

A Hope and Change That Is Certain, Because Jesus Christ Is King of Kings and Lord of Lords

Ezra 7:11-12
Revelation 19:16
August 12, 2012
Rev. Greg L. Price

In the presidential election cycle that is upon us here in the United States, you may expect to hear a lot about **hope and change**, and about **optimism** in steering the nation out of a recession and setting the nation back on the road to prosperity. In fact, that candidate (regardless of his qualifications) that is best able to communicate **an optimistic view of America's future** will most likely be the candidate that wins the upcoming election. How sad that people are more concerned with a mere perception of happy times ahead than hearing the truth. I dare say that a candidate that ran on a platform that the United States is under the Divine judgment of God, and that even more severe judgments of God's righteous wrath await us (if we do not repent of our many sins as a nation), such a candidate would immediately be disqualified because of his lack of optimism in painting a grim picture of America's future (even if the grim picture is accurate and true).

Dear ones, one of the most fundamental differences between a worldly optimism and a biblical hope is that worldly optimism trusts in a candidate (i.e. in the arm of flesh) to turn the economy around (or whatever else needs to be changed), whereas biblical hope confidently looks to the power of God and to the promises of God found in Scripture to bring about change in His appointed time (God may use men as His instruments, but it is God who works when and where He chooses, and works according to what He has revealed in His promises and prophecies). In fact, I firmly believe that this nation is under God's judgment due to its legal toleration (and therefore its promotion) of

idolatry, false religion, covenant-breaking, murder of unborn children, and every immorality imaginable, and that what immediately awaits this nation are not happy times, but even more severe judgments. And yet I am full of hope in the Lord Jesus Christ, that He is yet working out His purposes in this nation and that He will fully accomplish all of His promises and prophecies revealed in Scripture—one of which is that this nation, along with all of the nations of this world, will become a covenanted Christian nation, possibly in the not too distant future (Psalm 72:11).

Dear ones, how many times in Scripture are we taught not to put our confidence in princes (Psalm 118:9; Psalm 146:3), not to put our confidence in the arm of flesh (Psalm 44:3), and not to put our confidence in the strength of the horse or our military might (Psalm 147:10)? Dear ones, there is hope and change (a biblical hope and change) coming to this nation and to this world, but it will not be accomplished through the Republican, Democratic, or Libertarian candidate or any other political party. It will only be accomplished by Jesus Christ, the King of kings.

Let us consider the following main points this Lord's Day from God's Word: (1) The Persian King Was a Limited and Earthly King of Kings (Ezra 7:11-12); (2) The Lord Jesus Christ Is the Unlimited and Heavenly King of Kings (Revelation 19:16).

I. The Persian King Was a Limited and Earthly King of Kings (Ezra 7:11-12).

A. In the previous sermon from our ongoing series in the Book of Ezra, we noted how our sovereign God received all of the glory for turning the heart of King Artaxerxes to fulfill the requests of Ezra for royal

authority to continue the reformation of religion in Israel (Ezra 7:6). But we also observed from our text how God raised up a ready, qualified, and skilled scribe in Ezra, who “had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments” (Ezra 7:10). God sovereignly purposed and disposed all the resources needed to promote His own true religion and cause, but He did so, not in using a man who was unqualified, lazy, procrastinating, and unprepared for the task at hand, but rather by using a man who for years had been preparing himself to be used of the Lord to teach and promote reformation of the one true religion revealed in Scripture.

