

The Highest of Earth's Kings

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Preacher: Danny Saunders

[0 : 00] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 12th of January 2003. The preacher is Danny Saunders.

His sermon is entitled, The Highest of Earth's Kings, and is based on Psalm 89. Dear Lord, thanks that we can meet together today, this morning, as your people.

I pray that you would teach us now and help us through this psalm together. Be with us as we look to Psalm 89 and all the great promises and things that you reveal to us there.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, this is a great psalm for us to explore because it takes in the whole sweep of biblical history.

There are a number of changes of mood within the psalm, so it covers all the great themes of the Bible. It's a royal messianic psalm. It's a creation psalm, a lament over suffering and pain.

[1 : 04] The psalm speaks of God's promises, salvation history, and it's also a hymn of praise. It's all here for us to explore. I think the main theme that the psalm develops is that no matter what our circumstances, we can trust our future to God because God keeps his promises.

We can trust our future to God because God keeps his promises. Earlier last year, we took the Holy Trinity Youth Group to the IMAX Theatre.

And before we went into the movie, we all received our 3D glasses. We were watching a 3D movie. And I don't know if you've ever seen a 3D movie, but I was tempted to sort of take the glasses off and see what it looked like without the glasses on.

And, of course, without the glasses on, the screen was just fuzzy and out of focus. But with them on, there was a wonderful three-dimensional film to look at. In some ways, the New Testament, and specifically the personal work of Jesus, are our glasses that allow us to see clearly and explore all the treasures of the Old Testament.

Because it's in Jesus that we see the Old Testament fulfilled. Another way to look at it might be that my friend has a whole book of those magic eye pictures that were very popular a few years ago.

[2 : 20] The ones where you sort of look just off centre or sort of go a bit cross-eyed or something. And then this wonderful three-dimensional image just is revealed. It might be helpful to look at this psalm in this way.

On its own, it speaks clearly about God and His relationship with His people. It's a clear picture of these things. But if we look a bit closer, maybe like a three-dimensional image or film, we can see that the psalm also speaks strongly to us as God's people here today.

Well, the psalm starts off as a hymn of praise to God, remembering God's covenants or promises. From verse 1, Well, the psalm was probably originally sung at festivals.

The community was reminded of its duty to sing songs of praise for God's grace and faithfulness and to remember the promises that He'd given to His people. They did this to preserve the truth about God from generation to generation.

In these first verses, the covenant with David made by God is singled out. The psalm looks back to the promises given to David in 2 Samuel 7, where God says through the prophet Nathan that He will raise up David's offspring and establish His kingdom forever.

[4 : 03] God will be a father to him and He shall be a son to God. God's love won't be removed from Him and His house, kingdom and throne will be established forever. Well, what a great start to the psalm.

We go back in time to the promises and prophecies concerning a ruler of Israel. Our psalmist sits in hope and declares with certainty God's love and faithfulness.

And this sets up the rest of the psalm. As we shall see, the psalmist goes on to recount these promises in great detail. And this is then contrasted with the bitter lament that comes later.

But before we get carried away with this dramatic plot, we must make sure that our focus is correct. We can sit with the writer and look back in biblical history. We can look at the present circumstances of the psalmist as he remembers these great promises and then laments over the current position of the people of Israel.

But we also have to look forward through the lens of the New Testament to see that these promises to David are fulfilled in Jesus. Well, at Christmas we reflected on the birth of Jesus.

[5 : 12] The angel Gabriel is sent to Mary and tells her that she will bear a son. In Luke's Gospel, He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David.

He will reign over the house of Jacob forever. And of his kingdom there will be no end. So, in the space of four verses, we've already taken in a great portion of biblical history.

We've looked back in time to the promises to David and then fought in time as we see the fulfilment of the very things of which the psalmist speaks. Well, in response to God's great faithfulness and love, the writer wants us to sing to God, proclaim and declare with his mouth all that God has done. And this side of the cross, we see the fulfilment of these promises. So, this should give us even more reason to sing God's praises. Well, in Australia today, fans worship and praise their sporting heroes.

And this is in recognition of what they've accomplished, what they've achieved. They have a great record and so they're given great praise. We saw this in the recent Sydney test. Steve Waugh, under immense pressure for his captaincy, walked out on the ground to a standing ovation.

[6 : 29] He'd equaled Alan Borda's record for the most test appearances ever. And during that innings, he went on to become the third person ever to reach 10,000 runs. And then he scored a century in really hard circumstances and under immense pressure.

So, he was making history. The crowd was going wild. They were cheering him on, calling his name, standing to applaud him and even bowing in reverence. I was watching on the TV and I even saw a sign that said, In Steve we trust.

So, he had a great record and he was given great praise. The words of the psalmist here are sort of like that of a commentator recounting the great deeds of God.

