



A King Full of Splendor

The good news
of Jesus, the Messiah.

Hans-Jörg Ronsdorf

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Die Gute Nachricht

Neue Genfer Übersetzung

We are free church evangelical Christians, or evangelicals, as people also say. The label is not important to us. Together with many other denominations, we are simply Christians who believe in Jesus Christ and try to follow him.

The author is self-employed in the paint and coatings business. Born in 1964. He and his wife Christine have 5 grown children. He loves to study the Bible. And also what others have worked out about it.

We are not especially good Christians, but we have a good King. He deserves our very best. In the Bible we have the reliable source for what we believe.

Together with all those who worship Jesus as God's Son and Lord of the world, as the King of kings, and who serve him, we are on our way to a magnificent goal.

1 The good news in 3 words

Can three words be enough to sum up the most important thing in the Christian message or the Christian faith, to get to the heart of it? Yes, three words are the core of the good news. But it is also clear that there is much more to say about it. Here are *three words*, each of which describes this core on its own. Let me stress once again at the outset: This is only the tip of the iceberg, but it is indeed the summit. The gospel is the message about Jesus. About the crucified, risen man, crowned with power and glory, on God's throne. In summary, the message to the world is:

Jesus is LORD!

Jesus is King!

Jesus is the Messiah!

That is the gospel, the good news, the glad tidings. Anyone who speaks of the gospel will put this first as the most important point. These three words get to the heart of it. Everything depends on them. They describe the turning point of world history and the point where God's salvation history comes into focus. These three words confirm a change of front and a change of power: the defeat of the powers of death. There is hope. A good future. Now there are answers. Much appears in a new light. *That Jesus is Lord changes everything.* Read on – and let yourself be drawn into this story of the true King. The Jesus story and its glorious ending, that is the good news. That someone has become Lord over all people and all things does not automatically have to be good news for everyone. But it can be for anyone. Because that is why this Jesus story exists. And that is why this is good news.

Why do I call Jesus Christ a king? Almost all the writers of the New Testament call him that, and even those of the Old Testament already do. On top of that: Christ means “*Anointed One*.” In the ancient world, including Judaism, priests and prophets were anointed with oil, but above all kings were *anointed king*, just as we speak of the coronation of a king. Being anointed means being chosen for a special office.

Messiah means the same as Christ. The first word comes from Hebrew, the second from Greek. So this title and the name *Christ* always focus on and exalt the kingship of Jesus as well. As ruler and sovereign over all people and all things, especially, of course, for and over his people, those who confess Christ. For them, Jesus is the Lord. And the King. For whoever belongs to God's kingdom, which is at the same time the kingdom of Christ, can only have him as king.

By the way, the king motif can often be recognized in texts about the Lord Jesus Christ even when he is not explicitly called king. More on that in the following chapters.

The greatest question of all time is and remains: Who can master our great questions and problems – or help us solve them? And for each person: Whom can you entrust yourself to? Whom can we entrust ourselves to as humanity? – to save people and their home, our planet?

The great figures of our world and our history, to whom people entrusted themselves, often had one thing in common: They were power-hungry people, scheming and corrupt, who walked over dead bodies. They exploited people and sent them into senseless wars. They lived in luxury while the people starved. It would be nice if the powerful today were cured of that.

There is a longing to belong to someone, to lose ourselves in someone, anyone. To entrust oneself to another without a second thought. Some feel this strongly, others have given up hope of ever finding such a person. How does God answer our longing? By giving the world someone in whom we can and may lose ourselves without being destroyed by it.

Someone who thinks not of himself but of us. A king who deserves to be a king. Who knows us and our deepest needs and longings. And who cares about them. Someone who truly wants to and is able to. Who knows what it means to be human and has experienced it. My conviction, and that of many others, is this: This one is Jesus, the Christ!

I invite you to get to know this unique King. Come along on a short and intense journey of discovery. Let yourself be drawn into it for a few moments.

What joy! Over the mountains the messenger of victory comes running! He brings good news, he proclaims peace and salvation, he says to the city of Zion: "Your God is King of the whole world!"

Isaiah 52:7

For further reading and study: Acts 2:33-36; 3:13-20; 4:10-12; 13:37-39; 17:30-31; Daniel 2:44; Zechariah 9:9; 14:9; Matthew 27:11; John 18:37; Hebrews 7:1-3; Revelation 1:5; 19:16; Exodus 40:15; 1 Samuel 15:17; 16:3, 12-13; 2 Samuel 2:4, 7; 5:3, 17; 12:7; Psalm 89:20; 1 Kings 1:34, 39, 45; 5:1; 1 Chronicles 11:3; 14:8; 29:22; Exodus 28:41; 30:30; 40:15; Leviticus 7:36; Numbers 3:3; Hebrews 2:14; 4:15; Proverbs 16:15.

2 Do we still need a king today?

Before we get into the subject, first something important: I am not an advocate of monarchy or a fighter for it. For our time, I consider democracy the preferable form of government. It is best able to balance the political forces. I am grateful to live in one. Depending on the political model, the risk that a sovereign sole ruler, whether emperor, king or president, will abuse his power is great. Current events make this clear in the most painful way. But there will never be complete security wherever people have power and influence. On this side of eternity there is no perfect form of government. As long as people are not perfect, that will remain so. And under God's blessing any form of government can be a blessing.

Nevertheless, I vote for a king who has all powers, full authority in all questions and matters. *But only if he can be trusted.* If it is certain that he needs neither money nor soldiers. A king without lies and deceit. One who is "pure in heart." Without selfish motives. A king who is competent, who was born for this office. A king to whom you can entrust yourself without reservation. That is the kind of king we need. This One is the one it will be about. That is the good news. The gospel of the kingdom of God.

Yes, we need him, this One. As our King, as our Lord and God. One who calls us brothers and sisters. Who also treats us that way.

Jesus, the Lord, we can speak to directly, wherever we are at this moment. This King listens to everyone, he holds audience always and everywhere. The Bible calls this audience prayer. Approaching his throne. In faith, as if it were visible reality. The throne of this King is only one step, only one prayer away from us – one step and we are speaking with the King. Aloud, quietly, in our thoughts. Silently, hesitantly, doubting. Weeping, screaming, whispering. He hears everything. Let us call on him, for help, for forgiveness, for freedom! His hand is stretched out – let us take hold of it!

That was already a lot to anticipate. Let us start at the very beginning.

Hear my cry for help, my King and my God, for to you alone I pray!

Psalms 5:2

"Who is this King of glory? The LORD Almighty – he is the King of glory."

Psalm 24:10

For further reading and study: John 20:17; Matthew 19:28; Luke 22:30; 2 Timothy 2:12; Revelation 5:10; 20:4; Romans 5:2; Ephesians 2:18; 3:12; Hebrews 4:16; Psalm 50:15.

3 Back to the beginning: kings in Eden

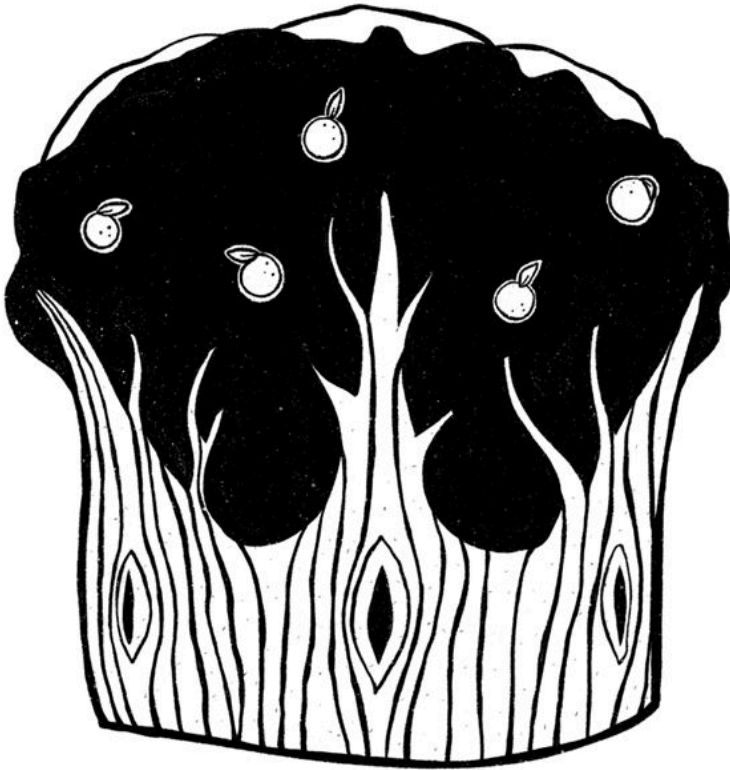
God wants to have us human beings as his kings. Yes, you are reading that correctly! Every human being, without exception, whether woman or man, is meant to be a queen and a king. That is exactly how it began. God, the King of the universe, created human beings as man and woman. A couple who together had royal dignity. For they were created as God's image. They were God's representatives. With royal tasks. The garden in Eden and the whole earth were their domain. For these two, ruling meant caring, protecting and cultivating. Not ruling over each other or dominating other people, nor exploiting them or creation.

In the ancient Near East, at the time when Genesis with its creation account came into being, that was sensational. Countercultural. Against the spirit of the age. Only kings had the privilege of being sons of the gods. Kings who had not become kings democratically but by their own authority. The stronger ones, in other words. And who then passed this status on to their heirs. Everyone else was a servant or a slave, without human rights as we know them today.

The king and the queen, Adam and Eve, had – in a figurative sense – a palace, or a temple. The Garden of Eden is God's gift to the two of them and was intended for all their descendants. For paradise was meant to spread over the whole earth. To be a good home for all people.

Without question, God is King over everything. As the Creator and Sustainer and Lord over everything. As viceroys, the human couple was an image of their Creator. To reign with him and in his place, that was the divine plan.

Nothing was lacking in the garden of paradise. There was more than enough. God himself came to visit regularly. People were meant to be, and could be, just as caring as God himself.



A sudden break ended this idyll. The vice-regents no longer trust and obey their Regent. They doubt whether their Creator has their best interests at heart. Whether he is withholding something good from them that is missing for their happiness.

So they take something they were expressly commanded not to take. A command that marks the difference between Creator and creature. They eat the forbidden fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. You only know evil once you have done it. The line is crossed, the gain in knowledge paid for dearly. From now on everything is different. No longer do paradise and God's visible presence offer protection and security; instead a struggle for

existence begins, a constant fight for survival beyond Eden. Nothing is safe anymore. Nature is harsh, and people become harsh too.

Human royal dignity remains. But it is damaged, the image of God disfigured, and so badly that people begin to rule over other people and to seize power by force. They make themselves kings over others. They replace the Creator with idols. In the struggle for survival, competition begins. The stronger one prevails. Or survives. Royal dignity is disfigured by us human beings. Not infrequently people resemble wild animals more than God's good ideal.

We sense it and sometimes dream of something that is somehow the way it was in the beginning. Free, full of love. And just. We long to be accepted and secure. We really were created for a different world than the one we live in now and which has become what it is now through us.

God, the King of the universe, would not be God if he resigned himself to that. He is more dissatisfied with it than we human beings are. He would not be God if he did not seek our very best. His heart beats for us. He cannot help loving us. God writes *his* story. World history becomes God's salvation history. You and I, all of us are part of it or can become part of it.

For further reading and study: Genesis 1-4; Psalm 8; James 3:9; Romans 5:12-21; 1 Timothy 2:3-7

4 A people of kings

However: God was and is always there. Even after Eden and beyond Eden. But no longer the *may* he was in Eden. Hidden and invisible. He is spirit. He is everywhere. Today as well. He is there for the good of us human beings. Even if we do not see or feel it. After all, he created everything out of nothing and holds it together and keeps it alive. Although he is the Infinite One, outside everything created, he is still the one in whom and through whom we exist. We are his creation. He knows about everything and every detail. He does not let go of us.

Back then, people began to call on the invisible God, to pray. This God, the eternal King, cared for his people. But, hardly any differently from today, they went their own ways. In religion, culture, family life, politics. The royal dignity of being God's image, as caring as he is, is not their motto for life. Only for a few is it. Even though an inner voice reminds every human being of how things should be. And also of how things should not be. Conscience was given to human beings, as a protection for themselves and for others.

We can only be kings as in the beginning *together* with the King of the universe. When he is part of our lives. That is how we were made. He wants to fill the emptiness in us, far from God. We have filled it with everything that replaces God. Exchanged it for idols that we believe can fill the vacuum. Nevertheless: God wants to have a family. A royal one!

When God writes history, then we have to look into history. Abraham was a milestone, a new beginning. With him, God's story with his people takes on a new dimension. He will be a blessing and have many descendants. His son Isaac, then Jacob and his twelve sons are the patriarchs of the people of Israel. In Egypt they become slaves. A small nation comes into being. Yahweh, the "I am who I am," chooses them as his people. An exodus of liberation leads them out of slavery in Egypt into the wilderness. Here God enters into a covenant with them: They become a people of kings and priests.

A new beginning with a whole nation. Moses is their king, priest and prophet, who leads them, who intercedes for them before God and who speaks God's words to them. The law, the Ten Commandments, are part of the

covenant. Later this will be only the old covenant. As in the beginning, there is a break now too. God's people make a visible god for themselves, a golden calf. The idyll is disturbed. Transgression and sin among God's people demand restitution and forgiveness. A sacrificial service is established.

As kings and priests and as a chosen nation, they were a model for the nations of the world and thus a signpost, or could have been. It was they who served the living Creator God, knew him and were meant to radiate his nature and his reality, while they lived as priests in his presence as Adam and Eve once did in Eden.

Their story goes on, just as ours does. They settle in the land of Canaan. It takes years before they come to rest.

Then, some time later, we read: Everyone did what was right in his own eyes. For there was no king in the land.

And even if you are a king or have a king and the whole people consists of kings and priests, that is not automatically how God intended it. Just as in the beginning the image of God is damaged by sin, so it is when kings and priests sin. We know this when kings and queens do not live up to their role and dignity. Being something, having a title, is one thing. Things are difficult with us human beings. In us a kind of gravity is at work that is called sin. We are not only at its mercy, often we are its accomplices. We need help. Rescue and liberation.

Psalms 139; Hebrews 1:3; Acts 17:27-29; Genesis 4:26; Psalm 10:16; 24:8; 29:10; Isaiah 6:1; Genesis 12:2; Exodus 12; 19:6; 20.

5 A king after God's own heart

Various leaders in biblical history had quasi-royal functions. Like Abraham, Moses, his successor Joshua or the prophet Samuel. But with the rise of David we come to the prototype of the human king. And so he also becomes the model and forefather of the coming King who is the subject of this book.

Despite his weaknesses and missteps, David is described as a man after God's own heart. He becomes the model for the promised Messiah. As this prophetic vision unfolds, it becomes clear that the coming King will not simply be another son of David. It will be a greater David, indeed David's Lord. That sounds like an unsolvable riddle. In King Jesus this riddle is solved.

This new David becomes the epitome of messianic expectation. He is the symbol of the messianic age of salvation that brings liberation. An age that would reunite the divided northern and southern kingdoms of Israel into one kingdom and bring the old days back to life. So people expected. It was to be fulfilled somewhat differently. Not because the predictions were wrong, but because they were not interpreted correctly.

David is a man after God's own heart. God has taken him into his heart. Not because he was flawless, let alone sinless. On the contrary. A lot goes wrong in his life. He becomes an adulterer and a murderer, he is a miserable father. Why did he have a special standing before God? The secret: Despite everything, David longed for God. In the midst of his defeats and his failures he sought God! Again and again. At the end of his life he was broken. He had submitted in everything God wanted. He had sinned gravely and had to taste the bitter consequences. However fragile his life was, he had experienced God's grace and goodness. And he could rely on a covenant, the Davidic covenant, which guaranteed an eternal kingdom with a new David.

David's story gives courage to all who have failed! And we become part of this story. The coming Messiah-King will burst the borders of Israel. The coming kingdom of the Messiah will fill the whole earth.

Who will it be who one day will have an eternal kingship on David's throne? Who will he be, the DAVIDUS REX, the Davidic King? And when will that be?

1 Samuel 16:13; the story of David is found in 1 and 2 Samuel and in the books of Chronicles. Matthew 22:42-45.

6 Waiting for the King: the prophecies

Imagine you belonged to a small nation that has a turbulent history behind it and is in the middle of difficulties. The holy scriptures of this people preserve many promises that a king will come. One without equal, who has everything one dreams of and more. These scriptures, which came into being and were collected over a long period of time, speak of it again and again. *The hope of the people of Israel is the Messiah.* The expectation of this King is the heartbeat of a small nation. It keeps the nation alive. A real, living hope.

One thing is missing in the messianic expectation: No one can say exactly *when* he will come. And no one, *how* he will come. Power and glory are often spoken of. But also suffering, death and fear. How will it be fulfilled? And can both come true at the same time? The texts of the Hebrew Bible produced different expectations. People disagreed about that, but not about the fact that he would come.

In the days of Jesus' birth, the messianic expectation is within reach. For the few who are let in on it directly, who see the child and the mother, for them a great day has come.

The expectations associated with this Messiah-King could not be greater. Israel, or what is left of it, is part of the Roman Empire. Not Jerusalem but Rome is the capital of the world. The Messiah would change that and turn it upside down. He would settle the question of power in Israel's favor.

But could one still count on a Messiah, on a true king of salvation? What spoke in favor of it? Prophecies, that is, predictions, had been fulfilled several times in the history of this people. And now? After all, this was the greatest matter of all that was at stake. And once again it would turn out that God cannot lie. What he promises, he keeps.

We take a big leap right into the days when everything foretold is fulfilled.

