

All in All, Matthew 28:16-20

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Introduction

In his parting words to his disciples, Jesus Christ shows himself to be all in all. *All authority is given to me. Go out to all the nations, teach them to obey all the commandments, and I will be with you always, that is, in all times and in all places.* In this word of command and promise we find the three-fold Unity of God. All authority comes from the Father and is bestowed on the Son. The Son shall be seated in heaven and yet be present with his followers in all times and in all places, through the Holy Spirit. That we worship Father, Son and Holy Spirit as one Lord and one God is not something that we have merely deduced; Jesus Christ commands us to baptize into these names that are the single Name. The Church is set apart to worship Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and to carry the gospel in the Authority of the Father, the Word of the Son, and the Power of the Spirit. The Trinity is no mere doctrine: For gathered believers it is a description of our life in God.

Let us pray: Lord God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we ask you to renew our faith. Give us the confidence of your authority, the Word that reassures us of your grace, and the power that inspires our mission to the world, all in the name of Jesus. Amen.

1. All Authority

Psalm 2 affirms the promise that the God of Israel would support the anointed kings of Israel, that is, the Christ-Kings, of whom David was the first. In the language of verse 7 the Christ-King is called God's own Son. In the ancient world it was normal for kings to claim divine lineage from the gods. Psalm 2 paints a picture of how other kings in the ancient world

respond to the news that there is a King in Zion. They think of themselves as equals to the Christ-King, and by extension, of their own gods as equal to Israel's God. God laughs them to scorn and reassures the Christ-King that he rules by God's own authority in a covenant of faith.

Faith is a relationship. Anyone who is married or who has friends knows that faith is a real thing. When the name of a friend or a spouse is spoken, the relationship fills that name with power and meaning and priority. When my daughters call me "Dad," even when they say, "Daaad," there is power and meaning. Those who have been divorced or been estranged from a friend know the pain that comes from a breach or a loss of faith

Our relationship of faith with God is best described as like that between dependents in a household and the head of a household, presented in the Bible as between children and a Father. On God's side of faith is promises, and the power to keep them; and on our side faith, as is true of children, is trust and obedience. The Christ Kings in Zion broke faith with God. They stopped trusting, and they disobeyed, turning to other gods, breaking the commands, and ruling as tyrants rather than as stewards. God could not have kings ruling on his authority who were not keeping faith with him, so the Christ-kings lost the kingdom. By the time that Jesus lived, there had been no Christ-King in Zion for six hundred years. Yet many faithful Israelites who read the Bible, identified in Psalm 2 promises that, on God's side of faith, cannot finally be broken. Even though the Christ Kings broke faith by their disobedience, God would not break faith by breaking promises. God would raise up a descendant from David and restore the Kingdom.

Most assumed that the new Kingdom would roll time backwards to what things were like under David and Solomon. The truth, though, is that restoring a line of merely mortal kings would have subjected them to the same risks and failures and loss. Ultimately, God had to be the one to keep the faith on both sides of the relationship; God had to be faithful not only in the

keeping of the promises, but also in the trust obedience of the Christ-King. Therefore the Word of God became flesh; the Second Person in the Trinity, eternally begotten of God, embraced in flesh the Sonship of the Christ-King of Israel, and made that Sonship divine.

The authority that rests on Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ-King does not come to him by a decree of adoption, but by the shared substance of the divine. When Jesus Christ says to the apostolic community, “Go and make disciples of all nations,” that is the Word of God spoken by God. Christians worship Jesus because he is God.

2. All Nations

Psalm 2 speaks of all nations becoming the inheritance of Israel’s Christ-King. Ancient kings often boasted about ruling over lands where in reality they had little to no power. More recently the monarchs of England claimed sovereignty over France until George III gave up the claim in 1801. God does not make empty claims. The ends of the Earth are the possession of the Christ by a divine promise; The disciples are commissioned to go to all nations in light of this promise. At the time of Jesus many hoped that God would set up the Christ’s global empire by dashing the nations into pieces. But more is at stake than a human empire, just as more was at stake than putting a descendant of David on a long-vacant throne.

A one-world order under a King in Zion is attractive for many reasons, but it can never solve the real human problem, the problem of sin. I watched the new *Wonder Woman* with Hope and Hannah last week. Its lesson is that no heroes even with their great deeds can change the human heart. In the words of the American pilot and spy Steve Trevor, every person carries a spark of kindness, but each one also carries darkness. Our wars and cycles of violence cannot finally be pinned in blame to one person; the blame is in all of us. No Wonder Woman (DC) or Ironman (Marvel) can change human hearts by heroic deeds and raw power.

