

Kingship

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[0 : 00] I add my welcome to Jeremy's. My name's David Short. I work here at St. John's. And at this time, I'd like you to take your Bible and turn to Psalm 72 that was read in two sections for us so well by Hannah, page 485.

We're in a series on the Psalms. And we have a new PA system. So if something is going to go wrong, it's going to go wrong when I'm using it. I'm just warning you.

I have this thing with PA systems. I seem to be able to break the best of them. The first time I preached at a guest service, I've probably told you this, I was still in seminary and there was a gooseneck mic and it was bent out over here.

And I grabbed the mic to my mouth and it snapped off. It was still working. So I preached like I was a singer.

Like this, which was very difficult to preach. Because preachers usually make two points. On the one hand, on the... Anyway. When my dad was the dean of the cathedral, he asked me to go and preach there and I did.

[1 : 14] And about 18 times during that sermon, there was a loud high-pitched screaming noise, which didn't come from anyone in the congregation. It came from my mic.

So you found Psalm 72. Good. So what this psalm asks us to do this morning is to imagine a world where every ruler, every leader, every person in authority bows their knee and is accountable to one person who is perfect in righteousness and justice.

Donald Trump. Vladimir Putin. Xi Jinping. King Mohammed Al-Salman.

Angela Merkel. Justin Trudeau. John Horgan. Kennedy Stewart. The psalm invites us to imagine a world where every act of injustice, every act of bias or unfairness is dealt with perfectly, from the smallest to the greatest.

Where the one thing that we can't seem to get right, relationships are put right. Where the poor and the needy have instant help and redress.

[2 : 34] Where oppression is crushed out and replaced with a positive sense of joy in each other and in God. Where every relationship and every person is filled with goodness and blessing.

And creation itself responds in abundance and plenty as righteousness flows from the tops of the mountains. And you may say I'm a dreamer.

But this is what Psalm 72 calls us to do. It's very different from the vision in John Lennon's song, Imagine. Have you noticed in the last 10 years that whenever there's a tragedy in the West, there's one of two songs that are sung, either Amazing Grace or John Lennon's Imagine.

Imagine. So in March, after the New Zealand massacre in the mosques, everywhere in New Zealand this song was sung at the public events, Imagine.

And I don't need to tell you that just imagining is not going to work. You probably know that John Lennon was a physically violent person, particularly to women. He was horrified with people with disabilities.

[3 : 49] His son Julian called him a complete hypocrite. But even hypocrites can have beautiful longings. However, Lennon's view was that the only way for the world to live as one was if we got rid of God.

Imagine there's no heaven, he said. The problem for him is faith in God. If we get rid of God and work really hard together, then we would be living life in peace.

Well, Psalm 72 gives us a different view. And it's wider and longer and deeper and much more profound.

And it surpasses a brotherhood without wars. It is a peace that's based on a perfect righteousness, where the creation itself is healed and joins in as a sort of a wild kingdom.

And where the blessings of God flow down from the mountains, not just today, not just tomorrow, but for eternity. And not just for some, but for all in every nation until the whole earth is filled with the glory of God.

[4 : 59] And the crazy thing about this psalm, or the wonderful thing about this psalm, is that the hope all depends on one person, one human being.

That's where our faith is all resting. And he comes in verse 1. He's called the King, the Royal Son. How can these words written a thousand years before the coming of Jesus offer us any realistic hope for today?

Well, I want to step back for a moment with you. The book of Psalms is written in five, it's collected in five different books. So if you look down the bottom of the psalm, you can see book 3 starts. And verse 20, the prayers of David, the son of Jesse, ended. That's the end of book 2. And books 1 and 2 are focused on King David, who was the king of Israel, 1000 BC.

And you can see in verse 1, the title of the psalm, Of Solomon. It's either written by David to Solomon on his deathbed, or by Solomon, doesn't really matter, because it is a prayer to God, so that God will fulfill his promises.

