The Lord who Reigns

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Preacher: Rev Donald A MacDonald

[0:00] I welcome you to this service of worship.

Let us worship God by singing to his praise from Psalm 99a, that's page 130 of the Psalter.

Psalm 99a, page 130. The Lord reigns from his throne on high.

Let all the nations quake. He sits between the cherubim, so let the whole earth shake. Great is the Lord on Zion Hill, exalted over all, upon his great and holy name.

Let all the nations call. The King loves truth and equity, established by his might. In Jacob you have done for us all that is just and right.

[1:18] Exalt the Lord our God with us. Let all the world abroad before his footstool worship him. For holy is the Lord.

Let us sing these verses. Psalm 99a, page 130. The Lord reigns from his throne on high. The Lord reigns from his throne on high.

That all the nations quake. He's standing between the cherubim.

So let the cherubim. So let the cherubim. The Lord reigns from his throne on high. The Lord reigns from his throne on high.

The Lord reigns from his throne on high. The Lord reigns from his throne on high. The Lord reigns from his throne on high.

[2:42] The Lord reigns from his throne on high. We all will open God and King Heavenly Father Though the blessings are But we'll seelar ■n These click and that is that Oh Oh

Let us engage in prayer. Almighty Lord, we thank Thee for the opening words of the psalm that we have newly sung.

The Lord reigns. We bless Thy name that this is a constant, unchanging factor. That Thy truth reminds us not that the Lord has reigned or that the Lord will reign, but that the Lord continues to reign irrespective of the changes in our lives.

And Thy word also reminds us that we ought to come into Thy presence with awe as we are confronted by the great and majestic God.

The Lord reigns. Let all the people quake. Oh Lord, may that fear be in our hearts, not the slavish, servile fear that would seek to put a distance between Thee and us, but the fear that would seek to serve Thee, the fear of sonship, the fear of sonship, the fear that accompanies love implanted in hearts and lives through the work of Thy Holy Spirit and quickening souls by the power of Thy truth and bringing them into a living and a new relationship with Thy self.

[6:21] We pray, O Lord, that as we meet on a new year, the first day of the week, the first day of another year in our lives, a time of reflection, a time when we look back and also a time when we look forward.

O Lord, for many, the passing of one year into another may be a time of pain, a time of sorrow, as they are reminded of the empty places in the homes and families to which they belong.

those who once were so vibrant and part of their homes and families no longer there.

We thank Thee for memories and sometimes we cling to them. But, O Lord, above all, we bless Thy name that Thou art the unchanging and unchangeable God, that Thou art the same yesterday today and forever.

And so as we stand on the threshold of a new year, may we know that Thou art our guide and our light as we come before Thee this day.

[7:55] Bless each home and family associated with the congregation. Grant Thy blessing upon young and old alike.

bless those unable to be present through Thy restraint and providence in whatever form it takes. And bless to the community the voice of death again in their midst when Thou has removed another from the sin of time.

O Lord, that goes ongoing, whether we are in an old year or a new year, there will always be the voice of death.

There will always be the messenger that comes to call us out of time into the eternal weather. And so today as we gather in Thy name, we pray that Thou wouldst present Thyself with us that we might know that we are indeed in the presence of the reigning God, the One who is the Eternal King.

May He be our King and our Lord. Remember the congregation in the light of a forthcoming induction.

we pray for Thy servant who has yet to undergo ordination trials. And we pray that Thou wouldst be with him and bless him and bring him to the congregation in the fullness of time and use him mightily in Thine hands to be a channel through which the blessing of the Lord may flow into many hearts and lives.

Bless Thy cause worldwide today wherever people meet in Thy name throughout the world. We give Thee thanks for every group that meets to worship the Almighty.

We pray for peace in that troubled area of the world where missiles have constantly been focused upon the country of Ukraine trying to break the spirit of those who are resident there.

O Lord we pray that Thou wouldst intervene for Thou art God and Thou art able to bring peace where is no peace.

Thou art able to turn and deflect the wiles and machinations of men in order that they peace might break out and that those who have been subjected to these attacks may yet come to enjoy a measure of peace in their own country.

