

Is the Lord Jesus our King?

Is it scriptural to sing of the Lord Jesus as the King?

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Introduction

It is always something very special for us to study the character and person of our Lord Jesus Christ. Often, we do it for purely theological interest and can forget who we are dealing with. As said in a song, He should always be the “King of our hearts”. He should be the centre our affections and feelings, and we should bow before Him in reverence. The Lord Jesus touches our hearts in so many ways, that one single way would not adequate to describe him.

The Lord Jesus is King

There is no doubt, that He is “*the King of kings and Lord of lords*” (Rev 17:14; 19:16; 1Tim 6:15). While in the Old Testament a King of Glory was announced (Ps 24:7), more specifically, it was about the son of David who would hold the throne over Israel (Jer 23:5). When Jesus was born, God ensured people of the nations acknowledged His royalty, even when the reaction in Jerusalem was distress when they asked: “*Where is he that is born King of the Jews?*” (Mt 2:2.11). The Lord Jesus Himself “*witnessed a good confession*” before Pilate (1Tim 6:13): “*You say rightly that I am a king*” (Jn 18:37, NKJV). When the Lord Jesus entered Jerusalem on a foal, the prophecy was fulfilled: “*Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass*” (Mt 21:5; cf. Zach 9:9). Also, God arranged that even contrary to the will of the Jewish leaders, it was written on the cross: “*THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS*” (Lk 23:38).

But the King was rejected by His people Israel and brought to the cross. The Lord Jesus said: “*My kingdom is not of this world*” (Jn 18:36). From then on, the sphere where His kingship would be recognized would be in heaven. However, there should still exist a kingdom on this earth. In Matthew 13 the Lord Jesus speaks about the existence of an earthly kingdom, mysterious in nature. This announced kingdom of peace would not yet be visible, but rather there should exist a kingdom that is invisible in nature (cf. Mt 13:11). Today, the kingdom of God does not exist materially like the kingdom of peace will – “*Not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost*” (Rom 14:17). The kingdom of God presently has no visible king on earth. The subjects should belong to this invisible, spiritual kingdom on this earth. The ten parables of the kingdom of heaven in Matthew 13–25 speak very clearly of this. As a result, today, one could put themselves on the side of the one who has been rejected as the earthly king and where one willingly submits to His commandments and statutes.

The Lord Jesus will be king in the future

We want to understand and take it seriously that the visible kingdom of Israel will be established in future. The disciples asked the Lord after his resurrection: “*Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?*” (Acts 1:6.7) And the apostle Peter says later “[...] *when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began*” (Acts 3:19-21). So, this kingdom was yet to come. That

means Israel is not replaced by the church or the church blended together with Israel. Rather, the church has been inserted into the way God would deal with Israel. Because of this fact, today we must primarily use the letters of the New Testament to answer the question: What is our relationship with the King and the related kingdom, “*as he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began*” (Lk 1:70)?

Our relationship with the rejected King

For many believers this question seems to be answered quickly, and for those there is no doubt about it: The Lord Jesus is *my* King. I *serve* my King. – The gospels talk about the “kingdom of God”. If we are dealing with a kingdom, then there must be a king, and this king is Christ, so their conclusion goes. Since I am in this kingdom, Jesus is therefore my King and if He is my King, I should address Him as King.

The question is of course, is this conclusion as self-evident as it seems? Let us go through this conclusion step by step:

1. There is a kingdom, then there must be a king

We read in Luke 19:12: “*A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return.*” It seems to show that there was a kingdom which didn’t have a king. Just because there is a kingdom, it doesn’t mean that Christ must today be the king of this kingdom. We do not say that He is not the king, but rather it shows that we cannot naturally conclude it.

2. If there is a king, then it is Jesus Christ.

Here we should notice that we very often read about the Kingdom of God or about the Kingdom of Heaven, but never about the Kingdom of Jesus or the Kingdom of Jesus Christ.¹ Even in Acts 8:12 the kingdom of God and Jesus Christ are separated: “*But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ [...]*”.