[6 : 07] And what's important about these two characters is that both David and his son Solomon were set apart by God. They were chosen by God for a special role, and they were anointed to be the anointed ones.

And the word in Hebrew for anointing is Messiah, and the New Testament word is Christ. Anointing, Messiah, Christ, all the same thing. I don't know how you felt when Hannah was reading it, but it's not a delusion of grandeur for this tiny nation.

It is a wild hope, based on what God has promised way back in the first book of the Bible, to bless all nations through his people.

And what God promised to King David was that he's going to give one descendant who's going to sit on his throne, and he's going to rule perfectly and in righteousness forever. And this is very important, because throughout the Bible, God promises that he's going to deal with all evil and bring blessing.

We read it in Psalm 7. We sang it in the hymn. But the key about this is that the way God is going to do it, ever since David, is through the one Messiah who is coming.

[7 : 30] So David's prayer shows us what Jesus is going to do. And that's the way it becomes our prayer as well. One more comment before we get into it. This is written at the peak of Israel's kingdom.

David or Solomon were king. Had peace from all the enemies round about. King David had brought the ark into Jerusalem, the ark of God, and God made these astonishing promises. But if you read the story of David as we did a couple of years ago, it's very disappointing.

You know, David's sinful and he dies. He followed God, basically, but then he committed adultery. And then he had the husband of his new lover murdered, covered it up.

And his son Solomon had so much promise. Ask God for wisdom at the beginning of his reign, made decisions of tremendous wisdom. But he also made disastrous decisions as he went on.

Do you know, he began his rule by killing off everyone who is disloyal to him. And then the first action he takes publicly is he makes an alliance with Israel's old enemy Egypt by marrying Pharaoh's daughter.

[8 : 38] Putting her up in a little house behind the palace so that she can worship her Egyptian gods. And then he imposes forced labor on Israel to build, you know, for his big building projects.

Tens of thousands of God's people are conscripted into slave labor. And then he lays these ridiculous taxes on his people for his building programs.

And at one stage, to pay for his building programs, he gives away 20 cities in Galilee to a foreign king. You know, this is God's land. And he takes hundreds of wives from pagan nations, exactly what God said not to do, until finally God said to him, I'm going to tear the kingdom away from you.

And that's exactly what happened. But the promises of God remain. The promises of God remain. And this contradiction between our hope for justice and our hope for righteousness and our hope in God and the experience of reality is where this psalm becomes so important.

Notice, please, there's no cynicism, no despair, no make-believe. But it is a prayer to God based on the promises of God and it resonates deep in our hearts.

[9 : 57] And the psalm itself, let me just give a couple of pointers. It's very simple. It's a very simple psalm. The key verse is verse 1. Everything else flows out of verse 1.

And the main idea is righteousness. So there's only one reference to God in the whole psalm. It's in verse 1. The entire psalm is dominated by this prayer for the Son.

So let me read verse 1. Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to the royal son. Very important.

This is not a prayer that the royal son, that the king, will be just and righteous. It's a prayer, God, give him your justice, your righteousness, which is completely impossible.

The righteousness and justice of God are beyond any human being. It doesn't matter how brilliant or ethical or educated or experienced the king, if he's a human being, he's not going to have perfect justice or righteousness.

[11 : 06] He's not going to be able to see in the hearts of other people, nor is he going to have power to truly deal with what is truly wrong. So right from verse 1, we are already asking way too much of one human being, are we not?

For God to answer this prayer, we need a human being who's going to share divine privileges and divine power. And since he is the royal son, a descendant of David, he must be a real human, part of David and Solomon's line.

But if he's going to have the perfect purity and righteousness of God, and if he's going to dispense perfect justice and restoration and deliverance, he's going to have to be a God man.

Isn't that amazing? Now, we use this word righteousness today mostly negatively. Someone's a righteous person. They're usually moralizing and full of themselves and self-satisfied and self-righteous.

It's a pity because this is the thing that we long for above everything. In the Old Testament, righteousness is a friendship word.