[11:06] Come with us we pray Thee leave us not to ourselves cleanse in the blood in Jesus name we ask it with forgiveness of sin.

Amen. Let us further sing to his praise from Psalm 97 page 359 of the Psalter.

Psalm 97 page 359 God reigneth let the earth be glad and isles rejoice each one dark clouds encompass and in right with judgment dwells his throne fire goes before him and his foes it burns up round about his lightnings lightened the world earth saw and shook throughout hills at the presence of the Lord like wax did melt away even at the presence of the Lord of all the earth I say the heavens declare his righteousness all men his glory see all who serve graven images confounded let them be let us sing these verses

Psalm 97 page 359 God reigneth let the earth be glad bo o Bo God glad say to Thank you.

Thank you.

[14:13] Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Amen. Let us now read from the New Testament, from the book of Revelation, chapter 4.

Amen. Amen.

[19:15] And may God bless to us, without reading from his truth. Let us again sing to his praise from Psalm 93, page 123 of the Psalter.

Psalm 93, page 123 of the Psalter. The Lord is King. His throne endures, majestic in his height.

The Lord is robed in majesty, and armed with strength and might. The world is founded, firm and sure.

Removed it cannot be. Your throne is strong, and you are God from all eternity. The seas, O Lord, have lifted up.

They lifted up their voice. The seas have lifted up their waves, and made a mighty noise. The Lord, enthroned on high, is strong.

[20:28] More powerful is he than thunder of the ocean waves, or breakers of the sea. Your royal statutes, Lord, stand firm.

Unchanging is your word, and holiness adorns your house for endless days, O Lord.

Let us sing the whole psalm, The Lord is King. Our Lord is King. The Lord is King.

The Lord is King. The Lord is King. The Lord is born in the majesty, now thou wilt travel from the night.

The Lord is born in the majesty, now should be the light and the light.

[21:53] Your throne is strong and you have come from the eternity.

The Lord is born in the majesty, now shall be the light and the light.

The seas are filled with love, their ways are made of mighty arms.

The Lord is born in the majesty, now shall be the light and the light.

The Lord is born in the majesty, now shall be the light and the light.

[23:46] The Lord is born in the majesty, now shall be the light and the light. The Lord is born in the majesty, now shall be the light and the light.

Let us now turn to the Old Testament, to the Book of Psalms. The Book of Psalms and Psalm 93.

The title of the Psalm, the Lord reigns. The Lord reigns, he is robed in majesty.

The Lord is robed, he has put on strength as his belt. Yea, the world is established, it shall never be moved.

Your throne is established from of old. You are from everlasting. You are from everlasting. The floods have lifted up, O Lord. Floods have lifted up their voice.

[24:52] The floods lift up their roaring. Mightier than the thunder of many waters. Mightier than the waves of the sea.

The Lord on high is mighty. Your decrees are very trustworthy. Holiness befits your house, O Lord, forevermore.

And I'd like to take as a text today the opening phrase of the psalm, The Lord reigns.

It's sort of hard to believe that another year has come and gone. And we've just begun a new year.

Whenever a new year comes around, we have an opportunity to reflect on the past and to look towards the future.

[25:56] Perhaps some have made resolutions that you will follow diligently during the course of the year. And perhaps some others have made resolutions that somehow seem to melt into oblivion almost as soon as they are made.

Some will feel that it is an opportunity for a new beginning or a fresh start. Some perhaps may be afraid of what the year 2023 might have in store.

As you get older, you cannot but wonder whether this new year might be the one where you bid farewell to this world and enter the eternal realm.

There is always much that is unknown as we stand on the threshold of a new year. But whatever may take place, I can safely say, unless the Lord chooses to come back, that there will be joyous events and sorrowful events in the course of 2023.

For example, of a joyous event as a congregation, you anticipate the beginning of a new ministry among you.

[27:34] Surely something to look forward to. Something I trust that is the focus of much prayer. If I am not mistaken, as in every other year, there will be difficult days too.

Times of illness or death when we part with those whom we love in life. And then as you look at the wider picture, we live in an unstable and a volatile world where nations seek dominion over other nations.

And some world leaders seem bent on using the considerable military hardware at their disposal.

Nationally, as a people, we are increasingly subjected to legislation that flies on the face of Biblical teaching.

