

Christ Reigns

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[0 : 00] Well, St. John's, it's a joy to be back with you this morning, and I really do look forward to catching up with many of you after the service, as many as possible.

Please do come and talk to me. But for now, would you open your Bibles to Psalm 110? It's a little psalm, but it punches above its weight.

And the great joy of the psalm is that it speaks so clearly and unflinchingly of our Lord Jesus himself. The psalm comes to us as the climax of a long litany of royal psalms.

Psalms which celebrate the fact that God is king. He sits on his royal throne, and he reigns over all the earth. And when trying to tell people and grappling with the significance of the identity in the ministry of Jesus Christ, every single New Testament author almost turns to Psalm 110 to show us who Jesus is.

It's the most quoted Old Testament passage in the New Testament. It's astonishing. Over 20 times it shows up. And it's because in Psalm 110, the New Testament authors believed they heard God's very own voice.

[1 : 20] It's as if the great cloud of the heavens opened and God's voice thundered, and we hear him talk about the glories of his Son. It's a little bit like what happened at Jesus' baptism, or on the Mount of Transfiguration, when God speaks directly.

And it's this poignant moment where everybody else stops speaking, and we listen to what God says about his own Son. And Psalm 110 is very much the same.

And we see two divine declarations in the psalm. Verse 1 is the first, and it tells us that Jesus is an enthroned king. Verse 1, The Lord says to my Lord, Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.

And the second declaration is in verse 4, where we find that Jesus is an enthroned priest. The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.

And so our meditations this morning are going to be on those two divine declarations. Verse 1, Let's begin there. Every Sunday we gather and we confess with Christians throughout the ages and throughout the world that Jesus was crucified and died and buried.

[2 : 45] He descended into hell, and on the third day he rose again from the grave, and he ascended into heaven, and then what do we say? He sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.

Right at the heart of the Christian confession, right at the heart of the good news that we come to celebrate this morning, is an image of a king sitting on his heavenly throne with his enemies as his footstool.

And it's an image that has a rich, rich pedigree throughout the whole Bible. It's an awesome image. If we think of Isaiah chapter 6, when Isaiah gets a glimpse of the king sitting on the throne, and his robe filling the temple, he sees seraphim with six wings, two covering their faces, two covering their feet, and two flying, and the seraphim are crying, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of hosts.

The whole earth is full of his glory. And the foundations of the throne shake at the sound of the voice that comes from the throne. And Isaiah is utterly undone, aware of his unworthiness, and he says, Woe is me.

You see, throughout the Old Testament, God is pictured as a mighty king. And God sits on his throne. And throughout the Old Testament, that throne is a symbol of God's unqualified uniqueness, and of his unrivaled lordship.

[4 : 16] It's a symbol of unqualified uniqueness, because God alone sits on the throne. No one else sits there with him. He alone is worthy of the worship and the praise, because he alone sits on the throne.

And the throne is also a symbol of God's unrivaled lordship, because he alone sits on the throne. Nobody else sits in heaven.

Every time you get a vision of heaven in the Bible, you have people standing there, ready to serve the one who sits on the throne, and ready to move and do his will. Or you have people that are face down, on their knees, prostrate before the Lord, worshiping and adoring him, in wonderful adoration.

But you never have people sitting in heaven. The only person who sits is the Lord who belongs on the throne. He sits on the throne, and he's worthy of all worship, and he's the sovereign ruler over all creation.

And that's why when we turn to the New Testament, our mouths are stopped, our hearts astonished, and we are dazzled by the fact that a human being now sits on the throne of heaven.

[5 : 33] Jesus of Nazareth, that human being who came from that backwater country, who was born in Bethlehem, and walked the streets of Galilee, and was crucified on a Roman cross, now is alive, and he sits on the very throne of God, in all of his flesh and blood humanity.

He is part of God's unique rule over all creation. And that's why in the New Testament, we get people like Paul saying, he's far above the heavens.

God has exalted him above every principality, and authority, and power, and dominion, which is named in all creation. And that Jesus is given the name that is above every single name.