[12 : 15] It reflects the connection and relationship between God and human beings. It's personal. It's not impersonal.

And ethics and law, yeah, they're a small part of it, but it has to do with right relating to each other in concrete ways. Righteousness is what we do not have.

It's why we mess up our relationships. But God's ways are always righteous, perfect, which means God's ways and God's ways of relating give life and hope and joy in communion with others.

In fact, later in the Old Testament, God says, I delight in showing righteousness. And then later in Jeremiah, he says, you can call my name righteousness. It's a name for God.

And justice is when God acts in righteousness. That is, he puts things right between himself and people, and he puts things right between people who have wronged each other.

[13 : 20] So their decisions to right wrongs and to reward rights, it's the active side of righteousness. And the reason I'm going on about this is because this is very important to understand about God before kindness or compassion.

Otherwise, compassion will be untethered to anything that's right and good. And when you have compassion with no compass, it's what you get when you get mafia figures, you know, who are very kind and lovely to their pets, but happy to kill people.

The Dalai Lama got into trouble a couple of years ago for talking about Hitler's compassion. When kindness and compassion are tethered to what is righteous and just, and when the power of God combines them in a God-man, now there's hope.

So as I said, everything flows out of this. And for the rest of my time, I just want to show that there are three main effects of this righteousness and justice being exercised by this king, the royal son.

What are the three effects of the just and righteous rule of God in the son of God? Three effects, goodness, greatness, glory. Firstly, goodness. When righteousness and justice, when God's righteousness and justice rule through the king, the effect is peace, peace.

[14 : 49] Hebrew, shalom, peace. Not the absence of nastiness and suffering and evil, but the positive enjoyment of right relationships.

It's the enjoyment of living in right relationship with God. It's the enjoyment of living in one's own physical surroundings. Enjoyment in living with one's fellows.

To enjoy life with yourself. So look at verse three. Let the mountains bear shalom for the people and the hills in righteousness.

The mountains are the highest points that you can see and the furthest away. It's saying that in that day, shalom is going to cover every millimeter of the land and creation itself is going to rise up in shalom in abundance and overflow and excess and blessing and there's going to be more than enough to go around.

Verse six. May he, the royal son, be like rain that falls on the mown grass, like showers that water the earth. In his days, may the righteous flourish and peace, shalom, abound till the moon be no more.

[16:03] This idea of human flourishing is so attractive to us. In the Hebrew, it means expanding and growing in capacity and happiness.

So the righteousness and justice the son of God creates makes conditions where all that is good and all that is fresh in humanity can grow. This is much better than the West Coast vision of life with good coffee and exercise and wealth and food and perhaps a house.

This is when a person blooms in relationship toward God and others and it sets the course of our life here. But it's not going to happen easily and it's not going to happen automatically and it's not going to happen overnight because there's deep resistance to the righteousness and justice of God. And so the king has to deal with evil in two ways, positively and negatively. Positively, the son has a special connection with those who belong to him, particularly the victims of abuse and exploitation. Verse two. May he judge your people, God, with righteousness and your poor with justice. The word for poor here means depressed, pushed down, crushed.

[17:23] Every person who follows this king, this royal son, has immediate access to the king. And even when he is bringing all kings to bow to him around the world, every one of us has instant access and entrance with this king.

Look down at verse 12 and 13. He delivers the needy when he calls, not after he's finished his busy list, the poor and him who has no helper.

He has pity on the weak. Literally, he is refuge on the weak and the needy. And saves the lives of the needy. From oppression and violence, he redeems their life.

And get this. Precious is their blood in his sight. Because those who belong to this king in this world are not excluded from suffering.

Some will suffer terribly. Some will be killed. And even when they're killed, he will redeem their lives through death because precious in his sight is their blood.

[18:30] We are more valuable to him than we can say. And negatively, he will also bring righteousness. Verse 4, you cannot defend the cause of the poor or deliver the children of the needy unless you crush the oppressor.

