

Jesus Shall Reign



Jesus' reign covers the whole earth. This is the message of Isaac Watts' text, considered to be the first missions hymn. It is a paraphrase of the words of David in Psalm 72, which proclaims, "Praise be to his glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory" (72:19). This hymn has inspired missionaries everywhere, and none more than Eric Liddell, an Olympic standout in the 1924 games in Paris. Following the games, Liddell left his home in Edinburgh, Scotland to become a missionary to China. Upon his departure, he inspired the gathered crowd with his motto: "Christ for the world, for the world needs Christ." Before leaving, he also led them in two stanzas of Watts' hymn as an anthem of his ministry to unite the countries of the world under Christ.

Like Liddell, we are reminded that our Savior is the Savior for the whole world. I am always mindful of this during worldwide sporting events such as the Olympics or the World Cup. As nations all over the globe come together in friendly competition, I reflect on how Christ loves them all no matter their color, language, or culture. Each person is covered in the span of God's Kingdom. Proclaiming the reign of Christ is seeing the world as he sees it. It is his Kingdom to which we belong, not the other way around. We all take a seat at the common table of his Kingdom and there we find no dividing walls. For, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for [we] are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

It has become commonplace to so personalize our faith experience that we forget the communal and universal aspects of the gospel. At times, we show symptoms of a "tunnel vision" faith and fail to see all that God sees. This may leave us to create our own picture of his Kingdom. The scriptures point us to a greater worldview. When asked, "what is the greatest commandment?" Christ tells us to love God first and then your neighbor. And, when questioned by the righteous in Matthew 25, Christ reminds us that faithful ministry to the Savior comes by attending to the "least of these." This echoes in the words of Liddell that, "Christ is for the world." It is for them, the others, the least of these – those whom we thought he couldn't possibly love. Yes, this includes the terrorist, the prostitute, and the murderer – Christ's reign soars above them all.

Eugene Peterson's translation of Philippians chapter 2 explains Christ's reign beautifully: "God lifted him high and honored him far beyond anyone or anything, ever, so that all created beings in heaven and on earth—even those long ago dead and buried—will bow in worship before this Jesus Christ, and call out in praise that he is the Master of all, to the glorious honor of God the Father" 2:9–11 (The Message). It stretches beyond boundaries of space, time, fear and prejudice.

Recently, I attended a worship conference where 140 countries of the world were represented. In those few short days I saw and heard a beautiful picture of heavenly worship. We sang in many languages and styles and everyone joined in the song. In moments such as this, I am reminded that Jesus' reign is much larger than my thinking and actions have sometimes shown. Every tongue and tribe on this globe has a voice in the "sweetest song" of Jesus' reign.

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