

In our readings on Christ the King Sunday, there are two concepts that are very unpopular in our society, kingdom and judgment. We've seen them both abused by human institutions so often that we really do not like to think about them. Kingdom and judgment, however, are both essential, not only to our hope for eternity, but for our lives as Christians in the present.

The idea of a kingdom is very unpopular in the United States. True monarchies are shunned by all of the Western world today. Even our British friends have no use for a true monarchy today. We much prefer the notion set forth in the Declaration of Independence, which says, "Governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed." The people are in charge of the government. If those who are governed do not consent to their government, they have the right to change it.

We tend to think that Western style liberal democracy has all of the answers to the world's problems, and cheer when a dictatorship falls and is replaced by a democratic

government. We cheer, at least, until it goes wrong. As we saw in Egypt several years ago, a government that derives its power from the consent of the people can go wrong as well. An oppressive dictatorship is then replaced by the tyranny of the majority, and those in the minority face intense persecution.

Over and against the tyranny of human monarchies and democracies stands the very first Christian creed. That earliest creed was the statement, "Jesus is Lord."

We tend to try to spiritualize the statement that Jesus is Lord so that it means something like, Jesus is risen, which he is, or Jesus is the Son of God, which is also true. To say Jesus is Lord in the sense that it has in the New Testament is to say, "Jesus is the rightful King of creation. He is the one who has the right to govern and order the world." All other governments on earth, whether they are democracies, or monarchies, or dictatorships, are subject to the Lord Jesus. When the Son of Man comes on his throne of glory, all nations will appear before him.

If we recapture what it means to say, "Jesus is Lord," it will make a tremendous difference in the way we live as Christians. It will mean that Jesus is more than a good moral teacher, or a fresh revelation of what God is like. Both of those are true, however, to say he is Lord means that we acknowledge his right to command our obedience. He can say, "Forgive the person who sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turns back to you to ask for forgiveness." It's not just a suggestion for a better way of living. It is a command to be obeyed. Jesus can say, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you," and then expect that he will be hearing our prayers for those who persecute us. He can say, "Care for the hungry and thirsty, the sick and those in prison," and expect that we will.

We do, of course, get it wrong. Even when we give it our best effort, we miss the mark. We have been assured that there is forgiveness when we fail. Unlike so many human kings that we have heard about, Jesus wants to restore us.

He wants to put us back in a right relationship to his kingdom.

That right relationship with his kingdom is where the second concept that we shy away from comes in. To be restored to a right relationship with the Lord Jesus and his kingdom requires judgment. One of the reasons that we do not like judgment is that we have all seen it exercised by people who are not qualified to do so. We have known those people who are good in the worst kind of way, who are always ready to point out what the rest of the world is doing wrong. Or, we have been on the receiving end of judgment by someone who assumes the whole point of judgment is to figure out what is wrong and punish it.

If you bristle at the notion of judgment, the first thing to remember is who the judge is. We can all save ourselves a lot of trouble if we remember that we are not the judges. The one who comes on his throne with the angels of God around him is the judge. That is comforting when we

remember, he is also the one who welcomed sinners and ate with them.

If we are willing to receive it, the judgment offered by Jesus is for our liberation rather than for punishment. As our reading from Matthew makes clear today, there are those who will refuse to receive the judgment of Jesus. You don't need to worry about them. He will take care of all of that. I am not saying that it is not important. I am saying the final judgment at the resurrection is not for you or me to render.

In addition to making the point that Jesus is Lord, in our reading from the Letter to the Ephesians, St. Paul says that Jesus is, "far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come." This includes not only the governments of this world, but also the spiritual powers at work in them and in us.

When we think of judgment, we often think of something that separates the innocent people from the guilty people.

If you've served on jury duty, you've experienced that kind of judgment. The problem of sin and evil in the world does not run between nations or individuals. It runs through the middle of every human heart.

I need Jesus to judge the powers and authorities that are at work in my heart. I need him, through the power of his Holy Spirit to bring order to my will and affections. I've tried to do it on my own. I've tried, through the force of my own will to do all of the right things, and none of the wrong things. I've discovered that no matter how hard I try, I cannot do it.

The good news regarding the judgment given by Jesus is that his Holy Spirit is able to transform the human heart. His Holy Spirit can overcome those areas in my heart that I, on my own, cannot force to submit to the Lordship of Jesus. If we are willing to embrace the judgment offered by Jesus our Lord, he will transform our hearts and minds. He will overcome those things that we cannot overcome on our own. He will give us hearts of flesh to replace hearts of stone.

Understood rightly, the kingdom and judgment of Jesus are comforting to those who will embrace them. His kingdom will liberate us from the tyranny of the governments of this world. His judgment can liberate us from the tyranny of the powers and authorities in our hearts that we could never defeat on our own. When you say the words, "Lord Jesus," pause, and reflect on what that really means. When you are struggling to live in obedience to the Lord, ask him to bring judgment to the things in your heart that need his attention. If you do that, he will open your eyes to a new kingdom and to new life.