

“Long live the king!” Did you know that comes from the Bible? At God’s command, Samuel, the last of the judges, anointed Saul as the first King of Israel. When he was brought before the people they shouted: “**Long live the king!**” (1 Sam 10:24). Interestingly a few verses later, when Saul returns to his home, we are told that “**some worthless fellows said, ‘How can this man save us?’** And they despised him and brought him no present.” (1 Sam 10:27). How can Saul save us? The men who said this sinned in despising the authority God put over them, but in another sense, they were right in asking that question. Saul, you may recall, fell into unbelief. He sinned against God, he tried to murder David on multiple occasions. He tried to conjure the dead, and his end was not pleasant. Saul, in whom the people of Israel hoped, the great and first king, proved a failure. How can this man save us? He can’t.

The acclamation “Long live the king” comes up again when David’s son, Absalom, tried to overthrow David as king. David flees for his life, humiliated. Absalom enters Jerusalem, and is hailed with these words (2 Sam 16:16). But Absalom’s dream of being king in place of his father end with Absalom’s death, and David’s inconsolable wailing. It comes up again, when an Israelite sets himself up as king when David is in old age and sickly. The words are said when Solomon is anointed king by Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet. At Solomon’s anointing as king the trumpets sound “**and all the people said, ‘Long live King Solomon!’ And all the people went up after him, playing on pipes, and rejoicing with great joy, so that the earth was split by their noise**” (1 Kgs 1:39-40). Yet even Solomon, the wisest of men, who ruled over a kingdom greater than his father David, and who reigned in peace, fell into idolatry. And like Saul, Absalom his brother, and David his father, like all sinners, Solomon died.

The subjects of kings and rulers pray for health, peace, prosperity. Those who are blessed with good rulers pray for their reign or service to have no end. It is good and godly to pray for our leaders. But look at how many royal graves dot our history. Yes even Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Everlasting, will close her eyes in death. Even as we pray for those in authority as God commands, He also admonishes us in the Psalm: “**Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation. When his breath departs he returns to the earth; on that very day his plans perish**” (Psalm 146:3-4). The pleas of the people cannot keep kings, good or bad, alive.

In this county we’re not big on kings. Even when your guy is in office the government is still the butt of jokes. No, we rather face the far greater temptation of self-rule, self-love, self-idolatry. Eat, drink, and be merry! Gratify the desires of the flesh in drunkenness and sensuality. Buy more. Amass more stuff and stuff the face. Exalt yourself and your opinion so that you cannot possibly avoid quarreling with and jealousy over your neighbor who has done exactly the same with himself. Long live the king! Repent. If human history does not instruct you in the fate of kings, be warned by God’s Word. Cry out “Long live the king” all you want, it will not, it cannot, keep you alive.

But God’s Word speaks of another King: “**Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold your King’**”! Here comes David’s Son, the long-promised King. But we need not cry out, “Long live the King!” He does. He lives. This King has not come in worldly pomp and splendor. He rides no stallion of war, but a humble beast. He rides into Jerusalem, the kingly city, as not just king but as sacrifice. This King doesn’t live off His subjects, He lives and He dies for them, for you, that you might live off of Him. That is a kingly rule unlike all others. That is what it means for this King to come. He comes in the name of the Lord, with the authority of His Father: God in the flesh, to lay down His life and to take it up again not for Himself or His own glory, but for you. To glorify, to save, you.

We do not cry “Long live the king!” We do not plead for the king’s life. We do not drink to His good health. We cry out instead, “Hosanna,” save us now! And our King does just that. He comes to save. He fulfills that cry as He bids you drink not just to your health, but to eternal life as He bestows His righteousness and salvation upon you. He delivers you from the works of darkness and clothes you in the armor of light. This King rules in power for you as He guards and protects you. This King rules in grace over you, where He bids you live not in terror of Him or under the burden of your sins, but in the peace of God which you have through Him. This is what He bids you awaken to. Keep watch in this, believing this. This is the King who comes now to save. He comes even now, His body rides humbly no longer on a donkey, but on bread and His blood in borne by wine. And we will rule with Him in glory when He comes again, to bestow His life fully on all who are members of His eternal kingdom.

Come, Lord Jesus! Come quickly!