1. Let us never forget that the reformation of the one true reformed religion of Jesus Christ throughout the world is Christ’s Cause and He will see to it. We sometimes look at the work to be done and are tempted to fall back into an apathetic or fearful heart attitude, because the work to be accomplished throughout the world is so huge. At times, despair would overwhelm us (but for the mercy of God) that our own families are divided and walk contrary to the truth revealed in Scripture. How we need to daily cast all our cares about the salvation of loved ones, and about the worldwide reformation of all churches and nations onto the King of kings, Jesus Christ. For salvation from sin and reformation of doctrine, worship, and church government is His Cause, not yours or mine. We are His tools to be used, but He is the King of kings who must and will wield us as tools for the conversion and reformation of all churches and nations at His appointed time. Fear not, dear child of God. Become not careless or indifferent in praying for your children, your spouses, your family members, your friends, the church, or the nation. Despise not the day of small things, but rather cast all your fears and even apathy upon Christ, and look with hope to the Lord who has promised, “Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts” (Zechariah 4:6). What a burden is lifted from our shoulders

when we cast all our cares upon Christ, for salvation is of the LORD (Jonah 2:9).

2. For each of us who yearn to see the true gospel of Jesus Christ prosper and a faithful covenanted reformation of Christ's true reformed religion promoted and embraced by the churches and nations of this world, we must see how our various work, trials, afflictions, and tribulations are being used by the Lord to prepare us (in whatever our calling) to be agents of godly change and biblical reformation in our own individual lives, in our families, in the church, and in the nation. There may be detours and roadblocks and even collisions at times on the road to reformation, but God has a plan in it all in preparing you and me to be capable and qualified to lead others in the paths of righteousness and truth for Christ's sake. Preparation is not easy (it is even hard and exasperating work at times), but it is necessary (just as we see was the case with Ezra).

3. Will you learn from your sins, mistakes, failures, trials, and afflictions, so that you can be prepared to lead others into a biblical reformation, or will you rather grow weary, grow upset, and grow resentful over your classes in Christ's school, judging Christ to be an unloving and unfair Master in the lessons He is teaching you? Dear ones, you are teaching others by your words and deeds in how you face your failures and your successes. You are either teaching others to get up again and again and again when you are knocked down, or you are teaching others to throw up their arms in despair because the fight is too uncomfortable and too hard. You are either teaching them to look to Christ and His merciful promises for their strength to continue in this battle, or you are teaching them to look to and to boast in man's resources.

B. Now as we approach our text for today, we have the privilege of reading the very letter that was composed by King Artaxerxes of

Persia, which he gave to Ezra, the reformer and scribe. For this letter was the authoritative commission delivered by the king to Ezra in order to continue the reformation already begun in Israel. We will only be considering the preface or introduction to the decree of Artaxerxes today (in Ezra 7), and will continue with the remainder of the decree of Artaxerxes in a subsequent sermon.

1. First, let us observe that Ezra 7:11 certifies that what is recorded in the verses that follow is a copy of the actual letter written by the authoritative decree of King Artaxerxes. But notice how Ezra is described here: “Ezra the priest, the scribe, even a scribe of the words of the commandments of the LORD, and of his statutes to Israel.”

a. What leaps off of the page of Scripture is that there is no apology or embarrassment at all for Ezra being “a scribe of the words of the commandments of the LORD.” So often in churches today, ministers want to make it as easy as possible to be a disciple of Christ and as pleasant as possible to hear a sermon. Thus, the law of God and the commandments of God in so many churches today are in various ways minimized and obscured, and relegated to that which is relatively unimportant or even divisive. What is important in many churches today is simply that you love Jesus. In fact, it is said to be legalism to preach God’s commandments, or to impress upon hearers that God’s Moral Law is authoritative and is binding upon the moral person of all people and all nations.

b. Dear ones, the heresy of legalism is indeed alive and well in churches today, who teach that we are justified and declared righteous before a holy God on the basis of something we do (such as being baptized, reading our Bibles, praying, or attending worship) or on the basis of some grace within us (whether faith, love, repentance), rather than on the basis of Christ’s obedience and righteousness alone and received by faith alone. And yet in the heart of all who are justified by faith alone on the basis of Christ’s obedience alone, there is also the

earnest desire to obey the commandments of the Lord from a heart of love and thanksgiving for all that Christ has done for us (not in order to be saved from the condemning wrath of Almighty God, but in order to walk in love and thankfulness to God for His great and unfathomable salvation).