Make no mistake, but the latest piece of legislation to pass through the Scottish Parliament, however much it may be dressed up, is anti-Biblical.

[28:55] In my view, it flows from an anti-Biblical agenda. Yet, however much change may take place in this new year, the opening words of this psalm are a constant.

The Lord reigns. It is a thread that runs through several of the psalms in this part of the Psalter.

Psalm 96, verse 10, Say among the nations, the Lord reigns. In other words, let it be published abroad.

The Lord is the true sovereign. Psalm 97, verse 1, The Lord reigns. Let the earth rejoice. The Lord's reign is cause for celebration and joy.

Psalm 99, The Lord reigns. Let the peoples tremble. Remember, the Lord's reign ought to fill us with awestruck fear in the presence of His glory, majesty, and perfect holiness.

[30:19] So, from our text today, I'd like to set three thoughts before you. Three Ds. First, a declaration.

Second, a description. And thirdly, His decrees. First, a declaration. First, a declaration. For that is what it is.

The Lord reigns. There is something, I think, very exclusive about the statement, the Lord reigns.

There is no one to rival His position, although many may attempt to do so. God alone rules over the whole of the universe.

That does not change. As I said earlier, it is a constant, unchanging factor. The text doesn't say, the Lord has reigned, or was reigning, but the Lord is reigning.

[31:32] He is reigning actively. He didn't step back, but He continues to reign, and He reigns unconditionally. When that was written first by the psalmist, it was true.

When we read it, the first day of 2023, it is still true. The Lord reigns. Personally, I find it most comforting and reassuring.

There is a certain ring to this declaration. I believe we need to be reminded of this. Times of change as we pass from one year to another, but also in every day of our lives.

The Lord reigns. Perhaps you remember how Isaiah records for us the death of King Uzziah. Isaiah.

The prophet was disturbed. He was grieved and concerned about the vacant throne in Jerusalem. And you remember he went into the temple and he saw a vision.

[32:49] A vision that was designed to remind him that Israel's true throne can never be empty. In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple.

In the New Testament, in the passage we read today in the book of Revelation, John the Apostle records for us the vision he received in lonely Patmos.

He speaks of an open door in heaven. After this he says, I looked and behold a door standing open in heaven.

That word behold is the most frequent command in the book of Revelation. And the second most common command in the book of Revelation, strangely, is fear not.

Behold and fear not. How will we obey the command to fear not in this strange, confused, bewildering place, painful place that we live in?

[34:15] How will we face future trials? How shall we fear not? And the answer that is given by John, or by the Lord through John, is by obeying the command to behold, to look.

In other words, John is saying that fear is silenced by looking where John points us. God opens the door in heaven and tells John, and tells us to look and behold, what was it that John saw?

Behold a throne stood in heaven. No, of itself. I do not for one moment believe that that would be of any consolation to John, or even of consolation to us the leadership.

An empty throne. Why? For the very good reason that an empty throne would imply there had been an abdication by the ruler.

An empty throne symbolic of a power vacuum. We know how dangerous that can be.

[35:41] But the vision that John saw was not just a throne, but an occupied throne. Behold a throne stood in heaven with one seated on the throne.

That is highly significant, hugely important. There is one seated on the throne. And you might ask, oh, but is he competent to rule?

Does he have authority and power? Is he just a mere figurehead, a puppet on the throne? And you are waiting for a disclosure.

And the disclosure maybe doesn't live up to your expectations. Because John writes, he who sat there had the appearance of Jasper and Cornelian.

Jasper and Cornelian. You are almost tempted to shout out. Is that the best you can come across with John?

But what you must conclude, I believe, is the total inadequacy of words to describe the glory of the indescribable.

You know, we are not able to deduce a lot from John's description of the appearance of the one on the throne.

All John can tell us is he is like precious stones. He is like a diamond, if you like, turning in the sun, dazzling in his beauty, captivating, breathtaking in the splendor of his majesty.

And the best John can do is communicate likenesses, comparisons that inevitably fail to do justice to the reality.

And the implication of that is that the person on this throne is wholly incapable of description.

[38:00] It can only be God. God is not someone we can ever say that we understand fully.