The original audience, and now us, are reminded of the great record of God. We're to recall all these great things that God has done and said that make him worthy of our praise. So, verses 5 to 18 expand on these first two verses.

The psalmist rises to give God a standing ovation. He recounts the greatness of God and reminds the audience of reasons to praise God. So, from verse 5, Let the heavens praise your wonders, O Lord, your faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones.

[7 : 44] For who in the skies can be compared to the Lord? Who among the heavenly beings is like the Lord? A God feared in the council of the holy ones, great and awesome above all that are around him.

O Lord God of hosts, who is as mighty as you, O Lord? Your faithfulness surrounds you. You rule the raging of the sea when its waves rise. You still them. You crushed Rahab like a carcass. You scattered your enemies with your mighty arm. The heavens are yours. The earth also is yours. The world and all that is in it, you have founded them. The north and the south, you created them. Tabor and Hermon joyously praise your name. You have a mighty arm. Strong is your hand. High your right hand. Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne.

Steadfast love and faithfulness go before you. So the call to praise God is based on his sovereignty and the power and his power in the universe and what God has done that reveals these things and this greatness.

[8 : 44] And so the psalmist talks about the mighty acts of God in creation and in history. We look back further than David to see the works of God even from creation. The crushing of Rahab in verse 10 speaks of God's conquest over his enemies or the powers of chaos.

Rahab here is a symbol of chaos taking the form of Egypt at the Exodus and the primeval sea raging in rebellion as described in verse 9. Verses 5 to 14 tell us that God has imposed his will and his order on the world so that it becomes the place where he reveals himself.

The whole of the creation rejoicing is the echo of God's mighty revelation. And so even the highest mountains in Israel Tabor and Hermon and all the world from north to south every point of the compass hail the creator.

All God's creation stands as a sign of God's greatness and power and gives us reason to sing God's praises. If we remember all that God has done for us and sing true praise to God then we should be a people that are happy and full of joy that comes to us from the Holy Spirit and from our Lord that gives us strength.

As it says in verses 15 to 18 Happy are the people who know the festal shout who walk, O Lord, in the light of your countenance. They exult or rejoice in your name all day long and extol or praise your righteousness.

[10:11] For you are the glory of their strength. By your favour our horn is exalted for our strength is replenished. For our shield belongs to the Lord our King to the Holy One of Israel.

Well just as verses 5 to 18 expanded on verse 1 and 2 the first two verses now the psalmist uses verses 19 to 37 to expand on the promises that are first recalled in verses 3 and 4.

So then you, that is God in verse 19 spoke in a vision to your faithful one that's Nathan the prophet and said I have set the crown on one who is mighty I have exalted one chosen from the people I have found my servant David with my holy oil I have anointed him my hand shall always remain with him my arm also shall strengthen him the enemy shall not outwit him the wicked shall not humble him I will crush his foes before him and strike down those who hate him my faithfulness and steadfast love shall be with him and in my name his horn shall be exalted I will set his hand on the sea and his right hand on the rivers he shall cry to me you are my father my God and the rock of my salvation I will make him the firstborn the highest of the kings of the earth forever I will keep my steadfast love for him and my covenant with him will stand firm I will establish his line forever and his throne as long as the heavens endure if his children forsake my law and do not walk according to my ordinances if they violate my statutes and do not keep my commandments then I will punish their transgression with the rod and their iniquity with scourges but I will not remove from him my steadfast love or be false to my faithfulness

I will not violate my covenant or alter the word that went forth from my lips once and for all I have sworn to my holiness I will not lie to David his line shall continue forever and his throne endure before me like the sun it shall be established forever like the moon an enduring witness in the skies so in verse 19 the psalmist turns once again to God and reminds him of his promises to David through the prophet Nathan the psalmist speaks with conviction and certainty not only did God promise these things but God's promises are so certain even if Israel disobeys these promises will remain God's will and grace are also found in these promises God's sovereign will stands firm and won't be shaken even if the Israelites as the bearer of these promises cease to walk in obedience to God and must be punished this is what is referred to in verses 30 to 33 well this is God's amazing grace at work human disobedience and sin does not put an end to God's love but is the very reason for God's love and grace found in forgiveness he may discipline and even punish his children but God will not remove his love towards his people

God remains faithful to his promises even if humans are unfaithful and as we sit reading this psalm today we know that these promises are true we don't have the problem of the Israelites waiting anxiously for the realisation of these promises this side of the cross the promises the psalm recalls have been fulfilled we know that Jesus is anointed by God's spirit descending on him at his baptism and by his own words when he declares that the spirit of the Lord is upon him and has anointed him to bring the good news to the poor this fulfills verses 19 to 20 we know that Jesus withstands the temptations of the devil he is command of the forces of nature he performs miracles walks on water and calms the stormy seas this fulfills verses 21 to 25 we see Jesus praying to God his father in the garden of Gethsemane and in John's gospel Jesus declares that all his authority comes from God his father this fulfills verse 26

