

# CHRIST THE KING SUNDAY

*Year B*

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## Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14

<sup>9</sup> As I watched,  
thrones were set in place,  
and an Ancient One took his throne;  
his clothing was white as snow  
and the hair of his head like pure wool;  
his throne was fiery flames,  
and its wheels were burning fire.  
<sup>10</sup> A stream of fire issued  
and flowed out from his presence.  
A thousand thousands served him,  
and ten thousand times ten thousand stood  
attending him.  
The court sat in judgment,  
and the books were opened.  
<sup>13</sup> As I watched in the night visions,  
I saw one like a human being  
coming with the clouds of heaven.  
And he came to the Ancient One  
and was presented before him.  
<sup>14</sup> To him was given dominion  
and glory and kingship,  
that all peoples, nations, and languages  
should serve him.  
His dominion is an everlasting dominion  
that shall not pass away,  
and his kingship is one  
that shall never be destroyed.

### Commentary from Matthew Phillips

Set during the Babylonian Exile, the Book of Daniel details the lives of God's people held captive in a foreign kingdom and includes several visions seen by the titular prophet. We encounter a section from the first of these visions on this Christ the King Sunday, in which "an Ancient One" sits in judgment over the four sovereign beasts described in the verses before this passage. After the fourth beast is destroyed and the other three are stripped of their sovereignty (in our passages omitted verses), Daniel reports seeing "one like a human being" descending from heaven, upon whom the Ancient One bestows "an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away."

This apocalyptic vision intends to provide God's people with messianic comfort amid their captivity. The four beasts represent various kingdoms and their rulers who are fearsome, ravenous, and arrogant: characteristics that those living during the Babylonian Exile may have understandably attributed to those whose rule they found themselves under. The "Ancient One" represents God in heaven, who unseats these earthly rulers and replaces them with the messianic "one like a human being" whose reign is sharply contrasted against those of the oppressive, earthly rulers. Following his words in Matt. 26:64, Christians have long identified Jesus as this messianic figure.

### Discussion Questions

What similarities or differences do you find between this passage's description of the "Ancient One" and what you believe about God? Between the "one like a human being" and Jesus?

How are the sovereignty of God and Jesus portrayed in this passage? How does that image of divine sovereignty differ from earthly rulers in our current context?

## Psalm 93

- <sup>1</sup> The Lord is King;  
he has put on splendid apparel; \*  
the Lord has put on his apparel  
and girded himself with strength.
- <sup>2</sup> He has made the whole world so sure \*  
that it cannot be moved;
- <sup>3</sup> Ever since the world began, your throne has been  
established; \*  
you are from everlasting.
- <sup>4</sup> The waters have lifted up, O Lord,  
the waters have lifted up their voice; \*  
the waters have lifted up their pounding  
waves.
- <sup>5</sup> Mightier than the sound of many waters,  
mightier than the breakers of the sea, \*  
mightier is the Lord who dwells on high.
- <sup>6</sup> Your testimonies are very sure, \*  
and holiness adorns your house, O Lord,  
for ever and for evermore.

### Commentary from Matthew Phillips

Psalm 93 strongly resembles the combat myths used among various cultures in the Ancient Near East to explain how the earth was created. Typically, these myths feature a deity who establishes order out of chaos, creating and ordering the earth after combating and defeating chaos personified—often in the form of the sea. In this psalm, God assumes the role of the conquering deity and subsequent king over a world brought forth from the sea's destruction.

This short psalm of only six verses is split between three stanzas. In the first stanza (vv. 1-3), God is portrayed as a king whose victory and creative act are being celebrated with a robing ceremony. In the second stanza (vv. 4-5), God's victory over the waters is recounted and the might of the victor is extolled. In the final stanza (v. 6), God is again praised for establishing order upon creation, and the eternal sovereignty of the divine is proclaimed.