The term “kingdom of God” expresses that God rules and the term “kingdom of heaven” expresses that it is kingdom is ruled from heaven or like Daniel says: “*The heavens do rule*” (Dan 4:26).

3. If I am in the kingdom where Jesus Christ is king, then He is my King.

Even if I am in such a kingdom, I must ask myself if I am in the service of the king or if I have a different relationship with that king. There are different relationships in every royal dynasty. There are the ordinary people, the servants and the royal family. There are also diplomats from different countries. All these different groups have different relationships with the king; different privileges but also things they share in common. The children of the royal family, the servants and the ordinary people must be obedient to the ordinance of the king, however, not the diplomats.

4. *If Jesus is my King, then I should address Him with His title.*

In the salutation there will certainly be differences: The ordinary people and the servants will address the king with “my King”. However, the children of the royal family will call him either “dad” or “father”. The diplomats will probably speak only of the king of this or that country. This example shows just that there are differences and that we must not jump to conclusions: we cannot simply reason that if the Lord Jesus is a king, that He is also “my King”. Many people think that the Lord will receive special honour when we address Him as “my King”. But we also can ask if a father who is a professor in a university wants to be addressed by his son with his academic title?

We want to continue to study the word of God and ask what our relationship with King Jesus is. This investigation is exciting and will reveal something we might not have expected. Certainly, we all would have been thankful to stand at the threshold of the royal palace (cf. Ps 84:10, NASB) and to bow before the King Jesus. By the way, of course we want to bow before the Lord Jesus, but at the end of this article maybe/hopefully because of a different reason.

The salutation of the Lord in the New Testament

It is surprising that not one of the authors of the New Testament addresses the Lord Jesus as King. Also, His disciples which literally have expected the kingdom, have never called Him king. There is no prayer addressed to the King. Always Jesus is addressed as the Lord. Acts is the earliest testimony of Christians. There we find Paul speaking to the jailer saying: *“Believe on the **Lord** Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house”* (Acts 16:31). The Christians testified of *“the resurrection of the **Lord** Jesus”* (Acts 4:33). They were baptized *“in the name of the **Lord** Jesus”* (Acts 8:16). And the *“**Lord** Jesus”* was preached (Acts 11:20). Men did not risk their lives for the King, but *“for the name of our **Lord** Jesus Christ”* (Acts 15:26). It was not the king that was exalted, rather *“fear fell on them all, and the name of the **Lord** Jesus was magnified”* (Acts 19:17) Also Paul had not received his ministry from the king but from *“the **Lord** Jesus”* (Acts 20:24).

After the Lord Jesus was rejected by His earthly people, He responded to Peter’s confession, *“Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God”* (Mt 16:16) by saying that He will build His assembly. Not only did the Lord Jesus carry the sins for all those people who would believe in Him, but also, He loved the assembly or church so much that He gave Himself up for her (Eph 5:25). By the coming of the Holy Spirit a completely new society of men was created: a completely new man (cf. Eph 2:10-18). *“For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit”* (1Cor 12:13).

Later, the Lord Jesus appeared to the apostle Paul and revealed to him a mystery that was eternally in the heart of God (cf. Acts 26:16; Eph 3). Today we live in this age in which this mystery is revealed by God. This age will last until Christ returns and then turns again to His earthly people, fulfilling all the promises God has promised to them in the Old Testament. We are part of a very different and special age, an age which was not announced in the Old Testament. As a result of this, it is not surprising that as children of God we are in a completely

different relationship with the rejected king than that which the people of Israel anticipated. Certainly, Jesus Christ has a claim on us, but He does this in His role as *Lord* and not in His role as king.