Or that we possess the vocabulary to describe him adequately. Instead, we are going to do with him what John says we do with diamonds and precious stones.

We adore him. That ought to be true for every born again Christian. Come take your eyes from him. Captivated by him.

And if you are today in Christ, you'll spend eternity. The greatest delight of your heart will be to spend forever having your eyes filled with new views of the truth, of the glory of your God.

What a feast for every person who gets to heaven. Endless expeditions of discovery and wonder in the beauty of God.

[39:23] The Lord reigns. He has not abdicated his rule. He has not defected from his sovereignty.

And though we may not always be able to grasp how that is so, John, in the book of Revelation, is inviting us to lift our eyes from our circumstances to see again the throne and the one seated upon it.

And it seems to me that the psalmist in our text today is doing the same.

Just as John sets before our eyes God in his sovereignty and in his mercy, so the psalmist sets before us this glorious truth, the Lord reigns.

If we do not believe that God reigns in sovereign power, then we are in danger of sinking in that vast, deep, deep ocean, that frightening, gloomy ocean of total despair.

[40:43] So, the Lord reigns. So, the Lord reigns. Let the earth be glad. Let distant shores express delight. Clouds and thick darkness cover him.

His throne is built on truth and right. He reigns. He reigns by inherent right. It is not something that is conferred upon him.

He reigns eternally and unchangeably. He governs and oversees all things according to the counsel of his will.

So, that's the first point. That's the first point. The Lord reigns. A declaration. Secondly, a description. And the psalmist sets before us four characteristics of God's reign.

He tells us his reign is majestic. He is robed in majesty. Majesty speaking of the grandeur and the stateliness of his person and rule.

[42:02] I suppose one way to see his majesty is to note the awe of those who behold him. I have already mentioned how Isaiah was comforted by the vision of Israel's true kingship at a time of change.

Isaiah had been reigning for fifty years or more. But remember the comfort occurred only after Isaiah was overawed by the divine majesty.

Remember what he wrote? The foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called and the house was filled with smoke.

In other words, such is the power and authority of God that his voice causes even the fabric of heaven itself to resonate and quake.

Smoke probably referring to that which surrounds the divine presence with an aura of mystery and wonder.

You wouldn't want your God to be anything less, would you, than one who is surrounded by an aura of mystery and wonder.

And the smoke reveals and conceals. And you will remember Isaiah's response. There is terrified awe.

And he realizes his sinful depravity. I have a man, he says, of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.

For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. What effect did it have upon us? To see God in his majesty is inevitably to see ourselves as puny and corrupt.

And the question for me and you is, have our eyes seen the King, the Lord of hosts?

[44:29] What effect did it have upon us? Did it draw out our hearts? Did it make us want to know more of his glory and his majesty?

He robes himself with majesty. You remember the state opening of Parliament. The Queen would be decked out in her finery.

Special robes for the occasion. Wearing the crown. All which was intended to give a majestic impression.

But you know, earthly monarchs, they merely put on the veneer of majesty. But the sovereign monarch, the eternal sovereign monarch puts on majesty itself.

That's the difference. Even when Christ is some true human nature. You remember, and I refer to it last Lord's Day, how the wise men reacted when they met the virgin born child.

[45:49] Do you remember the first thing they did? They fell down and worshipped him. They fell down and worshipped him.

Again, when the Lord was betrayed by Judas to the arresting party. Do you remember how they too were overawed by the declaration of the Lord?

I am he. John writes in his Gospel, When Jesus said to them, I am he. They drew back and fell to the ground.

You were battle-hardened soldiers. But when Jesus declared his identity, they drew back and fell to the ground.

At the cross, in his death, remember the reaction of the centurion. Truly this man was the Son of God.

[46:57] Well, how much more majestic now, having risen from the grave, fully robed in the majesty of his divine glory.

And you remember how even the disciple whom Jesus loved, who was intimately acquainted with him, in the revelation that was given to him in Patmos.

He writes, I fell at his feet as though dead. And what he spoke is a fulfillment of his claim to majesty.

Here in this psalm, remember what he said, I am the first and the last. The living one, I died or I became dead. Behold, I am alive forevermore.