But you, Bethlehem, in the land of the clan of Ephrathah, the Lord has this to say to you: Though you are small among the towns of Judah, out of you will come the future ruler over my people Israel. His origins are from of old, from ancient times.

Micah 5:2

Some prophecies: Genesis 49:10; Numbers 24:17; Isaiah 7:14; 9:7; 11:1; 40:3-5, 11; 53; Jeremiah 23:5-6; Micah 5:2; Hosea 11:1; Malachi 3:1; Psalm 118:22; Zechariah 9:9; 12:10; 13:7; Psalm 2; 16:10; 30:3; 110:1 and many more.

7 The gospel of Emperor Augustus

The word gospel sounds Christian. But it has not always been. It is not an invention of the church. It was a common word for good news of any kind or any content. The Roman imperial cult in particular uses this term for good news about the emperor, his birth and his outstanding attributes, for the blessing of the empire and its people. That is what the famous inscription from Priene says. Emperor Augustus is born. This gospel spreads as glad tidings in the Roman Empire about the first and greatest Roman emperor in history:

“This day has given the whole world a different appearance; it would have fallen into ruin if a common happiness for all people had not shone forth in the one who has now been born. Whoever recognizes in this birthday the beginning of life and of all the powers of life for himself judges rightly; now at last the time is past when one had to regret having been born. From no other day does the individual and the whole community receive as much good as from this birthday, which is equally happy for all. Providence, which governs everything in life, has filled this man with such gifts for the salvation of humankind that it has sent him to us and to the coming generations as savior; he will put an end to all feuding and shape everything gloriously. In his appearing the hopes of our ancestors are fulfilled; he has not only surpassed all the earlier benefactors of humanity, but it is also impossible that a greater one should ever come. The birthday of the god has brought to the world the glad tidings [gospels] connected with him. From his birth a new reckoning of time must begin.”

You have to keep texts of this kind in mind if you want to understand how an ancient reader understood the title of another literary work: The Gospel of Mark calls itself *gospel*. Mark places Jesus and his life alongside the emperor. He confronts the readers and hearers of his gospel with a choice.

What was supposed to be true of Augustus was also true of Jesus and his kingdom. It was not only the term gospel that was shaped by the imperial cult. The same applies to the most important of all christological titles, “LORD” (Greek: *kyrios*), and finally also to the term “Son of God.”

The messianic expectation of the Jews sees a ruler coming who surpasses all people and all things. Jesus of Nazareth is the fulfillment of all predictions and

expectations.

What is said by and about Augustus can never be achieved by a mortal. That is why he is called a god, or Son of God. He died nonetheless, just like everyone else. But now someone is coming who will also die. But not because he has to die. He dies voluntarily. For others. And he is God. Without beginning – unlike Augustus. Through his death he will defeat death, the greatest enemy of human beings. And remove its cause from the world: sin.

Mark 1:1; John 10:18; Hebrews 2:9-14; John 1:29.

8 The birth of the Messiah-King

Every birth is a miracle. Five times I was privileged to witness such an event. The toil and the joy of the woman giving birth alternate from one moment to the next. In ancient times births often did not end well for mother and child.

The birth of this King is also a miracle. Probably the greatest our planet has ever seen. What happens here, that God becomes human, lies orders of magnitude beyond our understanding. Like God himself, the Wholly Other and Incomprehensible One. God himself becomes small. Reduces himself to about 3,500 grams. And yet the Son of God is himself the Creator and King of the universe.

How is this King to come into our world? God has appeared many times. In the burning bush, terrifyingly on Mount Sinai, often as the angel of the Lord. But those were only “short visits.” Now God’s moment has come, the moment he had always intended: *He wants to live with people and stay.*

God becomes human. Again only three words that get to the heart of it. God remains God when he becomes human. But he leaves behind what makes God God, as far as we mortals can understand it: the heavenly throne, almighty power, dominion. He does not hold on to it as something he had seized or something to cling to.

The time is firmly fixed in God’s providence. It was the fullness of time. From God’s point of view the best moment. From a secular point of view insignificant. The world of that day does not notice it. Emperor Augustus – we heard about his gospel – has the inhabitants of his empire counted and registered. For this, people have to come to their hometown. After a march on foot of more than a hundred kilometers by Mary, who is heavily pregnant, with her husband Joseph from Nazareth to Bethlehem, all the houses are overcrowded. It is September. For the young couple, Joseph and Mary, there is no room left with relatives in an upper room, the living area of an Israelite house. They do find shelter with relatives after all. But on the ground floor, where the animals are brought in for the night. The house is already full. The men are sent away during the delivery. The birth comes immediately and goes well. Then they lay the firstborn in a feeding trough. A practical solution. The

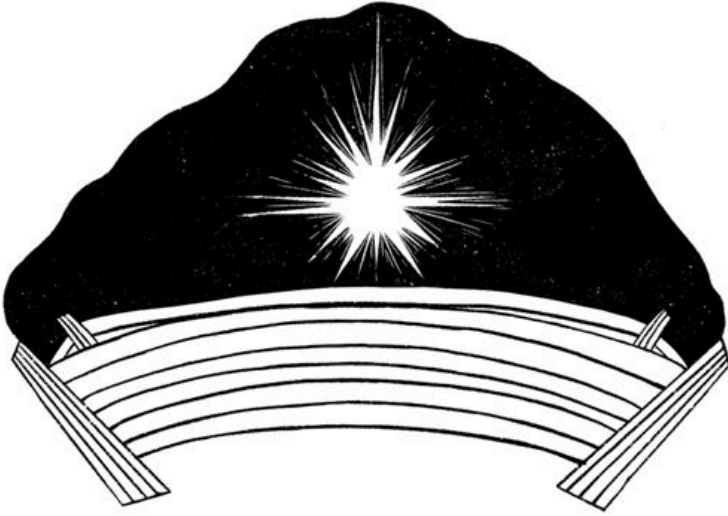
baby sleeps well there. An improvised place for a birth. But for that time, and for this simple couple from the humblest of circumstances, not unusual. Rather ordinary.

Jesus did not come only for the rich and famous. Not only for the respected and noble. He came for the nobodies. He came for the people others would never give a second thought. The ordinary ones. The inconspicuous and unremarkable. The forgotten and overlooked. This is already reflected in the way he was born. The Creator of the universe was born in the most unspectacular circumstances. God did something so spectacular that 2,000 years later we can hardly grasp the full weight of its significance: God writes eternity into the ordinary.

And that means that perhaps, through Jesus, God can write an eternally spectacular story in the middle of your ordinary, boring, everyday, meaningless life.

A king who comes into life this way, as a helpless baby, who entrusts himself to a young couple, is making a statement. From the very beginning he shows *what* he is like.

It is a cosmic event: From the Parthian Empire, formerly the territory of Babylonia, come scholars, astronomers, and they follow a star. A star that leads them precisely to the place of birth. Perhaps Jews in Babylon helped them with their scriptures to understand what was going on. Most remarkable accompanying circumstances. They did not arrive in Bethlehem one day after the birth. Only months later. They find the place and the child. They honor this child with precious gifts. In fact they worshiped the little child, the way one worships God. The first to worship the King of the Jews are Parthians, not Jews.



Added to this is the much-discussed subject of the virgin birth. Jesus had no male progenitor. Joseph was not his father. That got Joseph and Mary into difficulties with each other, and probably no one will envy them. Heaven does everything so that Joseph understands what is happening here. He is successfully convinced that everything is as it should be.

Non-Christians and Christians alike consider the virgin birth a metaphor or a fable. I do not. The virgin birth is not about Mary's biological and physical condition. The miracle is God's supernatural creative act. The Holy Spirit brought about Mary's pregnancy. The "begetting" of Jesus, the incarnation, happened through the Holy Spirit, through the power of the Most High. The one begotten and conceived was the *Son of God*. That is what he is as a human being and at the same time as God. A mystery. It had to be this way for him to be the *Holy One*. Without sin. In order to save us from our sins.

What is important is this: The King wants to be born into our lives. The simplest lodging is enough for him. He does not need a palace. Our life with all its junk is not worthy of the King moving in. And yet he does it, because he wants us. And yet he does it, if we let him in.

I wrote this text at Christmastime. My favorite song has this refrain, and I know of none better:

O come, let us worship,

The King.

King of glory

Ruler of the hosts

Adeste fideles, Friedrich Heinrich Ranke

*And were Christ born a thousand times in Bethlehem, and not in you: You would still remain
lost for all eternity.*

Angelus Silesius

John 1:1-2, 14; Exodus 3:1-6; 19:16-25; Revelation 21:1-3; Philippians 2:5-10;
Galatians 4:4; Luke 2:1-7; Matthew 2:1-18; Luke 1:35; Psalm 2; John 3.

9 The origin and mission of the King

For a long time Israel, or what was left of it, had not seen a king. The one who was king now was an Edomite, Herod. Nothing was as it should be in this small country under Rome's administration. The true King of Israel had to prove by genealogy that he was a descendant of David. That would not be the obstacle; Jesus was a descendant from the tribe of Judah, a descendant from the family of David.

Jesus existed before his birth. His birth was not a rebirth in the Buddhist sense. He existed as the Son of God, without beginning, without birth. He is eternal. Through him the universe was created. The earth and human beings.

The Son was sent to Israel, to God's own people. He was the longing of this people, who were waiting for their Messiah. That is what the prophets said. And that is how it came to pass. For a long time it remains hidden that Jesus, David's son, is at the same time the eternal Son of God. The Messiah brings the history of Israel and its prophecies to fulfillment. We, the Europeans and the nations of the world, are at first only spectators. Jesus is one of many prophets through whom God spoke to his people. He is the last in the long line of prophets, the final and greatest one. God himself speaks, because Jesus is God.

Jesus comes with a calling. He comes into the world with a mission. He will be the Messiah, the King of Israel. He comes to redeem the people from their sins. Not from the Romans.

By sending his Son, God installs Jesus as the Messiah, the "anointed King." In Jesus Christ, God has inaugurated and established his kingdom, the kingly rule of God; in his kingdom Jesus reigns – the King. Let us repeat it once more: The idea of the king and of kingly rule is bound up with the original creation. God wanted his image-bearers, Adam and Eve, to rule in this world. They failed in this role just as many kings did later. So God sent his Son, so that he would rule. Forever. The way God had always imagined ruling.

As its King, Messiah and Lord, the Son now commissions the church, meaning all Christians, regardless of denomination. The church is called to bear witness to this before the world: that Jesus is the true and returning King and that in him alone there is redemption. The church is called, as the people of

God, to embody this kingdom – the rule of God. Through the church, God's rule becomes visible.

Not the emperor but *Jesus* is the true Son of God. He comes from a royal house that is much older than Rome. He comes from the house of King David. David was promised a successor who would sit on David's throne forever. That was not David's son Solomon. That is Jesus from David's family tree. So he too is David's son. That is the prerequisite if God's promise is to come true. It did: In Jesus the promise is fulfilled.

This message was announced beforehand through God's prophets, and they wrote it down in the holy scriptures.

This message is about him, God's Son. On the human level he is a descendant of King David.

And at the same time he has been appointed Son of God. This happened through the powerful working of the Spirit of God, who unfolds God's holy reality, and it is shown by the resurrection of Jesus, the Messiah, our Lord.

Romans 1:2-4

Matthew 1:1-17; 2:1-15; Luke 23:8-15; John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1; 10:5; John 12:27; 2 Samuel 7:12-16; Romans 1:1-7.

10 The life of the King

Living like a king, like God in France (as the German saying goes)! A proverb that does not apply to the King who is the focus here. Just as he came into life, into poor circumstances, without royal honor, so he lived his life. A short life, 33 years of hard work and self-denial.

Can such a life be summed up in this chapter in about 700 words? Definitely not. These are only a few fragments of thought that let his royal life shine. Along with that, a question we keep in the back of our minds: What if our life were summed up in 700 words? What remains? Will anyone still remember us after two or three generations? I would not even know my great-grandfather's name if I did not ask.

When it comes to Jesus, many often think only of the manger and the cross. But the time in between must be just as important. Otherwise it would not have existed. The life of the King is just as important as his death. This life is as unique as it is precious, so pure and good that Jesus' death is indescribably sad. How could such an innocent life end like this?

The mission of Jesus is to redeem his people Israel and all people from their sins. To proclaim the kingdom of God. With his arrival it had been ushered in. The King was here. And with him the power of liberation. Not from the Romans, Israel's occupiers. No. Liberation from evil powers that enslave people. These invisible powers were and are more devastating than the Roman occupying power. Also liberation from incurable diseases that torment people and exclude them from social life. Liberation also from sanctimony, from legalistic, hypocritical piety. From scholarship in the Scriptures without love and life. Liberation from false expectations. From selfishness. From unbelief. Not least from ourselves.

All this marks the life of the true King. At one point things had come so far that the Jews wanted to make him king. But Jesus withdrew. He knew people's hearts and their motives. *His* kingdom needs renewed hearts. Hearts that have the heartbeat of Jesus. That are ready to serve and to take the lowest path.

The earthly life of the Christ remains largely hidden until his thirtieth year. An ordinary, strenuous working life with his brothers. As a builder. Here Jesus

learns not only the trade. He learns obedience, which he had not known in the land he came from. In heaven, Father, Son and Spirit, the triune God, were united in an eternal harmony of love and joy. On earth, Jesus, the Son, gave himself to a hard life. Who knows when he started working in construction? He was the firstborn. We hear nothing more of Joseph, Mary's husband. Perhaps Jesus took on responsibility for the family.

At 30, Jesus left this life behind. At the Jordan River he has himself baptized by John the Baptist, the one who had prepared the way for him. Then his public ministry begins. His messianic mission. All this is recorded in four life stories or biographies. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. It is worth reading these *Gospels*, as the four accounts are called. Again and again. Together they are the gospel of the Messiah-King.

His *life* is a message. His preaching, his words are so full of power, authentic, true to life, wise, that people can hardly find words for their amazement. He heals the lame. He makes the blind see. The dead are raised. Demons flee. The King goes out and takes the land. Not like a warlord. His wisdom and his truth are irresistible. The power of his love overcomes human hearts. To this day.

He is one of us and yet completely different. A life without luxury. Full of self-denial. Without a home of his own. Constantly viewed with suspicion and challenged by religious leaders and Pharisees. Followed by many people. For various motives. He fed many people with bread that he miraculously multiplied. But it was always about hearts for him, the innermost direction of life, which God needs so much as the goal. He was concerned with hearts that are pure or are to become pure.

With compassion he touches incurably sick people, who are healed immediately. One touch from this King changes everything. Let us allow this King to touch us. No one who came to him, and no one who comes to him today, has he ever turned away or will he ever turn away.

Just one touch from the King changes everything!

A single touch from the King changes everything!

John 21:25; 1 Peter 2:22-24; Matthew 1:21; Mark 1; John 6:15; Hebrews 5:8; Mark 6:3; Mark 9:15; 10:26; Luke 4:32; 8:25; 9:43; Matthew 8:20; Luke 5:13; 22:51; Mark 6:56.

11 The King's good news

The King's first official act is the proclamation, the preaching of the gospel. Proclamation and healing are his daily routine. He does not lead an army; people simply follow him and listen to him.

As is often customary with kings, a delegation comes ahead to prepare the royal visit. It is John, called the Baptist, who prepares the way of the Lord, of the King and Messiah. His message: Not streets and houses are to be cleaned, but hearts. People are to repent, to turn around and change their lives. A desert prophet in a coat of camel's hair, as herald, announces a king who does not come in pomp and splendor.

Repentance is also the message of Jesus. When John is put in prison, Jesus continues his ministry. He proclaims the gospel of the kingdom of God: Repent and believe the gospel! The approaching rule of God is the answer to all the problems of this world. God's rule alone brings peace, healing, forgiveness, freedom, security, prosperity and stability. God's rule, embodied in Jesus, the Messiah, is his answer to the dictatorship of the worldly empires and their failure, and also to that of the invisible rulers, who exercise their power just the same. That is, powers and authorities of the other world, which act on our visible world in order to destroy people.

Jesus is the King of this kingdom, sent and installed by God. He himself, in his person, embodies the message of the kingdom, the gospel. It is not for nothing that the four life accounts of the New Testament are called gospel. His life, his deeds and his words are the good news. And they say what the apostles later wrote in their letters.

When Jesus is supposed to heal the lame man who is lowered through a roof down to his feet, he says something unexpected. Some probably trusted him to heal the lame man, otherwise they would not have come. But first of all Jesus says to him: *Your sins are forgiven!* Sins are a bigger problem than being lame. Above all, Jesus brings the solution to the problem of sin. That is gospel. The angel said to Joseph, Mary's husband:

He will save the people from their sins!

With Jesus the good news had, without any doubt, truly arrived. Jesus was what he said. Words and life were one.

“So Jesus also came to Nazareth, where he had grown up. On the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read from the Scripture.”

And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. He unrolled it and read the passage where it says:

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me. He has sent me with the commission to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim to the prisoners that they shall be free and to the blind that they will see, to set the oppressed free and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

Jesus rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant of the synagogue and sat down. Everyone in the synagogue looked at him intently.

He began to speak. “Today this scripture is fulfilled,” he said to them. “You are witnesses.”

The gospel that Jesus himself was and proclaimed leads into the light, into eternal life. So that we leave behind the old, our sins and death.

“I assure you: Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He will not come under judgment anymore; he has taken the step from death to life.”

The good news and Jesus are one – you cannot have the one without the other. Where the gospel is proclaimed, Jesus is proclaimed.

We sum up the gospel of Jesus like this: It ...

establishes justice, destroys slavery, fights poverty, heals diseases, forgives debts, cleanses from sin, gives eternal life, welcomes the outsider, raises people from the lowest social status and brings the truth of God to its full validity.

