

Praise to The King

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[0 : 00] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 2nd of February 2003. The preacher is Carol Elfverson.

Her sermon is entitled Praise to the King and is based on Psalm 45. Lord, be a light to us. Help us and guide us as we come to this time now.

May we come to know more of your will for us and your love. Amen. Silk tulle with embroidered overlay, beaded and laced bodices, floral bouquets, satin slippers, five foot high tiered cakes, tiaras, wool suits, taffeta ties, black oxfords.

These are just some of the descriptions that I found of wedding paraphernalia in a bridal magazine this week. Appropriately named Brides.

Weddings are grand occasions and when it comes to royal weddings, they can be very opulent, dazzling affairs, lavish and abundant. Today's passage is from Psalm 45 and it's titled Ode for a Royal Wedding.

[1 : 21] You may like to have it open on page 449 as we look at this passage together. It was written as a song of praise of a king on his wedding day.

The psalmist doesn't say who the king was, but it's thought that it was probably a king of the 9th century BC, such as Ahab or Jehu, Jeroboam II or even Solomon.

The writer begins almost bursting at the seams with excitement and exuberation. He says his heart is overflowing on this great and auspicious occasion with what he describes as a goodly theme.

Then, having introduced himself and stated his intentions, the psalmist addresses the king himself directly in exaggerated language, hyperbole. And he describes him in verse 2 as the most handsome of men.

Here is this man, a king, or a man without equal, this king. He's so good looking. Not only has he been blessed with the physical good looks of Sean Connery, Pierce Brosnan and Brad Pitt all rolled into one, but he also speaks, when he speaks, his words are gracious and wise.

[2 : 41] This is no ordinary human being, this impressive king, who, as we see in verse 2, has been blessed by God forever. The mention of this perpetual blessing is an indication that he may well have been from the royal Davidic line, because in 2 Samuel, the second book of Samuel, God, we see, made a covenant with David in which he promised, The Lord will establish a house for you when your days are over and you rest with your fathers.

I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me.

Your throne will be established forever. That was the promise of God to David. Well, this king is certainly outstanding in looks and words, but what about his actions?

Verses 3 and 5 anticipate great victories. He's exhorted to ride majestically into battle to defend the cause of truth and right.

His supreme warrior's right hand will perform dread, or in the new NIV version it says, awesome deeds. From the battlefield, we then move to the royal court in verses 6 to 9.

[4 : 05] The king is to have not only symbols of power, but also moral qualities that characterise his rule. His military exploits are to be governed by truth, humility and righteousness.

His scepter, the symbol of a king's power and authority, is to incorporate justice, equity. By now, we've gained insight into the psalmist's goodly theme.

He's using, I think, this wedding occasion to stir up or prompt the king, to remind him of his responsibilities as a king. Perhaps he thinks that the king, now that he has a new wife, might be inclined to want to increase his wealth and power by expanding his territories.

So the psalmist is reminding him that in going to war, the goals and limitations of entering into such a conflict are clearly defined. The king is to fight in the cause of justice, to defend truth and righteousness.

He's not to engage in battle for selfish means. He's not to go and do it to gain land or financial spoils just simply for the purpose of doing that, such as the kings of other nations do.

[5 : 25] The defence of truth and righteousness is a reminder that Israel's kingship is to be modelled on God's kingship. God is Israel's true king.

The people are his people, as established by God, when they signed the covenant at Mount Sinai. God rescued them from slavery in Egypt and as Israel's king promised he would protect and provide for them and they in turn were to keep his commandments.

So the model of how Israel's kings should govern comes from God himself. In Deuteronomy chapter 17, Moses prophesied of a time that would come after the people had settled in the land when they would call for a human king.

When they would want to have a human king. But they were told they were not to appoint a king like those from the nations around them. They were to appoint one that the Lord their God would choose.

This prophecy was fulfilled and Saul was chosen and anointed. Israel's king was to be a covenantal king. He was to be subordinate to God.

[6 : 37] As part of the covenant renewal on the plains of Moab just before the people entered the promised land, Moses reminded the people of all the laws and the commandments.

And in it he spoke of the provision for the future king. The king was to be obedient to God's laws, diligently observing them and not exalting himself above the people in his community.