Have the keys of death and AIDS. So that's the first thought of the description.

[48:08] And then secondly, his majesty is accompanied with power and might. He has put on strength as his belt, the psalmist writes.

His power is not derived from out with himself. His power comes from within himself. You may remember when Abraham had been waiting for 50 years to have a child.

And he still didn't have a child by Sarah. God comes to meet Abraham when he's 99 years of age. Do you remember the first thing that God said to him?

I am God Almighty. Why does God introduce himself to Abraham again? They have been walking together for half a century.

Abraham knows that God is God Almighty. Why would God say that to Abraham again? Well, I believe it was because Abraham needed to know it and remember it and believe it.

[49:23] He needed to believe that his God was Almighty, was all-powerful. A God who could do what he promised. Because Abraham was still waiting for God's promise of a son to be fulfilled.

And at that moment, it seemed further and further away. He needed to be reminded again of who God is.

And so do we. It's not just a show of majesty. It's a majesty of power. Your God is in control. Your God is King. Your God is mighty.

And because he is mighty, he does whatever he pleases. He is the undefeated God. No matter how much rebellion may raise its head.

As depicted for us colorfully in the psalm by the powerful forces of nature in verse 3. Floods have lifted up.

[50:32] Their voice, their roaring, and so on. Colorful phrases used by the psalmist.

I understand this picture. To set before us the turmoil in nations. The spirit of agitation and rebellion against God. Not just confined to nations, but in the hearts of men and women and boys and girls.

But note what the psalmist states. Mightier than the thunder of many waters. Mightier than the waves of the sea. The Lord on high is mighty.

No matter how defiant or aggressively hostile nations might be. Or people might be to believers in the world.

No force, no power can prevent the fulfilling of God's eternal purpose. And thirdly in the description.

[51:37] His kingdom is characterized by his absolute sovereignty. The world is established. It shall never be moved. Now, I don't believe that this has anything to do with the place of the earth in the solar system.

It has more to do with God's order and righteousness. It cannot be overthrown despite every attempt by earthly governments.

God's will is unshakable and fixed. This is what he says through the prophet Isaiah. I work, he says.

And who can turn it back? It is his kingdom. And that is significant.

His kingdom. That's the guarantee that it will always stand. It is his kingdom. The psalmist expresses it, your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and your dominion endures throughout all generations.

[52:48] Remember the writer, the letter to the Hebrews speaks of the sovereignty of God as being exercised by the exalted Jesus Christ at the Father's right hand. He upholds the universe by the word of his power.

And the final element in the description, his kingdom is eternal. Your throne is established from of old.

You are from everlasting. So given the characteristics of his kingdom, there is every encouragement to serve this reigning Lord.

He is worthy of praise. Or we may consider him today irrelevant to our life. We may even try to ignore him or blot him out of our lives.

But my friend, ignoring him will not work. One day, each of us will have to give an account to him.

[53:59] And the Bible speaks of him as one who is possessed of an intimate knowledge of his creatures. Our hearts are open before him.

And all our desires are known to him. We must yield to him either in this life, or if we do not, when we pass into his eternal presence.

I don't know what your circumstances are today. There may be times in the trials of life, when perhaps you are tempted to cry out, Where is the Lord?

Where is the Lord? And the Bible answers that question in this way, Christ Jesus is the one who died.

More than that who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who is indeed interceding for us.

[55:13] That's where he is. And this is how one person expressed her faith in this reigning Lord.

Be still, my soul. Your God will undertake to guide the future as he has the past.

Your hope, your confidence, let nothing shake. All now mysterious shall be bright at last.

A description, a declaration, finally his decrees. The concluding verse of the psalm, your decrees are very trustworthy.

Holiness befits your house, O Lord, forevermore. It's as if the psalmist in this verse is making a pronouncement about God's person.

[56:19] God is trustworthy. He is faithful. And God is holy. He is righteous. He is good.

His decrees are trustworthy. The word decrees is the same word that often gets translated in the Bible, particularly in Psalm 119, as testimonies.

God is faithful. And there is a real sense in which this particular passage is reminding us again that God's word can be trusted.

His word is trustworthy because his character is trustworthy. And therefore, his word can be trusted.