Matthew 3:1; Mark 1:4; 8:28; Luke 3:1-18; Ephesians 2:1-3; Colossians 1:13; 2:15; Mark 2:1-12; Matthew 1:21; Luke 4:16-22; John 5:24.

12 The murder of the King: the cross

The evangelist John describes Jesus as King. More than the other evangelists. Above all where you would not expect it. Where it does not fit at all. Namely in the Passion of Jesus, in the story of his suffering, his arrest, the trial that condemned him and finally his death on the cross.

This Passion is horrific. Unjust. Shameless. Brutal. Dehumanizing and bestial. Yet through this darkness faith recognizes the installation of the true King. With a double meaning, the Passion story bears witness to the glorification, the exaltation of the Messiah-King.

Jesus, the Son of David, goes into the Garden of Gethsemane. When Jesus asks the soldiers whom they are looking for, they are thrown to the ground by his answer as if by a gust of wind, when he says: “I am he.” It is as if they were lying at his feet, the King’s feet.

With royal dignity and resolve, Jesus does not defend himself with the sword as his disciple Peter does. To drink the Father’s cup is what counts for Jesus, the Son: Your grace, O God, is better than life, as David once said. A cup that for him is full of suffering, for us in the Lord’s Supper a cup of thanksgiving.

Jesus is led away to Annas, the father-in-law of the high priest. Annas’ son-in-law Caiaphas had once said – with political instinct, but without knowing the full weight of his words: It is good that one man die for the people. How true. A true king dies for his people!

From the small, oppressed world of the Jews, Jesus is now led into the universe of the world empire of Rome. Pilate, the Roman governor, has the power and asks him straight out, when the two of them are probably alone: Are you the king of the Jews?

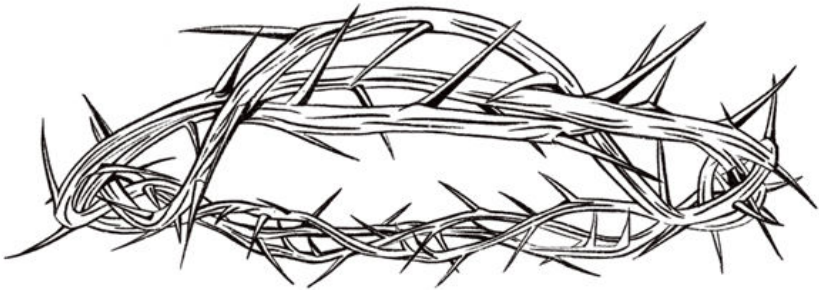
Jesus confirms that he is a king. But over a kingdom that is not of this world. A kingdom that is exalted above every political claim, a kingdom that does not conquer the world by force of arms, as the Romans do. A kingdom from the heavenly world. With different laws. A kingdom that, in the person of its heavenly King, lets itself be crushed by the brutal violence of an earthly empire. At least that is how it looked.

For Pilate it is clear that this is the king of the Jews. Astonishing, what instinct Pilate displays. He, the Roman and idolater, practically makes him king of the Jews. He says openly to the crowd: “Here is your king!” He even has a royal sign nailed to the top of the cross. Everyone is to know exactly that. The leaders of Israel and Jesus’ accusers are provoked by Pilate to the utmost. For they want his death, indeed his death on the cross.

Pilate unwittingly stands up for the truth about Jesus: Jesus is not guilty of anything at all, and he is their king. The Jews choose the emperor of Rome. They reject Jesus, their true King.

The next thing we see is Jesus with a crown of thorns and a reddish purple robe that is draped around him. The bloody caricature of the King who came to bear witness to the truth. Majesty crowned with thorns.

He carries his own cross to Golgotha. There they tear the clothes from his body. Nail him to the cross. Raise it up. He is lifted up, as he himself had announced. The King is installed on his throne: a torture stake, a wooden cross.



A naked, bloody, disfigured man, full of pain. His cry before he breathes his last is royal, liberating and redeeming for him, for all, for us: *It is finished!*

Given up for us. It is this Crucified One who draws us to himself. Not Pilate, no emperor, but Jesus, the Messiah-King! This man at this place of execution becomes our refuge, our place of atonement. Here his blood covers our sins and makes peace with God, reconciliation through the blood of his cross. Peace with God, and also among us human beings, now becomes possible. God’s bloody and pierced hand is stretched out!

This is the true King of the world, the King of heaven, the Ruler of all the world and Lord of lords! Whoever is willing to lay aside his power, to exchange

the throne for the cross for our sake, is worthy of our worship. Whoever then even intercedes with God, with his Father, for forgiveness for his murderers leaves us human beings speechless. Did we deserve such a God?

A cross demonstrates the power of the Romans and the destruction, the annihilation, indeed the obliteration of the crucified and of every memory of them. The strong defeat the weak. Jesus was crucified in weakness. For God, the Ruler of the universe, that is victory. As paradoxical as it seems: The victory of love.

The cross is and remains a scandal. As the sign of the Christian faith it remains so. It is madness and foolishness to make a cross and the Crucified One the founder of a religion. Nothing about it can be glossed over or romanticized. It is so bizarre, so contradictory, so turned upside down. But for all who believe that God's wisdom and love reach their climax on this stake of shame, the cross, and what happened there, is God's power for salvation. For rescue! A suffering, a crucified God is foolishness, but at the same time it is the message that touches people every day, changes them and makes them new people.

The story of Joseph is a foreshadowing of the Messiah – his brothers throw him into a pit, sell him to Egypt, where by painful detours he becomes vice-regent, just like Christ.

When Joseph came to them, they stripped him of his robe, the splendid robe he was wearing. Then they took him and threw him into the cistern. The cistern was empty; there was no water in it.

Genesis 37:23-24

John 18 + 19; Matthew 26:36-27:56; Mark 14 + 15; Luke 22 + 23; Romans 3:21-26; 2 Corinthians 13:4; 1 Corinthians 1:22-24; Colossians 1:20; Ephesians 2:16; Philippians 2:8.

13 What a king

(Song in the original German)

Was für ein König, der sein Land verlässt für mich. Und alles hingibt, was ihm lieb und wichtig ist. Der sich aufmacht und weit in die Fremde zieht, um zu suchen die, die er von Herzen liebt. Der nicht ruht bis auch der letzte seiner Freunde bei ihm ist, der voll Sehnsucht und voll Freude mich in die Arme schließt.

Wer so ist, der ist wahrhaft königlich. Diesen König liebe ich.

Was für ein König, der ein großes Festmahl hält für all die Schwachen und die Armen dieser Welt. Der uns seine Brüder, seine Schwestern nennt, weil er wie wir das Leben hier auf Erden kennt. Was für ein König, der aus Liebe seine Krone niederlegt und sie eintauscht gegen eine, die aus Dornen ist.

Was für ein König, der sein Leben für mich gibt, wo ich doch nicht von edler Herkunft bin. Was für ein König, der dem Tod ins Auge sieht und ihn als Erster ein für alle Mal besiegt. Was für ein König, der den Weg geht, der noch nicht gegangen ist, weil dieser Weg für uns der Weg in die Freiheit ist.

Lothar Kosse, 2011, used by kind permission.

14 The King in the tomb

A king is buried in a special way. With a great procession and a worthy tomb. Crucified criminals are left hanging on the cross for days, as a deterrent. Then they end up in a mass grave, not far from the cross. Their bodies are treated like animal carcasses. On the cross these people are broken. And every memory of them is wiped out.

But here hangs the Author of life. Killed together with two criminals. What happens to him now? In the drama of the crucifixion there is a small ray of light. Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Sanhedrin, is a secret disciple of Jesus. His hour has now come. Now he proves that he is a disciple of Jesus. Being a wealthy man, he has made provision and acquired a tomb for himself. A rock tomb with a large stone weighing tons in front of it. It is rolled in a groove in the ground in front of the tomb's opening.

Joseph musters a great deal of courage, goes in to Pilate and asks for the body. Pilate, surprised at how quickly Jesus died, agrees. Joseph takes the body down from the cross. Whether alone or with helpers, we do not know. He wraps Jesus in a linen cloth. It has to be done quickly; the Sabbath begins at dusk. He lays Jesus in his own tomb and assumes that he will need a new one for himself.

Many predictions (prophecies) were fulfilled in the life and death of Jesus. A distinction that applies to no other human being. Even his burial is written about hundreds of years beforehand: He was assigned a grave with the wicked, but he was with a rich man in his death.

Often when the apostles tell the gospel, they always mention that Jesus not only died but was also buried. No one should dismiss this as a minor detail. For whoever is buried is dead. Not unconscious. Not apparently dead. All bodily functions have irreversibly ceased. With the tomb, the chapter on Jesus is closed for the time being.

If everything seemed to be over with his death on the cross, then all the more so with his burial. The Romans then sealed the tomb and had it guarded by a special unit. The Jewish teachers of the law had to make sure that Jesus' disciples would not come to steal the body. But there was little danger from

them; they had fled. Unlike the disciples, the teachers of the law remembered that Jesus had several times spoken of his violent death, but also of his resurrection. Something was in the air. Was something else going to happen?

The early Christian creed says: "buried, and descended to the realm of the dead." The Author of life breaks into the insurmountable stronghold of death by dying himself and being dead. Later Jesus says of himself: I was dead.

What then happened beyond death, when he descended into the realm of the dead, is no less significant than what happened on the cross. But it is certain that this too happened for us. For mortal human beings, so that we might live, together with him.

He was mistreated, but he bore it without complaining. Like a lamb led to the slaughter, like a sheep being sheared, he endured everything in silence, without complaining.

In the midst of his imprisonment and his trial, death overtook him. Because his people had taken such great guilt upon themselves, his life was snuffed out. Who among the people of this generation gives it a thought?

And he was assigned a grave with the wicked, but he was with a rich man in his death, because he had done no wrong, and there was no deceit in his mouth.

Isaiah 53:7-9

Acts 2:22-46; 3:15; Hebrews 2:10; Matthew 27:57; Mark 15:43; John 19:38; Isaiah 53:9; 1 Corinthians 15:4; 1 Peter 3:18-22

15 The King in the realm of the dead

Kings too must die. This King we are talking about here suffered an agonizing death. He was violently executed on the cross. Then he was laid in a rock tomb that was closed with a large stone.

A human being is more than his body. After death he lives on. His consciousness, his spirit-soul, cannot be killed. The spirit-soul corresponds to the whole person; he remains and is a complete person in the hereafter. Without a material, mortal body. Even outside the Christian faith there are countless indications, not to speak of proofs, that a human being can exist outside his body and perceive with all his senses the surroundings of the invisible world beyond.

This world beyond is the realm of the dead. In the Hebrew Bible it is called *Sheol*. In the New Testament the underworld where the dead stay is called *Hades*. There is an area there for the righteous and one for the unrighteous. The first is called “*Abraham’s side*.” Then there is a *lowest area* in which the rebellious and fallen angels are kept, who mingled with human beings before and during the time of Noah. They played a decisive part in human beings falling into sin to such an extent that God drew a line under it with the flood. That is how the first book of Moses reports it. The early church proclaims in its creed, which to this day is spoken aloud together by Christians countless times every Sunday: *He descended to the realm of the dead*. Precisely there, into the underworld, which is hidden from us and can only be entered through death, down there and into it went he, the Christ, the King.

Perhaps this seems strange and antiquated to the reader. But the worldview of the Bible is quite simple: There is the created visible world and the created invisible world. The invisible world includes heaven, where God lives and reigns. This is explained with words and concepts that we know from the visible world, so that we can imagine at all, and somehow, this world that is more or less hidden from us. God’s heaven is *above*. The underworld, the realm of the dead, is always *below*, *under the earth*. Under the earth means not only the grave, but the invisible underworld beyond, where the dead are.

Although Abraham's side is a place of rest, the Hebrew Bible nevertheless does not describe Sheol as a place where you would want to go because it is so beautiful there. *Sheol stands for death and also for the power of death, which God never wanted.*

The New Testament calls the underworld Hades. That was also the name of this place in Greek mythology. Later Hades became the ruler of the underworld. This place is to be distinguished from hell. Hades and hell are not the same.

Let us come back to that day of the crucifixion and to Jesus' burial. Seen from the outside, things became quiet; the tortured body of Jesus rested in the tomb. The Sabbath began. *But the King did not rest.* Tremendous things happened in the underworld. *The King descended.* Only as one who had died could he descend into this realm of the dead. And confront the prince of death. He descended into the pit of the ancient serpent and crushed its head. He overpowered the strong man in order to plunder his house. In order to set the prisoners free.

He did not go down into Sheol to suffer further, but to conquer, to liberate and to proclaim.

He descended into the lowest prison, to the fallen angelic princes. To them he did not proclaim a message of salvation but a message of victory. They were to know that their plan, and that of their prince of darkness, had not worked out. *His death meant their death. His death, which all the powers of darkness had instigated, was not their victory. It was their defeat.* Unexpectedly for them, they now meet the Victor in the place where they would never have expected him, and hear from his own mouth that rescue has come for human beings. Not the downfall of mortals together with the powers of darkness, but victory, salvation and eternal life have now been accomplished and are ready for sinners. For sinners who have not deserved it, but on whom the King has mercy.

In Sheol or Hades were also all who had feared God and had died up to this day of crucifixion. They were in the realm of the dead, but not in the heavenly paradise. *Now the promised King comes to them, to Abraham, David, Job and all the others. The King of glory enters and is received and welcomed by a countless multitude. They are prisoners of hope!* Their hope is not to stay there. The King did not come to stay either. He came to lead them out and into the heavenly paradise.

So a great exodus from Hades into paradise takes place on the very day Christ died. For to the one robber on the cross he said with great confidence:

Today you will be with me in paradise. This robber follows the great King, who fights for his people and leads them all into the heavenly sanctuary, into God's glorious presence.

Left behind are the ruins of Sheol and those in it who did not believe. It is possible, and not ruled out, that he also freed from the underworld those to whom he proclaimed salvation there. Whoever meets him, whoever calls on him, no matter where, will be saved. He is rich toward all, this merciful King of glory.

The King became one with our life and became human. He lived the life we should have lived. He took on our death and took our sins away from us and carried them himself into the grave. God credits his death to us; we may live. A new, eternal, immortal life. He went down and broke the fortress of death, so that we can live. He came back to life. His death is our death, and his life is now our life.

Every step, the King's whole life, was necessary for salvation. Otherwise he would only have had to appear for the cross. Between the cross and the resurrection the King fought a battle for his people, although the rock tomb gave no hint of it. The fight in the visible world had been fought, to the point of death. Now came the fight in the invisible world. He plundered Sheol and led the prisoners up to Mount Zion, the mountain of God.

And so, raised to new life, he went to the spirits in the invisible world who had rebelled against God in Noah's time and who are now held captive until their final condemnation, and proclaimed his victory to them.

1 Peter 3:19-20

This is why it says: "When he ascended on high, he led captivity captive and gave gifts to people." But what does "he ascended" mean, if not that he also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is the very one who also ascended far above all the heavens, in order to fill all things.

Ephesians 4:8-10

Do not be afraid! I am the First and the Last and the Living One; I was dead, and look, I am alive for ever and ever, and I hold the keys of death and Hades.

Revelation 1:17-18

2 Samuel 22:6; Job 17:16; Psalm 16:10; 30:3; 68:16-24; 116:3, 8-9, 15; 118:17-27; Isaiah 14:9-15; 38:18; 45:2; Ezekiel 31:16; Hosea 13:14; Zechariah 9:9-12;

Matthew 12:28-29, 40; Acts 2:22-36 (Psalm 16:10-11); Romans 10:6-10 (Deuteronomy 30:12-14); Colossians 1:16; 2 Peter 2:4.

16 The resurrection of the King

The dead do not come back to life. A rule without exception. No special insight; everyone knows it. Death, our finiteness and transience, is not a horizon we want to be content with. Many sense that we were created for more than returning to the earth. That cannot be all.

The King has gone to war. Alone, on his Father's orders. For us. He has faced the power of death. He has let himself be defeated. Lost the battle and thereby won it after all. He has overcome the power of death. He has turned death into life. During his life he brought some people back to life. Now he is raised from the dead by his Father. The rule without exception is abolished. God the Father does not remain silent about the death of the Righteous One. He was silent in Gethsemane when Jesus prayed to be spared this suffering. He was silent when he walked the hard road of suffering with his Son. He was silent when Jesus hung on the cross. But then the Father spoke and unfolded all his divine power and brought Jesus back to life.

The cross is the cruel, hard No of human beings. The resurrection is God's emphatic Yes. His Yes to Christ, to life and to us, even though we behave like his enemies. Or are completely uninterested in our Creator.

In Jesus' death, Jesus meets the hostility of human beings. And the hostility of the powers of darkness and death. And becomes the substitutionary sacrifice for our sins. In the resurrection it is sealed that the question of guilt, the problem of our sins, has been settled once and for all. In our favor. In the resurrection all the invisible powers hostile to God and to human beings are defeated. The way is clear for God's kingdom! What a King comes out of this tomb! The King lives! He has returned victorious from the dead. The future of a new life has begun.

Risen! Jesus himself is the one who breaks through death and leaves the sealed rock tomb behind. He leaves his grave clothes behind, neatly arranged and folded, and enters the world of the resurrection. He is the same Jesus the disciples knew. Scars on his hands and feet and in his side remain as an eternal reminder and sign of his suffering and his death for us. But now he lives a new existence. He goes through locked doors, needs no time to change places. Eats

fish with his disciples, lets himself be touched, is and remains forever a true human being.

The stone at the tomb, weighing tons, is removed. Not so that Jesus can get out, but so that the disciples and the women can get into the empty tomb.

