



KANYE WEST: “JESUS IS KING”

Millions have heard of Kanye West, some haven't. This largely depends on whether you keep up on the American Rap scene and the broader celebrity culture. West, you see, is not only a rapper but a songwriter record producer, fashion designer, and entrepreneur (Image: <http://clipart-library.com/clipart/1066752.htm>).

Born in 1977, West has been nominated for an astonishing 67 Grammy Awards, winning 22 in an plethora of categories. He is worth an estimated \$250 million. Marrying model and socialite Kim Kardashian in 2004, West is what millions would consider to be the quintessential American success.

WHAT WE HAVE HEARD

West's forty-two years is of interest. Elvis Presley died at that age, ironically in the very year West was born. Instead of dying at Presley's age, West has come out with his ninth solo album claiming to be born again (one of Jesus' essential descriptions of what it means to be a Christian).

Observers of West's music tell us the pronouncement has been coming for some time. There are early signs that his faith in Christ is genuine. We can cite the newfound peace observed in his demeanor, his interest in worship, his desire to make Jesus known, his carelessness about his reputation now that he has Christ for his Savior and Lord, and his desire to lead his wife spiritually.

Kim Kardashian, for her part, is on record as finding “beautiful” his journey to faith, while admitting that his desire that she dress more modestly has occasioned some struggles between them. As for the world around West, rumors that he is being “canceled” on account of his faith in Christ comport with the promise of Jesus that if the world persecuted him, it would persecute his disciples—

read, authentic disciples—too (John 15:20).

WHAT WE SHALL SEE

The veracity of Christianity, though, rests not on Kanye West. That's just as well, for the world has greeted his profession of faith cynically and the church cautiously.

From the perspective of a fallen world, Jesus' idea of being born again is unfathomable, and it is! Human minds cannot get it, whether their inability be described in terms of either their darkened or finite state. The music industry and the commentators on pop culture dismiss West's profession of faith in Christ as but his latest iteration of himself, they so generalize it as to reduce it to a new-age sounding “spiritual transformation,” or they blast it as fake. The latter at least implicitly recognizes that there *is* a Christianity that is authentic.

Others note that West's profession of faith will not last, or that he will peel back his initial commitment to God as other celebrities have done after coming out as Christian. In part, we can understand such modifications. Even genuine Christians need time to mature, sometimes having to opt for extensive rather than intensive commitments.

From a Christian perspective, a “Trust but verify” approach is advisable. God in his great power and mercy is able and willing to forgive. To him, the saving of a celebrity is no different from the saving of the anonymous. Not so today's graceless culture that demands a “perfect” record or stellar skills at burying an imperfect one.



That said, the same Jesus who saves from sin warns us that not every claim to being saved is “legit.” In his parable of the sower he speaks of those who spring up on hearing the Word of God but who then wither as quickly. A love of pleasure, the deceitfulness of riches, or persecution reveal the true nature of our faith. (<https://dn-img.instyle.com/sites/default/files/styles/684flex/public/images/2016/05/050916-kanye-west-kim-kardashian.jpg?itok=xe6iAINb>.)

THE KING IN CONTEXT

Irrespective of what comes of Kanye West, history, the Bible, and experience all teach that Jesus *is* King. No failure or inauthenticity in those professing to belong to Christ dethrones him, nor does a secularist clamor to rid the world of him. Thus, we celebrate once more this Christmas his coming. It is not passé to do so, for by 2010 King Jesus had nearly four times more subjects globally than he had back in 1910.

KING JESUS HAS A HISTORY

Jesus did not appear out of nowhere. For thousands of years, God had been promising through an accumulation of prophets the advent of a Messiah (anointed one) who would establish an eternal kingdom.

Initially, it was the nations surrounding Israel that had the kings. In Israel, however, God was the King on High. He rules universally throughout the cosmos but was uniquely recognized in Israel to do so. Over time, however, Israel started hankering after a king so as to be like the neighboring nations (1 Samuel 8:1-9).

God overruled this sinful demand, assuring his prophet Samuel that it was he who was being rejected, not Samuel. As we might expect, the Israelite king, even at his best, could not represent God adequately. Each fell short of God's standards. The people followed them but could not put their trust in them.

At his best, King David desired to build for God a temple in Jerusalem. Initially given the go-ahead by the prophet Nathan, the Lord revealed that David would not be the one to build the temple, for he was a man of war. In breaking this news to David, Nathan conveyed God's marvelous consolation, namely, that from his line would come a king who would establish an everlasting kingdom (2 Samuel 7:12-13).

Thus, began the belief that the Messiah would sit on the throne of David. David's son Solomon, who built the temple, knew that he was not the hope of his people. His prayer for justice and righteousness found fulfillment, accordingly, in the Messiah who appeared a millennium later (Psalm 72:1).