c. God's commandments ought not to be burdensome and grievous to obey in the life of one who has been freely forgiven and declared righteous by faith alone (even if God's commandments do show to us our own weaknesses, our own failures, our own sins, and our continual need of Christ to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Christ in obedience to His holy commandments). In this regard, consider the inspired words found in 1 John 5:3 (in fact, this verse teaches that we actually demonstrate our love for God by obeying His commandments). If anyone teaches that following Christ in loving and thankful obedience to God's Moral Law is legalism, then that same person must likewise declare Christ to be the greatest legalist that ever lived, because He lovingly obeyed God's Law and commandments perfectly, never having failed even once in thought, word, or deed.

d. Dear ones, those who minimize the Moral Law of God or downplay obedience to Christ's commandments are not great in Christ's Visible Kingdom, but are the least in the Visible Church. However, those who teach God's Moral Law to others and endeavor by God's grace to keep His commandments from a heart of thankful love and joyful obedience themselves are great in Christ's Visible Kingdom and Church (Matthew 5:17-19). Dear ones, is there evidence in your life that you love the Lord Jesus Christ through an earnest desire and endeavor (by God's grace) to keep His commandments? If not, you ought to be on your hands and knees before the Lord pleading for God's mercy to trust Him, love Him, and obey Him. Ezra was not ashamed "of the words of the commandments of the LORD", and neither should we be (even if it means we stand all alone, and no one stands with us).

2. Second, in Ezra 7:12, the royal introduction of Artaxerxes begins with these words: “Artaxerxes, king of kings.” This title hit me like a ton of bricks. This title was certainly true of Artaxerxes in a limited sense; for he was the supreme ruler over many kings and many nations of the earth at the time of his reign. Many kings and kingdoms bowed the knee to Artaxerxes as their royal lord and master. And he went forth as a conquering king in putting down rebellion and in subduing peoples, kingdoms, and nations under his authoritative rule. But dear ones, Artaxerxes is only a faint, a very faint, shadow of one who bore that title, “King of kings”. For the Lord Jesus Christ, who bears that title as God’s anointed King, holds universal and unlimited dominion over every king and ruler from every nation on the face of the earth. And He will show forth His universal dominion in subduing all kings and all nations to Himself in the day of His great power. Thus, I would like to turn at this point in the sermon from considering a puny, finite, and corrupt representation of the title, “king of kings”, to a consideration of that most glorious, pure, and full embodiment of the title, “King of kings” in the person and office of Jesus Christ. I invite you to turn with me to Revelation 19:16, where the title, “King of kings” is given to God’s anointed King, Jesus Christ.

II. The Lord Jesus Is the Unlimited and Heavenly King of Kings (Revelation 19:16).

A. So often we hear today from many Christians that there is no moral obligation upon rulers or nations to officially submit to Christ (and to His gospel, laws, and one true religion) within their constitutions, laws, and oaths of office. It’s as if Christ has a mere title, “King of kings”, but no authority or right to rule over all kings and nations. I have even read various Christian ministers who in public forums have said that the Bible does not teach that a nation can be a Christian nation. Only individuals

can be Christians, not nations (which implies that there is no moral obligation for rulers in their official capacity or for nations in their constitutions and laws to submit to Christ, even though He has the title, “King of kings, and Lord of lords”; even though Christ is called “the prince of the kings of the earth” in Revelation 1:5; even though all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Christ according to Matthew 28:18; and even though all things have been legally put under His feet [including all dominion and every name that is named in this world] according to Ephesians 1:21-22). How can Christ have such authority and power over all kings, over all dominions, and over all nations, and yet those kings, dominions, and nations not be morally required to constitutionally bow the knee to Christ, officially kiss Jesus Christ, legally rule according to God’s Law as the supreme law of the land, and formally establish the one true Christian religion as the only religion of that nation (as we see in various passages of Scripture: Psalm 2:10-12; Psalm 72:11; Isaiah 2:2; Zechariah 2:11)?