And there's no doubt that God's king will execute God's judgment because putting things right means dealing with what's wrong. A God cannot be a God of love unless he judges and punishes what is wrong.

You can't put things right unless you destroy things that are wrong. This whole idea that there's no judgment, that's not love. That's apathy. That's disinterest.

It's not love that never puts things right. That kind of apathy will never bring shalom and peace. But here is the promise that the royal son will bring all the goodness, all the flourishing, all the peace, all the shalom of God by establishing God's justice and righteousness.

So the first effect of the royal son is goodness. The second effect is greatness. My second point. And I hope when you read through the psalm, you could see the sheer extent of the rule of the son is staggering.

[19:44] For example, it extends in time. Verse 7. Until the moon will be no more. Verse 17. May his name endure forever. His fame as long as the sun.

It extends not only in time, but over all people. Verse 11. All kings fall down before him. All nations serve him. And the countries that are mentioned there cover the known world.

And it takes the worship that belongs to God alone and prays now that it will go to the royal son. Isn't that amazing? And verse 8.

Has a very familiar ring to us as Canadians. May he have dominion from sea to sea and from river to the ends of the earth. What is the official motto on the Canada coat of arms?

Does anyone, any smarty pants know it in Latin? I looked it up. It's amare usca ad mare. Yeah, from sea to sea. It's from this verse. In 1867, the Canadian politicians were in London trying to figure out what they should call Canada and the debate was about whether we should be called a republic or

a kingdom.

[20 : 53] How glad we are that neither happened. And Sir Samuel Leonard Tilly, who was the premier of New Brunswick, and a keen Christian, got up one morning and he read Psalm 72.

And he went to the meeting and he suggested Canada be a dominion. And the idea would be that we'd be united under this sun. And the Prime Minister of England agreed and Queen Victoria did because she was a very clever woman.

And until 1982, Canada Day was still called Dominion Day. And if I ask Canadians now whether we're still a dominion, the answer is it depends on who you ask.

However, I need to say that since the days of Adolf Hitler, people have been rightly suspicious of all grand claims to power, haven't they?

We are. I mean, Hitler dreamed big. He dreamed of a whole new humanity ruled by a master race. And millions were exterminated and millions more had lives damaged forever.

[21 : 57] And what's worse is that Hitler spoke as though what he was doing was the will of God. But you see, the righteousness and justice of God were completely absent.

And when the goodness and loving kindness of God appeared in Jesus Christ, his son, it is marked by humility and grace and saving others at the cost of his own life.

That's why we can trust him with this extent, not just in time, but over all the earth. And because his kingdom, his righteousness extends as well into the hearts of those who bow to him.

Now we know from the New Testament, there will come a day when every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Not every creature will do that willingly and happily. Satan will bow the knee to Christ with rage and hatred, but he will recognize the authority of Jesus and that his justice is right.

But here is the amazing thing. The prayer in this psalm is that more of those who don't recognize Jesus or even hate Jesus or ignore him or are careless about spiritual things would come to adore him with all their hearts and call him blessed.

[23 : 14] Read it again. The psalm is not a call for vengeance on God's enemies. It's a prayer that the hearts of those who oppose the king and God would turn back.

You see verse 11? That they would fall down and serve him. Or in verse 17, more remarkably, may all nations call him blessed. As the son executes God's righteousness and justice, God calls on all those who are outside the kingdom to enter in.

We've seen this again and again and again in Matthew's gospel, haven't we? Jesus offering forgiveness and grace and the kingdom of God even to those who are planning to kill him, even those when they're talking about killing him, he does it.

So verses 9 to 11 are not a prayer for revenge and punishment, but for those who are outside the blessing might step inside. And I've got to say, if you're not seeking Jesus, if you're careless about Jesus, if you're seeking your own flourishing and the peace somewhere else, it can only lead to frustration and futility.

And I think it's a good reminder, this psalm, not just to imagine these things, but to pray very big prayers. In Psalm 72, take it and pray it for our world.