KING JESUS HAS A KINGDOM

The New Testament reveals Jesus to be the long-promised King. This comes out most clearly in Matthew's Gospel. In the narration of his birth and early days, we read of the Wise Men arriving from the East in Jerusalem, asking, "Where is he who is born King of the Jews?" (2:2). The

question haunted a paranoid Herod, known to have already committed murder to secure his rule.

Thirty years later, Jesus began his public ministry. The first words of it that Matthew records are, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has drawn near" (4:17). Jesus said in effect that God's universal rule, ever a reality throughout the cosmos, was now localized and accessible in him. Thus, he set about establishing the authenticity of his extraordinary Kingship by demonstrating his powers and other-worldly principles (Matthew 4:17 and 16:20, especially).

Yet, Jesus' ministry revealed that he was not simply a King, but that he was a *divine* King. Contra Emperor Hirohito of Japan, Jesus' claim required no safe distance and high walls. Rather, he mingled with the masses, and then set his face to go to Jerusalem. No king had or has been so self-sacrificing. Fully divine he went there to do what only God could do, namely, to procure forgiveness for sinners. Yet, to do so, he had, as one also fully human, to do what only man must do. He therefore, to pay for sin, maintained *en route* to Jerusalem his perfect fulfilment of the law of God so that on the cross his atoning sacrifice for sin would be acceptable to the Father.

KING JESUS HAS A PURPOSE

Jesus, though, is now alive once more! His resurrection is not only the assurance that his atonement has been accepted in heaven, but that he has all authority to establish his kingdom throughout the earth.

The rule of Christ over the minds and hearts of men and women is governed not

by a political constitution, but by Holy Scripture. His rule is not limited by geographical borders, for the reach of God's grace quickly became global (Acts 1:8; 28:17-31).

Although we do not naturally welcome Christ's rule over our lives, it is to our benefit that he reign over us. Left to ourselves, the sins we deem to epitomize our freedom destroy us in this life and condemn us in the next. Christ's reign is, by contrast, a tremendous gift of God's grace and is our hope for time and eternity. As King, Christ subdues then excises the sins within, protecting us without from the destructive influences of the world and the devil.

Christ lovingly calls us, then, to turn to God in repentance for sin and invites us to rest on him for forgiveness. Repentance and faith thus function as a passport admitting us into Christ's kingdom. To be clear, though, we are not admitted because of *our* passport, but on account of *God's* grace in Christ. That said, no one enters the kingdom without the repentance and faith. (Image: www.catholicweekly.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/three-wise-men-king-herod-NEW.jpg.)



HEROD TROUBLED BY NEWS OF A RIVAL KING

THE KING IN CONQUEST

Whereas God the Father established the kingdom of heaven by the work on earth of God the Son, the kingdom increases through the work of God the Spirit. That increase is twofold. Not only does Christ's rule spread across history and the world, it increases within the hearts of each person entering the kingdom.

While, in the miracle of God's grace, it only takes a moment to cross over into the kingdom, it takes a lifetime of God's patience to lead us ever more deeply into the joy and peace that come with surrender to Christ our King. Christians are very well aware of this, for the work God has begun in us is not complete until the day Jesus returns (Philippians 1:6). If, then, you are yet to cross the threshold into the kingdom of heaven, and are pondering doing so, it may help to know why Christians can, we confess, be somewhat inconsistent, and how Christ will work in your heart as he is working in ours, to bring us to full surrender to his reign over lives.

Helpful in this regard is the life story of South Africa's recent Rugby World Cup winning captain, Siya Kolisi. His journey reminds us how influential a life surrendered to Christ can be, and how Christlikeness is gained by the spread of his reign over our minds, hearts, and will.

THE INFLUENCE OF CHRISTLIKENESS

Siya Kolisi was born in 1991 and was raised by his grandmother, his aunt and uncle, in a slum settlement in Port Elizabeth, South Africa. Kolisi recalls that as a child he often went without food and had no bed or toys.

It was his grandmother's unwavering faith in Jesus Christ which made life bearable. Not only did she attend church regularly, she took young Siya with her. He recalls with fondness the advice and inspiration she offered him, telling reporters that "she always put me ahead of herself and suffered so that I could be what I needed to be." Yet, Siya's grandmother never got to see him become either the rugby success or indeed the public Christian he is today.

Siya only took up rugby after his grandmother died. Given what we now know, it is unsurprising that his coaches and mentors observed his exceptional natural talent. To it he added hard work, honing his skills, becoming professional, and achieving recognition in the world of rugby.