Above we have seen that there is now a completely new society of men which is called the church or assembly which is the body of Christ. This society is so closely linked with Christ that we are called his members [Eph 5:30]. Through the members of his body, He takes His form in this world. While Christ is away, He is represented through His body on this earth. To describe our closeness with Christ, Paul says in Ephesians 5 that husbands should love their wives like Christ loved the church. We are not only closely connected to Christ, but, as we have already seen, we entered a love relationship in which our affections center on our bridegroom in heaven. This connection with Christ has brought us into direct closeness with the Father. Since Christ is with the Father, we also have this same closeness with the Father, that we are permitted to say: "*Abba Father*" (cf. Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6). Also, we have confidence to enter the holy place and "*have been brought near by the blood of Christ*" (Eph 2:13-18, NKJV). Such closeness did not exist in the Old Testament and will not exist in the future kingdom of peace, as the prophet Ezekiel makes it clear to us (cf. Ezek 40-48).

The discussion about the "new covenant" is very similar. In the same way many people say that the new covenant has been made with the church. But we cannot see this in the New Testament. Rather Hebrew 8:6-13 confirms that the new covenant applies to the house of Israel. The new covenant has only two parties: God and Israel. When we look at this two parties, where do we see the church? We are not on the side of God nor are we on the side of Israel. However, the new covenant still affects us as Christians. Why? Because we are so intimately connected with Christ – the mediator and guarantor of this new covenant, we are affected in the same way by this covenant as Christ is. We are His body! But we are not a party of this covenant. We are in a completely different type of relationship than that which Israel will have in the future.

A heavenly society

As Israel had innumerable promises associated with this *earth*, so then the new society of men is connected to *heaven*: They have a "*hope which is laid up*" for them "*in heaven*" (Col 1:5); their "*citizenship is in heaven*" (Phil 3:20, NKJV). For this society, there are no treasures on this earth (cf. Mt 6:20). As pilgrims and strangers (1Pet 2:11) they do not belong to this world (Jn 8:23). By the will of the Father they are delivered "*from this present evil world*" (Gal 1:4). This is contrary to what is found in the Old Testament. There could not be a bigger difference to the believers in the Old Testament, although there are certain hints that the patriarchs looked for a heavenly dwelling place (cf. Heb 11), but this was not their primary calling. In the same way we enjoy certain earthly blessings even when they are not our primary calling (e.g. the marriage relationship).

When we notice these correlations then it becomes clearer for us why the early Christians did not speak of their *King* but of their *Lord*. This was not out of disrespect but out of the knowledge of their special relationship with the Lord.

The idea of a king always implies (1) a distance to his people and (2) a hierarchy with ranks. In this hierarchy there are different positions some are more distant or closer to the king than another; that includes different relationships between the different groups of the monarchy. However, the Holy Spirit shows – especially in Ephesians 2 and 3 – that we have come into such a closeness with both the Lord and with God the Father, a *closeness that cannot be surpassed. Furthermore, the biggest difference – that which was between Jews and Gentiles – is removed in the church which means all have the same blessings, and all have the same closeness.* If we see the Lord as our King and address Him by that title, we act completely contrary to the way the Holy Spirit wants us to display our Christian blessings.

However, the early Christians knew that they were nevertheless in the dominion of the kingdom of God. We see this when the Apostle Paul wrote: *“These only are my fellow workers unto the kingdom of God, which have been a comfort unto me”* (Col 4:11). Or when the Apostle John wrote from Patmos: *“I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ”* (Rev 1:9).

Those who have a clear comprehension of the teaching of the apostle Paul, understand that: *“In the dispensation of the fulness of times”* (Eph 1:10) – which is the millennium, the future kingdom of peace – the Lord Jesus will be head of everything in heaven and on the earth; everything will be subjected to Him. Paul then expounds on this with the incredible teaching that at this time, not only will the assembly be excepted from this; the assembly will be *“the fulness of him that filleth all in all”* (Eph 1:21-23). When Christ starts to rule, the assembly will be associated with Him as His body. She will be the bride at His side. He will present to Himself *“a glorious church”* (Eph 5:27) and she will reflect His glory (Rev 21:10-11). His innermost feelings and affections belong to His bride, the one who moves His heart. Should it not also move our hearts to address the Lord in such a way that it is adequate to such a closeness?

