

The Once and Future King

Two Jewish rabbis were waiting at a bus stop, and the bus was taking a long time to come. One rabbi turned to the other and said "We have been waiting so long for this bus! It is like waiting for the Messiah!"

The other responded, "Not at all! The Messiah will definitely come... eventually... but as for the bus..."

Queen Elizabeth was a good queen and was very wise. Her faith in God was evident. Her sense of duty, immense. As the editor of the Daily Telegraph Charles Moore once said of her "She has what the Bible calls purity of heart...she is content each day if she has done her best and said her prayers.

What a contrast she has been to other world rulers like Putin, Trump or Xi Jinping!!!

The former Queen seems to have had an understanding of what true monarchy might be about. It came out in her speeches at Christmas time, and in her service to the Commonwealth countries. I remember when she went to the Royal stables and talked of the birth of Christ from there. She was aware that her stables were a far cry from the Bethlehem Inn stable, but she wanted to make the point in her way, of the humble nature of the birth of Jesus. He was not born at St Mary's Hospital, Paddington, London with all the experts and doctors in attendance where her own child Charles was born, but in the stable outside the Inn in old Bethlehem. She got the difference.

In the book of Zachariah there are two images of the Messiah. One is of a very humble man and the other is of a conqueror. In order to reconcile these two very different images of the Messiah, Jewish tradition began to teach that there would **be two** Messiahs to come. The one found in Chapter nine of Zachariah would be humble and the other in chapter 14

would be someone to reckon with who would have political power. The suffering Messiah would be called Messiah Ben Yosef and the other would be Messiah Ben David, the conquering Messiah.

The earliest Gospel, St. Mark says that Jesus wanted his Messiahship kept secret. He would say “Who do people say I am?” And after he checked with his disciples that they understood, he said that they should keep that knowledge to themselves.

So, Jesus, the incognito Messiah, just went around doing good. His roots were so humble. Jesus was just a carpenter’s son who became a Rabbi.

Or was there something more?

There were occasional flashes of something more when he stilled the waves on lake Galilee, and the disciples, **became more afraid of him than the storm.** But generally speaking he was regarded as a Rabbi and as a healer. John the Baptist announced that he was something more. The miracles did set him apart, but the Messiahship was kept secret until the very end of his ministry. It was revealed on Palm Sunday.

On Palm Sunday he dropped the mask and rode into Jerusalem on a donkey deliberately triggering the famous Messianic prophecy:

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Behold, your king is coming to you,
Humble, and mounted on a donkey...”

This entrance into Jerusalem sparked speculation and immediately triggered excitement. The Jewish crowd well knew of this prophecy. So did Jesus, but he followed and understood the model of Ben Yosef, which called **for suffering and death.** The crowds were expecting Messiah Ben David to rule in Jerusalem and were disappointed.

At the time of the historical Jesus, the Jews were under the oppression of Rome. They very much wanted a political Messiah to throw off the Roman Yoke. Yet, Jesus said that his kingdom was not of this world.

Jesus was humble. Could a king be humble? The other kings were anything but!

As the Queen pointed out he was born in a stable not a palace. The wise men expecting a palace went to See King Herod.

The wise men brought interesting gifts that were prophetic.

I love the old carol “We three Kings and the verse: “Gold we bring to crown him again
King forever, ceasing never
Over us all to reign.”

It was not expected that one would bring gold to a stable...or frankincense or myrrh.

Then there were the shepherds on the hills and the visit of the angels with a message of peace on Earth and goodwill to all human beings. It was not a war to throw off Rome that was being foretold, but a future that one day would come, beginning on Palm Sunday and reaching far into the future.

Jesus was probably in his thirties when he began his messianic ministry. St Luke says: “And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. Then he commented on the Scripture. He reprimanded them by saying that God was active with other nations and peoples. The hometown crowd took offence. They took him out of the city to stone him. But then it was **that the something more came out.** He walked away unobserved, right through the crowd. To their great surprise they lost their opportunity to push him over a cliff. He had another destiny that was not to end in Nazareth.

What was Jesus like as a Messiah/king?

He was kind to everyone in need, particularly outcasts like lepers, Tax collectors and muleteers and donkey drivers. He lifted women up and welcomed children.

He was also an amazing teacher and healer. He restored sight to the spiritually and physically blind.

He was a man of peace not war. He said in the Gospel lesson to Pilate. "My kingdom is not of this world." He was not into power like Putin Trump or Xi.

When America went into Iraq they went in with 'shock and awe'. That did not work. They had to learn what Jesus taught as the way forward. **The battle was for hearts and minds.** Jesus knew that you don't win that kind of battle with brute force.

He was able to set His life down for a great cause. Above all He knew how to love. And forever in history he has been a foil for those like the autocrats who are so addicted to power that they attempt to keep it regardless of cost in lives and blood...in today's world witness Palestine The Ukraine and January 6th in America.

