

Jesus: Liberator and King

Advance in Faith 1, Unit 2
Week 6 — Jesus in the world today



Coronation of the King (Acts 1)

After conquering death, Jesus “spoke about the kingdom of God.” (Acts 1:3) God’s kingship over the earth matters: what Adam lost (Gen 1:26-28), Jesus has regained.

The disciples ask only about the Israel part of the kingdom (Acts 1:6), but there is far more! Jesus is king of “heaven and earth” (Mt 28:18).

Instead, Jesus promises them the Holy Spirit—the one who hovered over creation (Gen 1:2) and brings God’s plan to birth. In the Old Testament, only to a few leaders had the Holy Spirit: some prophets, kings, and judges. As Christ (anointed one), Jesus had the Spirit (visible at his baptism). In the new kingdom established by his death and resurrection, he gives his anointing to *all* his followers (Acts 1:4-9). The Spirit empowers believers to give testimony that Jesus has dealt with sin and conquered death, and so he is King and Lord. (Acts 2:36) This is the good news: Jesus is Lord of the earth!

When Jesus had explained this, the disciples saw his coronation! He was “lifted up” into “a cloud” (Acts 1:9). This cloud is God’s presence (Ex 13:21-22; 16:10; 24:16; 40:34-38; Num 16:42; 1 Kg 8:10-12; Eze 1:4; Dan 7:13; Lk 9:34-35; 21:27; 1 Cor 10:1-2; Rev 1:7; 14:14-16).

So, Jesus has been taken up into God’s presence—the God who is right here! Heaven is not miles away in the sky somewhere: it is right here, if we could only see it. The divine presence is so close, and Jesus has been *exalted* into the divine presence, as ruler. He is now King—Lord of heaven and earth. Acts 1 describes his **coronation**!

He will return as king, when every eye will see him (Acts 1:11) and everyone acknowledge his kingship. Again, this doesn’t mean he is far away somewhere with a long journey to come back. The NT also calls his return his “appearing” (2 Thes 2:8; 1 Tim 6:14; 2 Tim 1:10; 4:1, 8; Titus 2:13; 1), as if he is already here but veiled from view just now.

So, for those who have eyes to see, the earth is his kingdom! The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our God (Rev 11:15). We are entrusted with good news: all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to the risen Saviour. Jesus is Lord!

We proclaim this news, and the Holy Spirit confirms its truth. That’s the story of the rest of the book of Acts.

How Jesus rules

God had formed Adam’s body from the earth and breathed his own life into him so he became a living being (Gen 2:7), but sin and death overcame him, spoiled creation, and cut them off from God’s life-giving presence (Gen 3:19, 24).

Jesus changes everything. His death overcomes sin and injustice. His resurrection overcomes death and decay. His dead body was transformed into one that could never die again—a body with new properties. His disciples were hiding for fear of the rulers who kill to maintain power, but the locked doors are no barrier to earth's new Ruler: Jesus shows up in the room, and breathes his Spirit into them just as God had done to Adam in the beginning (John 20:22).

Some of the early believers may have wondered whether Christians would still die now that Jesus had overcome death. If they did, they must have looked on with horror as they learnt that those who live lies still die (Acts 5:1-11 = Ananias and Sapphira).

But what about the righteous? Do they die? Stephen was:

- full of faith and of the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:5),
- full of grace and power, doing great wonders and signs (6:8),
- like an angel (6:15),
- full of the Holy Spirit, seeing Jesus reigning (7:55)

Yet he was killed (7:60). Did Jesus really solve the problem of evil? How is this any different from the evil world where Cain took his brother's life (Gen 4:8)?

Saul of Tarsus was one of those responsible for killing Stephen (7:58; 8:1). His animosity against his Jewish brothers is described in a very Cain-like way: "breathing threats and murder against the followers of the Lord." If he can threaten and kill them, how is the world different?

But Jesus does intervene! He reveals himself to Saul. Suddenly, Saul sees Jesus right there! And the question Jesus asks Saul is, "Why are you persecuting *me*?" (9:4) Jesus takes this personally: "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting." (9:5)

Notice that Jesus did not strike Saul down: that was not how Jesus introduced the kingdom during his life, and it is still not how his kingship works now. Instead, he instructs Saul to wait until a brother comes to him. Jesus calls Ananias to visit Saul. This is really scary for Ananias; yet Jesus' kingship brings brothers together!

So, yes: people like Stephen still die; what's different is that the very people complicit in such evil (like Saul) are being *renewed*! Wow: this is a really different kind of kingship. We are accustomed to worldly rulers who enforce their will with the threat of death. In contrast, Jesus rules by restoring people's hearts, giving them his life, and sharing his commission with them! Saul the persecutor becomes Paul the apostle.

Christ's body on earth

Following the confrontation with Jesus on the Damascus Road, Paul thought deeply about how Jesus took that persecution personally. Whatever you do to Jesus' people, you do to Jesus (Acts 9:4) just as Jesus had taught (Mt 25:40, 44). That's because Jesus is living and

ruling *in* his people. He breathed his Spirit into them, so they are actually his body—the body where Jesus is known and experienced in the world.