Scripture rests on the integrity of God who vouches for its statements, its promises, its warnings, and commands.

You can build your life on the trustworthy nature of his word. The words of God, the words of Jesus, perfectly express his character, his mind, his will.

He never deceives. He never changes his mind. He never misspeaks. In fact, Jesus teaches. You remember at the close of the Sermon on the Mount, to remember he teaches that.

Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

Everyone who hears and does, in other words, everyone who listens and obeys will be like a wise man who built on the rock.

What happened? To the wise man, the rain fell, the floods came, the winds blew and beat on the house, but it did not fall. Why did it not fall?

[58:29] Because it had been founded on the rock. So is everyone who hears and does, everyone who listens and obeys, whatever may lie before you.

You can be sure of building on a sure and a certain foundation. Then look at the second half of the verse.

Holiness befits your house, O Lord. And it's as if the psalmist switches our attention to the temple, the house of the Lord.

It's characterized as holy because God is holy. God's holiness adorns or is the comeliness of his house.

To put it another way, one of the psalms says we are to worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness because holiness is the beauty of God's character.

[59:45] we have a culture that worships beauty, but the Bible views God's holiness as beautiful.

Therefore, his house is described as adorned with the beauty of holiness. Holiness adorns it. Pointing to God's character again.

He's trustworthy and he's holy. And because he is holy, he has a purpose. And his purpose is this, to make saved sinners like himself so that they will be holy even as he is holy.

And you see, holiness is to be equated with perfect happiness. We have the cliched phrase, a happy new year.

What really is a happy new year? happiness, happiness, well, happiness, in the biblical sense is to be equated with holiness.

[61:01] That's where true happiness is to be found. Perfect holiness being made like God.

Jesus Christ, who was the fullness of God in bodily form, perfect in holiness, died in the place of sinners, that we might be holy in him as we trust in him alone for salvation as he is offered to us in the gospel.

his word can be trusted. We don't know what's going to come in the days ahead. But the message of the Bible is this, God is in control of everything.

And if we are in Christ today, he is working all things for good in the lives of those who are called according to his purpose.

So, as we step into the unknown in a sense, stepping into 2023, irrespective of our circumstances, let us trust in his word, remembering that the God who continues to reign, who always has reigned, is in perfect control, mightier than all the united forces who are hostile to him.

[62:41] He cannot be defeated. His word is to be trusted for all time perpetually. Can you and I say today that he is our king?

The psalm is good. And this is what he wrote, I will extol you, my God and king. Bless your name forever and ever, every day.

I will bless you and praise your name forever and ever. Can you and I say the same?

A declaration, the Lord reigns, a description of the reigning Lord and his kingdom and his decrees, trustworthy in the extreme.

Oh, put your confidence in him alone and you shall have indeed a happy eternity. Let us pray.

[63:48] O Almighty God, we thank thee that you reign and that your reign is unchanging and unchangeable, eternal in its nature and that the reigning eternal Lord is equipping a people in this world to be like himself to reign with him throughout the endless ages of eternity.

May we be found in that circle and the glory shall be thine. In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen. Our concluding praise is from the second version of Psalm 145 page 445 of the Psalter.

The second version of Psalm 145 at verse 13 thy kingdom hath none end at all doth through ages all remain the Lord upholdeth all that fall the cast down raiseth up again the eyes of all things Lord attend down the weight that here do live and thou in season Jew dost send sufficient food them to relieve yea thou thine hand dost open wide everything dost satisfy that lives and doth on earth abide thy great liberality the Lord is just in his ways all holy in his works each one is near to all that on him call who call in truth on him alone these verses thy kingdom hath none end at allaste ost tu gods

England faistt The nights off all seem short again, But long be with the death yet, And the decision you've got said, salvation's good, then to relieve.

Give that thy hand a stoop in white, and everything that satisfies, that lives and does on end the light of thy deep in their quality.

[67:58] The Lord is just in his soul, and holy in his works he's run.

He is near to all, and I will come, who call it to the Lord.

After the benediction, if you would allow me to get to the door before you go out. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, fellowship and communion of the Holy Spirit, rest on and abide with you all, now and forever. Amen.