Jesus has done for us, in dying on the cross for each one of us. By grace we are members of his kingdom through our faith. Remember that hymn that says:

Nothing in my hand I bring;
Simply to the cross I cling;
Naked, come to thee for dress;
Helpless, look to thee for grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly;
Wash me, Saviour, or I die.

Some one once said Christian sing lies. What they were saying is that it so easy to sing some of these hymns without thinking about the words. Do we really believe these words as we so often sing them in church?

In entering into his kingdom we enter truly in to life. Remember that Jesus said,

I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. John 10:10



We as Christians should be the most alive and vibrant people on this earth. For the life of Jesus, through his Spirit, should be flowing out from us to others. The kingdom of God should flow in us and through us to the world around us. As the kingdom of God we should be salt and light to the society in which we live. It is all too easy to look at all the bad things happening in Great Britain at this time. Heaven knows the media seem to delight in all ways telling us all the bad news and never any good news. We do see around us a broken world that is all too often full of pain and misery. But let us as Christians and as the church bring heaven down to earth. Let us attract people to the kingdom of God, the kingdom of Christ the king. We may not mention Jesus by name, but let us reflect his love and concern for people.

But remember Jesus is no lofty and remote king. Rather he is the king of love as we sang earlier. He expresses the Father's love for the world in coming to earth and dying to deal with our sin and brokenness.

It is all too easy to look at our empty and weak churches and feel hopeless. However, let us rather, look at Christ the king. He is victorious. He has won the battle when he smashed the forces of darkness through his death and resurrection. He has the power to change the world and to change the society in which we live in. He can revive the church if only we will let him. We need to both live and proclaim the good news that the kingdom of God, is near, indeed this kingdom is here with us, right now.

I believe one of the greatest aspects of this kingdom is that it is a kingdom of love. Most of the kingdoms in the past and even in our society today, are all about power, status and wealth. But Jesus kingdom is a kingdom of love; a kingdom where it is better to give than to receive; a kingdom where we are called to love even our enemies. And remember Jesus added one new commandment when he said:

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

John 13:34-35

It was those outside the church that gave the early followers of Jesus the name Christians. One of the things that attracted them to the church was the love the early Christians had for each other. We read in Acts how they served each other and pooled their money so that no one went with out. We need to love each other, not just in words, but in practical action, in our churches. Then the people around us, might ask what is different about us, as they see our deep and practical love for each other.

Jesus said he would call us friends. Isn't it great that Jesus is our friend. Indeed he is our brother. But I keep saying to God a maybe a friend of Jesus but in terms of action I want to be a servant. I want to serve God in extending his kingdom. I know I haven't fully entered into this kingdom of his yet. I know that in order that the kingdom of Jesus may grow more fully in me, I need the Holy Spirit to move in my life. That why like so many Christians today, I cry, 'More Lord, more of your Holy Spirit'. For his Spirit can transform my life and help me to more fully express the kingdom of God. His Spirit can give me the power to demonstrate this kingdom of others. It is his power that will enable me and you to bring the kingdom of God down here to earth.



Title: Christ the King



So I pray that you will all open your hearts afresh to Jesus the King. May he flood your hearts afresh with the knowledge of Jesus the King, through his Spirit? And may our prayer, truly be, that his kingdom, will come upon earth as it is in heaven; the kingdom of Christ the king.

[Words: 2747]