

## Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2023 – Colossians 1:15-20: ‘King of kings’ (1) ‘The King of all Creation’

In two weeks’ time we will celebrate the coronation of King Charles III. After a difficult few years in our national life, which seems set to continue for some time yet, I hope the weekend will provide a brief season of joy, hope, celebration and some much-needed unity. I’m too young to remember the coronation of Queen Elizabeth, though I’m told to expect that the ceremony will, among many things, be very long – so make sure you’ve got plenty of snacks to hand if you’re going to watch the whole thing from the comfort of your sofa. King Charles’ favourite snack is apparently cheese and biscuits – Duchy Originals biscuits, no doubt!

To mark this important occasion, we will be having a special civic service in church the day after the Coronation – but we’re also dedicating a Sunday sermon series, which will run across the next five weeks, and which we’re calling ‘the King of kings’. It reminds us that, much as many of us will celebrate the coronation of our earthly monarch, **we worship a greater monarch, the monarch of monarchs – the Lord Jesus Christ himself.**

And it is to King Jesus that we owe the ultimate allegiance. Yes, Scripture encourages us to obey our earthly rulers, but only in so far as their rule accords with the ultimate reign of all – of the Lord God Almighty. Over these next few weeks, we’ll look at the theme of Jesus’ kingship from various angles, beginning today with Jesus as ‘the Lord of all Creation’.

But to return to King Charles. One thing that has often intrigued me is the list of titles that attaches to a ruler. As a history graduate, I often had to read documents produced by, or for, various monarchs. For example, the introduction to the original version of the King James Bible in 1611 opened as follows: ‘To the most high and mightie Prince, James by the grace of God King of Great Britaine, France and Ireland, Defender of the Faith, &c.’

I’m quite relieved about the ‘etc’ because the full list would have included many of the titles that our own Charles inherited before he became King. Prior to the death of Queen Elizabeth, this was no less than: Charles Duke of Cornwall, Duke of Rothesay, Earl of Carrick, Baron of Renfrew, Lord of the Isles, Prince and Great Steward of Scotland, Prince of Wales, Earl of Chester, and then after the death of his papa, also Duke of Edinburgh, Earl of Merioneth and Baron Greenwich.

Not a bad list – but it’s nothing compared to his titles now: this is what was read at the Queen’s state funeral last year, and presumably at his coronation in a couple of weeks’ time: ‘Let us humbly beseech Almighty God to bless with long life, health and honour, and all worldly happiness the Most High, Most Mighty and Most Excellent Monarch, our Sovereign Lord, Charles III, now, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and of His other Realms and Territories King, Head of the Commonwealth, Defender of the Faith, and Sovereign of the Most Noble Order of the Garter.’

In addition, he is now king of the following, in alphabetical order: King of Antigua and Barbuda, Australia, The Bahamas, Belize, Canada, Grenada, Jamaica, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, St Christopher and Nevis, St Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, the Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and, last but by no means least, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

A pretty impressive list, and at the coronation, King Charles will have the regalia to prove it: including the world-famous St Edward’s Crown which weighs nearly 5lb and is decorated with more than 400 precious and semi-precious stones.

**...But it's nothing compared to the list we see here in our glorious passage for today.** The background is that the small community of Colossian Christians were facing pressure to 'add things' to their faith, as if Jesus wasn't enough. Paul's answer was to write them a letter to remind them just how awesome Christ is – in other words, that he is more than sufficient for all we need in the spiritual life. Fundamentally, and put bluntly, Jesus is top dog, best of the best, numero uno – or, to use the language of the text, 'before all things'. The One who was, who is, and who is to come.

How can we possibly declare how great Christ is? We can't – but St Paul attempts a 'cosmic list' to try and give us a picture. Just look at Jesus' amazing titles in the passage, in the order they appear – a top ten to beat all top tens: (1) image of the invisible God; (2) firstborn over all creation; (3) creator of all things; (4) the reason that all things were created at all; (5) the One in whom everything holds together; (6) head of the church; (7) first to rise from the dead – note, in the sense that he has life within himself – we know of course that Jesus raised others in his earthly ministry; (8) possessor of the fullness of God; (9) the reconciler of all things to God; (10) the One who shed blood on the cross.

The last one jars, doesn't it – in the list of titles, it sticks out a mile. And yet, strangely, **it is the one which decisively demonstrates the truth of all the others.** As we saw in John's gospel on Palm Sunday (12:23), the humiliation of the cross is the way Jesus himself declared that he would be glorified – and through it, everything else is brought to fruition. Jesus' legacy is, extraordinarily, sealed through his death on our behalf: it is the fulcrum for his surpassing greatness, which existed from the beginning of time, and is afterwards manifested in his resurrection power and authority.

In this Easter season we have particular reason to worship this risen Christ – but of course it doesn't end there. Once this Christ ascends, he pours out the Spirit and when he returns, he will exercise all power and authority and be finally and eternally crowned – as we'll see in our passage in three weeks' time.

**This is who Jesus really is.** He is veiled in flesh – to use the lovely phrase in that famous carol – for a season, but Jesus has been there since creation, and, as Paul says quite astonishingly, all things were created through him, and for him, and in him all things hold together. Just take a moment to let that sink in. Creation was made *through* him, as the Lord declared 'Let there be light!'; creation was made *for* him – in other words the whole purpose of the universe is to worship, serve and love him; and creation only *holds together* now because Christ is Lord of it. That doesn't replace biological processes – it just means that that there is more going on than selfish genes and balanced eco-systems: the Lord of the universe has his hand on the tiller. We often find ourselves asking: why does God allow this disaster or that disaster to happen... maybe the question ought to be: just how bad would it be if Christ wasn't continually holding it all together?

I hope that our coronation weekend is joyful; and we all need to pray – and keep praying – for our new monarch, and all those who support him. But today, as we bask in this glorious passage, let's remember that **we can never exhaust the greatness of Christ** – there is no-one more amazing, no-one more worthy of our worship and adoration – and yet also no-one who carries this awesome power with such grace and humility. This extraordinary Saviour died – and rose – for us! Hallelujah!

And may this glorious Christ fill our minds and hearts again today, that we might bow in worship and be filled with joy and praise. Amen.