This darkness that the movie speaks of is human sin, each person's natural bent to put oneself ahead of the needs and dignity and lives of others. The darkness of our sin cannot finally be defeated by our real-life heroes, not even Navy Seals. No Christ-King, not even a divine one, can use power to force peace or coerce faith and expect to solve the problems that can only be solved by a change of heart. Darkness can never dispel darkness; only the light of God can dispel and scatter the darkness of sin.

Jesus the Christ-King is the light of God who shares this light by means of faith; he offers each of us a relationship with himself. The divine Son of God took up the Kingship of Israel for this purpose, to redeem sinners into the light of God for life in an eternal kingdom. Christ offers the light of faith as a gift, in freedom and truth and trust.

God is advancing the kingdom of eternal life so that one day God's light will shine in believers from all nations, peoples and languages, and God advances this Kingdom by diplomacy. Not negotiation, but diplomacy. God sends ambassadors to all nations to proclaim the victory of God's eternal kingdom, and to declare the terms of peace with God for eternal life. The first ambassadors were the apostles, and until the end of this age we who are the Church are called to continue the diplomacy of God. We are not called to conscript recruits into an army, but to baptize disciples. The Kingdom of Life and Light is a Kingdom of Peace and Freedom.

3. Always

This kingdom cannot be advanced by the world's weapons of darkness, it can only be advanced by the light of God. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus the Christ-King called his followers the light of the world. Now in his final words the Christ-King promises to be with his followers always, that is in all times and in all places, until the end of the age.

The promise of his presence means that his followers have the power of God at our fingertips and on the tips of our tongues. Being God's diplomats, we are called to display that power, in faith, before the world. The power of our faith brings redemption to sinners, it brings liberty to souls and consciences enslaved to tyrants, it brings healing to bodies, it reconciles relationships. All of that was true at the time of the apostles, the first ambassadors, and it remains true today, for Jesus is present with his diplomats in all times and in all places.

The nations fear the power of godly faith: Tyrants use terror to enslave the conscience. Markets feed the wants of sinners. Our legal system stakes its lucrative careers on broken relationships: broken contracts, broken marriages, crime. The nations are still hostile to the Christ-King, to the God of Israel, and to the laws of righteousness, just as they were in Psalm 2. In all the times and places that followers of Christ bring our gospel, we find strongholds of darkness. Being Kingdom ambassadors we have targets on our backs. God's People are made victims of a darkness that wants to snuff out the light. This commission in Matthew 28 must be understood in light of other promises and warnings made by Jesus, especially where he says that we who follow him will be carrying crosses in our world.

Christians are often tempted to fight back, to use the world's weapons of darkness. Sometimes Christians have put on swords and armor, thinking they would liberate the Holy Land. Or they praised God and passed the cannon balls, thinking they would liberate England from its crown and install a republic. Sometimes they have gone to the polls and the ballot boxes and the phone centers, hoping to compel this or that law to be either enacted or repealed. All of this together has only served to pull Christians into the cycles of violence and retribution, politics and power, compromises and short-cuts. We have given the world more and better excuses for making us its targets, we who are the followers of Jesus and diplomats of God.

Many evangelicals think of ourselves as being surrendered to God. If God strikes us on the cheek, we turn it. Our church has more cancer survivors than I can recall. You have come through the other side of your trials in faith and grace. That is the mark of a surrendered life, that prays with Job, “the Lord gives and the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.” However, many evangelicals cannot abide turning the other cheek to the world. When the world strikes at us, we desire to strike back: to call a Senator’s office, or to blog and tweet our resentments, or to conceal and carry into the sanctuaries of the Lord – that will never happen here as long as I’m serving. Even so, is there even one among us who is able to forgive the world seventy times seven insults a day?

Yet when we own in faith that God is with us always what looks like defeat in the world is victory in God’s sight. When we resort to the tactics and weapons of flesh, we lose the battle both in the flesh and in the spirit. When we allow the Holy Spirit to work through our hearts, hands, and tongues, we win the battle in the spirit and we triumph over the flesh. So we are called to put on the armor of God, to be clothed with the Spirit for our protection against the seventy-times seven daily slings and arrows of evil that the Devil hurls at us from out of the world’s darkness.

We do resist evil, we are in a fight, it is a battle. But our weapons are light, not darkness. Our weapons function by Word and Spirit, not violence; our weapons heal and restore, they do not harm and alienate. When we speak the truths of scripture we wield the sword of God’s Spirit, to convict sinners, to call them to repent, to proclaim them forgiven in the love of God. Our diplomatic mission in the power of God blasts away the darkness like no guns can.

Conclusion

Jesus Christ is all in all: He has all authority from his Father, his Word fills all the commandments, his Spirit is present in all ages and places. We are his diplomats; the Church is the embassy of God. We push into the world's darkness, carrying forward the light of God in the power of the Holy Spirit. God uses our mission to fulfill the promise that peoples from all nations to the ends of the Earth will become subjects of the Christ-King, and all the world will become his inheritance. Amen.