Mission Sunday 2020
John 5:25-29; Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14

The two passages read to us from John's Gospel and the book of Daniel, may not seem to have much to do with mission. But I want to try and show you otherwise. You see, the first passage from John 5 comes immediately after Jesus has healed the crippled man at the pool of Bethesda… on a Sabbath. And in response, the Jewish leaders - people who took their religion very seriously - were harassing Jesus and questioning his authority. And in response, Jesus says in v27, God 'has given him [he's talking of himself, the Son of God] authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man.'

And when you read *Son of Man*, especially in the context of someone being given authority, you've got to think of Daniel chapter 7, and that incredible vision Daniel sees of one like a son of man approaching God and being given authority over every nation. Which is all about mission.

So, we're going to look at four things in half the time we normally look at three! Another king, another kingdom, the opposition you'll face and the endurance you'll need.

Another King
Look what Daniel says he saw: One like a Son of Man coming before God and being given all authority, so that 'all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him.' (Dan 7:14).

And Jesus is saying, when Daniel saw that, he saw me. I'm the Son of Man, I'm the One to whom all authority over every tribe and tongue and people and nation has been given, that everyone should serve me.

In one of the riots against the early church, the instigators made an accusation that, in many ways, is a great summary of the Christian message: "these men who have turned the world upside down have come here also… and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus" (Acts 17:6-7).

And that's the essence of the Christian gospel - that another king has come, a king who demands our allegiance, a king that we must serve.

Now in the ancient world if a king wanted people from other nations to serve him he would rain death and destruction on them. But look how Jesus says he will bring that about: 'Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself' (John 5:25-27). Or as another translation puts it, God has given 'the same life-giving power to his Son.'

I was reading Matthew's gospel earlier this week, and in describing the beginning of Jesus' ministry Matthew quotes the prophet Isaiah: in the land where death casts its shadow, a light has shined.' (Matt 4:16). And we're currently living at a time when death casts its shadow over the land. But here is Jesus saying, 'I'm the king who has come to bring life. Life as you hear my voice speaking to you, calling you out of death. Life now and life at the end of time: v28, 'An hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out.'

And so the very thing that we dread - death, Jesus says, my voice, when you hear it, breaks its power. The power of physical death, at the end of time, in the resurrection of the dead. But also death now - the death that grips every heart as people try and find meaning and significance apart from a God who loves them. The daily dying that hopelessness and a sense of worthlessness can bring. The growing hardness that can steal over your heart as ambition, or unforgiveness, or self-righteous criticism, or pursuit of personal freedom, takes a hold on your heart. And into all that death, Jesus says 'My voice speaks and brings life.'

And it's because he's that king, because there will be a resurrection and judgement at the end of time, that Jesus says, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matt 28:18-19). It's the authority of the king that's the mandate for mission.

And that's why we support the Seed Company and the translation of God's word - the King's voice - into other languages, so other people groups can hear it too. It's why we support the work of the Bible school in Myanmar, training up church planters to take the King's word to those who've never heard it. It's why we support CABES and their work to take the gospel to refugees here in Lausanne. And GBEU and their work on campus, because every people group, wherever they live are Christ's, and his word brings life.

But if there's another king then there's….

Another Kingdom

Look at Daniel 7 again, 'To him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom… his dominion is an everlasting dominion… and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.'

And one of the great plot lines of the Bible is how God is at work in the world, rescuing people out of the domain of darkness and death and bringing them into the kingdom of light and life in his Son. And that plot line culminates in the last book of the Bible, as the angel blows his trumpet at the end of time and says, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever" (Rev 11:15). When as Paul writes in 1 Corinthians, 'Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power' (1 Cor 15:24).

But that's then, and now's now and we live in the in-between time, when all those forces, the rulers and authorities and powers that oppose God are not yet destroyed. When we still pray, 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come' - may the rule of your Son extend.

But what does that look like? What impact should it have that people are hearing the voice of Jesus and coming alive for the first time? What impact should it have on us as Christians that his rule is extend in our lives? What's the character of his kingdom?

It's the character of the king. As the proverb says, 'as go the leaders, so go the people'. As goes the king so goes the kingdom. And if he's the King of grace and mercy, of justice and righteousness, of sacrificial love and of life, that's what the coming of his kingdom is going to look like in this life. As the prophet Micah said, 'he has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?' (Mic 6:8).

