

# The Lord is King

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Date: 29 December 2002

Preacher: Brian Westaway

[ 0 : 00 ] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 29th of December 2002.

The preacher is Brian Westaway. His sermon is entitled The Lord is King. It is based on Psalm 99. The psalmists cry out, The Lord is King, the Lord reigns. Rogued in majesty, the writer of Psalm 93 declares.

Let the earth rejoice, trumpets the writer of Psalm 97. Let the peoples tremble, we hear in the psalm read for us this morning, Psalm 99.

The Lord is King, the Lord reigns. What an enormous claim. How can the psalmist, how can you and I assert the Lord is King in the face of the political and social reality of the world in which we live?

[ 1 : 07 ] In a few days it will be 2003. As we enter the new year we enter it with greater fear and anxiety and uncertainty than I can remember. The powers of evil seem to hold sway in the four corners of the earth.

The threat of terrorism and war hangs heavy in the air. I was surprised, I don't know about yourself, but I was surprised and shocked when on the news broadcast the other night I was encouraged to continue to prepare my new year festivities in a way that was not fearful of being under attack, under terrorist attack.

There's an edginess, there's an unease that I haven't experienced before. The Middle East continues to smoulder. The short-lived peace, even in the place of Jesus' birth, was shattered within days by the rattle of tanks, the sound of gunfire.

Millions of people around the world daily have their lifeblood sucked away under the burden of poverty and disease. And I'm perplexed at the sight of governments that continue in their selfish and self-serving behaviour, in many cases corrupt and fearing no one, least of all God.

The Lord is King. The Lord reigns. An enormous claim in the face of the world in which men and women claim their own autonomy, the right to be in control of their own destiny, their own life, beholden to no one, under the authority of no one but themselves.

[ 2 : 55 ] In a world in which so many believe there are no absolute truths or norms, who base their actions and behaviour on what feels good or what they believe to be right or good for them.

The notion of a king who has authority is a stark contrast to such lifestyle and beliefs. And the situation was surely a little different in the time of the psalmist.

A man from a small nation amidst the rich and powerful nations of his time. Nations who sought to conquer and rule. Nations who gave allegiance to all manner of pagan gods who had no time for this Yahweh, the God of Israel.

How could he cry out so confidently, The Lord is King. The Lord reigns. Our reading this morning provides some of the answer.

I encourage you to turn with me to Psalm 99. You can find it on page 480 in the Bibles in our seats. But let me first pray for us.

[ 4 : 15 ] Lord, please touch our hearts and minds this morning and bring us to worship as you teach us about your kingship and lordship over your creation and over our lives.

Amen. A sense of God's power and authority and majesty spring from the page as I read this psalm. The Lord is King.

Let the peoples tremble. He sits enthroned upon the cherubim. Let the earth quake. The Lord is great in Zion. He is exalted over all the peoples.

Let them praise your great and awesome name. Holy is he. Mighty king, lover of justice, you have established equity. You have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob.

Extol the Lord our God. Worship at his footstool. He is holy. Moses and Aaron were among his priests. Samuel also was among those who called on his name.

[ 5 : 22 ] They cried out to the Lord and he answered them. He spoke to them in the pillar of cloud. They kept his decrees and the statutes that he gave them. O Lord our God, you answered them.

You are a forgiving God to them, but an avenger of their wrongdoings. Extol the Lord our God and worship at his holy mountain. For the Lord our God is holy.

A great psalm of enthronement. Of enthronement of God, Yahweh, as king in the psalmist's life. And in the world that the psalmist knew. In the face of all that was going on around him. It hearkens back to the history of Israel.

It hearkens back to looking at that history that showed this Yahweh, this God that had taken them from bondage of slavery in Egypt. That had brought them to the promised land.

[ 6 : 27 ] That God had been faithful. And God had been able to do what he promised. That he was willing to do what he promised. That God's story had been a story of victory on their behalf.

And they declared as they came forth, as Moses recounted this story, the Lord will reign forever and ever. The confidence is based in the history, in what God has done for his people.

It's a song of assurance and hope. It's a call to praise and worship. The Lord indeed is king, cries the psalmist.