[14:17] Colossians chapter 1 tells us that Jesus is the firstborn of all creation all things have been created in him and through him and for him Jesus is also the firstborn in the sense that Jesus is the first to die and be resurrected as John explains in Revelation Jesus is the firstborn of the dead and the ruler of the kings of the earth for this fulfills verse 27 to 29 we also have salvation and redemption in Jesus this means that through the death and resurrection of Jesus we have the forgiveness of our sins and so the grace that is shown to the people of Israel in verses 30 to 34 is the same grace that is completed finished and made perfect by Jesus' death on the cross taking our sins and giving us forgiveness well this side of the cross we're not like the Israelites waiting anxiously for their Messiah we know that all the promises in verse 19 to 37 are fulfilled in Jesus so this develops the main theme that I spoke of earlier we can trust our future to God because in Jesus

God keeps his promises we can trust our future to God because in Jesus God keeps his promises so as we return to the psalm we can see that the scene has been set the background the history the past it's all been reviewed and recounted the Israelites know where they stand they are the people of God they have their promises their God is the mighty creator of the universe they are his people established forever enduring and certain the psalmist has built up this great picture for us of God's promises and power but this is also the turning point if we look now to verse 38 we see that the psalmist cries out in anguish to God you have made all these promises but now you have spurned and rejected him you are full of wrath against your anointed you have renounced the covenant with your servant you have defiled his crown in the dust you have broken through all his wars you have laid his strongholds in ruins all who pass by plunder him he has become the scorn of his neighbours you have exalted the right hand of his foes you have made all his enemies rejoice moreover you have turned back the edge of his sword and you have not supported him in battle you have removed the scepter from his hand and held his throne to the ground you have cut short the days of his youth you have covered him with shame the psalm suddenly turns dark in lament and despair that contrasts with the joyful picture created earlier of God's promises and power so this is a very important but in verse 38 the psalmist is saying

God you promised all these things but look where we are now look what's happening to us today the psalmist sees not grace but wrath not election but rejection the Israelites have suffered a great military defeat and they're taken off in slavery it seems that God has abandoned them and given them up to their gloating enemies but what a contradiction the psalmist has pointed us towards the glory of Israel chosen by a sovereign God to bear the promises of God the expectation was that the line of David would continue forever the psalmist believes in the sovereignty of God he has faith in the promises but now he is vexed and dismayed as he surveys the scene around him God said he would not remove his love he won't violate the covenant God doesn't alter what comes from his mouth he won't lie to David God swore on his very character what more could he do but now we are spurned and rejected punished by God our lands lie in ruins we are tormented and mocked by our enemies

God has not supported us in battle he's covered us with shame and we are abandoned by our God well there is despair here of the psalmist is very real the problem this psalm presents is that the psalmist knows God's sovereignty and promises but this is now set against the reality of Israel's rejection and suffering the psalmist has no answer for the situation of his people and he cries out to God in dismay what makes it even worse for the psalmist is he sees God's hand at work it's almost like he's accusing God of breaching the covenant he says you did this you did this he's accusing God of being the power at work in this and that's what is so hard for him to take he sees God's sovereignty and power at work well however this side of the cross we see the contradiction and dismay of the psalmist resolved the suffering and rejection of Israel is a foreshadowing of the redemptive suffering of Jesus on the cross the cross isn't this great defeat that we see here but the means of God's great victory and salvation for his people the events of the crucifixion are very similar to those described in verses 38 to 45 the soldiers stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him and after twisting some thorns into a crown they put it on his head they put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him and mocked him saying hail king of the Jews they spat on him and took the reed and struck him on the head after mocking him they stripped him of the road and put his own clothes on him they led him away to crucify him those who passed by derided and taunted him the chief priests the scribes and elders mocked him saying he is the king of Israel let him come down from the cross now and we will believe in him he trusts in God let God deliver him now if he wants to for he said

I am God's son the great miracle and mystery of the cross is that it completes God's plan of salvation beyond any human expectations the contradiction of Psalm 89 is resolved what the Jews did not understand is that not only will the Messiah be their king but he will also be the suffering servant that is described here in verses 38 to 45 this side of the cross we acknowledge and believe that Jesus is truly the Messiah the true Israelite the true king of God's people in David's line but also the suffering servant who would take on our sin so that we could be forgiven the paradox of the cross is that it looks like God's enemies have won as described in verses 41 and 42 but at the cross God's enemies were defeated the promises were fulfilled the cross is the victory for which the psalmist yearns the suffering servant that died to take on our sin is also the firstborn of verse 27 who was raised to life by God to show that the enemies of sin and death had no power over him we have all like sheep gone astray we have all turned to our own way but if we put our faith in the

victory of Jesus on the cross then we can also die and rise with Christ our sin can be forgiven and God will not remove his love from us as we seek to live as his children the promises are fulfilled in Jesus and those who put their trust in Jesus are the beneficiaries of God's faithfulness love grace and forgiveness that are described in this psalm and that are fully realized in the victory of the cross we can trust our future to God because in Jesus