Even individually, He is “my Lord” and not “my King”. What a deep closeness Paul expresses when he writes in Philippians 3:8 of *“my Lord”* and what tender affection is contained in the words of Mary Magdalene: *“Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him”* (Jn 20:13). In both cases we see closeness and not distance. Likewise, for Thomas, it wasn't when he heard about the Lord Jesus from others, rather it was when he was so close to Jesus that he could touch Him, he exclaims: *“My Lord”* (Jn 20:28).

In the light of these challenging truths, do we not then need to assume that the Lord Jesus must be grieved when we express something through our songs which shows that we merely have not understood our true position and relationship with Him or even with one another? Surely the Lord Jesus also looks at our hearts and He is very patient with us. Nevertheless, He wishes for us to have a proper understanding. How often must He have been grieved when His own disciples did not understand Him. Shall we not pledge to praise Him with even more insight? Does not the Father look for worshipers, who worship Him in *“in spirit and truth”* (Jn 4:23).

Furthermore, we do not read anymore in the epistles that the kingdom of God was “preached” as it was in Acts 14:22; 20:25; 28:23 and 28:31. It is apparent that the revelation about the

church, which the Lord revealed to Paul, contained some teaching of the kingdom of God. Those who had understood well the teachings of the apostle Paul did not have to assume that the teaching of the kingdom of God had become irrelevant. Rather teaching would be included in the new revelation about the house of God, the assembly and the body of Christ. Even when the kingdom of God was not preached in the same way as it was in Acts, the idea of the kingdom was further mentioned (Rom 14:17; 1Cor 4:20; 6:9-10; 15:24, 50; Gal 5:21; Eph 5:5; Col 1:13; 4:11; 1Thess 2:11; 2Thess 1:5; 2Tim 4:1; 4:18; Heb 12:38; Jam 2:5, 2Pet 1:11). This emphasizes the fact that despite our high position in Christ, we have a *Lord* whom we must submit to.

In this context it is very interesting to see that after Acts 21, we no longer read that the early Christians were called “disciples” (This term also has a much more distinct reference to the kingdom of God). That does not mean the characteristics of discipleship do not apply to us. But if we live as Christians; as saints; as beloveds; as children; as sons; as servants etc., we automatically fulfil all the characteristics of disciples and even more.

The Gospel of the Kingdom

In His speech about the Last Days, the Lord Jesus says in Matthew 24:14: “*And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come*”. That brings up the following question: Is it not our mission to preach this *gospel of the kingdom*? However, we must notice to whom the Lord Jesus is speaking and to which time He is speaking about. The Lord is speaking to the Jewish remnant, which we learn from Matthew 23:37-39. It is the time very close to the great tribulation (cf. Mt 24:15-22), because it is written: “*Then shall the end come*”. Near the close of this age, after the church has been raptured, the “gospel of the kingdom” will be preached. It will not be another message than what was preached in the beginning of the ministry of our Lord. John the Baptist and later the Lord Jesus Himself have preached the gospel of the kingdom. Their message was: The King is coming; the kingdom of God is very close. When the end of this age approaches, the church will have already been raptured.

Of course, we can preach this kingdom to people today, especially when we consider that we are close to this time of the end. We can tell the people that the Lord Jesus is coming to judge and that He will establish His kingdom as king on earth. This is a serious reminder for them to convert. People even need to be reminded of the message of the eternal gospel: That God is the creator, who “*made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters*” (Rev 14:7). Today people are so poisoned by the theory of evolution that they no longer believe in the Creator. Yet our very gospel is still different: It is still the most wonderful gospel that exists: “*The glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God*” (2Cor 4:4), the “*gospel of the grace of God*” (Acts 20:24), the “*the glorious gospel of the blessed God*” (1Tim 1:11). But the content of the gospel of the kingdom does not apply to a Christian. He is not waiting for the judgement or even for the Antichrist, but for the Lord Jesus and the rapture of His church with all of those who have fallen asleep in Christ (cf. 1Thess 4:13-18). While the message of gospel of the kingdom will be: “The king is coming”, the Christians today shout and pray “*Come, Lord Jesus*” (Rev 22:17-20).

