



JESUS SHALL REIGN



FROM
KEITH'S
HEART
TO
YOURS

Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
Does his successive journeys run;
His kingdom stretch from shore to shore,
Till moons shall wax and wane no more.

Last time I wrote this column, we were beginning to hear about this thing called COVID-19 and I reflected then on the backlash in America and especially in Europe, against Asian members of those societies, all because of news reports suggesting that the virus had its origins in China. No one could have predicted just a year ago, how our world would be affected at every level by this pandemic. New words have been coined to describe what we live in, from “conspiracy theory” to “new normal” to “unmute” to “lockdown” and “zoom”, which is not something one does in a hurry. We have seen politicians struggle to lead effectively in territory none has ventured into before.

We have witnessed huge change in just about everything that has been our security in the past and many can testify to experiencing things that we never thought possible in our lifetime. In this period, I have welcomed two grandsons into the world and I realise that they will grow up never knowing a pre-covid world, such is the scope of changed reality for all of us. Depending on what our departure point is in regard to our faith, we can see this state of affairs either as cause for real anxiety or as an incredible opportunity to demonstrate the reality of what we claim as followers of Christ.

An old hymn has become very personal to me again of late, as it reminds me of the essence

of how we balance living *in* this world with not being *of* it. The opening words are:

Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
Does his successive journeys run;
His kingdom stretch
from shore to shore,
Till moons shall wax and
wane no more.

As I think about what these lines suggest, I find my faith and trust in God in the midst of all of this change is bolstered, not diminished. There are three aspects to the truth this hymn declares.

1. The CERTAINTY of His act of reigning.

A central theme within our COTN life has been the gospel of the kingdom and we are used to talking about what that really means for us. We use terms such as an advancing kingdom and, the kings will be drawn to the brightness of our light and we imply that we are making headway for the King. However, we can easily make the mistake of seeing the kingdom of God in geographical terms only, in the same way that we may regard the territory ruled by present day monarchs as the full extent of what a kingdom means. The greater the territory, the greater their claim to kingship. Biblically though, the emphasis lies on the *act* of God's rulership and not merely the territory He governs. This hymn reminds us that Jesus shall reign, not as some kind of wishful thinking set against a background of increasing despair as in, "I hope He will some day reign", but as a certainty that He is busy reigning and ruling already. Throughout the Word of God, His *hiddenness* is definitely not a sign that He has lost authority over His creation or is not busy ruling. Being able to navigate our way between what we see as reality (a world out of control) versus what we *know* as truth (God is ruling and reigning and has the final say), is what causes us to live totally alive to the circumstances around us, yet to do so from a very different perspective. I am moved by how often Scripture reminds us that, though we

have not seen Him in the flesh, we have every reason to trust Him and believe that His action of rulership over His creation is not defined by whether or not I see tangible evidence of that in my lifetime. While it is wonderful when we see proof of His kingdom breaking into this flesh world, God's dynamic act and action of rulership is a certainty even if hidden from our view for now.

2. The SCOPE of His act of reigning.

The imagery of this hymn sees the extent of God's rulership as King to be all encompassing. In these few lines, Isaac Watts, who wrote the hymn, covers *Time*, *Space* and, in a symbolic way, *Spiritual dynamics*. The thought expressed by the sun running its successive journeys is that there is not one moment of history, the present or the future that escapes God's attention or is not subject to His rulership. However much things may appear to change, Solomon's wisdom reminds us that there is nothing new under the sun. I understand just how important that fact is when we first realised we were facing a pandemic and the rising number of global deaths due to the virus began to make people fearful. Really negative forecasts about how different life would be were entrenched the longer nations locked down their people and normality began to be redefined. Reading backwards in history, it soon became clear that the world had faced pandemics before and still came through it - changed, but not destroyed. That the sun sets and rises *only* as far as *our* view experiences the end of a day and the beginning of another, gives us the confidence that the scope of God's ruling and reigning spans past, present and unseen future.

Space or geographical terrain is also subject to His rulership, as the hymn says - His kingdom stretches from shore to shore. Acknowledging that the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof seems to be in stark contrast to living with the devastating consequences of man's

abuse of the earth's resources in pursuit of his own pleasure, or even destructive weather phenomena. Yet, devastating and unsurprising as these things are, as the whole of creation is affected by the Fall, a broken environment or any other form of creation malfunction does not limit God's dynamic rule to every other area except this.

Spiritual dynamics and seasons are addressed in a picture form when the hymn speaks of moons waxing and waning no more. This poetic phrase indicates the regular rhythms of moons coming into sharp focus and then hiding. It pictures something much more acute than a routine monthly occurrence, as the image projects a time when even this normal, secure feature of creation might end and result in an imagined devastation apocalyptic thinkers would have us anticipate. It's amazing to me how things like conspiracy theories, widely differing perspectives on the end times and a host of real challenges threatening to tear societies apart, have risen in the last year. While these spiritual dynamics result in fear, confusion and harm, we declare, even over *these things*, Jesus shall reign. How? In a practical way, by using us as His ground forces.

3. The MINDSET His reigning produces.

The spiritual dynamics I listed are not just cycles or seasons that repeat themselves, but are the things comprising the "darkness" Isaiah speaks about, that will cause even the kings of this world to come to the brightness of our light, seeking solutions. Why our light? Because we have been called and mandated to be the *visible* expression of the power of His *hidden* act of reigning and ruling. The power of persuasion that there really is another reality by which to live, another Kingly authority or kingdom rule we can confidently align with, is us, who follow Jesus wholeheartedly. The kingdom grows by *attraction*, but not necessarily attraction as in 'come to our events and see how different we are'. Rather, it is attraction as in witnessing us operate as salt and light in the darkness and seeing the alternative in action.

Abraham Kuyper, the Dutch theologian and Prime Minister famously stated: *There's not a square inch in the whole domain of human existence over which Christ, who is Lord over all, does not exclaim, 'Mine!'* Kuyper saw followers of Jesus being so convinced of the rulership and reign of God as a present yet hidden reality, that their only response was total submission to Him. They were also willing to be used by the King in the everyday, ordinary circumstances they faced, worked and lived in, as an opportunity to display that kingdom's life as an alternative to this broken worldly system. The result?

Watts adds another verse that says it all -

Blessings abound where'er
He reigns;
The prisoner leaps to lose
his chains,
The weary find eternal rest,
And all the sons of want are
blest.

Keith & Shelley



IMPACT THOUGHTS FROM OUR 50 YEAR JOURNEY

We commenced our last Kingdom Clip with these words:

“The seasons of our 50-year journey have taught us to live in the day while dreaming tomorrow. This COVID time has certainly been one of these, a time to reflect and focus”.

But we cannot dream tomorrow without looking back. How can we know an unchanging Father’s intention without knowing His original intent? We cannot understand The Book of Revelation unless we understand Genesis. This is the heart of the Kingdom message.

So, as we possibly move into a post COVID-19 season, let us not approach it with just the question of, how will what I do be blessed, but ask God what are You doing on earth to advance your Kingdom and how can our church, business, charity or indeed my life serve your purpose? Then written on our tombstone, when it is our time to go, would be as the New Testament remembered King David. “David, a man who served God in his generation then fell asleep.”

Brother Luke Ditewig of the Society of St. John the Evangelist in Boston notes:

“God’s mission is to restore and renew all of creation in a loving embrace. Jesus intercedes and invites our participation.”

Remember it is “Back to the Future.”

Tony & Marilyn



For any comments, suggestions and news, please do not hesitate to contact the COTN Virtual Resource Centre at communication@cotn.org

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