Jesus used two kinds of power: Influence and unconditional love.

Do not all of us want kindness in someone who rules over us? We want Someone who loves and respects us; someone who cares about us and has deep compassion for the poor and the dispossessed, the weak, the lonely, the widow and the fatherless. We want someone with wisdom. Where do we get that model from?

The world once knew that kind of ruler...for 33 wonderful years.

Dr. James Allan Francis wrote:

“Here is a man who was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He worked in a carpenter shop until He was thirty. Then for three years He was an itinerant preacher.

He never owned a home. He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never had a family. He never went to college. He never traveled two hundred miles from the place He was born. He never did one of the things that usually accompany greatness. He had no credentials but Himself...

While still a young man, the tide of popular opinion turned against him. His friends ran away. One of them denied Him. He was turned over to His enemies. He went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed upon a cross between two thieves. While He was dying His executioners gambled for the only piece of property He had on earth – His coat. When He was dead, He was laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend.”

Francis said: “I am far within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched, all the navies that were ever built; all the parliaments that ever sat and all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of man upon this earth as powerfully as has that one solitary life.”

Jesus was worthy to be King. He was the kind of ruler that all of us would wish for on earth and that wish is ongoing into the future.

Was the man who was once King, and unrecognized in his day, to be the Once and Future King?

In the times of the New Testament there was a feeling that Christ would return in the lifetime of the writers. Jesus said that he didn't know when God would act. “But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.”

There became a restlessness in the early church about when Christ might return, which the late book of Second Peter notes (that book was written

probably around 165 of the common Era), and there is a reason given for the delay.

The author says: Above all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, ⁴ They will say, “Where is this ‘coming’ he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.”

But St. Peter says:

Do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

The book of the Acts, written by Luke, raises the same question: **Luke says:** “In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach ² until the day he was taken up to heaven, after his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.

⁶ Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Messiah Ben David)

⁷ He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁹ After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ¹¹ “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? **This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.**”

I was listening to a program on CBC talking about the deep future. The speaker said that we have no way of knowing the deep future. For

instance, recently, for the first time on record, our Galaxy was penetrated by a long cigar shaped object that had come from another galaxy. It had travelled millions of miles and was millions of years old. It missed earth by 6 times the distance between us and the moon.

There are no guarantees that in the future such an object could not strike the earth. Also, the CBC program was concerned that things like arsenic poisoning or nuclear waste might kill future generations as the knowledge of their inherent danger to human beings might become lost.

The speaker said we have only been here on this planet for 200,000 years as a species. That is not long in space time. Who knows about the deep future; what knowledge might be lost? If knowledge of poisons was lost that generation might not know why they were dying...

But it is my belief that the future actually belongs to God. I also believe that God is patient with us in the extreme and that only the Creator God knows the future, and that is a very good thing. This secret, says Jesus, is only known to God the Father of all, and Jesus leaves the question there.

But there is a preparation he talks about that we need, while we wait for his coming again. It is to love as Micah the prophet taught us: “And what does the LORD require of you But to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God?”

One of the Messianic prophecies states that in the Day when the messiah returns, that a little child shall lead them...

It was parent teacher night at a Daily Vacation Bible school. The kids were putting on a play they had learned at the DVBS school. After a lot of practice, four five-year-old boys, acted out the story of Moses before King Pharaoh. Wielding their plastic swords, the boys liked playing the very mean Pharaoh who would not let the people go.

At the performance the prompter told little Moses what to say, “say: ‘Pharaoh all the slaves are all tired and they don’t want you bossing them around any more. Let my people go!’”

King Pharaoh sitting on his throne, wielding his plastic sword said, with prompting, “Never, never, never.”

Moses left the room only to return a little bit later . Once again he approached the king. “Pharaoh my people are really tired of being beat up. Now will you let my people go?”

Once again, the prompter said “Say, Never, never, never!”

But the young King suddenly had had enough and the voice of another King deep inside of his heart prompted him. He suddenly jumped down from his throne and said “ I don’t want to be mean any more. All of you can go! Just go. All of you can go home now.” Then he threw his sword down on the floor and walked off with his arm draped around Moses.

The once and future King wanted his followers to respond with their hearts like this little boy; to do justice, love mercy and kindness and to walk humbly with God until He returned. What can we do until then?

As the Christmas carol says: What can I give Him, poor as I am? If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb; If I were a Wise Man, I would do my part; Yet what I can I give Him: give my heart.

Winston Churchill used to be First Lord of the Admiralty a position he had to leave in great sorrow some 25 years previous to the start of The Second World War. But when things began to look very bad, he was once again made First Lord of the Admiralty. Right across the British fleet by means of signals the message of hope went out, Winston is back!

It is my faith that One day the King of hearts will be back!

And when he returns the old prophecy will be fulfilled:

He will speak peace to the nations;
And His dominion will be from sea to sea,
And from the River to the ends of the earth.” Amen.