The “King” in Acts 17:6-7

*And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also; Whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus. **Acts 17:6-7***

Now at the end we want to have a look at the passage in Acts 17:6-7. This passage is very often quoted by proponents of songs in which Jesus is addressed as the King. In my opinion there is no doubt about one thing: You cannot establish a doctrine based on this passage. It seems to be almost the only straw the proponents of these songs have, and it is always quoted again in this context. But let us notice who is speaking here: it is those people who want to say something bad about the Christians. This passage is like John 19:12 (NKJV): “*From then on Pilate sought to release Him, but the Jews cried out, saying, ‘If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar’s friend. Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar.’*” If the accusing Jews somehow wanted to upset the Romans about Christ, then they had to argue in that way. Even Pilate was dissuaded to release the Lord by this kind of argumentation. In addition, it is quite possible that the early Christians had really explained to the Jews that they had rejected their king. But that does not mean that the Christians were speaking of the Lord Jesus as *their* King. On the contrary, we have already seen above, that they themselves always spoke of the *Lord Jesus* (Acts 16:31; 4:33; 8:16; 11:20; 15:26; 19:17; 20:24).

Different relationship levels

Sometimes people say that we have different relationship levels in the ways we address the Lord. Generally speaking, the thought is correct. The Lord Jesus is not only our *Lord*, He also calls us His “friends” and even His “brothers”. He is our “high priest”, and even our “creator”. Yet, we cannot find a Bible verse in the New Testament where we as Christians are asked to address the Lord Jesus in prayer or song as *our/my* friend or brother. If *He* calls *us* His friends or brothers, then that is one thing. But we should not conclude that we also are allowed to address Him in that way (for this there is no indication in the Scripture of this; but rather we find the opposite in the New Testament). On the other hand, in Hebrews we read that the Lord Jesus is “*our* high priest” (Heb 4:14-15; 8:1), and nevertheless nobody addresses Him with this title. In hymns we often find that we sing of the Lord Jesus as our high priest and the Scripture itself gives us this pattern. That is contrary to songs where we sing of the Lord Jesus as our King; as we have no pattern in the New Testament.

Of course, there are also songs today in which we can sing about the Lord as the King: When it comes to His position in the kingdom of peace or to His supremacy as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Of course, we are already looking forward to (1) that on earth, where they only had a crown of thorns for Him, He will soon wear many crowns; (2) that here, where He was struck on His head with a reed, He will hold a divine scepter in His hand; (3) that here, where they only had a cross for Him, will soon stand His throne. But He is not “*our*” or “*my King*” as in the way He will be for His people Israel, in the kingdom of peace.

Conclusion

As Christians we are transferred into the kingdom of the beloved Son of the Father (Col 1:13). He is not only the King, who will be recognized as such on earth, He is also the “beloved Son”. He is the beloved of the Father – that is how we recognize the Lord Jesus today. And because we are in the Son and have received the life of the Son, the Father loves us as He loves the Son (Jn 17). No believer of the Old Testament was able to enjoy “*the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness*” (Eph 2:7). And the Scripture does not say anything about such closeness in the coming kingdom of peace. We enjoy an undeserved relationship that most likely cannot be excelled and because of that we can only bow our knees in adoration of the Son and the Father.

Translation: Samuel Ackermann & James Edwards

Footnotes

[1] Various biblical passages seem to indicate that the kingdom of God on the earth nowadays is associated with the Lord: Ephesians 5:5; Hebrew 1:8; 2. Timothy 4:1+18; 2. Peter 1:11; Revelation 11:15. A more detailed investigation of these passages shows that it is the kingdom of peace in the future when everything in heaven and on earth is under the authority of Christ that is described in these verses.