He knows this from what he has done in the past. His goodness to them. He's freeing them. The defeat of enemies on their behalf.

And the giving of a good and prosperous land. And the nations about know that this God is sovereign. For he has seen what God has done for his people.

[ 7 : 37 ] They have seen what God has done. And his care and concern for Israel shines forth into the world round and about. This king is not just any king.

No, he's the king of kings. He's the Lord of lords. And the appropriate response is cosmic trembling. For this king and his reign shakes loose all other kingship and all other governance. Overrides the machinations and the delusions of others who would hold that they are in control.

There is no other that compares. This is the one from whom all others throughout history have derived their authority.

The one before whom all others will one day give an account. Tremble before this king for he holds the whole world in his hands.

[ 8 : 44 ] Give to him the awe and the wonder that is his due. What a source of hope and expectation for those who love and follow him.

For this says that while the powers of the day of man's sinful rebellion may seem to hold sway for a time, this is not absolute or eternal.

What is certain is that the Lord will reign forever. That he will shower mercy on his people. That all will be called to give an account and that justice will be done.

This is a mighty king. This mighty king, however, does not stand aloof from his creation and his people. He is present among his people.

In the words of verse 1, enthroned upon the cherubim, the mercy seat within the holy of holies of the temple of the people, the place from which he would speak and commune with his Old Testament people.

[ 9 : 55 ] Yet he is also exalted over not just his people but over all people, creator and sustainer of all there is. Present in his temple, yes, but not constrained by it.

Reigning over his creation. But alongside this we see in verse 4, alongside this presence with his people, we see the abrasive elements of transformation.

Mighty king, lover of justice, you have established equity, you have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob.

God's reign brings not with it the normal trappings and hallmarks of kingship. Mighty success in battle, palaces and opulence, these are not what are held up.

What are held up are the characteristics of transformation. Transformation in people's lives and the social order. Justice and right behaviour and right relationships are the fruits and character of this reign.

[ 11 : 10 ] Fairness and equity are hallmarks of his rule and kingdom. This king has revealed himself.

This king has revealed himself to his people. Moses, Aaron and Samuel are giants of the Old Testament faith.

They interceded for the people of Israel. They interceded on behalf of a sinful people on the basis of God's faithful promises to show them mercy.

And the Lord responded faithfully and mercifully, not on the basis of any merit, but purely out of his love and his mercy.

His unmerited favour that he chose to show and shower upon his people. He spoke to them in the pillar of cloud, the psalmist reminds them.

[12:12] The image of the pillar that went before the people in their wilderness travelling as they escaped from Pharaoh and from the slavery of Egypt, leaving bondage behind them.

He spoke to them through the law that he gave. Not some set of arbitrary rules and regulations, but a means of living in right relationship with God and so experiencing his blessings.

And almost surprisingly, we're told in verse 7, they kept his decrees and the statutes that he gave them. Not necessarily completely or always, but distinctively as the chosen people of God.

to whom he'd chosen to reveal himself. The people that the nations looked upon. The people that the Lord used to be a witness to the other nations as they were obedient to him and followed the laws and statutes given to them as their way of life.

the blessing was great, but so too was the responsibility. And in answering his people, we see both the God who forgives and the God who punishes.

[13:37] Verse 8, O Lord our God, you answered them. You are forgiving to them, but an avenger of their wrongdoings. Obedience and repentance brought blessing, while rebellion against God and doing what is wrong in his eyes brought punishment.

The psalmist reminds his readers that God desires to show mercy, his unwarranted favour to all people, but is likewise compelled to punish wrongdoing as he is a just God.

These characteristics of mercy and justice have often been argued to be in conflict. However, that understanding is blown away by this and similar passages that describe the character of God as both merciful and just, each an expression of his boundless love for his people and his creation.

And throughout the psalm there is a linking phrase that continues to arise. The basis for God's action in all of this is grounded in one preeminent characteristic, namely that he is holy.

There is no other like him, completely other from everything else, completely distinct, completely good, completely loving, completely merciful, completely just.

[15:08] It is this holiness that requires that there be a solution to human rebellion, that there be a kingship that is established over and above the kingdoms of this world.