He was not to acquire for himself, as the kings of other nations around them did, great wealth, property or many wives. He was always to submit to the law and the words of the prophet, recognising the Lord God as Israel's true king.

The psalmist in verse 6 says, Your throne, O God, endures forever. And this is quite a puzzling sentence because it seems to be addressing the king as God himself.

And whilst the kings of Egypt and other ancient Near East countries often claimed to be God, certainly the people in Israel knew that this was not the case.

[7 : 46] Throughout the Old Testament, the distinction between God and king was clearly maintained. There can be several explanations for this particular expression in verse 6.

One is the footnote, the text note in your Bible, where it says, O your throne is a throne of God. The Hebrew word can be interpreted that way. It can also be interpreted as a wider usage of the word than our English word, God.

It can be used, and has been used in Exodus to refer to human judges, and also elsewhere is used to denote power, the mighty one or a ruler.

So in some ways, verse 6 and 7 could be seen as a pun making the point that the enthroned king, whilst a mighty ruler, must acknowledge God and his God above.

The anointing of the king as a divine ruler meant that he became God's representative amongst his people. And his anointing as king is much more delightful than even that on his wedding day, when he's anointed with fragrant oils, rich oils.

[8 : 51] He's been anointed with joy, gladness by God, and his reign would love righteousness and hate wickedness. Verses 8 and 9, we see the magnificent splendor of the king's attire and his palace.

The walls are adorned with ivory, and there's the sound of music playing within those walls. All this splendor reaches a climax for the appearance of the king's bride, the queen who will take her place at the king's right hand.

She's told in verse 10 and 11 to show total loyalty and commitment to her new husband by leaving behind, forgetting her people and her father's house.

And she's told that in so doing she will be blessed. The nation's richest people, the people of the town and province of Tyre, she's told will come and seek her favor.

So not only will this queen have fame and fortune, but the psalm ends with the promise to the king of blessings of children and a perpetuation of their family.

[10 : 01] The psalmist has painted here a picture of the paradium for what the king and his new wife. The history of Israel shows how their kings fell short of living up to the standards that were

required of them.

Saul, the first king, disobeyed God and rebelled against him. Because of this, God rejected him and had Samuel anoint David in his place.

David was imperfect, but was nevertheless said by God to be a man after his own heart. He ruled with compassion, was humble, and above all, remained dependent on God.

When he sinned with Bathsheba and was confronted by the prophet Nathan, he repented and sought God's forgiveness. Frequently, the kings of Israel and later when the kingdom was divided, Judah too failed to live up to the covenant.

The call for the king's wife to leave behind all the things from her past, her people as well, in verse 10, was a call for her to cast away the foreign habits and not to introduce foreign habits into Israel because that would introduce foreign gods and corrupt their worship of the one true God.

[11:24] History shows that Solomon's many foreign wives, including Jezebel, introduced these foreign habits and false worship amongst the people. Sadly, the ideal king as portrayed in this psalm is a far cry from the reality.

All the kings of the northern kingdom were said to have done evil in the eyes of the Lord according to the book of Kings. And only two of Judah's kings received approval.

They were Hezekiah and Josiah. The kings repeated failure and their slide from bad to worse provided the backdrop for Israel's prophets to speak of a future king, one who would be worthy. At a very early date, this psalm was reinterpreted by the Jewish people as a psalm to be looking forward to the coming of the Messiah. This ideal king became the longing for a people who were living with the consequences of the failures of their leaders and themselves.

Jerusalem fell in 586 BC and the king and the people were sent to live in exile in Babylonia. The temple was destroyed together with the palaces and the city itself.

[12:46] During this time, the hope of a future king was seen in apocalyptic terms as a divine warrior, a messianic king who would appear as God's deliverer.

In the book of Daniel, he had a vision whilst in exile of a future king who would come with the clouds of heaven. The people of Israel looked forward to a time when the Anointed One, the Messiah, would come.

This, they saw, would be the fulfilment of God's covenant, his promise with David when he said his kingdom or his throne would be established forever. It was understood when this messianic king came, wars would cease and peace and justice would be established on earth.