The wonderful truth of Psalm 110 verse 1 is that Jesus of Nazareth, that particular human being, sits on the throne of God.

So that means, bowing down in worship before him, gathering to hear, and confessing and singing of him, is not ignorant idolatry, but honest and sincere worship.

[6 : 42] It means that trusting, and seeking, and serving him, is not a waste of our time, and is not deep deception, but it's a fully human, and flourishing life. Jesus sits on the throne of the universe.

Not Donald Trump. And I'm serious about that. But the man who wept over the city Jerusalem when he saw it, and gathered little children into his arms.

Jesus sits on the throne. Not Apple, not Google, and not Amazon.com. But the man who was moved with compassion to feed the hungry, and to seek the outcast.

Jesus sits on the throne. Not pluralism, not consumerism, and not postmodernism. But the man who was unmoved by the fads of his day, and spoke words of truth, of life-giving truth.

Jesus sits on the throne. Not cancer, not disease, and not death. But the man who was outraged and grieved at the death of his friend Lazarus, and wept.

[7 : 56] Jesus Christ is the enthroned King, the Lord who rules over all. And brothers and sisters, that is reason for rejoicing, and that is reason for repentance.

Both of them, together. It's reason for rejoicing, no doubt about it. Throughout the Bible, God's rule includes God's judgment. And surprisingly, throughout the Bible, God's judgment is a reason for joy. It's not what we'd expect, but it's there. Look at verse 2 of our psalm. God rules. He sends forth from Zion, your mighty scepter, and says, rule, Lord Jesus, in the midst of your enemies.

And God's rule includes a day of judgment we see in verses 5 and 6. The Lord is at your right hand. He will shatter kings on the day of his wrath.

He will execute judgment among the nations, filling them with corpses. He will shatter chiefs over the wide earth. It's a scary image.

[9 : 05] It's a poetic image of God as warrior who conquers all his enemies. And you may well ask me, how in the world is that judgment a reason for rejoicing? And it's because throughout the Bible, God's judgment means one thing.

It means the destruction of everything that seeks to destroy and ruin God's good creation.

Judgment means that God will subdue all wickedness and evil and greed and injustice.

He will silence all lies and pride and idolatry for the sake of the renewal and the realignment of his creation, for the sake of new creation.

That's why the psalmist can say in Psalm 97, at the beginning, he can say, the Lord reigns. Let the earth rejoice. Let the many coastlands be glad.

Why? Because the Lord's throne has a foundation of righteousness righteousness and justice. It's a reason for rejoicing.

[10 : 10] But it's also something that's a hard truth for us to swallow in our culture. There's no doubt about that. It causes a lot of offense and I can't take away the offense. But I can offer a

couple clarifications that I think are important for us.

The first is simply that judgment is not ours. It does not belong to us. Throughout the Bible, when the Bible talks about judgment, it says, God says, vengeance is mine.

What it means is that judgment is the prerogative of God, not of human beings. We are not wise enough and we are not compassionate enough to rule on the throne. God alone is.

And so judgment belongs to God and not to us. That's the first thing we have to think about. And the second thing is that judgment will begin with us. That's the scary thing in the New Testament.

It tells us that judgment will begin with the household of God. We've received God's truth and grace. We have been given the divine oracles of life.

[11:13] And to whom much is given, much will be required on that great day. And so judgment does not belong to us and judgment will begin with us. And so when we come to passages like this in the scripture, it is not reason for moral and spiritual pride on our part as God's people.

It is reason for sober rejoicing. As we hear God declare from the heavens to his son, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.

And then we sing, the Lord reigns, let the earth rejoice. It's a reason for rejoicing. But it's also a reason for repentance.

God will triumph over his enemies. Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead. But God does not delight in the death of a sinner. One preacher once said, when God judges, he judges through tears.

He does not delight in it. Rather, his great delight is when sinners turn from their wickedness and they live. When we were going through Ezekiel, we were hearing it over and over again.