It's a kingdom that Jesus says has come near in Mark as Jesus walks amongst the people. It's a kingdom that we cry out for as we pray the Lord's Prayer.

Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. It is a holiness that requires there be a solution.

It is a holiness that is shared as believers put faith and hope in him and in doing so receive all the blessings that flow from relationship with him.

Peace, joy, forgiveness and life itself. In short, it is God's holiness that underpins the very life of his people and their relationship with him.

[16:23] And so his people are to in the words of verse 3 praise his great and awesome name and in those words from verses 5 and 9 to extol, to exalt, to praise highly the Lord our God, to indeed worship him.

This call to praise and worship this call is a praise to praise and worship him as a whole life response. It is expressed not only in words and song and music but in obedient lives of service to God and to each other and the nations.

I cannot read this psalm without seeing its ultimate fulfilment in the person and reign of Jesus Christ.

So reflect back on the past celebration of this last week of Jesus' birth, his incarnation, God come to live amongst us. As I look forward to his ministry, to his death and resurrection and with wonder and awe to his exaltation and rule at God's right hand, I see again the threads of assurance and transformation of God's revelation of himself to us, of forgiveness and punishment as seen in the time of the psalmist but now complete in the person of Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us.

as the people of Israel look to the victory won by God on their behalf which freed them from slavery and brought them freedom, forgiveness and restored relationship with the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords so too believers today look to the Lord Jesus for life.

[ 18 : 17 ] For those who believe are made holy by his blood that was shed for them and so they are able to come into the presence of God not fearful but with exultant joy and celebration and declaring him as King of Kings and Lord of Lords who is merciful to those who put their faith and trust in him.

There will come a time when all the earth will acknowledge Jesus as King when there will be no more pain and suffering and where people will worship him forever but even now believers belong to a new kingdom where the Lord even now is King surely it is this perspective and the certainty of seeing God's promises fulfilled that gives rise to exuberant praise and worship and declaration of Jesus as Lord.

no longer are believers called to worship at his holy mountain but in spirit and in truth in the temple that is Jesus who lives within us by his holy spirit.

God has revealed himself in the word made flesh Jesus Lord and rescuer but also judge who we can know and encounter in his living word the Bible and through his holy spirit.

How do we praise and worship the king? Is it just with voices with music and song?

[ 20 : 05 ] Surely not. Surely our praise and worship is with our very lives. declaring the wonder of his rescue of us the wonder of his love the wonder of his compassion of his mercy declaring his justice that equity and righteousness will prevail declaring to others the wonder of his mercy and grace transformed ourselves and transforming within a world that so cries out for transformation.

Passionate for justice passionate for the things that Christ was passionate for in his ministry passionate for the things that God has always been passionate for throughout the ages.

seeking to grow in our relationship with him bringing our requests to the one who is able to answer to answer all requests brought to him through Jesus whoever lives to intercede for us.

Are you and I passionate about our praise and worship of the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords? Are we committed to justice and equity and right behaviour and right action and right relationship which is so dear to the heart of God?

Are we desirous and committed to growing and maturing in our relationship with him through reading and meditating upon his word and through bringing our requests to him?

[ 22 : 05 ] The desires and the pressures of this world will take us in other directions but the Lord of the church shows the way of a transformed life through his sacrificial and loving service and asks each of us to follow to put our faith and our trust in him and follow where he leads.

The Lord is King. Let the peoples tremble. He sits enthroned upon the cherubim. Let the earth quake.

The Lord is great in Zion. He is exalted over all the peoples. Let them praise your great and awesome name. Holy is he, mighty king, lover of justice.

You have established equity. You have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob. Extol the Lord our God. Worship at his footstool.

Holy is he. Moses and Aaron were among his priests. Samuel also was among those who called on his name. They cried to the Lord and he answered them.

[ 23 : 19 ] He spoke to them in the pillar of cloud. They kept his decrees and the statutes that he gave them. O Lord our God. You answered them.

You are a forgiving God to them but an avenger of their wrongdoings. Extol the Lord our God and worship at his holy mountain. For the Lord our God is holy.

May ever we bring praise and honour and glory and our worship to him, the King of Kings and the Lord of lords.

Amen.