### Discussion Questions

While the imagery employed in Psalm 93 may seem strange to those living in the twenty-first century, it would have been familiar to those living in antiquity. What aspects—if any—of this imagery reflect your own understanding of God's nature and sovereignty?

Psalm 93 portrays God as king over the earth and the forces of nature. Can you identify any other passages from Holy Scripture that demonstrate God's sovereignty over nature? Have you ever experienced this aspect of God's sovereignty yourself?

## Revelation 1:4b-8

<sup>4</sup> Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, <sup>5</sup> and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood <sup>6</sup> and made us a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

<sup>7</sup> Look! He is coming with the clouds;  
every eye will see him,  
even those who pierced him,  
and all the tribes of the earth will wail on  
account of him.

So it is to be. Amen.

<sup>8</sup> “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

### Commentary from Matthew Phillips

While the exact date of Revelation’s composition is disputed, scholars argue that the apocalyptic visions it reports—much like this week’s passage from Daniel—were written to provide hope and comfort to Christians facing Roman persecution. The book has been interpreted by many as a literal foretelling of future events; however, many others interpret Revelation as a symbolic account of God’s active and future transformation of the world, its power structures, and relational paradigms. A central theme in this week’s passage and throughout the book is God and Christ’s sovereignty over all creation, including over all earthly rulers.

This passage features the beginning of John’s visions, which he notes in his opening salutation are revealed to him by God, seven heavenly spirits, and Jesus Christ (vv. 4-5). John goes on to ascribe to Jesus several titles that illustrate his kingly authority: “the faithful witness” as a reference to his sacrificial death and to identify Jesus with early Christian martyrs, “the firstborn of the dead” as a reference to his resurrection, and “ruler of kings of the earth” to proclaim his ultimate sovereignty (v. 5). Jesus is also praised for liberating believers from their sins and for inviting them to actively participate in his reign as “priests” in service to God (vv. 5-6). By writing “to him [Jesus] be glory and dominion forever and ever” in v. 6, John also proclaims the legitimacy of Jesus’ reign over and against the implied illegitimacy of Caesar’s or that of any other earthly ruler. John even includes a reference to this week’s passage from Daniel in v. 7 (cf. Daniel 7:13), cementing the messianic hope of this vision.

### Discussion Questions

John’s vision of Christ’s ultimate sovereignty seeks to bring hope to early Christians amid persecution. What hope can we draw from this passage today in our own contexts?

What role do we have in participating in the reign of God and Jesus Christ? How can we exercise that role in our daily lives?

## John 18:33-37

<sup>33</sup>Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” <sup>34</sup>Jesus answered, “Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?” <sup>35</sup>Pilate replied, “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?” <sup>36</sup>Jesus answered, “My kingdom does not belong to this world. If my kingdom belonged to this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.” <sup>37</sup>Pilate asked him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.”

### Commentary from Matthew Phillips

This week’s passage from John’s Gospel account details Jesus being interrogated by Pontius Pilate before his crucifixion. The central question posed to Jesus is whether he truly is “the King of the Jews” (v. 33). This is the accusation that the Jewish leaders have made against Jesus: an accusation of blasphemy for these leaders—equating Jesus with God—and of treason against Rome—placing Jesus as a rival to the Roman emperor.

Initially, Jesus seems hesitant to answer the question, instead answering with another question: why Pilate is even asking this question at all (v. 34). When pressed a second time, however, Jesus acknowledges his sovereignty but emphasizes the differences between his reign and those of earthly rulers. While earthly kingdoms are demarcated by force and violence, Jesus’ kingdom is not (v. 36). And while kings and emperors are concerned with ruling land and people’s bodies, Jesus reigns over the minds and souls of those “who belong to the truth [and listen] to [his] voice” (v. 37).

### Discussion Questions

Why did Jesus not want his reign to be demarcated by force and violence like earthly kingdoms? What impact ought this aspect of Jesus’ reign have on the lives of his disciples today?

In what ways do you wish earthly rulers were more like the model of leadership that Jesus provides? Why?