This resurrection goes against everything we know. That simply cannot be! A fairy tale? A myth? Much has been mustered to refute this historical fact. But hardly any event in world history is as well documented as this one. And that should not surprise us. For everything stands or falls with this event. The tomb was empty. Too many eyewitnesses met the Risen One. Disciples who had been frightened to death became courageous confessors of Christ. They no longer feared death. Too many people today experience Christ in supernatural experiences of seeing and hearing that cannot be explained scientifically.

The resurrection of the Messiah-King has led humanity into a new dimension. It has room for all people. It leaves death and transience behind in the grave forever. Before us lies a new existence. Life in abundance. Eternal life and a new creation stand for what our King has won for us by fighting. At the cost of his life.

His resurrection pulls us out into life. The life that is worth living has won – through him.

You, Lord, will not abandon me to the realm of the dead! You will not let me end in the grave forever; for I hold fast to you in faithfulness!

You make known to me the path of life. In your presence I find unclouded joy; from your hand comes eternal happiness to me.

Psalm 16:10-11

John 2:22; Acts 2:24, 32; 3:15; Romans 4:24-25; 6:4, 9; 8:11, 34; 10:9; 1 Corinthians 15; 1 Thessalonians 1:10; Ephesians 2:1-6; Colossians 3:1; 2 Timothy 2:8.

17 The ascension of the King

The ascension of King Jesus is not an escape. Not simply a change of place: It is an event with enormous consequences. In fact no less important than the cross, the tomb or the resurrection. You hardly hear anything about this event. It gives us a public holiday in spring, in Germany also known as *Father's Day*. And yet this event crowns the life and death of Jesus.

“Ascension” (German *Himmelfahrt*, literally “journey to heaven”) sounds strange. It was not a “journey,” for then Jesus would never have arrived at his destination. It was a stepping over into the heavenly world of God, into the transcendence, which is completely different from our visible, immanent world, but not far away.

Jesus passed through the heavens in a triumphal procession. All the beings of this world beyond bow down. They have no other choice. This road leads all the way to the throne of God. Similar to his entry into Jerusalem, and yet completely different. For the cross lies behind him.

A human being has paved and cleared the way for us human beings to the Father heart of God. He is the way. We can now come home. The Father is waiting for us. He wants to receive us.

First *he* was received there, like a king's son. Speaking of Father's Day: God, the eternal Father, welcomes his Son. He greets him joyfully. Heaven rejoices, all the angels and heavenly beings. The Son is back. After 33 years on earth he returns to the heavenly palace.

He has accomplished something hard. He has brought about an eternal rescue, eternal salvation. A new creation is born. Through his becoming human, through his dying and rising. No wonder he was so longed for in the government palace of the universe and is now being received.

None of this is a fairy tale. It is reality with great impact. The consequences cannot even be foreseen yet. We human beings are directly affected.

For us, this ascension event can only mean doing as the heavenly Father did. Let us receive King Jesus just as the Father received him. Let us expect him, let us receive him. He wants to move into our lives too. He is ready to do so.

By the way, as he went up to heaven in a cloud before his disciples, there were two men, two angels, who said: Just as he has gone now, so surely will he come again. Visibly, in the clouds.

You ascended on high in a triumphal procession, you led captives with you. You received gifts from people, even from the rebellious. Surely God, the LORD, will remain dwelling here! Praise be to the Lord! Day after day he bears our burdens; yes, he, God, is our salvation.

Psalms 68:18-19

Mark 16:19-20; Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:4-11; Hebrews 5:10; 4:14.

18 The coronation of the King

Coronations are pompous ceremonies. No expense is spared. A once-in-a-lifetime event for every queen and every king. High-ranking guests are invited. The palace is decorated. But now we are talking about heaven. Outside space and time, our imagination is limited. Fantasy and science fiction inspire our powers of imagination. But the entry, the reception of the Messiah-King Jesus and his coronation celebration in the heavenly dimension beyond can only be imagined in part, if at all. But very real and with far-reaching consequences.

Jesus is crowned with glory and honor – with a victor's wreath! That is probably not a wreath of olive branches. Rather a metaphor we can connect with. The coronation festival lasts ten days.

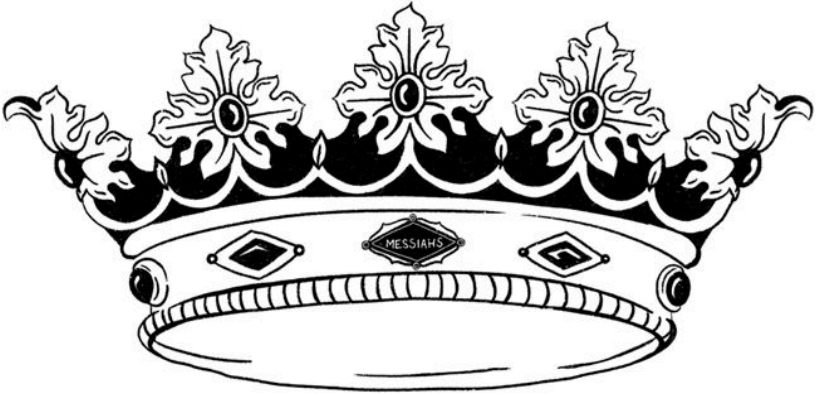
God the Father, the King of the universe, gives his Son the highest place of honor he can bestow. He makes him vice-regent. What he says and does is as if God does it. Like Joseph in Egypt long ago as Pharaoh's deputy.

The honor shown by the heavenly Father is not a family favor or obligation. Jesus has earned this place. As low as he humbled himself, so high is he exalted. A stable in Bethlehem, hard work, without possessions, despised and in the end the cross. Even though he is the Creator, the King of heaven! Only this place of honor at the center of all being and the highest title of honor are worthy of him.

King David already wrote these mysterious words:

The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I have made your enemies a footstool for your feet!"

It has been fulfilled. When you read this, it is not old news. All of this has consequences. If Jesus has been made Lord and Christ, then that will have consequences. Sooner or later. For our planet, for every human being. No one will get around this Lord, this *Lord of Lords*.



Back then, not long after Jesus went to heaven, the Christians sang songs like these in their catacombs and hiding places:

Therefore God also exalted him so incomparably high and gave him as a title of honor the name that is greater than any other name.

And because Jesus bears this name, one day everyone will fall on their knees before him, all who are in heaven, on earth and under the earth.

Everyone will acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, and in this way they will give glory to God the Father.

Or: And he who descended has then also ascended again far above the highest of all heavens, in order to fill the whole universe with his presence.

Also: ... the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who now – having gone into heaven – sits in the place of honor at the right hand of God, and to whom the angels and all powers and authorities are subject.

By the way, just as with the resurrection, there are also eyewitnesses of the exalted Messiah-King. The former zealot Paul had to realize that whoever wants to wipe out the Christians is attacking Christ, their Lord, himself. It was tremendous grace that Christ appeared to him of all people. Not for judgment. On the road to Damascus Paul suddenly stands in the radiance of his heavenly glory. Like on a stage in the spotlight. Result: blindness. Three days later it is healed. The result of this encounter: Paul is completely turned around. From then on, as quickly as he can, he proclaims Jesus as the Messiah and Lord. He

had suddenly grasped that this person was the Messiah, as described and announced in the prophecies. All at once everything fit together for him.

Another eyewitness, even before Paul, was the disciple Stephen. The Jews stoned him. As the stones rain down on him, he is given a glimpse into the opened heaven. Of Jesus. He stands in heavenly glory and leans toward the dying martyr to receive him to himself.

All authority has been given to him, in heaven and on earth. He reigns. He has the say. But, and this is important, his way of ruling is different. Not the way emperors, kings and despots do it. His rule is selfless, just, truthful and loving. His reign is not a coercive power. The evil of this world is not stopped by violence. Jesus, the King over all kings, does it in his own way. Just as we know him from the Gospels. We can trust him. He will reach his goal. One word is enough, and all the powers of this world are stopped.

If the Father gave him the throne, then it cannot be otherwise than that he also gets the throne of our lives! Jesus, the true King, is not a usurper. We decide who gets the throne in our lives. People, idols, religions, addictions, fear – and many other things want to have dominion over our lives. His rule is the only one that does not enslave us. The only one with a future.

Which side do we want to be on? I may at times underestimate the mighty greatness and the glory of my Messiah-King Jesus. That is why we can hand over the throne of our lives to him again and again. With him there is forgiveness and patience. Always a new beginning. He does not reproach us. He receives us again and again into his reign of grace.

In my visions at night I looked: And behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man. And he came to the Ancient of Days, and was led into his presence.

14 And he was given dominion and glory and kingship, and all peoples, nations and languages served him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingship is one that will not be destroyed.

Daniel 7:13-14

The counterpart in the New Testament:

Jesus answered (the high priest): “Yes! But I tell you, from now on this holds true: You will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven!”

Matthew 26:64

Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all the tribes of the land will mourn because of him. Yes, amen.

Revelation 1:7

Jesus has passed through the heavens to the throne of God. The Israelites in Jerusalem mourn at Peter's sermon at Pentecost, the same people who killed him.

Lift up your heads, you mighty gates, make way, you ancient doors, so that the King of glory may come in. Who is this King of glory? It is the LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD, mighty in battle. Who is this King of glory? The LORD Almighty, he is the King of glory.

Psalm 24:7-10

Hebrews 2:7, 9; Psalm 10:16; Jeremiah 10:7, 10; Acts 2:34; Hebrews 1:13; Genesis 41:41-46; Ephesians 4:8-10; Psalm 110:1; Philippians 2:5-11; 1 Peter 3:22; Acts 9:1-22; 7:54-60; Matthew 28:18; Luke 11:23.

19 My King of glory

(Song in the original German)

Der Wind, der in mir weht

Das Wort, das nie vergeht

Alpha und Omega

Der sein wird, ist und war

Berge verbeugen sich vor seinem Angesicht

Ein Wort und es geschieht

Er kommt und Ängste fliehn

Das ist mein König, König der Herrlichkeit

Sein ist das Reich, die Macht in Ewigkeit

Nichts muss ich fürchten, solange ich weiß

Dass der König der Könige nah bei mir bleibt

Der Weg auf dem ich geh

Das Licht auf meinem Weg

Meine Heimat, mein Zuhause'

Deine Nähe füllt mich aus

Das ist mein König, König der Herrlichkeit

Sein ist das Reich, die Macht in Ewigkeit

Nichts muss ich fürchten, solange ich weiß

Dass der König der Könige nah bei mir bleibt

Tobias / Samuel / Hundt / Harfst

20 The King – Son of David and Son of God

The second psalm has no heading. It is a royal psalm, and we would expect it to be by David. That could be, but the king described here cannot be David, nor his son Solomon. Rather, this psalm points to a unique king who did not exist at that time. The Anointed One in Psalm 2, the Messiah, is the king chosen by God. He is anointed and installed as king and at the same time anointed with the Spirit to carry out his office.

In this somewhat longer chapter, the focus is on the fact that this King is the Son of God. In the ancient Near East, among the Egyptians and also in Mesopotamia, the king was the incarnate deity. If you read Psalm 2 without knowing who it is really about, then in this psalm the Anointed One is installed as king on Mount Zion in Jerusalem and is thereby adopted as son of the Most High. So he was not that before. The begetting in Psalm 2 is the enthronement. By taking the throne, the king is adopted as Son of God.

"I have installed my king on Zion, my holy mountain!"

I will proclaim the decree of the Lord. He said to me: You are my Son; today I have begotten you.

Ask of me, and I will give you the nations as your inheritance, the ends of the earth as your possession.

Unlike the historical situation, the rule here extends not only over Judah or Israel, but over all nations. Did people dream of world domination?

It is God's dream to unite all nations under one unique King and to bless the whole world through him. It began with David as the archetype of the ideal king and the prototype of the coming King. Not just any king, but one from his descendants, in other words, a Son of David. From the royal tribe of Judah. Psalm 2 looks into the future and expects a literal fulfillment. The psalm is not an exaggerated pipe dream; it is the purest messianic prophecy, which has been fulfilled and will yet be completely fulfilled. Today we live in the fulfillment of this psalm, as Acts 13:32-34 shows:

And we proclaim to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, that God has fulfilled it for us, their children, by raising up Jesus, as it is also written in the

second psalm:

“You are my Son; today I have begotten you.”

But that he raised him from the dead, never again to return to decay, he has stated in these words: “I will give you the sure mercies of David.”

The sure mercies of David are the promise to David, and thus to the people whose king he was, to have a son on David's throne who would take up an eternal world rule (Isaiah 55:3). *In Christ this is fulfilled.* Israel does indeed have significance for the whole world. For Jesus, a Jew, from the tribe of Judah, now sits on the heavenly throne. He is the fulfillment, or better still, the overfulfillment. *For he does not become the Son; he is the eternal Son of God who became human.* Begotten by God, he is God's Son also as a human being, and in addition he was confirmed as such in the resurrection:

... the gospel of God (which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures) concerning his Son (who as to the flesh came from the line of David and was declared to be Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by the resurrection of the dead), Jesus Christ our Lord.

Romans 1:1-4

The second psalm describes the ritual of accession to the throne. The evangelist Mark takes this up and works it into his Gospel. The enthronement of the king in Psalm 2:7-8 is reflected above all in Mark 1:11 and 9:7, but goes in a different

direction than Jewish readers would probably have expected, and is then completed in 15:39.

Psalm 2	Gospel of Mark
Anointing of the king and gift of the Spirit 2:2, 6	“Anointing” of Jesus as king 1:11
Installation on Mount Zion (the king’s accession to the throne) 2:6	God’s speech to Jesus (and John) (the tearing open of heaven) 1:11 and 9:7
God’s message to the nations 2:6	Appointment of Jesus as Son of God 1:11 and 9:7
Legitimation of rule and empowerment of the king, Jesus’ appointment of the king as Son of God 2:7	Jesus’ glory at the transfiguration on Mount Hermon 9:2-3, 7
Transfer of rule – world rule of the king of Jerusalem 2:8	Jesus’ authority in exorcisms and miracles
Taking over the insignia of rule (iron scepter – smashing clay pots) 2:9	Jesus’ rod is the proclamation of his gospel 1:14 (based on Isaiah 11:4 – “rod of his mouth”) Jesus’ accession to the throne – the way of the cross to Golgotha – the cross as throne 15:16-19, 39

I owe this study to Nenad Božović, from the collected volume “Christ of the Sacred Stories,” 2017, Tübingen.

In the very first verse Mark begins: *“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”* Christ, the Anointed One, is God’s Son! At last it can be said who the historical person of the Messiah from Psalm 2 is. But what kind of Messiah is it that Mark describes? The line goes straight to the cross, where not a Jew but a Roman joins in Mark’s opening confession: *And when the centurion, who stood there facing him, saw that he cried out like this and breathed his last, he said: Truly this man was the Son of God!* (15:39)

At the beginning, as in Psalm 2, it is God the Father who addresses his Son and declares over him what is of essential and at the same time incomprehensible significance: *And a voice came from heaven: You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased* (1:11). So also in the middle of the Gospel: *And a cloud came and overshadowed them; and a voice came from the cloud: This is my Son, whom I love; listen to him* (9:7).

In the light of the enthronement in Psalm 2, the descent of the Spirit on Jesus can be regarded as the “anointing of Jesus as king”: *And just as he was*

coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove (1:10). In Noah's case the dove came back with an olive leaf, which allows us to identify the dove as the Spirit of God (olive oil = anointing with the Holy Spirit). Through the descent of the Spirit, Jesus is legitimized and empowered as the long-awaited Messiah. God himself, the Father, does this: *I have found David my servant – with my sacred oil I have anointed him* (Psalm 89:20). Another word of Isaiah is fulfilled: *Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom my soul delights: I have put my Spirit on him, he will bring justice to the nations* (42:1). God's relationship to Jesus is unique and filled with love, with mutual affection. It surpasses all relationships we know and fills the kingship of Jesus as the only begotten Son of God with a dimension and fullness never seen before.

The transfer of rule to the king mentioned in 2:8 takes place in Mark 1:11 through the union with the Spirit and shows itself in Jesus' authority. Jesus teaches as one who has "authority" (1:22, 27); his authority can also be seen in the driving out of demons (1:24), which resembles the authority of the king in Psalm 2:9. His authority can also be seen in the fact that Jesus' appearance brings astonishment and admiration (1:27), that the news of his work spreads (1:28) and that the miracles multiply (1:29-34).

The iron rod from Psalm 2:9, with which the enemies are smashed like clay pots, can be connected with Isaiah 11:4, a passage that speaks of the "rod of his mouth" of the Spirit-filled Messiah. If we apply this to the enthronement of Jesus in Mark 1:1-15, the "rod of his mouth" can be understood as Jesus' rod, as his royal scepter, *that is, Jesus' scepter is his proclamation of the gospel* (1:14).

In 2:8 the nations are promised to the king as his possession, and world rule is transferred to him. If we look at this promise in the context of Mark 1:11, the question arises which nations were promised to Jesus as his possession and what "the ends of the earth" mean in this context. One answer can be: All the nations to whom the gospel is proclaimed and who accept it are the nations that become Jesus' "possession." The gospel is proclaimed to the "ends of the earth." The first member of one of these nations that become the possession of the enthroned Messiah Jesus is the Roman centurion under the cross in 15:39.

Instead of an increase in his political power, as was expected, the enthronement in Mark goes in the opposite direction: *The Messiah does not strive*

for political power. Before the disciples stands a Messiah who will suffer. Before the glorification on Mount Hermon, Jesus announces his suffering once, in 8:31-33, and after the glorification twice more, in 9:30-32 and 10:32-34. With this in view, one could understand why in Mark Jesus never introduces himself as Messiah or Son of God, but always uses other terms that do not raise false expectations.

