



The Anglican Parish of Whangaparaoa Peninsula  
3 Stanmore Bay Road,  
Whangaparaoa, Auckland, N.Z.  
[www.ststephenswgp.org.nz](http://www.ststephenswgp.org.nz)

## Sermon

### ***Kings, Queens and Kingdoms***

### ***Daniel 2:19-23; Acts 13:32-36; Matthew 6:9-14***

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It is in liminal moments like these, times which mark the passing of an era, that we look back to significant events which can help us through, and we look to the Lord to instruct us how to deal with what we face now.

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth's reach has been significant historically, politically, and culturally. One of her titles was "Defender of the Faith and Supreme Governor of the Church of England." She tried to live that out with her words and actions. I think particularly of her Christmas messages, which pointed people to the message of the Bible. In the message for the year 2000, her words were, "*Our beliefs are of fundamental importance. For me the teachings of Christ and my own personal accountability before God provide a framework in which I try to lead my life. I, like so many of you, have drawn great comfort in difficult times from Christ's words and example.*"

And there are other examples of her yearly witness to Christ. Likewise, her actions have provided an ongoing outworking of that title: she lent her name and influence as patroness of at least 600 charitable bodies.

As governments and world powers evolved, Britain's monarchy realized that its role had to be in duty and service to its people. How grateful we all must be that we belong to the Commonwealth. As such, we gave allegiance to a monarch whose character was shaped by Biblical truth. Just see how she matches up to Proverbs 31:

*"She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come.*

*She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue.*

*She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her, saying "Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all."*

*Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. Honour her for all that her hands have done, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate."*

There are many stories of encounters with her. My favourite is about the bishop Ian and I served with in England. He was "on duty" as Her Majesty's bishop, as they all take their turn. He was bending over a map or document of some sort next to the Queen and suddenly felt such warmth towards her that he wanted to put his arm around her as around a beloved aunt. "Oh, I'd better not!" he said to himself. "This is my Queen."

Her obituary in *The Telegraph* declared: "She proved herself one of the most effective and best-loved sovereigns the nation has known." In her own words, Queen Elizabeth said, "I know that the only way to live my life is to try to do what is right, to take the long view, to give of my best in all that the day brings, and to put my trust in God."

Among other notable things which she is reported to have said, is that when the time comes when crowns are cast before the throne of God, hers will be the first.

Crowns are symbols of honour and of the prestige. St Stephen's martyr's crown is depicted in our big stained glass window in the chapel by the seven sparkling jewels. Crown jewels!

When we study the history of the kings of Israel, we find that it was not God's idea that Israel have a king. The people demanded a king from God because they wanted to have someone they could see, to lead them into victory and help them fight their battles. God wanted to be their king, but they rejected Him. They couldn't see him. He wasn't impressive to the other nations. Even his name didn't boast of power and splendour. "I Am." ...What kind of a king has that sort of name? So God gave them a human king. After the failure of that first king, Saul, God appointed David. David was called "a man after God's own heart." He wasn't perfect. He made mistakes. But overall, his heart was for following God. He looked to God for direction, for guidance, for everything he needed. You can see this in Psalm 23 when David blesses God for being a good shepherd to him, thinking ahead of all his needs and providing them.

Looking at Psalm 23, we find that where God is in charge, there is peace, provision of everything that we need, protection from danger, and hope for the future. Then, in the New Testament, when we look at the prayer Jesus gave to his disciples when they asked, "Teach us to pray," we see the kingdom, the rulership of God shining all through it. This is how it goes: "Your kingdom (that is, your rulership) come, Father; your sovereign will be done. Provide for our bodily needs; provide for our spiritual needs; protect us from the dangers of spiritual warfare." This prayer asks God for all the benefits of living in His kingdom.

The disciples would just have had to look around them to see what the government of Rome was doing to see what a different picture that gave. We see it in our world still today. It makes me want to pray: *Lord, we've seen so many examples of power in the hands of cruel, dominating rulers. They use their power heartlessly and selfishly. Lord, let your kingdom come, here on earth!*

Many prophecies of Isaiah and other Biblical prophets describe the time after Jesus Christ's return when the Kingdom of God and its benefits spread around the globe. God's government and laws are for the good of those governed and produce peace and justice. The positive effects of obeying God's laws will snowball and increase without end! When you are under His lordship, and when He is in control of your life, that is the kingdom of God. It is just not a matter of getting the book of rules and regulations and following them to the letter in order to be acceptable to the king. Paul says in Romans 14, "The kingdom of God is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit".

When we pray and seek the kingdom of God, we are also praying for the rule and reign of that king in our lives. This is when Jesus is in charge. But it is not only feel-good benefits and nourishment that we receive, it is also his guidance on how practically to live an abundant, fulfilled life. In Matthew 6 v14, he follows the prayer instruction by saying, "*For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.*"

When we hold back on forgiving anyone who has wronged us or hurt us, we are not living under the rulership of God. We are living under the rulership of the law of rights and wrongs, the law of "He ought to have done that..." or, "She owed me more respect..."

Jesus says, "*Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.*" Matt 7:21

We step into the blessings and privileges of the Kingdom of God when we forgive from the heart. The result of our glad obedience to God is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. The word “righteousness” encompasses right relationships. It’s not just about being good and avoiding evil, but relating well, truthfully, lovingly, holding no grudges.

Not long ago, I was spoken to in a way that I did not like. I felt disrespected and vilified and accused doing something terrible. I tried to forgive. I chose to forgive. I spoke out my choice to forgive before the Lord. But it still hung around for months, with a bad feeling, and the hurt remained. Then the idea came to identify the problem as a form of holding IOUs. I wrote them out. “She ought to have known me better than that. She owed me respect. She was returning evil for good. She owes me good for the good I have done for her.” I faced the hurt of it all and then tore up the piece of paper I had written them on. I said forcefully, “I tear up these IOUs! I forgive it all in Jesus’ name! I release her from my judgement!”

With the physical action of tearing up the paper, throwing it away and passionately declaring forgiveness, that seemed to break the power of it over me and I have all-but-forgotten the offences. It no longer eats me up inside and I am free to relate rightly to the person. I am so thankful to the Lord for the righteousness, joy and peace of living in his kingdom, allowing his rulership over my emotions and thoughts about that situation. I am living in the kingdom, the rulership of God.

Jesus modelled far greater forgiveness as he chose the way of the cross. He is our King, and our pattern.

Now today, as we mourn, we are sad. We have lost our Queen; but we have gained a King. We have lost a woman who knew how to serve and how to model graciousness, kindness and strength. We have gained King Charles, who has seen the fruit of his mother’s way of leading. May he gain wisdom thereby. May we be mindful of the Lord’s command in St Paul’s first letter to Timothy that “*petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people – for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.*” (1 Tim 2:1-2)

Let us do that now.