[12:22] Turn from your ways and live, my people. And therefore, in the time that we now live in, final judgment is delayed because God is being patient with humanity.

God's giving humanity time and space for repentance, to turn to him, to find life in him. And this is the picture that we see in verse 3. People turning to him freely.

Verse 3 says, your people will offer themselves freely on the day of your wrath in holy garments. From the womb of the morning, the dew of your youth will be yours.

The apostle Peter puts it this way. He says, the Lord is not slow to fulfill his promises, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you. Not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

So we are invited in this time to a place of repentance as God's people. The first church that I grew up in, it was a wonderful Pentecostal church in California.

[13:34] It's very different from St. John's. I've come a long ways. And I still believe in the mighty power of the Holy Spirit and that it is his winds blow through us that any good comes to us.

My Pentecostal brothers and sisters taught me that. But one devastating thing happened in my final years there. It came out that the pastor of the church had been having a three-year affair with a member of the congregation.

a huge scandal. It devastated the church for some four or five years to recover from that. And the particular woman that the affair was with, her dad was the head of the trustee board, basically.

It was just absolutely devastating. And it was such a lesson for me, even at the young age of like ten years old, to see two different ways of responding to God who is the judge, who calls us to repentance.

The pastor himself never showed his face again in the congregation. He ran from public repentance, he moved away with his family, he hid his face, and he never went into pastoral ministry again.

[14:46] The woman walked up the very next Sunday and stood in front of a congregation of 2,000 people and offered public confession and public repentance before the congregation that she had grown up in and said, I will submit myself to church discipline and seek God's grace and slow healing in my life.

I am sorry for what I've done. And I can't imagine the pain that was for her family. My mother is still good friends with this woman and my mother was reporting to me just a couple weeks ago that this woman and her husband went through years and years of horror and counseling trying to experience God's grace together and finally, after two decades, they have come to a place where they are now doing marriage counseling for other couples.

It's an astonishing reversal. The non-repentance of one man led to silence and withdrawal and the repentance of one woman led to a life of joy and new ministry.

brothers and sisters, rejoicing and repentance go together in the Christian life. And it's the only proper response to hearing that Jesus sits on the heavenly throne of God as king.

And that's what we learn from verse one. But there's more. There's verse two. And I promise you this will be a slightly shorter one, but it's no less important.

[16:19] Verse four. Verse four. Jesus is the enthroned priest. The great high priest, as Hebrews says. Another divine declaration.

The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind. Isn't that good news? The Lord will not change his mind. You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

This aspect of Jesus' ministry, and I mean his priest, the priestly aspect of his ministry, is quite significant discovery for me the last five or six years or so.

The church I grew up in, they taught me, they taught me that Jesus died for my sins. And for that, I am eternally grateful. But they gave me no idea what in the world Jesus is doing right now.

So as a good Californian, I was left to my own devices to fill in the gaps. So I figured he was sitting on the beach on a really long heavenly holiday. And then after 2,000 years, he was probably starting to get a little bored.

[17:21] What I had a fuzzy grasp on is what difference does what Jesus is doing right now make for my life now? How do I relate to him in a way that he is present and active now?

Because if he just died for my sins, he could easily become a distant, static, passive, and unconcerned figure that is pretty hard to follow in the present. So what is he doing now?

And throughout the Bible, we find a sense that Jesus is alive and he is reigning and he is active right now in a priestly ministry as a great high priest.

We see it in verse 4 of our psalm and the whole book of Hebrews is devoted to it. And so what is the role of a priest? It's to represent or mediate for God's people in relation to God.

To represent the people in relation to God. And priests in the Old Testament did this a couple different ways. They did it through sacrifice. They would sacrifice the animal that somebody brought forth as a sin offering and they would collect its blood in a bucket.

[18:27] And they would enter into the Holy of Holies of the tabernacle or the temple in the presence of God where no human being could go. And they would take that blood and they would sprinkle it on the altar before God as a living sacrifice so that God would have mercy on his people.