The final step of Jesus' enthronement in 15:39 was prepared beforehand in several places: first by Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, by the anointing of Jesus by a woman for his burial, then in the trial before Pilate and finally in the mocking of Jesus by the soldiers. In Jesus' entry into Jerusalem in 11:1-10 and his sitting on the donkey, a parallel can be seen to the enthronement of Solomon, who entered Jerusalem on David's mule (1 Kings 1:38). This explains the cry of the crowd, "*Blessed is the kingdom of our father David,*" in 11:10, which shows that they expected the restoration of the house of David.

In his Passion, Jesus is dressed up and fitted out with the props of a Hellenistic vassal king, with a purple robe and a wreath of thorns. The greeting "Hail, king of the Jews" represents the usual salute of homage before the ruler and resembles "Ave Caesar." *The whole scene is meant as a caricature of the royal ritual.* Jesus is struck on the head with a staff and spat on. According to Matthew 27:29 the staff is placed in his right hand and so made into a "royal scepter." By caricaturing the royal ritual in this way, the soldiers ridicule Jesus and deny him as the rightful ruler.

The ascent to the hill of Golgotha (15:22) can be interpreted as Jesus' accession to the throne. The place thus becomes the counter-image of Zion: While the royal enthronement on Zion in Psalm 2 means political power, on the hill of Golgotha the suffering Messiah-King is enthroned. *The cross itself represents the royal throne on which Jesus dies as King of the Jews.*

The tearing of the temple curtain symbolizes the opening of access to God for all nations, which can be related to the expression "give the nations as a possession" in Psalm 2:8. This opening takes place in the death of Jesus: *Through the crucifixion of his Son, God is revealed before all nations.*

Finally comes the confession of the centurion in 15:39. Unlike the Jewish chief priests, the centurion needs no sign in order to believe, but comes to faith under the cross. *Only under the cross can the reader understand who Jesus is and what kind of Messiah he was.* With this, Jesus' enthronement in Mark is completed.

What is left for us to say at the end of this journey through the second psalm and the Gospel of Mark? The holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments form an interwoven and unbreakable unity. You cannot have the one without the other. *Prophecy is a divine reality!*

The King has come, and he will come a second time. He is our King. Let us follow, unconditionally and before all the world, here and now, this summons, which the whole world will soon obey:

11 Serve the LORD with reverence, tremble before him and rejoice before him!

12 Show honor to his Son, so that he does not become angry and you perish on your wrong way – for his anger quickly turns into fire that consumes you! Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

The sure mercies of David as an eternal covenant:

When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He will build a house for my Name; and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ... And your house and your kingdom shall endure before you forever; your throne shall be established forever.

2 Samuel 7:12-16

1 Why are the nations in an uproar? Why do the peoples make plans that are doomed to fail?

2 The kings of this world stand ready to attack, and the rulers band together to fight against the LORD and against the king he has anointed.

6 He says: "I myself have installed my king here on Zion, my holy mountain!"

7 Then the king says: "I will proclaim the decree of the LORD; he said to me: 'You are my Son; today I have begotten you.'

8 Tell me your request, and I will fulfill it! I will give you all nations as your inheritance; the earth to its farthest end shall be your possession!

10 And now come to your senses, you kings of the world; be warned, you judges of the earth!

Psalm 2

Of David, a psalm.

The LORD said to my Lord:

Sit at my right hand until I lay down your enemies as a footstool for your feet!

The LORD will send the scepter of your might from Zion; rule in the midst of your enemies!

Psalm 110:1-2

The Anointed One in the royal psalms: 2:2; 20:6; 84:9; 89:38; 132:10

21 The King's gift

Jesus had promised it. When he goes away, when he is no longer there and the disciples have to manage without him, then he will send the Spirit. As his representative. That is the *Holy Spirit*. He is so one with Jesus, so identified with him, that Jesus can say he himself is coming to them. This Spirit is God just as Jesus is, a person who is everywhere. Omnipresent. Through this Spirit, Jesus, as the crowned Lord and King, is now directly with all who love him. That is, with those who believe him and obey him.

For this day of the giving of the Spirit there is also still a public holiday today. A whole weekend. *Pentecost* is the name of the historical event. It is a Jewish festival. There are fifty days between Easter, that is, Jesus' resurrection, and the feast of Pentecost. After forty days Jesus went to heaven. Ten days later he gives and sends the Spirit upon the praying disciples in Jerusalem.

That means ten days of coronation celebration and enthronement of the King in the heavenly world. Heaven and its inhabitants rejoice. The Son is back and has accomplished what had to be done to save the world. That must be celebrated. And rewarded. Besides the highest place of honor, the Father gives his Son the Holy Spirit.

This Spirit is now the hand and eye of the King. Sent out over the whole earth. Christ is where the Spirit is. He is active everywhere. Seeks, helps, liberates, enlightens, prevents disaster and also brings judgment where injustice has become boundless.

Through this Spirit he reigns, the Messiah-King. His rule is real. Among his people, who are loyal to him. In his kingdom, which – as long as the King has not yet come back – is invisible. For politically, the great ones of this world rule. Those loyal to Jesus are often oppressed. Even persecuted. Like Jesus himself once, they belong to a *suffering kingdom*.

The Spirit of God, whom the King has sent and given, is the proof that he is the King, the Most High, the firstborn from the dead. The one who now, as a risen human being, has received back all the majesty and divine riches that he had before he came and before the world existed. After all, he had left all of that behind when he became human. He had voluntarily given it up. It is

precisely this glory that the Spirit of Christ bears witness to and confirms on earth. Above all where people reach out for it.

This living Spirit of God – or Spirit of the Messiah – is the bond that firmly connects him with his disciples on earth. Distances are no obstacle to this unity and fellowship. The Spirit bears witness to the Messiah-King wherever people hear the gospel and are touched.

The Spirit is the power for the disciples to be faithful to the King. He is their guide, their coach, their defender and advocate.

You hear many a joke about this Spirit. Wherever inexplicable but completely trivial phenomena occur, he is supposed to be the cause. A ghost, so to speak. What remains important is that this Spirit is active without pause. With divine, with unlimited possibilities. So that people personally meet the King. And come home into his kingdom. It is open to all. The weak are especially invited. The doubters. Those who have completely blown it. Sinners who know they are sinners. Also do-gooders who do not yet know that they need him just as much.

This Spirit of God, this Spirit of Christ, is active on the front line with the heart of Jesus and with the heart of the Father when it comes to the rescue of the world. We would be astonished beyond measure if we could see the invisible through special glasses and in color. On the other hand, it would be unimaginable what our world would look like if this Spirit had not been given by the King.

That is why God's book says: "When he ascended on high, he took captivity itself captive and in return gave gifts to people."

What then does the statement "He ascended" mean? Surely also that he descended into the deepest regions of the earth!

The one who descended is the same as the one who also ascended, high above all the heavenly worlds, so that he fills the universe completely.

Ephesians 4:8-10

John 14:18, 28; 16:4, 7; Acts 1:5-8; 2; 5:32; Revelation 1:4; 5:6; 2 Corinthians 3:17.

22 The King as benevolent giver and gift

The good and ideal king in the ancient world was distinguished by benevolence, of course also in order to claim esteem and return services such as loyalty. That is how things worked back then. The ideal king in the ancient world is a generous benefactor who works for the well-being of his subjects. He ruled, among other things, through demonstrative benevolence. Perhaps that was more cliché than reality.

Jesus is the Christ, the royal Messiah, the anointed King from the bloodline of David. So when Christ is spoken of, the king motif is more or less present. As King of Israel and of the whole world.

The letter to the Romans uses the king motif in several places. Paul lays the foundation for it right at the beginning, in 1:3-4:

... to proclaim the gospel of God, which he promised long ago through his prophets in the holy Scriptures – the gospel of his Son, who as to the flesh is descended from the seed of David, but who according to the Spirit of holiness was appointed Son of God in power, since the resurrection from the dead: the gospel of Jesus Christ our Lord.

He then comes back to this again and again and builds on it. The letter also closes with this, with the one who will rule as king, in whom the nations will hope (Romans 15:7-13). His suffering and his willingness to sacrifice cannot silence God's faithfulness: God gives him rule over the universe by giving him the throne. The rule of Adam at the very beginning is marked by disobedience, sin and death. The rule of Christ, by contrast, by obedience, righteousness and life. Death could not hold him; he was raised through God's glory and is now enthroned at God's right hand. Paul's royal ideal is downright programmatic; there is a messianic dialogue in Romans 5-8 and in the whole letter.

Romans 5:1-11 is a summary of everything said up to that point and at the same time the basis for what then follows. This text is framed in verses 1 and 11 by the words "*through our Lord Jesus Christ*" (just as the whole letter is framed royally between 1:1-7 and 15:7-13). This Pauline text can be viewed from the perspective of royal benefaction or benevolence. That casts a special light on it and was probably also how the original readers understood it.

The surpassing royal gift frees, strengthens and preserves his followers. So too with Christ and his own.

The ideal king brought peace and reconciliation to his people or to a city. *So we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.* Through him, the royal benefactor, we have access to God. Access to the royal chambers. There we have been granted citizenship; we may live there, 24/7. For someone who was not worthy, unknown and insignificant, or an enemy, such access was beyond all possibility.

Paul describes the Messiah bringing a sacrifice, which the kings in the ancient world also did. But this sacrifice is he himself, with the giving of his life. It could happen that a king sacrificed himself for his people in war, or was ready to do so. In any case he expected it of his subjects, above all of his soldiers.

But what leaves every usual pattern of the benevolent king of the ancient world behind is *who benefits from the benefaction here*. It is precisely not the righteous and worthy or honorable who found the favor of kings. Here it is sinners, enemies, those who deserve death. *That is the great surprise: A king dies for his enemies and cannot even expect them to serve him, the way people knew it in the ancient world.* For there a gift was given with the expectation of getting something in return, in whatever form. At any rate, that is how benevolence worked.

The theme of suffering is also addressed within this royal dialogue. A royal gift would normally mean ending suffering. But here the sufferings remain, because they will only be finally ended in the glorious future of God's messianic kingdom. Persevering in suffering, and boasting in sufferings, is an expression of loyalty to the King, to our Christ.

1 So now we have been made righteous on the basis of trust. Through this we have peace with God through our Lord, the Messiah Jesus.

2 Through him, on the basis of our trust, we now also have free access to this experience of God's grace. In it we stand firm and rely, full of pride, on the hope of God's wonderful glory.

7 It very rarely happens that a person goes to his death for another person, for one who is righteous. Yes, perhaps someone might dare to die for a truly good person.

8 But God has shown his love for us very clearly by this, that the Messiah went to his death for us while we were still lawbreakers.

10 For this is how it is: When we were still God's enemies, God reconciled us to himself again through the sacrificial death of his Son. And that then also means that all the more, now that we are reconciled to him, we will experience salvation through his life.

11 But not only that! We also speak full of pride of God, through our Lord, the Messiah Jesus. For through him we have been reconciled!

Romans 5:1-11

And in another place in God's book it says: "Rejoice, you nations, together with his people!"

And in another place: "Praise God the Lord, all you nations, and let all the peoples extol him!"

The prophet Isaiah also says: "The one who is in reality the root of Jesse will arise to rule over the nations. Yes, the nations will hope in him!"

Romans 15:10-12

23 The riches of the King

A king is rich. Normally. He has great possessions. But what is wealth in a perishable world? And what is wealth worth if it has been robbed from one's own people? If only a few are rich but many are poor?

The Messiah-King Jesus is the Son of God. He is the heir who receives everything. The whole universe. Everything that exists. It belongs to him.

Wealth is not only material possessions. There are ethical and moral qualities in which one can be poor or rich. Goodness, grace, love and justice, truth and kindness, generosity and wisdom are the virtues one wishes for in a king. Jesus lived them as a human being. These traits have remained with him; even as the Most High he has remained the way the Gospels describe him.

Power and wealth often change people. Not always for the better. Jesus was and is and remains the same forever. For us human beings, that is good news. A constant. For us, something we can rely on.

His wealth of glory surpasses gold, silver and cryptocurrency. His wealth is the new creation, beyond death and transience.

It is impressive to read that he regards *people* for whom he died and who are devoted to him as faithful followers as his wealth. As his precious possession. If we are honest, people are the greatest wealth. They make our lives rich; without them we would be poor.

Jesus makes rich. *He shares all his wealth, his place of honor, with all who want to belong to him.* You know, as a Bible verse says, how the grace of Jesus Christ our Lord was shown: *He who was rich became poor for your sake, so that you through his poverty might become rich.*

When it comes to the good things, we, or most of us, do not have much to offer. Honestly admitted: We are beggars. And he is the King who became poor. Mark Twain's "The Prince and the Pauper" is the brilliant story of the king's son Edward, who exchanges his clothes with those of the beggar boy Tom. By mistake he is taken for Tom and then lives the life of a beggar. A weak comparison, but still apt. Jesus leaves heavenly glory, eternal splendor behind. He does not cling to it. He voluntarily gives all of that up in order to reach us.

So that we may see and hear at close range how serious he is. Our riches were his goal.

Now he is back where he came from. Everything he had, he received back. Now as a human being. In order to be able to share it with human beings. His wealth is his personal glory, the glory of the LORD (in German *HERRlichkeit*). His holiness too. The prophet Isaiah had a vision that makes him shudder. He sees the Lord seated on the high and exalted throne. Angels surround him and serve him. The angels declare over the one on the throne: *Holy! Holy! Holy!* Isaiah is so terrified that he says: *Woe to me, I am a sinful man.* For my eyes have seen what one cannot really see: *For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.*

The Messiah-King is like a lamb. But at the same time also like a lion. His glory is wild, untamed and terrifying, but at the same time loving, gentle and kind. God and his Christ also remain a mystery to us. He is greater than we can think. We need not be afraid. But we do need reverence. Isaiah's sins were forgiven. When Jesus makes us clean with his blood, we can live in his light. Perfect love drives out fear.

His wealth is our wealth. He is not only generous; he is lavish when it comes to his people. Let us set out and get to know this wealth. What a king, who collects no taxes but gives gifts to all the inhabitants of his kingdom!

Lord, no one is like you! You are mighty and known for your strength. Who would not fear and honor you, you King of all nations? That is your due, for among all the wise men and kings of the world no one can compare with you.

Jeremiah 10:6-7

Psalms 50:10; Hebrews 1:2; 13:8; 2 Corinthians 8:9; Isaiah 6:1-7; John 17:22; Ephesians 2:6-7.

24 Our King: mediator and intercessor

A king was regarded as a mediator between the gods and human beings. That was the worldview and the belief in the ancient world. His role as mediator found expression in his function as the highest-ranking priest. We have already heard about Augustus and his gospel. He is the first emperor to take the title Pontifex maximus, and with it, as emperor, he also makes himself the religious head.

The title Pontifex maximus originally designated the supreme guardian of the ancient Roman cult of the gods and then passed to the Roman emperors. Politics and religion were closely intertwined at that time. So, from Nimrod in Babel to the pharaohs in Egypt, religion and politics were in one hand.

Pontifex means *bridge builder*. He maintained the connection with the world of the gods.

All these functions and offices of honor are united in a perfect way in Jesus, the Christ. He is not only the end of the Aaronic priestly service of the old covenant. He is the end of every cult of the gods with its priestly and sacrificial services, as was customary among the Romans and the other nations and was an omnipresent and everyday belief.

It is Christ who has led his people to God. It is he who intercedes with God as high priest, as Pontifex maximus, if you like, for his people. He stands up for us and asks for God's blessing and help for us. As royal priest he comes out of the heavenly sanctuary to his people and brings us blessing.

He intercedes for us as no one else can. He understands us, knows our heart and mind, knows what we lack, and brings us with all of it to the throne of the Most High. That is why we are in the best of hands with him. He is the mediator between God and humanity. It is he who has established the relationship with God and made peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Because Jesus does not come from the tribe of Levi and does not belong to the family of Aaron, but was born from the royal tribe of Judah, God has provided a new priestly order. He had prepared it, or made it possible, long before the Aaronic priesthood. Now Christ is a priest in the order of *Melchizedek*. Melchizedek lived at the time of Abraham and met him, the father

of those who believe. He was king of Salem and priest of the Most High. So king and priest in one person. In this “dual role” he is a foreshadowing of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ has been appointed by God as priest and king forever.

But because he remains for all eternity, he holds the imperishable priesthood. Therefore he is also able to save without any limitation those who come into the presence of God through him. For he lives forever and therefore intercedes for them without ceasing.

Hebrews 7:24-25

1 Peter 3:18; Hebrews 2:17; 4:14-16; 5:5-10; 7:25; 8:6; 9:15; 12:24; Romans 8:34; 1 Timothy 2:5; Genesis 14; Psalm 110:4.

(Song in the original German)

Heilig, Heilig, das Lamm Gottes

Das geopfert ist

Lob und Ehre, sei Dir dem König

Auf dem Gnadenthron

Die ganze Schöpfung singt und

Preist dich, den König

Du bist mir alles Herr

Und ich will dich ehren

Text: Anja Lehmann

25 The wisdom of the King

For a people, its king was the wisest of all human beings. Even if it was only a rumor. A king was also the supreme judge of his people. He had the last word. His verdict had consequences for people, so it had to be true and right (and just).

Long ago two women stood before King Solomon. They were quarreling over a newborn child. Each had given birth to a child. One died. The mother of the dead child secretly exchanged the dead one for the living one. The deceived mother notices this immediately. But how could she prove the deception, without a genetic test? How was Solomon to decide when he had not been there, when there were no witnesses? Solomon takes a sword to cut the baby in two. One half for each woman. From the women's reaction he notices who the true mother is. The real mother wants to spare the child, even if the deceiver gets the child. But the other does not care if the child is killed. Astonishing wisdom. Solomon had asked God not for wealth and power but for wisdom. It was given to him. They came from near and far to ask him for advice.