And this is how Paul understands the church—as Jesus’ body on earth. God came to us in the Messiah (incarnation). He identified with us in our death, so we were within him when he rose from the dead (Eph 2). Incorporation into Christ is the flip-side of incarnation: **incarnation** means “in flesh”; **incorporation** means “in body”.

This is more than a metaphor. Jesus lives in his people, so our actions are actually Jesus’ actions:

Eph 1:23 (*The Message*) The church is Christ’s body, in which he speaks and acts, by which he fills everything with his presence.

In the beginning, God created people to care for his creation. God’s management of creation—his reign—is expressed through people who are restored through Jesus.

What God did for Christ that first Easter morning, he will for the entire creation in the end. And in the meantime, we are corporately the presence of the resurrected Jesus in the world, announcing his rule that releases from evil, throbbing with the life of his Spirit—the temple where the world can encounter God today!

God is in the process of restoring everything, and he is using us.

Consequently, what you do really matters! We embody Christ in the world. We are the place where the world experiences Jesus. We are the means by which Jesus sets everything right. By announcing and implementing what he has done and anticipating what he is yet to do, we are the means by which Jesus becomes known as king of creation!

Jesus’ mission

Jesus’ mission in the world is not yet complete. As his body in the world, we are to continue what he “began to do” (Acts 1:1).

It is scary to realise that the “light of the world” (Jn 8) is now in us. Collectively, we have become God’s lampstand (Rev 1:20). Jesus walks among the lampstands (Rev 2:1). If Jesus’ love is not firing us up to be that light, the world will be a dark place indeed (Rev 2:5).

God’s drama is not finished yet! He began with a world that was “very good” until enslaved to sin and death. Israel was unable to fulfil their commission to be a light to the nations, needing to be delivered themselves. Jesus dealt with oppression by taking it on himself, breaking sin’s power and freeing us from death’s rule. He is the hope of the world, and that hope lives within his body (the church). We are called to implement his victory, enter into his suffering, and joyfully anticipate his reign in the power of his Spirit.

So, our role in this on-going drama (as we saw in Acts) is to:

1. Announce the good news that Jesus is Lord.
2. Expect the Holy Spirit to confirm it.
3. Trust God to build his kingdom.
4. Baptise and disciple those who believe, so they become his kingdom, so everyone sees earth's Lord. (Mt 28:18-20)

We find ourselves now in Perth as "a voice" in God's unfinished symphony. We echo the promise of a world set right, a creation where the Master Conductor pulls the cacophonous discord back on key, yielding harmonies that are so rich and complex that every ear hears his song and every heart beats with his rhythm and every person is drawn into his dance.

Yes, it is his song we echo. The son of David reigns! There's enough life-giving water for everyone to drink and be satisfied. The groom is at the door, and the bride joins the Spirit-song inviting everyone to join his celebration while the door is open (Rev 22:16-17).

We are his voice in his world.

Conclusion

Here is what Jesus prayed for. Having entrusted his mission to us, he made it our prayer also:

- ⁹ Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
- ¹⁰ Your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
- ¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread,
¹² and forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
- ¹³ And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil. (Matt 6)

Group Questions:

- 1) Jesus taught so much about the “kingdom of God.” There is still a future component to his kingship (when everyone acknowledges him as king), but in what sense is he already earth’s king?
- 2) Ephesians talks about us being “in Christ” and being “the body of Christ.” What do these phrases mean? How does it work out in daily life?
- 3) If the Bible is the story of God’s amazing project, describe his mission for the earth today. How did Jesus fit into that mission? How do we? Discuss what this might look like for you personally, and use some of the group prayer time to pray for each other in this mission.
- 4) Thinking back over the six weeks of learning about Jesus life and work, what has inspired you the most? How will your life be different as a result of participating in this course?

Memory Work:

Ephesians 1:22-23 (NIV)

And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

Take Home Exercise:

At the start of this unit, we asked you to describe Jesus’ identity, mission, and gospel. Since then we’ve discussed the terms Jesus used to describe his identity and his mission, and the good news he proclaimed. You’re probably still processing all this, but has hearing the way Jesus described his identity, mission, and gospel changed the way that you would describe them? How would you express these three things now?

	How did Jesus describe ...	How do you describe ...
His identity (in a phrase)		
His mission (in a phrase)		
His gospel (in a sentence)		

Over the next five days, meditate on one verse of the Lord's Prayer each day (Matt 6:9-13). Ask:

- a) What does the verse mean? What are we God asking for?
- b) How can you respond? What will you do about it today?

For example:

<i>Day</i>	<i>Verse</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Response</i>
Tue	Our Father ...		
Wed	Your kingdom come		
Thu	Give us this day ...		
Fri	Forgive, as we forgive		
Sat	Deliver us from evil		

Follow your meditation each day with prayer. Make the day's request as meaningfully as you can, and make yourself a willing partner in Jesus' mission in your world.

Notes (PDF) and podcasts (MP3) for this unit are available at:

<http://www.riverviewchurch.com.au/watch-listen/podcasts/foundations-2.html>