[22 : 18] God keeps his promises if we look now to the remainder of the psalm we see that although the psalmist is in despair and dismay the rejection of God he hasn't let go of his faith in this moment of crisis so he cries out to God in verse 46 how long oh Lord will you hide yourself forever how long will your wrath burn like fire remember how short my time is for what vanity you have created all mortals who can live and never see death who can escape the power of Sheol Lord where is your steadfast love of old which by your faithfulness you swore to David remember oh Lord how your servant is taunted how I bear in my bosom the insults of the peoples with which your enemies taunt oh Lord with which they taunted the footsteps of your anointed the psalmist longs for the restoration of Israel his prayer is impatient and urgent as he considers the suffering of his people and the end of his life he prays that God will remember once more his covenant with David how long oh Lord how long will you let this go on will you hide yourself forever well how often do you feel like this that God has abandoned you and left you on your own have you ever been faced with some terrible suffering and wondered why God would let this happen well I think these feelings are very real for us our faith is tested by God and sometimes we can feel the passionate despair and grief that is found in this psalm we can feel like God has abandoned us and left us to fend for ourselves well unlike the Israelites we're not waiting for the covenants to be fulfilled or for the restoration of Israel and the defeat of its enemies but we are waiting for the completion of

God's plans and the final reign and rule of Christ and his kingdom so we do ask this same question how long oh Lord but to a different context and time we know that our world is fallen and is in decay when we see suffering and pain illness and disease in the world when our friends and family get sick and die we're in despair and grief and we ask how long oh Lord when we see medical missionaries killed churches burned and Christians persecuted we begin to understand the lament of the psalmist has God rejected his people and we ask how long oh Lord when we struggle with our own sin when we're tormented by our inner conflict with our flesh and sexuality when we see our own selfishness our greed and pride when our priorities are far from God's we cry how long oh Lord so the application of this psalm for us is a call for perseverance and trust in the certainty of God's promises like the psalmist we are to recall and recount all the promises of God to us so that we can hold on to our faith and persevere to the end we can trust our future to God because in Jesus God keeps his promises we trust in the promises of Jesus that he will come again in glory that he has gone to prepare a place for us a place where God will dwell with us where he will wipe every tear from our eyes where there is no more death or mourning or crying or pain we trust the words of scripture that say that those who suffer for being Christian have been given great honour that they should glorify God because they bear his name we groan inwardly as we await the full redemption of our bodies and our glory in Christ we long for the creation to be set free from its bondage to decay but we trust that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Jesus that our salvation depends on God's grace not our own effort we remember that in hope we are saved and so we wait patiently for Christ's glory to be revealed we can trust our future to God because in Jesus God keeps his promises this side of the cross we know there is a sequel to Psalm 89 the promises are fulfilled in Jesus we know that the people of God have not been rejected but the redemption does come in the form of Jesus dying on the cross and rising again to defeat sin and death yet even though we have this salvation we can share the psalmist's despair at the state of the world we can ask how long oh Lord as we wait for the return of Jesus so we should recall the promises of the New Testament we as Christians are witnesses to the fact that God does keep his word and so we have good reason and confidence to trust that Jesus will return that everything will be made new and that God's sovereign will will be accomplished in your experiences of suffering and pain when you look out at our world today it may seem like God is silent and powerless but Psalm 89 teaches us that this is not the case at all in Jesus all things are fulfilled and accomplished we can trust our future to God because in Jesus

God keeps his promises Psalm 89 teaches us that no matter how bad things get no matter how much despair anguish or even persecution no matter how silent God may seem he is true to his promises his love is established forever his faithfulness is as firm as the heavens he is in control

God does hear our prayers and he will answer when he hears the people cry how long oh Lord let's pray dear father god we thank you that you have created the world that all creation stands as a sign of your greatness we thank you that way back you made promises to Abraham and David fulfilled in Jesus we thank you for your grace that allows us as sinners to be forgiven and to be called your people and we thank you that you have made promises to us that you will return and that your kingdom will be established

[29 : 14] Lord please give us perseverance trust and hope as we wait for these promises to be fulfilled especially when we are suffering or feel abandoned or rejected we pray Lord that you would return soon to finally answer this prayer how long Lord thank you that we can trust our future to you because we know that you keep your promises we pray in Jesus name Amen Amen Amen