Jesus once said something that is easy to read past: “For she – the Queen of Sheba – came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon – and here is one who is *greater than Solomon!*” Jesus impressed people with his wisdom. When he spoke and preached, another world opened up. Different from that of the teachers of the law. The Spirit of wisdom spoke through him. His wisdom was from heaven, pure, for simple people. Not lofty and over people's heads. His words were like the clearest spring water. Refreshing, invigorating, cleansing.

In Christ, the Messiah-King, we encounter God's wisdom. It is concerned with us human beings, because we are in a crisis with no way out. His wisdom takes care of us. And leads us into freedom. A true exodus. The King leads us out. He knows the way. In him, says the apostle Paul, are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. To be with him, to listen to him, is the very best decision one can make.

Wisdom is the quality of putting knowledge and experience into practice in everyday life and making good decisions. Decisions that are good for everyone.

Sustainable for the future. Even if today they should mean painful cuts and sacrifice.

We wish politicians wisdom. We bless them with wisdom in the name of our King. Their task is more challenge than privilege. Who has the best solutions, who has the answers that those in government need to lead a nation through difficult times? Heaven is open to our politicians too, to repeat Solomon's request.

Whoever senses that he lacks wisdom, let him ask this King, the wisest King of all time, for it! He says he gladly gives it to anyone who asks for it. Without reproaching them. Failure and sin that we acknowledge are no reason for him to withhold wisdom.

What a king, who gives away his wisdom and does not keep it to himself! Let us learn from him. Wisdom is more than knowledge. It is a life at the side of the King. In fellowship with the one who is called *Wisdom*, who was with God before the earth existed. The fear of this Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

But the wisdom that comes from above is first of all pure and clear; then it is peace-loving, kind, yielding. It is full of mercy and produces many good deeds. It knows neither prejudice nor pretense.

James 3:17

1 Kings 3:5-10; 16-28; 5; Luke 11:31; Colossians 2:3; Mark 1:22; Proverbs 1:7; 8:22-30; 1 Corinthians 1:30; James 1:5; 3:13-17; Revelation 5:12.

(Song in the original German)

EIN KÖNIG VOLLER PRACHT,

Voll Weisheit und voll Macht.

Die Schöpfung betet an, die Schöpfung betet an.

Er kleidet sich in Licht. Das Dunkel hält ihn nicht

Und flieht, sobald er spricht, und flieht, sobald er spricht.

So groß ist der Herr, sing mit mir.

So groß ist der Herr.

Ihn preisen wir.

So groß, so groß ist der Herr.

Von Anbeginn der Zeit bis in die Ewigkeit

Bleibt er derselbe Gott, bleibt er derselbe Gott.

Als Vater, Sohn und Geist, den alle Schöpfung preist,

Als Löwe und als Lamm, als Löwe und als Lamm

Text: Arne Kopfermann

26 Jesus' royal law

For the ancient Greeks, and also for the Jews, a good king was one who made good laws. And who also kept them himself. If Jesus is a king, what laws did he enact? Was he a lawgiver? Jesus shocked his Jewish contemporaries when he said the following in the so-called Sermon on the Mount:

"You have heard that it was said: You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may become sons of your Father, who is in heaven; for he causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous."

Love the Romans? That is scandalous. That turns everything upside down. Commanding love for one's enemies is one thing, but living it is another. The Passion story of Jesus proves that he fulfills his command himself. Although twelve legions of angels would have stood ready to rescue Jesus at his request, he refuses to be freed. He does not resist. In the hour of his death on the cross he prays for his torturers:

Father, forgive them, they do not know what they are doing.

The Messiah-King was the law embodied. He was the Logos, that is, the Word of God. In his Sermon on the Mount, the manifesto of his kingdom, so to speak, he shows that love for one's enemies is the very nature of the heavenly Father. And always has been. He lived not only the command to love, but also the command to love one's *enemies*. Acting as he did is the prerequisite for becoming a son and a daughter of this Father. The only begotten Son, God's vice-regent, embodies this nature of his Father. Love is the heartbeat of the kingdom of the Father, who loves his Son. And who makes this love the standard of his kingdom.

As King, Jesus gave his people a new command, which he himself modeled:

"A new command I give you, that you love one another, so that, as I have loved you, you also love one another."

James, Jesus' physical brother, had understood and writes:

If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right.

This King was through and through what he said and demanded. Not an arbitrary command, just to demonstrate his right to be a lawgiver. His command is unconditional love, which can overcome enmity and change people like nothing else.

In his kingdom his law applies. Always. Where it is not obeyed, his kingdom is not. And whoever does not obey this command does not belong to this kingdom.

The law of Christ, of the Messiah-King, means carrying one another's burdens. It is a law of freedom. A law, then, that sets free. From ourselves. And perhaps sets our neighbor free from his burden. Just as the King did with our burden, which he took from us.

Who would not want to have such a King?

Now, if you really follow the royal law as it is laid down in Scripture, "Love your fellow human beings as yourself!" then you are acting well and rightly.

James 2:8

Matthew 5:43-48; 26:53; Luke 23:34; John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:13; John 13:34; James 1:25; 2:8, 12; Galatians 6:2.

27 The King's commission

A king expresses wishes that are understood as commands. He commissions his subjects. They carry out what he asks as well as they can. When Jesus went to heaven, he gave his disciples a commission:

“When they saw him, they (the disciples) worshiped him; but some still had doubts.

Jesus came to them and said:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Therefore go to all nations and make people my disciples; baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you.

And be sure of this: I am with you every day, to the end of the world.”

Indeed, here stands the King of heaven and earth – who else has all authority, not only on earth but also in heaven? Yet he does not use this power to subjugate the kings and nations of the earth. No, whoever issues the command to love one's enemies wants to *win* people. Not force them. He uses his power so that all nations will recognize who he is and what he is like.

Ultimately his power and authority are all-encompassing and real. This King can end the history of this planet on any day. He could make the world see and feel his power and rule. That is how dictators do it. His rule is different. His law is the law of freedom. People are to follow and honor Jesus out of conviction.

The King's dream is that all people get to know him and become his disciples. In order to give them what they cannot get anywhere else: grace, forgiveness, eternal life, freedom, rest.

How can people get to know this King who is there for them? All disciples have the privilege of leading people to this King. Let us imagine that literally for a moment. On the one hand, to have the favor of the King of the universe, to know him personally, even privately, 24/7, to have audience with him always and without interruption. And to be allowed to bring along all who ask about it or learn of it through us. To lead them to the King! And to know that they are all more than welcome with him. Because he is waiting for everyone.

And yet also: How does this Messiah-King Jesus now claim the world as his possession? By sending out ambassadors into the world with the good news. They proclaim the true King and with him the obedience of faith. So the gospel is also like a command that one obeys. The message is clear: To the worldly emperor and his commands one renders obedience. To the Lord Jesus, the Lord of lords and King of all kings, one *is* obedient. Even more than to the emperor, even if one does not see Jesus. That is why the term for our loyalty and faithfulness is “*the obedience of faith*.”

The commission was carried out and is still being carried out. It is in its final phase: Many people have heard of this King. Thanks to many people who, without regard for themselves, went to the most remote regions to make the King known. It started small. The courage of the disciples changed the world. They knew who stood behind them. And who stands behind every follower and confessor of Jesus today. The one to whom all authority has been given.

They need fear no one. The last word, in life and in death, will belong to the King.

This book is an invitation to come to the King! An invitation, or a reminder, to confess the King! With this King a new beginning is always possible, again and again. Forgiveness, grace and freedom are the laws of his kingdom.

All kings will bow down before him, all nations will serve him.

For he will become the rescuer of the needy who cry for help, of people who suffer and have no one to stand by them.

He will take pity on the weak and the needy and will become a lifesaver for people in distress.

He will redeem them from oppression and violence, for their life is precious in his eyes.

Long live the King!

Psalm 72:11-15

Matthew 28:16-20; 1 Timothy 2:4-5; Romans 1:15; 5:2; 16:26; Ephesians 2:18; 3:12; Acts 17:30-31.

28 For the King: faith and faithfulness

It is a great honor to serve this King. To swear allegiance to him. He is worthy to possess us. As his very own personal possession.

To whom do we give our lives? To whom or to what are we faithful, quite consciously or without noticing it? Which idols rule over us? To whom do we belong? What is sacred to us? To whom have we surrendered ourselves? Our time? Our money? Our attention?

Social media? Facebook and Instagram? Religiosity? Reputation? Vanity? Sports? Self-centeredness? Food? Alcohol? Nicotine? Possessions? Money? Power? Sex? Success? Career?

It is not a question of whether these things, or some of them, are good or bad, holy or sinful. What is decisive is what role they play in our lives. A question for all people. For those who serve the King or try to. Or who only know his name. And for those who do not know the King and do not know who he is and what he is like.

By virtue of his office alone, a king demands loyalty and obedience. Faith that only agrees or holds something to be true is dead. It creates no connection with the King. *The obedience of faith is what the King calls us to.* His wish is our command. If we follow this King, it only works all the way. Half measures work very badly here too.

Whatever it costs us to stand on his side, it is and remains the right side. The side of the Victor, who first gave everything for us. Our faithfulness is gratitude. Our devotion is our duty. Freely and without compulsion. One leper came back out of gratitude, but ten had been healed. This life has the best future. Today it means having no special advantages in this earthly life over those who ignore our King. A life without this King can be simpler and more comfortable. That is why, Jesus says, one should count the cost before following him.

Following him, Jesus says, means taking up one's cross. That is, giving oneself up to others and being there for them. Putting others, and not myself, first in life. Having the life of Jesus as a model. Truly loving and serving.

By the way, this following is often a matter of ups and downs. Never perfect. Not only success and achievement, but just as much defeat and disappointment with ourselves. Also doubts and unanswered questions. A life of faith, after all. Not of sight. At times that is absolutely challenging.

Faith and faithfulness (Greek: *pistis*, Latin: *fides*) meant mutual and lasting loyalty in Roman society. *Fides* held society together – commitment and loyalty, giving and taking, reliability and faithfulness are united in this word. Loyalty was owed first and foremost to the emperor, who in turn was loyal to his people. Faithfulness to Jesus, the Lord, is what being a Christian is all about.

Is faithfulness worth it, and all the inconveniences, hardships, sacrifices and persecutions that can come with it? Jesus says that in such a life there is joy and blessing already here, that is, before God's future begins. But in the end, eternal life as the reward for all the hardship. An indescribably beautiful, deep, secure, fulfilled and rich life with the King. Then soon real and visible in his eternal kingdom.

The song lyrics quoted below are not nostalgia. And certainly not romanticism. Nor do they describe one hundred percent the reality of life for followers of Jesus or those loyal to the King. They are more prayer, wish or goal.

(Song in the original German)

Ein Leben gegeben für den Herrn der Welt

Ein Leben gegeben für das, was wirklich zählt

Ein Leben für Gott, für ihn allein, das soll mein Leben sein

Lukas Di Nunzio



1 Corinthians 6:12; 1 John 5:21; Luke 16:13; Luke 14:25-33; 17:11-19; Mark 10:28-31; Matthew 25:21-26; Ephesians 1:1; Colossians 1:7; 4:7; Revelation 2:10, 13; 17:14.

(Song in the original German)

*Für den König, für den Herrn
Für ihn geben wir uns hin
Seine Ehre unser Ziel
Nichts bedeutet uns jemals so viel
Für den König, für sein Reich
Alle Menschen sind hier gleich
Lamm und Löwe sind vereint
Und das Licht der Gerechtigkeit scheint
Alle Ehre König Jesus
Unsere Herzen, sie fliegen dir zu
Wir erheben deinen Namen
Der allein wahre König bist du
Albert Frey*

29 The King and his people

A good king in the ancient world was expected to bring peace to peoples and tribes. To hold his kingdom together and lead it like a good shepherd. To treat his people with kindness. The good king embodied all the virtues that were considered desirable. Even when that did not match the reality of life.

Jesus, the Messiah-King, has been appointed by God as head of the universe. As royal head over everything and everyone, he brings the broken cosmos the long-awaited healing and restoration. Under him as head, all things will come to their proper place and become whole. He brings back together what belongs together. He removes disorder and all forces of destruction. Under his royal “headship” everything is brought together. But that still lies in the future.

But: Already now the King has brought peace. He, the Prince of Peace. Back then, in the time of Jesus, Israel was the nation that had an exclusive claim to God’s promises. But the risen Messiah sends his disciples to all nations. All people are invited and welcome. Good news for us Europeans. In the early days it was not an easy process to bring Jews and the nations together on equal terms. But the Christ brought exactly this peace and united Jews who believe in the Messiah and people of the nations from all countries of the earth. They are now his people, in which the old national borders fall away. Joined together into *one new humanity*. The Christ, the head, creates a unity as a new creation.

The union of Jews or Israelites with such people from the nations is so close that it can be compared to a body, to an organism. Christ is the head, in the literal sense of the word, and his people, drawn from all people, is his body, his physical body.

Jews and the nations now together become citizens of his kingdom. So they have, as it were, two identities. On the one hand, they remain what they were before. Citizens of their country. But in addition they are incorporated into the body of Christ. They become citizens of another, a heavenly kingdom. The latter will remain forever.

Church buildings were called *basilica*, making it clear that they are the house of the ruler, the *basileus*, that is, the king. Basilica is derived from this. The place where the King’s people meet with the King bears this name. Of course, this

gathering needs no special buildings, or any buildings at all. But where they exist, they are an expression of reverence for the King.

The pacification of many nations in the body of Christ is an eminently political event of cosmic proportions. When people of many nations, with all their peculiarities and their past, bury their enmity under the cross of Christ, that has tangible effects. Also in the society of which they are a part. Where the King of peace reigns, violence, discrimination and strife come to an end.

When so many ethnic groups come together, that is very challenging. This peace that the King brought must be guarded like the apple of one's eye. Accepting others and taking them seriously. Forgiving and covering sin. Not taking oneself too seriously, in other words: loving one's neighbor as oneself is the ethos of this new community of the King.

It is a priceless gift and an honor to belong to the people of the King. Not just any king. Our King, if you belong to this people, is the King over all kings. We as his people have incredible privileges. Uninterrupted audience in the throne room of his majesty. The King at our side. He is with his people, with each individual. His future is our future. His wealth is our wealth. He has given us his power. But it is made perfect not in dominance and authority but in weakness. His power lets us experience and do what only he can do. The power that was in Jesus, the Nazarene, also works in us.

For the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our leader, the LORD is our king. He will save us.

Isaiah 33:22

Ephesians 1:9-11; 2:11-22; 4:1-6; Isaiah 9:6; Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:10-11; 1 Corinthians 12; Revelation 1:5; 19:16; 1 Timothy 6:15; Acts 1:4-8.

30 At the King's table

This story from the life of King David is not an everyday one. After his kingship is established, he looks for descendants or relatives of the late King Saul, his predecessor. Saul had persecuted him and tried to kill him. Did David now want to take revenge? A grandson of Saul, Jonathan's son, named Mephibosheth, was found. He was disabled, lame in both feet. He needed help and could not get anywhere on his own. Imagine, David invites this man to his table. Not just once, but every day, for the rest of his life, he may eat with the King.

That is what I call love, indeed even love for one's enemy. And the lame Mephibosheth shows how helpless we human beings are. Coming to God is possible only with his help. We are disabled, not physically but spiritually. We do not come on our own; we have to be called. We are too distracted, too intelligent, too unbelieving.

Jesus, the Christ, invites us to his table. He loves to share fellowship, to talk, to enjoy, to rejoice together.

You may have heard of the *Lord's Supper*. Of the *Eucharist* or *the breaking of bread*. The King instituted a meal of remembrance. Bread and wine recall the King's death on the cross and his blood, which he shed for us. When we celebrate this memorial meal, we proclaim the death of our King. Until he comes again, in royal majesty.

Although we do not see the King, he is nevertheless invisibly present. Everywhere his people are together and honor him, think of him, thank him and praise him. A close-knit fellowship of those loyal to the King who have lost their hearts to Jesus. Whom nothing can stop from loving this King and being faithful to him.

This table of the King is a matter of faith. Around it the disciples of Jesus gather as long as the King is in exile. They see and encourage one another when they celebrate the memorial meal. When this time in between is over, the King will celebrate together with his people. No longer in faith, but in visible and tangible reality.

In the presence of my enemies you prepare your table for me; you festively welcome me to yourself and fill my cup to the brim.

Psalm 23:5

2 Samuel 4:4; 9; 2 Samuel 19:24-30; 21:7; Matthew 26:26-30; Mark 14:22-26; Luke 22:14-20; 1 Corinthians 10:14-22; 11:20-34; Psalm 23:5; Hebrews 13:10.

(Song in the original German)

Königlich strahlt Dein Licht

Du bist ewiglich

Niemand kommt Dir gleich

Sanftmütig führst Du mich

Hin zu Deinem Licht

Ich darf bei Dir sein

Sei Du der Mittelpunkt in meinem Leben

Der Mittelpunkt in meinem Herzen

Ich gehöre Dir

Sei Du der Mittelpunkt in meiner Schwäche

Der Mittelpunkt in meiner Stärke

Ich gehöre Dir

Ich will Dir nah sein

Ich werd Dir folgen

Mein ganzes Leben in Dir verlieren

Text & music: Juri Friesen & Paula Friesen © 2012 Outbreakband

31 The King's garden

It is impressive to see aerial photographs of New York City. Central Park is like a large green oasis in the middle of a sea of skyscrapers. It is four kilometers long and almost one kilometer wide. Every big city has its parks. Recreation, quiet, shady places, fruit, refreshment, colorful beauties and fragrances, and celebrating festivals: to this day that is the epitome of a garden. Somehow it reminds us of paradise. Queens and kings had their gardens and parks, each more beautiful than the last.