THE ROAD TO CHRISTLIKENESS

It is unclear when exactly Siya claimed Christ as his Savior. What is clear is that it took some time for him to realize that when we claim Christ as such we also claim him as our King. Left to ourselves, we are more willing to receive him as the one than the other. God, however, permits no

selectivity. Our inability to atone for our sins or to free ourselves from them means we need him as our Savior as well as our King. Since it is the person of Christ we receive, we cannot have him as one but not the other.

In seeking, as many of us have done, to claim the perks of Christianity (possession of a Savior) while forgoing its responsibilities (surrender to Christ as King), Siya inevitably got ensnared by the cares of the world and the pursuit of success. Such temptations, he confesses, "became weeds that prevented the spiritual growth" he desperately needed.

God, however, does not leave his own to their personal devices. He intends in grace not only to pardon our guilt and to cleanse our hearts, but to refashion our lives so that they reflect Christ's holiness and his self-sacrificing service. Indeed, it is Christ, ruling as King in the lives of his people, who brings about their transformation.

Christ works this in us by the Holy Spirit. It was, then, the Spirit who, following the 2015 World Cup, created within Siya a struggle with the sins and the lifestyle choices he had secretly tolerated. Through the pain Siya came to see the mercy of God: ". . . when my sin was exposed, I knew I either had to change my life, or lose everything. I decided to lose my life and find it in Christ."

The subsequent change was dramatic:

"I've been able to discover the truth and saving power of Christ in a whole new way. This new life has given me a peace in my heart I'd never experienced before. Now that I have given everything to God, nothing else affects me. I now live and play with the freedom of knowing His plan will always happen, and at the end of the day, that's all I care about!"

Doubtless, Siya still sins, as does every Christian while still in this life. Yet, in claiming Christ, now as King as well as Savior, Siya welcomes the transformation he is undergoing. Indeed, the more Christ spreads his reign over Siya's life the more transformed he will be.

In the meantime, Siya has become a national hero. The world will remember him as the first black captain of the Springboks (the South African Rugby team), and only the third South African captain to lift the Webb Ellis Cup as



Rugby World Champion. Christ, however, will remember Siya as his own—one for whom he died and rose again.

(www.msn.com/en-za/sport/rugby-union/rugby-world-cup-champions-close-trophy-tour-by-vowing-to-set-example-of-nation-building/ar-BBWAQqN?li=BBqg6Q6).

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We can muse about the authenticity of Kanye West's proclamation that Jesus is King, we can read up on what the Bible has to say of Christ's Kingship, and we can reflect on how Christ is transforming Siya Kolisi. Yet, all this will mean nothing for our lives unless we, personally, surrender to Christ.

While Christ's uniqueness compels further study, his unequaled moral fiber guarantees there is no small print to fear. Christ is very open about the cost of surrendering to him. He will cost you your throne, your freedom to remain enslaved to your sin, and your hope of being loved by all. The worth of his kingdom is determined not by our adjudicating of its pros and cons as if we are sovereign, but by the Son of God who has established the kingdom and by the Spirit of God sent to open our hearts to receive it. Only in Christ's kingdom are we:

- Assured our sins are forgiven.
- Living in relationship with God.
- Undergoing divine transformation.
- Finding the true purpose of our lives.
- Given hope for eternity.



Ask God, then, for his gifts of repentance and faith in Christ—this one page, two-sided passport required for entrance into Christ's kingdom. It has no expiry nor is an additional visa needed. Yet, God's invitation to enter the kingdom is time sensitive. In weighing it, bear in mind that Christ's kingdom is the only one which lasts. The apostle Paul teaches us that Christ shall deliver the kingdom to God the Father having destroyed every rule, authority, and power arrayed against the God of grace (I Corinthians 15:24). And, yes, that includes ours!

Next Issue Due Out: March 1**A CAROL FOR
THE KING**

As with gladness men of old
Did the guiding star behold,
As with joy they hailed its light,
Leading onward, beaming bright, ~
So, most gracious Lord, may we
Evermore be led to Thee.

As with joyful steps they sped,
Saviour, to Thy lowly bed,
There to bend the knee before
Thee, whom heaven and earth adore, ~
So may we with willing feet
Ever seek the mercy-seat.

As they offered gifts most rare
As Thy cradle rude and bear, ~
So may we with holy joy,
Pure, and free from sin's alloy,
All our costliest treasures bring,
Christ, to Thee our heavenly King.

Holy Jesus, every day
Keep us in the narrow way;
And, when earthly things are past,
Bring our ransomed souls at last
Where they need no star to guide,
Where no clouds Thy glory hide.

In the heavenly country bright
Need they no created light;
Thou its light, its joy, its crown,
Thou its sun which goes not down;
There forever may we sing
Hallelujahs to our King.

William Chatterton Dix, 1837-98