And that's why we support Medair as they serve the world's poorest and most vulnerable; it's why our Sunday school kids sponsor other kids so they can be clothed and educated; It's why we support Vanessa and Port'espoir as they physically embody the kingdom in the red light district. But it's also why I'd like to ask each of us, at the moment, to be thinking 'how can I love my neighbour?' That may be making sure your elderly neighbour's shopping is taken care of. It may be finding someway of making sure they're not crushed by loneliness and isolation. It may be contacting a volunteering organisation and seeing where you can best serve the community. Whatever it is, let's be praying your kingdom come, and let it come in me.

But this proclamation, in word and deed, that there's another king who all must serve, is not exactly welcome news to all.

The Opposition You'll Face

Now Jesus makes this claim to be the Son of Man to whom all authority is given in the context of religious people questioning his authority. And Jesus warned his disciples the day would come when people would persecute them thinking they were doing something good for God.

And that has been the experience of Christians through the ages: that in every nation the gospel has spread, those with religious power oppose it. And often that's not because they *mis*understand the claims of Christianity but that they do understand it. It's the exclusivity of it - that Jesus says no one can come to the Father but by me; it's the world wide scale of it - that Daniel says, '*all* peoples, nations, and languages should serve him.'

But it's not just religious powers, secular and political powers oppose the king too.

You know, when the rioters against the early Christians said, these people are proclaiming 'there is *another* king, Jesus', it's that 'another' that's so problematic isn't it? When Paul writes in Romans 10:9 that, 'If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead you will be saved' the clear implication is that Jesus is Lord and Caesar isn't. Because the refrain, 'Caesar is Lord' was part of the cult of the Roman emperor; and in the persecutions under Nero and Domitian, Christians lived or died on their willingness, or not, to say it.

And whether in 1st Century Rome, or 21st Century China, or North Korea, or even here in the West, the gospel calls us to an allegiance to the King that trumps every other power, every other Caesar. And that means that when a political system demands your first allegiance, opposition for being a Christian is simply inevitable.

And that's why we support the work of Open Doors - and especially their work in Iran - as they support our brothers and sisters facing persecution for the king.

But it doesn't have to be structural powers that oppose you as a Christian. Our current culture tells you that to be free you need to decide for yourself what's right and wrong. And in that kind of culture, the message that the King has come and he commands your obedience, may not exactly be welcome. And that means as a Christian, if you're open about being a Christian, and if you want your friends to become Christians, you'll face opposition.

And opposition means sacrifice. I've been trying to lose weight, and the problem with exercise is it hurts, which is when I want to stop. But it's only when it's hurting that it's working. And obedience

to Christ, and involvement in his mission, is going to mean sacrifice: career, reputational, financial sacrifice, relational sacrifice. And sacrifice hurts, but it's then that it's real, it's then that growth and change comes.

But it also means you've got to persevere.

The Endurance You'll Need

In the book of Daniel, Daniel's three friends Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are faced with a stark choice. Do they worship Nebuchadnezzar's vast golden statue, or do they stay faithful to God and worship him alone. Essentially their choice was which king would they serve? And even though they knew it could cost them their lives, it seems they didn't hesitate.

But here's the thing, before throwing them in the furnace, Nebuchadnezzar offered them a way out, an exit strategy. They didn't have to die. They didn't have to pay the sacrifice.

The prophet Jonah was commissioned by God to go on mission to Ninevah, capital city of Israel's greatest enemy. And Jonah had zero interest in being obedient to that call. So he headed down to the port looking for a boat that would take him as far away from Nineveh as possible. And guess what? It just so happened that sitting in the port was a boat heading to Tarshish - Spain, as far from Nineveh as you could go.

Listen, when faithfulness and obedience to Christ and his mission requires sacrifice, there will always be an exit strategy offered to you. There'll always be a boat heading for Tarshish. There'll always be a way out that says, you don't need to do that… there's another way that's much less costly. Maybe a friend will agree with you and say 'yeh, the Bible's not really that clear.' Maybe you'll listen to the voice of culture telling you that to give your money and your time for Christ's mission is not what real life looks like, 'this car is what you really need!' That there are much easier ways.

And because there will always be ways out, obedience to the king in your life and in his mission requires life-long endurance.

How can you develop that? It's question the writer to the Hebrews had to wrestle with at a time when his readers were facing the growing cost of faithfulness to Christ. Listen to his answer: 'Let us run *with endurance* the race that is set before us, *looking to Jesus*, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.' (Heb 12:1-2).

How can you run with endurance, and say no to the offer of a boat trip to Tarshish or a seemingly cost-free exit strategy? By looking to the King who endured the cross for you. How can you embrace the hurt of sacrifice for him? Because he sacrificed himself for you. He gave up everything and endured the shame of obedience to God, so that you might hear his voice and live.

So, look to the King who endured for you, hear his voice, and spend your life in the mission of making his name great and his kingdom come.