The Bible begins with a garden. It ends with a city. But there too there is something like a Central Park, a city garden like paradise.

In the beginning we read that God, the King of the universe, walked in the garden in the cool of the evening. He obviously liked it. He rejoiced in what he himself, as the “divine gardener,” had created and handed over into the hands of human beings. The care and protection of the garden had been entrusted to them.

Thousands of years later God has become a human being. Toward the end of his life Jesus, followed by his disciples, goes into a garden called *Gethsemane*. An olive grove. There the King withdraws into a struggle in prayer. He knows that his condemnation to death on the cross is imminent. In this garden we witness that something is coming toward him that is worse than physical torture on the cross. It is about making a new and better Eden, a new paradise, possible for all. The price for it is immeasurable. For this, our sin and death must be cleared out of the way. He himself will take sin upon himself and die for it. For him, who was without sin, that is infinitely hard. He looks for another way. But there is none. In this garden he is then arrested. His road of suffering begins. It ends on the cross. And in a tomb.

This tomb was also in a garden. Mary Magdalene had witnessed the crucifixion and how a man then took him down from the cross and brought him to the nearby rock tomb. Early on Sunday morning Mary went into this garden. A man meets her. She thinks he is the gardener. It is the “gardener” from Eden. The King is back. Risen from the dead. There will be a new and

better Eden, a paradise. Inhabited by countless sisters and brothers of the King. That is the good news that Mary is now allowed to bring to the disciples.

Just as Central Park is in New York, so there will be a garden paradise in the New Jerusalem. Through the death and the resurrection, a new creation in new dimensions has become possible. It has already begun. It will be completed on a new earth, in the New Jerusalem. The epitome of beauty, of perfection. There is the throne of God. From it the water of life will bubble forth and water the garden. The tree of life will be there and bear abundant fruit. A symbol that there is life and healing there. And that all thirst, above all the thirst of the soul, is quenched.

This place seems surreal. But several times the Bible invites the reader, it virtually calls out to him, to be part of this New World of God. Anyone can drink of this living water free of charge. That is another picture of the gospel, the good news. It gives a life that lasts into eternity and need not fear death.

One more thing. The Bible speaks of the *fruit* of the Spirit. By this it means things like: love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Somehow we too today, the Christians, are the King's garden, where he looks for such fruit and harvests it. This fruit hardly corresponds to our natural disposition. That is why it is also called the fruit of the Spirit. With the help of this divine Spirit it can grow.

Eden, the beginning, the ideal, but also the place of the Fall and of the break. Gethsemane, where the Messiah resists the temptation to give up. The garden tomb, where death is defeated by the resurrection. And where the risen King first met a woman and entrusted to her the best message for his disciples. The city garden in the New Jerusalem: God has reached his goal, through the Lamb. There we will then be at home – in an eternal homeland.

Be sure of this: The Lord comforts the city of Zion; he lets it rise anew from the ruins. He turns the devastated land into a paradise; it will blossom and be fruitful like the Garden of Eden. Joy and gladness will resound there, and you will sing songs of thanks to your God.

I, the Lord, will guide you always and everywhere; even in the parched land I will satisfy you and give you my strength. You will be like a garden that always has enough water, and like a spring that never runs dry.

For as the seed sprouts and grows from the ground, so the Lord, the mighty God, makes our happiness grow and increases our fame among all nations.

Isaiah 51:3; 58:11; 61:11

Genesis 2:8ff.; Revelation 22:1-5; 22:17; Matthew 26:36; John 19:41; 20:1-18;
Galatians 5:16-26.

32 The political Jesus

A real king is one who enforces his royal power of government. Who shapes his state, enacts laws, levies taxes.

If Jesus is a king, and there is no doubt about that, then he has a political claim. Then he has the right to carry out the affairs of the commonwealth, its administration and its legislation according to his mind and will. That holds true even if his kingdom is not of this world.

Here and there Christians try to bring Christian principles into politics. To exert a Christian influence. One fruit was the abolition of slavery – a tremendous breakthrough.

There are kings who have gone into exile. Or had to go. Sometimes they still try to exert influence through their loyal followers. It is similar and yet different with Jesus, the Messiah-King. He himself has withdrawn; he is not personally and physically present. Although his Father has given him all authority, in heaven as on earth, he exercises no political power. Even though he could, whenever he wanted. But that simply does not fit his nature, as we get to know him in the Gospel accounts. His kingdom is not like one of this world. His rule needs, so to speak, a new world. Everything has to change. New wine into new wineskins ...

He gathers his followers on earth. They obey his royal commands. At least they try to. They do not fight for political power. But where it is possible for them, they use their influence. They stand up for human rights, religious freedom and equal rights and raise their voices. In small or large contexts of public life and politics.

But the political claim to rule, that Jesus certainly has. He will take the place of the kings, emperors, presidents and dictators. They will go; he will come. And stay.

That is exactly the subject of the next chapter.

33 The return of the King of kings

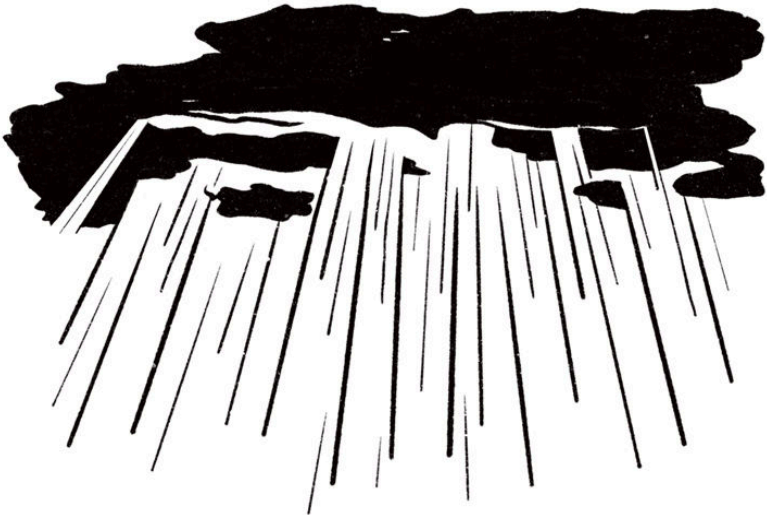
Perhaps you know Aragorn from the epic “The Lord of the Rings.” A ranger. Not a nobleman. His name means “Royal Valor.” To everyone’s surprise, after the victory over Sauron he becomes the rightful High King of Arnor and Gondor. “The Return of the King” is the title of the third book of this epic.

Perhaps Tolkien, the creator of this saga, had in mind what I cannot help thinking of. The builder from Nazareth. An inconspicuous man from the construction trade, who all his life, as the firstborn, repaired houses or built new ones with his father and brothers in the towns of Galilee. Not a noble occupation. Without prestige. The last three years of his life were different. We have looked at all of that.

The people in Israel remember Jesus as a wonder-working itinerant preacher or rabbi. After his resurrection, only his disciples saw him, no people who did not follow him. So what remains in memory is a crucified man. Most people today would agree with that much as well.

But one day that will change very suddenly. Once again everything is said in three words: *He is coming back!* He will return to our world, to our planet. An event that will make the world stand still. It is described often and vividly in the Bible. Words fail to describe it fully. People will be speechless. From Sydney to Rome, from Beijing to Washington. The curtain that veils the invisible world, the world beyond, from us opens. The stage is set for the great day of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The desire of the nations is coming. A second time. Now visible to all. No more discussions. No doubts. No mockery. The time has come. Some wonder whether they are dreaming. Yes, for some a dream comes true. For others, for all those who deny God, hate Christ or are indifferent, it will be more of a nightmare. Christians have longed for this day. Their hope is fulfilled. From now on and forever, no human being has the say anymore. Only this one human being, the only perfect and righteous one, has unrestricted sovereign rule from then on.



Why is the King coming back? He is keeping his own promise! The Lord's Prayer, prayed billions of times, is finally answered: *Your kingdom come and your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven!*

He is coming to bring the redemption of Jesus' followers to its goal. In the same way, the exploited, mistreated creation longs for this day. It will be redeemed; the King will bring healing.

Is the King coming to take revenge? For his crucifixion? For the rejection by so many people? No, Jesus will not be the "butcher of Armageddon." Many images in the Apocalypse, the last book of the Bible, are an irony, if not even a parody, of all worldly kings, above all of the Roman emperor of that time. *Human beings* take revenge in their own way. It can neither make amends nor restore. Human revenge escalates; it almost always wants to destroy more than one has lost oneself. It is said of this coming of Jesus that it is a day of vengeance. God's holy and just vengeance. Jesus is described figuratively as the slaughtered little lamb with the mortal wound. A flashback to the cross, to his death for humanity. He who even commanded us to love our enemy and not to take revenge ourselves will not come to cause a bloodbath. People do that to themselves, should the nations put their gigantic arsenals of weapons to use.

At his appearing, coercive force will no longer be necessary. In the Garden of Gethsemane his words, “*I am he*,” were enough, and all the soldiers fell to the ground. On his great day everyone will lay down their weapons. Weapons will fall, and so will words, deeds and convictions. No war is needed for that; his visible presence will make every knee bend.

How will Jesus come back? Publicly, visibly, audibly beyond doubt, unmistakably, suddenly, unexpectedly, dramatically, terrifyingly, in great power, gloriously in great radiance, from heaven, in the clouds, escorted by countless angels. God himself comes in the person of his Son Jesus, the Christ.

Our imagination reaches its limits. This event can hardly be conceived. The change from day to night no longer matters. Time stands still. All our appointments and obligations are over. No one is waiting for us anymore. Every woman and every man will then be focused on one thing only, on the King and what he will say and do.

What for is Jesus Christ coming back? Every Sunday millions of Christians recite the ancient, still relevant Apostles’ Creed:

He ascended into heaven; he is seated at the right hand of God, the Father almighty; from there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

Imagine, all the dead, all the people who ever lived, will rise. So much explosive creative power is revealed in his return.

Finally the question: *When* will this happen? Jesus and the apostles said that no one knows the time. In parables Jesus pointed out that it may take a very long time. One reason is that the gospel of the King is to have reached people everywhere. That is beginning to be fulfilled.

The time of his coming is described as a time of tribulation and great distress. People will be at a loss with fear and with the expectation of the things that will come upon the earth. Unusual events in the sky will accompany this before the end comes.

Whether on that great day there will still be the possibility of asking the King for forgiveness, no one can say today. I am thinking of those who were never interested in him or even consciously rejected him. For all who are alive today, this urgent appeal applies:

Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts. Today – not tomorrow – is the day of salvation.

Today millions are waiting for this glorious day, which was foretold even in the Old Testament. Their true goal in life. Be part of it. Step over to the side of those who know that he will come back. Even if nothing looks like it, he has promised it!

For God's day of judgment will come, just as unexpectedly as a thief. On that day the heavens will dissolve with a tremendous roar and the elements will go up in flames, and the earth and everything that ever happened on it will no longer be found.

But God has promised us a new heaven and a new earth. There will be no more injustice there, because God's will reigns. We are waiting for this new world.

2 Peter 3:10, 13

Matthew 24:27-30, 44; 26:64; Mark 13:26; 14:62; Luke 17:24; Romans 8:18; 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:13-18; 5:1-11; 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10; 2:8-12; 2 Timothy 4:1, 8; Titus 2:13; 1 Peter 1:7, 13; 4:13; Revelation 1:7; 19:11-16.

34 What a glorious day

(Song in the original German)

*Einst, als im Himmel der strahlendste Tag war
Herrschte auf Erden die dunkelste Nacht
Da wurde Jesus als Mensch geboren
Er hat uns Gnade und Wahrheit gebracht
Das Wort wurde Fleisch und das Licht wohnte bei uns
Es scheint in der Nacht*

*Für uns geboren, für uns gestorben
Er nahm die Sünde der Welt mit ins Grab
Am dritten Tag ist er auferstanden
Einst wird er kommen, welch herrlicher Tag
Welch herrlicher Tag*

*Dann führten sie ihn hinauf um zu sterben
Ans Holz genagelt, das Kreuz aufgestellt
Der Mann der Schmerzen verachtet, verstoßen, er trug die Sünde
Der Heiland der Welt
Die heilenden Hände sind weit ausgebreitet für unsere Schuld
Am dritten Tag hielt das Grab ihn nicht länger
Weg war der Stein und die Grabkammer leer
Er ist auferstanden, den Tod überwunden
Er fuhr auf zum Himmel, der siegreiche Herr
Er gab neues Leben
Die Schuld ist vergeben, mein Retter ist er
Einst wird er kommen, welch herrlicher Tag
Welch herrlicher Tag, herrlicher Tag
Ob bald wird der Tag seiner Wiederkunft kommen
Bald werden wir ihn in Herrlichkeit sehen
Er wird die Seinen dann ganz zu sich nehmen
Staunend werd ich vor ihm stehen
Für uns geboren, für uns gestorben*

*Er nahm die Sünde der Welt mit ins Grab
Am dritten Tag ist er auferstanden
Einst wird er kommen, welch herrlicher Tag
Welch herrlicher Tag
Herrlicher Tag
Herrlicher Tag welch herrlicher Tag*

Albert Frey

35 The King as righteous judge

The Messiah-King appears. Now he is here. Every person wonders what will come next. Everything seems surreal. The laws of nature are suspended. A new age is dawning; that has become definitively clear to everyone.

As if it were not enough that the boundary between the visible world and the invisible heavenly world has suddenly disappeared, something no less dramatic happens. The dead rise. All the people who have ever populated this planet, from all eras, are suddenly there. As alive as those who did not die. Although their social status was very different, they are now all equal, the emperors, kings, founders of religions and the ordinary people, the countless soldiers, the shipwrecked, the poor and the poorest. The starved and the murdered, the slaves and the free. Children, unimaginably many children. All the unborn, those killed in the womb, are there.

Only gradually does it dawn on everyone that the God who has just come from heaven, Jesus, the Messiah, has called the dead out of their graves and from everywhere they were scattered. His voice, which long ago called the earth into being, now calls the dead to life.

The time of judgment has come. The Son of God, Jesus, has been given the authority to carry out this judgment. A human being who knows life, the temptations, the trials, the unjust sufferings. All are gathered before him. Each will stand before him alone. No mass processing, no summary proceedings. Every moment, every deed, every thought, every motive and every word will be examined. Everyone will look his own life in the eye. And what he has done to others. And feel what those who were victims felt.

How that will be possible with so many people and their years of life, no one can say. Heaven needs no hard drives on which everything is stored. Before us will be the All-knowing One. The one who knows our thoughts and emotions.

Does that reassure you? To learn everything about yourself? To see it, or even live through it, once again?

This judgment must take place. Justice must be established. Perpetrators and victims alike need justice. No human court can accomplish that. That is why the Last Judgment, as it is often called, is also an indispensable part of Christian

hope. Everything comes to light. Everything is judged by God's standard and set right. What individuals, what groups, what nations have done.

Jesus will be incorruptible. He will show no partiality. What was sin will remain sin. What was good he will praise. Before this judge people must recognize their sin and will feel it deeply as such. And accept the judge's verdict.

The judge himself died for the sins of humanity. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Not only for ours, but for those of the whole world. In this judgment the judge is not against us; he is for us. For all who have believed. Nevertheless, one thing will not count on that day for those who have heard or read the gospel. Our good works alone – insofar as there are any – will not save us. If we hope that we were good people, then there is a problem. Whoever appeals to this, to his good life, would then have to present a *perfect* life by God's standard. Whoever appeals to God's commandments should then have kept not just one, but all of them. Nevertheless, the works we did are of great significance; they will play an important role.

But what will help there? What matters?

The question will be what relationship we have with Christ, the King. There is no neutrality. Jesus himself puts it in a nutshell: *Whoever is not with me is against me*. In other words: Now, not only then, here and today, we must settle who Jesus is for us. This King condescends to us and offers forgiveness. If you hear of the King's act of grace and ignore it, what will you say on that day when everything is laid on the table? When everything unjust, sinful and selfish in our lives then stands between us and the King?

There will also be people there who never heard of Jesus and lived before his time. How Jesus deals with them, I can confidently leave to his divine grace and justice. But those who heard of him but thought it was all irrelevant or a fable – for them it will not end well.

As gracious as this King is, he will force no one to serve him. When the Bible speaks of hell, it speaks of a place where one does not have to serve this King. But the King is not just anyone. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. He is the center of all being. Of all good being. Separated from him, being will never be good. Therefore, whoever can, let him make his choice today.

For the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our leader, the LORD is our king. He will save us.

Isaiah 33:22

His rule grows greater and greater, and peace is boundless on the throne of David and in his kingdom; he establishes it firmly and upholds it with justice and righteousness, from now on forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

Isaiah 9:7

Psalms 36:6; 76:8; 89:14; Ecclesiastes 12:14; Isaiah 5:16; 9:7; Daniel 7:10, 22; Malachi 3:5; Matthew 12:36; 25:31-46; Luke 20:47; John 5:22-30; Romans 2:5; 14:10-12; 2 Thessalonians 2:12; Hebrews 9:27; 1 Peter 4:17; Revelation 20:11-15.

36 Eternal kingship

Jesus reigns! All followers of Jesus stake everything on this. But what does this reign look like? The world and its development, what governments do, how they behave toward one another, how Christians are persecuted, all of that goes on. Does he reign already now or only when he has come?