His kingdom would endure forever and ever. The New Testament shows us how Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of these royal messianic promises of the Old Testament.

Christ means Messiah, the Anointed One. Luke's Gospel records that in announcing Jesus' birth to Mary, the angel said, He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High.

[14:00] The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever. His kingdom will never end. When Jesus was born during the reign of King Herod, the Magi came looking for the one who has been born King of the Jews.

The genealogies recorded in Matthew's Gospel confirm Jesus' human descent as coming from David. When Jesus fed the 5,000, the people recognised this as a sign of the messianic fulfilment. At that time, a popular Jewish expectation was that the Messiah, when he came, he would renew the feeding or the sending of the manna that the people received when they were in the desert with Moses.

And so the people interpreted Jesus' feeding of them as such as this and they tried to force him to become their king. Blind Bartimaeus was able to see clearly who Jesus was when he called out Jesus, Son of David.

At his trial before the Sanhedrin, Jesus was asked if he was the Messiah. He replied, I am and you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One.

[15:18] and coming with the clouds of heaven. In Jesus, the duality of a human and divine king meet. He is the God of gods and Lord of kings.

The exaggerated descriptions of the king found in this psalm find their reality in Jesus Christ. The writer of the book of Hebrews interpreted that difficult verse 6 as referring to Jesus, the king and God.

His coming to earth inaugurated the kingdom of God here on earth. It has begun. It also looks forward to a future time when Jesus returns and his reign will be consummated.

The messianic hope was not just for Israel alone. as the foreign bride in verse 12 of the psalm was exhorted to leave all else behind and commit her loyalty to her king alone, so too the people of all nations and tribes are called to submit themselves fully to Jesus Christ as their saviour.

They're called to leave behind anything that would divide their loyalty and corrupt their faith, their worship of the one true God. The psalmist had a goodly theme.

[16 : 44] He used the occasion of a royal wedding to remind the king of his call to be a king of righteousness and justice. When engaged in battle the king was to act with the righteousness of God.

At the time of his wedding when he was receiving much honour and glory the psalmist was using this time to point him to God, the one to whom all honour and glory belong.

As we continue to live with the reality that God's kingdom has begun but is yet to be consummated what is our goodly theme? How do we live?

And how do we encourage others to do so? Jesus warned his disciples in the parable of the ten bridesmaids awaiting the return of the bridegroom of the need always to be ready to be expectant of his return at any time.

This means living a life of service to others and of service to God. I was reading an article by Peter Corney the other day. He was writing about the decline of the number of Anglicans in churches today.

[17 : 56] One of the reasons he gives for this is what he calls the cave-in to secularism and modernity. As many in the Anglican church drifted away from the central truths of the Bible and creeds liberalism gained a strong foothold.

This has resulted in the appearance of Christianity being preserved but the essence lost he says. It's a bit like those stuffed animals we see in museums.

From a distance they look very real until you come close. then you see they're just the outer covering. The life within has gone. With the loss of relying on truths of the Bible comes then the loss of being able to accurately interpret or judge from a Christian perspective what's going on around us.

Peter warns that when Christians attempt to become relevant by blending in with their surrounding culture they become disconnected from the biblical perspective and are seduced by the spirit of this age.

People disconnected from their biblical roots are no longer able to be light shining for others to see. Instead they become the followers groping around in despondency.

[19 : 22] This is a reminder and call for us to keep in close connection with the roots of our faith by reading and studying our Bibles to continue worshipping together in spirit and truth and to encourage others to do the same.

We have a great and future hope in the Lord Jesus. Calling on the Corinthians to remain faithful and not to be led astray by false teachers the apostle Paul says Paul is looking ahead to the final and ultimate royal wedding to the time when Jesus will return and will gather his bride all the believers of our church together and he will reign victoriously forever and ever.

this is the time when wars will cease and peace and justice will reign forever. We long for that great time that time of great joy and I'll just finish with John's vision in chapter 19 of Revelations.

Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunder peals crying out, Hallelujah!

For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory. For the marriage of the Lamb has come and his bride has made herself ready.

[21 : 01] To her it has been granted to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure. For the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. And the angel said to me, Write this, bless to those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

And he said to me, These are true words of God. Amen.