1. In fact, I ask, if there is no obligation for kings and nations to officially, constitutionally, and legally kiss the Son of God and honor Him as God’s anointed King and Savior of the nation, establish God’s Moral Law as the supreme law of the land, and establish biblical Christianity as the only true religion of that nation, then why does God’s judgment fall upon not only individuals that turn against God, but also upon families who reject the Lord (Jeremiah 10:25), upon churches that break God’s law by tolerating errors and sins (Revelation 2:14-16), and upon nations—not only Israel, but Gentile nations as well (Psalm 9:17; Revelation 16:14>Revelation 19:11-21)?

2. Dear ones, if there was no moral obligation for rulers and nations to honor and exalt Jesus Christ and biblical Christianity, to establish His Moral Law as supreme in the nation, to suppress idolatry, heresy, and blasphemy, then for what reason does Jesus Christ judge nations? From a study of Revelation 19:11-21 (and some other biblical

texts), we see it is because the nations of the world have engaged in a war against Jesus Christ, who is “King of kings, and Lord of lords.” The rulers and nations of the world do not want to submit to Christ’s absolute authority over them; and therefore, Christ goes forth in His appointed time to crush their rebellion against Him. These nations have instead followed not only the civil beast, but also have followed the false prophet (i.e. the papal church of Rome through whom Satan has deceived the nations), and the image of the beast (i.e. the papacy of the Roman Catholic Church).

3. Dear ones, rulers, congresses, parliaments, and nations in their official and constitutional capacity are morally bound to receive and submit to Jesus Christ and His holy commandments. The civil and political rulers of nations are morally bound to uphold both Tables of the Law (not only Commandments 5-10, which speak of our duties to our fellow man, but also Commandments 1-4, which address our duties to the one true living God). Rulers and nations (that have received the light of the gospel and of the Holy Scriptures) are morally required by God to officially and constitutionally kiss and submit to Jesus Christ as “King of kings, and Lord of lords”). To not do so brings God’s wrath not only upon individuals, not only upon families, not only upon churches, but also upon nations as we shall see more clearly as we consider more fully Revelation 19:11-21 in the next sermon.

B. Dear ones, you can be absolutely certain that there is a biblical hope and change in whatever circumstances you face in your life. For the Christian, whose trust is in Jesus Christ alone for His eternal salvation, there is never a valid reason to give up because of the gloom and doom that he hears and sees all around him/her. For Jesus Christ is “King of kings, and Lord of lords”. There is no power or authority in this world that is able to move Christ in the least from His eternal purpose and plan to save His people from their sins, to sanctify and reform His church, and to

bring all nations of this world (including Israel) to covenant with God to be Christian nations. Dear ones, do you think for a moment that Christ as “King of kings, and Lord of lords” has all authority in heaven and on earth to subdue all nations to Himself, and yet will not subdue those besetting sins in your own life as you cast yourself upon His mercy and His provision in Christ? Is Christ as “King of kings, and Lord of lords” able to conquer the unbelief and rebellion of the nations and not able to conquer the unbelief and rebellion of your spouse, your child, or your parent? If Christ as “King of kings, and Lord of lords” is able to turn the tribulations which faithful Christians have suffered for the Cause of Christ throughout church history (and even now suffer to the point of death in many nations throughout the world), so that the blood of the faithful witnesses of Christ becomes the seed for a future and glorious reformation of the gospel and of biblical Christianity in every nation, then will not that same Christ (who is “King of kings, and Lord of lords”) certainly sanctify your various trials and your physical afflictions so as to teach you to put not your hope in men or in the mere resources of men, but rather to hope in the Lord who loves you, His people, with an everlasting love, and has redeemed you through the suffering of Christ, and is using that which you suffer to prepare you to be used to promote gospel reformation in your family, church, and nation? Your suffering, beloved, is not in vain in the Lord. Why? Because Jesus Christ is “King of kings, and Lord of lords”.

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