God's intervention in our world can be understood with the words *already now – not yet*. In other words: The die has been cast. The victory of Golgotha is D-Day, the day of decision. That is what the day is called when the Allies landed in Normandy on June 6, 1944. That was the *beginning of the end* of the Third Reich. Jesus accomplished God's rescue for humanity and creation on that Good Friday in Jerusalem. That is the beginning of the end of this perishable, wounded and mortal world. Also the end of the powers of darkness that are hostile to life. Dark powers, fallen angels and demons, still seduce and enslave people and prevent their salvation wherever they can.

Redemption will be fully accomplished in human beings and in creation when Christ comes again. For now we are still living in an in-between time. Between D-Day and V-Day. Victory Day, the day of victory, will come when all enmity has been overcome. When God's victory has the last word.

Jesus, the Messiah-King, now reigns among his people. He would also have power over all people. Over world politics. His goal, however, is not to take over world rule over the world *as it is now*. He wants to win people who recognize him and acknowledge him.

With his coming, visible to all people, the new world rule begins. Included in it are all those who honor him and are ready for his reign. All world empires pass away; his remains forever. A new world, a new age dawns when he comes. Whether there will be a process of restoration or a radically short change from old to new, we do not yet know.

The hope-filled promises that encouraged people in dark days will be fulfilled:

'For a child is born, the future king is given to us! And these are the names of honor that will be given to him: Wise Ruler, Mighty Hero, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

His power will reach far, and lasting peace will come. He will reign on the throne of David, and his rule will endure forever, because he keeps to the just order of God. The Lord, the Ruler of the world, has decreed it and will do it."

David's throne is occupied again! With the Babylonian captivity the royal succession had come to an end. There was neither throne nor king in Israel. But there was this promise to King David:

"I will raise up your offspring after you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He will build a house for my Name; and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son!"

For the Twelve, the apostles, it became clear with the Messiah's ascension that the *throne of David* has now been taken by the eternal Prince Jesus. He has been appointed by God as Lord and Christ. God's covenant with David is fulfilled. For Israel. Everything is still happening in Jerusalem and Israel. The sure mercies of David are the rightful expectations of this people. But something astonishing happens. David's throne is no longer in the earthly Jerusalem. The throne is at the heart of all being, with God. It is no longer an *earthly* kingdom within the borders of a greater Israel. The apostles, Paul too, realize that it is about a *heavenly* kingdom. A kingdom that is not only for Israel, but for the whole world.

First comes the earthly, then the heavenly. The latter is greater and more glorious. A heavenly Jerusalem on a new earth will become the home of all believers. That is the epitome of the eternal kingship of Jesus, the Son of David. Here the circle closes in the unexpected and different fulfillment of the promise to David.

We cannot yet see or experience this universal kingship of Jesus in its unimaginable dimension. But one day the time will come. When his time has come. So what we already recognize now in faith, with the eyes of the heart, is this: Jesus, who in his earthly life lived as a human being in lowliness. Who suffered death for all and tasted the full bitterness of a violent death as a sacrifice for our sin. For all of us. So that in this way God's grace would benefit the whole of creation. And therefore, because he did the impossible, let himself be crucified and died, he is now clothed with God's glory and honor, indeed crowned with the victor's wreath of glory.

With this Son of David the old reckoning of time has ended. We follow our King into his eternal kingdom, where new adventures await us.

He gave him power, honor and dominion, and people of all nations, peoples and languages submitted to him. His power is eternal and imperishable; his rule will never end.

Daniel 7:14

Then the Lord will be king over all the nations of the earth. He alone will be God on that day; to him alone will the nations pray.

Zechariah 14:9

And there were loud voices in heaven, which cried: The kingship over the world now belongs entirely to our Lord and to his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever!

Revelation 11:15

Psalm 22:28; 45:6; 145:12-13; Isaiah 9:7; Daniel 2:44; 4:3; 7:27; Matthew 6:10; 25:34; Luke 1:33; Acts 2:30; Romans 14:9; 1 Corinthians 15:24; Ephesians 5:5; 1 Thessalonians 2:12; 2 Timothy 4:1, 18; Revelation 11:15; 12:10; 22:5.

37 The grace and gift of the King

The word grace hardly occurs in our everyday language. We and our legal system insist on our rights. Grace would mean not insisting on one's rights. We want to understand what grace and gift meant in the ancient world, in the time of Jesus and the apostles.

There are various words for grace and gift. But the central term in the New Testament is the Greek word *cháris*. It has a wide range of meaning: favor, graciousness, goodwill and gracious care, as well as the demonstration of this favor and care, such as an act of grace or, combining the two words, a *gift of grace*. Gifts from benefactors are acts of *cháris*.

In the ancient world, grace or gift had a function that permeated the whole of society in all its social classes. The exchange of gifts or favors never happened without ulterior motives. If someone needed money to expand his business, it cost him more than just interest. A patron's condescension created a mutual but unspoken obligation. It brought every recipient of a grace or gift to which he had no right into a relationship of giver and recipient. Perhaps the recipient could never give back a gift of equal value, but at least he could give his vote to the giver when an opportunity arose. Yes, the reciprocal "system" of grace and gift was highly corrupt. With gifts people bought others for their own interests. And everyone knew it.

Once more for us today: A grace was a gift that someone could give in sovereign freedom. But the recipient thereby entered into an obligation. The giver knew that, and he could then consider when the right moment was to demand something in return. A kind of relationship of dependence arose through the grace or gift. To a small extent it is still like that today. If we receive a present, and a special one at that, then we will give something back at the next opportunity. We simply feel a certain obligation to do so.

Let us come to Jesus. Paul says this incomprehensible word about him:

You know how the grace of Jesus Christ our Lord was shown: He who was rich became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

Jesus, the King of the universe, who called everything into being, to whom everything belongs, does two controversial things: He gives to *all*. Without distinction. And he gives with extravagant *generosity*. That did not correspond to the culture of the time. Nor to today's. Becoming poor himself and giving everything away so that others become rich. Giving it to us, that is grace. Undeserved. Our poverty moved his heart.

The meaning of grace in the ancient world also has a meaning with King Jesus. Through his gift he wants to create a relationship. That is exactly what he expresses with his grace. Uncoerced fellowship. A fellowship in which we give something back. It is much less than what we have received. But our heart, our life is to belong to him. He is to receive our voice. In a world that for the most part still rejects him.

His gift of grace brings us a great deal. He wanted to make us rich, and so it happened. Here is only a fraction of what we have been given, and what everyone is given who receives this King: forgiveness, acquittal, redemption, eternal life, liberation, sanctification and freedom.

Our response is that we cannot do otherwise than hand our lives over to him. To consecrate them to him. Every day anew.

The word gift of grace is used in the New Testament, just as a side note, to describe the abilities within the church that the Holy Spirit gives. Supernatural gifts such as teaching, healings, prophecies and speaking in tongues, working miracles and distinguishing between spirits. They are given in order to be used for God's kingdom.

For the saving grace of God has appeared, and it applies to all people.

Titus 2:11

John 1:14, 16-17; Romans 3:24; 5:15-16; 6:23; 12:1-3; 11:29; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11; 2 Corinthians 6:1; 8:9; Ephesians 2:5; 2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 2:11; 3:7; Hebrews 2:9.

38 The bride of the King

Whom is such a King interested in, who possesses everything and rules over everything? What can attract his heart? Who could give him anything? What could be so attractive and lovable to him that he would set out to possess it?

The Bible describes God as a bridegroom. That is extraordinary, for it presupposes that he wished for a bride. God as bridegroom expresses that he does not want to be alone but seeks fellowship.

He himself created man and woman in his image. The two were to become one flesh and form an inseparable unity and fellowship of love. And that is how we human beings experience it, not all, but many. And so we may venture to draw one or two conclusions about the relationship of God to his wife. In the old covenant, God, Yahweh, entered into a marriage relationship with Israel. The bride is not one person, but the totality of many persons.

In the new covenant the bride is not a single nation. The bride is now an assembly from all peoples and nations. The beloved is not *one* person, as the bridegroom is. The bride is a metaphor for all followers of Jesus. Likewise for all believers who lived before Jesus came. So the entire, gathered multitude of all the people who love Jesus, the King and Bridegroom. What comparison could describe love better than this one of bride and bridegroom?

To possess this bride, to win her heart, he proved his love. He gave himself for her, unto death on the cross of Golgotha. He left no room for doubt as to whether he meant it seriously. He absolutely wanted to have her, at the price of his life.

What does the King find so attractive about us? Kings in the ancient world married within their own rank. It is still so today. But it is the exceptions that are sensational. When a king takes an ordinary woman, or even a slave, as his wife. We were not lovable. We were not interested in God and his Son. We behaved like enemies of God. Our story is incomprehensible. He saw something in us that was worth dying for. Dying with the risk that we might not return his love and might reject it.

Many already belong to this bride today. But he is still waiting for many.

He is a truly exemplary bridegroom and husband. He cares for his bride. He acts like a slave and washes her, so that she is clean and perfect. This imagery makes clear that this love relationship is real and will remain so. This relationship is so close that, as Adam and Eve were in the beginning, Christ and the church too are one flesh. He is the head who loves and provides, and she is the body, his body (physical body). Together they form one human being. This body is what Christ lacked, and it now makes him complete for all time. All this is imagery, but it gets to the heart of how great, how deep and real and strong-willed the love of Christ is. To love such a bridegroom, to know oneself safe with him, cannot be hard.

One day, when the feast begins, the bride will put on her wedding dress. Interestingly, it will consist of the good deeds that Christian people have done in their lives. So this dress is in the making, and everyone is working on it.

From the King's wedding song in Psalm 45:

My heart is stirred by good words! Yes, I dedicate my works to the king.

And the king will desire your beauty, for he is your lord: So bow down to him!

Psalm 45:1, 11

Psalm 45; Isaiah 61:10; 62:5; Matthew 22:2-12; Mark 2:19-20; John 3:29; 2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 3:18-19; 5:25-30; Revelation 19:7-9; 21:2, 9, 17.

39 The wedding feast of the King

I love weddings. Especially in spring and summer, when it is warm. When the mood is intoxicating and joy fills the evening air. Especially when I am simply a guest who only has to celebrate, eat, drink, talk and laugh. The bride and groom have long looked forward to this day. When it finally comes, it is over quickly because of all its beauty. One would love to hold on to it, keep celebrating and not just enjoy the memory.

The King, of whom we have already heard a great deal, is also waiting for a wedding feast. And as great and glorious as the King is, so great and glorious will the wedding be. A truly cosmic celebration. Heaven holds its breath when the King receives his bride. Forget all the (royal) weddings you have experienced so far or seen on television. Even that of Aragorn and Arwen at the mountain citadel of Minas Tirith. It is played in a film scene that is unforgettable for me. It inspires me a little when I think of the future.

Yes, here the deepest emotion is to be expected. Here the fire of love burns. Here both forget the world around them. For now it has finally come, the feast. The waiting is over.

The precondition for this wedding will be that the Almighty has taken up worldwide rule. All enmity has ended. Nothing will ever be able to disturb or endanger this wedding. The time and place of the wedding banquet can be freely chosen. No venue is too expensive. No, nothing will be good enough.

Let us imagine a joyful feast, a party with billions celebrating exuberantly. Without growing tired. Do not ask me how that will be possible. I do not rack my brains about it. The one who invites is the Almighty, the Creator of all things. In this feast we will see that he is the inventor of joy, of celebration and of jubilation.



The newly made earth will be the venue. In all its beauty, as we already know it now. But now completely renovated and restored. Made new. Then made even more beautiful, because we are worth it to him. He prepares the place for this feast. He cleanses everything and he adorns everything, in his own way, in which his love becomes visible.

The Bible describes this future feast more than once. I noticed that I could not find an end to this celebration. What is certain is that this feast will not be over after one day or, as in the Middle East, after a week. Time will no longer be important then.

In another comparison Jesus speaks of this wedding feast. Many are invited. But you need wedding clothes. Without them you quickly stand out and get thrown out. How do you get wedding clothes? In a figurative sense, a Bible verse says: “They – the guests at the feast – have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

Our clothes, by which our whole life is meant figuratively, are quite dirty in places, unsuitable for the light and the glory of the King’s wedding feast. But he died for us so that we might get free of our sins. To make us clean, just as he himself is clean. Bride and Bridegroom shine in brilliant white. Nothing at this feast is reminiscent of our dark and dubious past. Only the wounds of the

Bridegroom, on his hands and feet and in his side. These proofs of his love remain an eternal memorial.

It is true that the King is in fact still inviting today and now to the future wedding feast. He has sent out his people to invite. And indeed everyone, without any preference or advantage. All, the poor and the rich, the strong and the weak, the lonely and the sociable, the sick, the sinners, the despairing, the forgotten, those who look back on their lives and can find nothing good in them, or only a little.

*As a young man joins himself to his girl, so your Creator will join himself to you forever.
As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so your God will rejoice over you.*

Isaiah 62:5

Isaiah 61:10; 62:5; Matthew 22:2-12; 2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:25-30; Revelation 19:7-9; 21:2, 9, 17.

(Song in the original German)

*You're my friend
And You are my brother
Even though You are a King
I love You more than any other
So much more than anything
Du bist mein Freund
Und Du bist mein Bruder
Obwohl Du ein König bist
Ich liebe Dich mehr als jeden anderen
So viel mehr als alles andere
Du, o Herr, bist mein Freund und Bruder, du mein König und mein Gott!
Dich begehre ich mehr als alles, so viel mehr als höchstes Gut.*

40 They will reign over the earth

This book has been about the King of kings. Not first of all about us human beings. But the two can hardly be separated. Do you remember the beginning of the book? Yes, God created human beings in his image so that they would rule over the earth. But all of that has failed thoroughly. Even today. The true King came to raise us up from the rubble, the shards and the dust. And to install us as kings anew. That is unbelievable, but true. God reaches his goal with us. With all who come to him. Who realize that they need forgiveness, rescue and healing.

God wants to bring us together as his kings with the King of kings, his Son. That was worth a high price to him:

... and from Jesus Christ, the trustworthy witness to the truth, who was the first to rise from the dead and now reigns over all the kings of the earth.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, to him who has made us co-rulers, kings in his kingdom and priests for his God and Father,

To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever.

So those who confess Jesus will go into eternity, led by their King. They will be amazed. It is better, richer and more blessed than they ever dreamed. Following after Jesus was worth it. Their faithfulness and loyalty are rewarded. Nevertheless: Their eternal bliss is and remains undeserved. This happiness is open to all.

But before we come to the end, one more thing: The people of Jesus are kings and priests *already now*! But how do they reign? Do they have influence on world events? Or should they try to?

For their personal lives, the strange word applies that they reign as kings in their own personal lives. Sin is the enemy. Sin as a destructive power that reaches for every life in order to possess it, to separate it from God, to burden it. But this power has been broken by the death and resurrection of the King to whom we belong. Sin does not have to rule us; we can and should master it, take away its room and opportunity, not let it unfold. God's Spirit is the living power in us.

When that succeeds, it has an influence, an effect on our surroundings. As kings we do not seize political power. But where injustice happens, we call it what it is. And stop it where there is an opportunity. We stand on the side of the forgotten and the oppressed, the hungry and the hopeless, just as the Messiah did in his life.

As royal priests we have influence on the world and on world events in a form that could be called a conspiracy. A secret conspiracy! A nonviolent plot. Not for overthrow, but for success and for pushing back injustice, hunger and droughts in the world. Christians can stand up for the one and against the other *before their King*. Prayer, intercession, is a kind of government that is invisible, but becomes visible where the King answers prayer. Whoever practices it is in the training program for the future, when Jesus, and we with him, will reign.

The followers of Jesus are also anointed priests. Called to bless. As royal priests. They bring God's blessing into the world. For all people. They bless in the name of the King and lay his name on people in prayer. They not only speak well to and about others, but bring God's grace upon them. Also upon animals, upon houses, upon families, upon governments. Simply upon everything that needs grace and blessing. Through blessing, God's presence can become real, tangible and visible. In love, holiness, healing, success, rescue and liberation.

However, prayer and intercession and blessing are no excuse for not standing up actively and with commitment on the ground against injustice and discrimination where it is possible and necessary.

And under no circumstances take part in any activity that comes from darkness and therefore produces no good fruit. Rather, expose such activity!

Ephesians 5:11

Romans 5:17; 1 Timothy 2:1-7; 2 Timothy 2:12; 1 Peter 2:5-9; Revelation 1:5-7; 5:9-10; 22:5.

In closing, once more about Jesus, the King: He is God's vice-regent for humanity.

Jesus, born King of the Jews; Matthew 2:2.

Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God; Matthew 4:17, 23; 12:28.

Jesus demonstrated his claim to rule over the visible and the invisible world, even if he did not yet finally realize it; Matthew 12:28; Luke 19:38; John 1:49;

but also: 6:15.

Jesus reigns over his church and empowers it for service; Matthew 28:18; Ephesians 1:19-22.

Jesus restores the kingship of David; Acts 15:15-17; Amos 9:11-12.

Jesus is coming again as the victorious, universal King; 1 Corinthians 15:25.

He possesses all authority (Matthew 28:18); he reigns over an invisible, spiritual kingdom (John 18:36-37) and will later reign visibly over the whole earth: Psalm 66:4; 72:16-19; Isaiah 2:2; Daniel 7:13-14, 18, 22, 27; Hebrews 10:13; Revelation 15:4.

Oh, if there's only one song I can sing, When in His beauty I see the great King, This shall my song in eternity be, "Oh, what a wonder that Jesus loves me!"

Oh, if only there were one song I could sing, When I see the great King in his beauty, Then my song shall be for all eternity, "Oh, what a wonder that Jesus loves me!"

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