[24 : 31] God promises that he will answer. So three effects, goodness, greatness, and finally and thirdly, the third effect is glory. Look at verse 18 and 19.

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things. Blessed be his glorious name forever. May the whole earth be filled with his glory.

Amen and amen. And that is a lot of glory. And since we live on this side of the coming of Jesus, we know that we don't just have to imagine a world living life in peace.

Because the way that God has begun to fulfill this prayer is more wonderful and more radical than David could have imagined. That God did not do it by a naked show of power, but he lowered himself and he humbled himself in the person of his son to become fully one with us.

the eternal, divine, son of God, fully God in every way for eternity past, fully equal with the Father and the Spirit. He entered our world by taking to himself human flesh while continuing to be divine.

[25 : 47] He became the God-man. And a thousand years after this psalm was written, on a quiet night in Bethlehem, a baby was born to a virgin who'd been conceived in the womb of this young woman by the Holy Spirit, a fully human baby who took his human nature from his mother.

The angel who had appeared to Mary had said, he will be called the Son of the Most High and the Lord will give him the throne of his father David and he will reign forever and of his kingdom there

will be no end.

And kings came from the east with gifts and tribute, gold, frankincense and myrrh and they bowed before the child. And when he was baptized the heavens opened and the Spirit came upon him and God the Father said, this is my beloved Son in whom I'm well pleased.

He was the God-man, the divine Son in human flesh. And he came and he preached peace, shalom. And he preached the kingdom and he healed all who came to him and delivered the needy and he saved the children of the poor.

But it's in his death where the glory of God is most clearly seen. And on the last night before he was handed over to be killed, he prays this prayer.

[27 : 03] He says to God the Father, I glorified you on earth having accomplished the work you gave me to do and now Father glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world existed.

So in his death, Jesus makes peace. He makes shalom by the blood of his cross and he reveals what it's going to take to establish God's righteousness and God's justice.

And most wonderfully, in a way that we cannot understand, through the cross and through his resurrection, he offers to us the very righteousness of God in exchange for our unrighteousness. For our sake, God made him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. And every time you hear this good news and every time I preach this good news, we know that God reveals his righteousness and justice to us again afresh for our faith to share it with us and to make us right with him.

And he was raised from the dead. Death could not hold him. He ascended into heaven and is now seated at the right hand of the power on high where he has begun to rule and he will come to judge the living and the dead when every creature in heaven and earth will bow before him and he will make, he will remake creation and righteousness will flow from the mountaintops and the whole earth will be filled with his glory and until that time God is putting all things under the feet of Jesus Christ.

[28 : 45] Brothers and sisters, our hopes for this world are not that we'll finally elect really good politicians, find truly selfless, wise, ethical, you know, who'll make good policies and sensible decisions.

Our hope is not for a super UN where we might all agree to a policy on brotherhood and non-violence and equality of distribution. Our hopes are pinned on this one man, the God man, Jesus Christ.

And when we look at him by faith, we see all the glory of God in his face and there is nothing to compare. There's nothing that can compare with him. And everything else that satisfies in our life and everything we desire is at very best just a distant reflection of the glory of God in his face.

And the more we see it and the more we believe it by faith, the more we contemplate the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, the more like him we become. And God promises to fill our hearts with a love and a joy and a delight and rest at the sheer beauty of who he is and what he's done. I finish with a quote. This is from a theologian 350 years ago, John Owen. He says this, where are our hearts and minds if we see no glory in him, Jesus?

[30 : 05] He says, I know when we contemplate his glory, it quickly overwhelms our minds and our understandings come to a loss. They're at a loss. And he says, I want to be brought to this loss every day because when faith can no longer act any more incomprehending, when it finds the object it is fixed on too great and glorious to be brought into our minds and capacities, it will produce holy admiration, humble adoration and joyful thanksgiving and will fill the soul with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

Bless the Lord, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things. Blessed be his glorious name forever. May the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen and amen.