And the priests would do something else. They would make intercession for the people. They would pray. They would offer prayers on behalf of the people asking for God's kindness and mercy on people as they have their needs.

And when the great high priest did this he would wear special vestments. The kind of princess dresses that I'm wearing right now. But special vestments.

And on those vestments they had 12 precious stones. And each one of those stones represented a different tribe of Israel. So 12 stones 12 tribes of Israel.

So that when the high priest went into the Holies of Holies before God and did his mediating representing work God saw his people on the breastplate.

[19:34] That priest acted on behalf of the people and mediated their relationship with God. And in Psalm 110 it's telling us that not only is Jesus a king but he's a priest when he's on the throne of the universe.

That's the whole point of saying he's a priest after the order of Melchizedek. You're probably wondering what in the world is that about? This is one of two places where he shows up in the Old Testament.

The other place is Genesis and in Genesis it tells us he's the only person pretty much in the Bible who is a king and a priest at the same exact time. Nobody else was. And so that's why it's so significant to see that Jesus is a king who administers justice and a priest who advocates for the needs of his people.

He's a king who represents God to human beings and he's a priest who represents human beings before God Almighty. He does both at the same time as he sits on the throne and rules over all.

You see the throne of God is not simply a throne of sovereign power. As the book of Hebrews says it is a throne of grace. It's a throne of grace.

[20 : 54] Yes, it's a throne whose foundations are justice and righteousness but it's also a throne that is a mercy seat. it's a throne where angels prostrate fall but it's a throne where sinners come to receive the bread of life.

It's a throne where cherubim and seraphim continually do cry holy, holy, holy as we talked about but it's a throne where tired and broken and weary people come to be refreshed from the wells of living water.

It's a throne where prophets and angels and martyrs kneel in adoration but it's a throne where outcasts and misfits are welcomed with open arms.

That's why Hebrews says let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in our time of need.

That's the invitation of our Lord of our priest. And so I want to ask you this morning where are you in need this morning? Where are you in need in this season of your life?

[22 : 07] Where do you know that you'll be in need in the upcoming week? Is it difficulty parenting a child or loving a spouse? Is it difficulty forgiving someone who has wronged you or letting go of resentment towards someone you envy?

Is it difficulty being a voice of truth and justice day after day in the workplace? Is it difficulty coping with a sexual attraction that is broken and that feels all-consuming?

Is it difficulty facing a devastating medical prognosis and the very real possibility of death? Come to the throne.

It's a throne of grace and Jesus says come all who are weary and heavy laden. Come all who thirst. I suspect that many of us have trouble coming to the throne of grace because we're not convinced it's the throne of grace.

We think it's still a throne of condemnation. But Paul says in Romans chapter 8 there is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. We may not say it but it's hard to feel it.

[23 : 27] some of us may be like the scribes and Pharisees in John chapter 8. We think that God has a throne of condemnation so we're keen to drag people before that throne and to expose their sins hoping they get what they deserve from God.

And we may do this in deeds but it's more often that we do it with silent attitudes with secret words and with subtle thoughts. We want to drag people before the throne.

Some of us are like the adulterous woman though in John chapter 8. We feel caught in our sins and enslaved by them. Or maybe we're in fear of being found out and being shamed of our sins.

And we think there's no way out and we fear that we will most definitely get what we deserve from God. See some of us are the condemners and some of us feel like we're the condemned.

And Jesus the king and the priest has a word for both of us this morning. To the condemners the king says let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw the stone.

[24 : 35] Asking us to drop our stones and to stop our condemning. And to the condemned among us Jesus the priest says where are they who are going to condemn you?

No one's condemned you. And Jesus looks us in the eye and says neither do I condemn you. go and sin no more. This is Jesus' word for us this morning.

He who sits on the throne of the universe is both king and priest. His throne is a throne of grace. A throne of undeserved unrestricted and undefeated goodness.

goodness. And it's for that reason that we came here this morning. And we say the Lord reigns. Let the earth rejoice and let the many coastlands be glad.

Brothers and sisters I speak these things to you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.