

The Reign of Christ | Luke 23:33-43; Colossians 1:11-20 | LUMC | 11-20-2022

This week we explore the reign of Christ. We regularly need to be reminded of the history regarding the reign of God and the reign of Christ. What is the difference between them and where do we fall!? The reign of Christ theme has been of great interest and the subject of debate by Christians over the years.

According to the Christian liturgical calendar, the “Reign of Christ” Sunday is also known as “Christ the King” Sunday. This Sunday is followed by Advent, which is “Christian New Year’s Day”. We end the Christian year on the Reign of Christ Sunday.

On this Sunday, we: 1) celebrate God’s reign in the entire universe that has already been achieved; and 2) anticipate when that reign will be fully accomplished in every human soul. For easier understanding, the reign of Christ can be divided into two segments: the first phase started at Christ’s birth and second phase will be finally accomplished in his second coming. We are now in-between-times hoping and expecting to be part of that second coming.

In the current reign, evil is partly tolerated, in that one can sin and live in sin. One can be unkind to others or to oneself and think it is okay and live with that habit for the time being. In the next reign, however, St Luke says Jesus is very clear that evil will not be tolerated; it will be crushed, and Christ's reign will be the reign of righteousness and peace on earth for 1000 years and perhaps beyond.¹

Since creation, God has been in charge, ruling the human soul on God’s terms and volition. God warned humanity against evil deeds through prophetesses and prophets, dreamers, visionaries, and seers. In places where Christianity has not made inroads, God’s presence was and is mediated in most tribal religions by ancestors, medicine men and shamans who may combine both healing and prophetic powers. Such people feel and see God’s revelations and God’s presence through natural phenomena like earthquakes, valleys, mountains, rivers and illness and pandemics. God is yet to bring these people into a God-revealed revelation through Christ, and enter Christ’s present reign.

The people, and nations living in God’s old revelation cannot be condemned because they have not heard nor are aware of Christ’s present reign. It is unfair to judge such people by saying they will not inherit eternity.² The best option for me is to pray for them and where possible, introduce Jesus into their lives. Today, mission is best done by mutuality—respecting non-Christians and their belief systems and gently welcoming them to experience Christ’s love and grace in us. It is not done by promoting a holier-than-thou attitude of yesteryears’ missionaries.

The phase-one Reign of Christ began with his birth, death, and resurrection, mainly by the resurrection that ushered in a new reign of Christ made manifest during Pentecost with the birth of the Church. The church continues to shepherd that reign among mortals who have freedom of choice to follow Christ and live in the new reign.

¹ Revelation chapters 6 and 20 limits the reign of Christ to 1000 years. However, that period is up to God. It may be 1000 or more. Our concern is to be in that reign.

² St John in Revelation 20:6 gives us a hint that some unchristian people may receive fair judgement and allowed to enjoy eternity

We are free to choose to live in this reign. Jesus' offer is voluntary. The options, however, may produce three outcomes: 1) a committed believer, 2) a lukewarm "follower", or 3) an outright sinful soul. Christ taught us awareness of such options and He prefers we choose to be genuine faithful believers whose lives have no blemish. I intentionally choose the term "blemish" to define the pure soul of a believer as opposed to a follower's soul that is tainted by a sinful life.

Those who choose to remain in Christ's reign daily, carry their cross and follow Christ, they make a conscious decision to remain in Christ's reign because they know choice has consequences. Scripture teaches us that the believers' soul will be subjected to refinement on the last day. It is after passing through the refinement—judgment—that the genuine soul shall enter the second advent: the final reign of Christ where there is no evil or malice. The faithful shall be a holy team of Christ. Christ will allow them to participate in the reign. This reign will be felt in the whole earth, and the knowledge of God will be upon every believer. We shall enjoy economic justice and a righteous and peaceful coexistence over the years. At his second coming, Christ will reign over the earth with absolute power, and rule over every nation. The believer shall enjoy this reign and will participate in it.

We can reflect on that second advent in Jesus' narrative as written by St Luke. Dr Luke affirms Jesus is the Son of God, and He is aware of God's deeds toward the human soul from the beginning. God decides to send him out to reconcile the human soul lost in sin by dying on the cross.

Jesus embodies fearless preaching. He agrees to go to the cross to face pain and humiliation by sinful humans to provide salvation of the human soul. That salvation is now possible where there is genuine forgiveness. Jesus is the light in a dark soul and savior of a soul wounded by sin. Humans then can transition from sinfulness, resurrect their souls, and enter into the reign of Christ. I visualize all the resurrected souls despite of their color, nationality or status being in peaceful existence.

That imagination makes me praise God every day and stand firm on the promises of God. God started the work of salvation, took away fear of sin and ushered me into a fearless Christian life followed by the call to serve. I am gratified to be in the reign of Christ now, and I hope to enter the final reign where there is no pain or sin. It will be the fairest administration; I will enjoy the human voices praising and singing in the choir of Christ. This choir is comprised of those who triumphed over the sinful world and transitioned into the final reign. Let us have confidence to be there.

You and I know it is not easy to live a genuine Christian faith in the world today. The world around us promotes lies and uses lovely words and enticing statements geared to turn lies into truth. Such people scoff at believers like those who did it to Jesus on the cross saying "let him save himself" or "save yourself" you so-called son of God! In our current society, more people value human-to-human (horizontal) relationships more than the God-to-human (vertical) relationships. Some people will do anything, including lying and sinning, to remain in good terms with friends over being in good terms with God.

Friends have died to save face or protect their friends. I imagine that kind of human-to-human relationship easily sways our faith toward being lukewarm to please others. The Liturgical readings implore us to stay in the reign of Christ, confirming Christ holds the first place in our deeds, and other people's needs come in second.

We should not give up remaining in the reign of Christ because of the current economic status in the world. Inflation may have been caused by the pandemic that eliminated jobs and caused many employers to close, retarding world economic growth. Nor should we give up on our place in the current reign of Christ because of bad politics often promoted by people who want to score political mileage or attain selfish gains. Sadly, some Christians have been caught in this situation.³ We are the people of the cross and should not allow election outcomes to draw us away from the cross. We prayed for God's will in the election to be done! I am glad we still have a nation though fractured by bad politics. May we continue genuine prayers for this nation down to leaders in our neighborhoods.

What greater love than this: despite human sinful lives pushing us away from the reign of God that Christ has revealed, Jesus remains committed to saving human souls from self-destructive lifestyles and disordered minds.

Dr Luke also reminds us Jesus has power to comfort us in all situations we face. We can rely on Jesus, especially this month as some of our members are struggling with various illnesses. Let us remember that Jesus comforted the thief on the cross and forgave his sins, even welcoming him to paradise. How I pray Jesus to declare us candidates to enjoy the second reign in eternity by waiving internal judgment. That Jesus has power to promote faithful followers to paradise is attested by his forgiving the man crucified with him. "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise". Jesus can forgive repented sins and open the way for us to enjoy eternity now! Praise the Lord!

Friends, let us run this race tirelessly until we receive the ticket to paradise and enjoy being with Christ in his reign. Do not worry how long that final reign will last. Whether 1000 years or even more, we can leave the decision of that time to God through Christ, our Savior!

As people of the present and coming reign, let our souls live free of sin, and let others live. May we reflect each minute of every hour and every day: the final reign of Christ is upon us through God in Christ. Amen!

³ Please read November 2022 Christian Century, a respected Christian journal. Genuine reflections on war, politics, and the economy are shared.