

God's Plan in Focus

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[0 : 00] Let's turn again to the book of Psalms. We read it earlier. And to Psalm 110.

And I'll read the first part of the psalm again. The Lord says to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool. The Lord sends forth from Zion your mighty scepter. Rule in the midst of your enemies. Your people will offer themselves freely on the day of your power in holy garments from the womb of the morning. The dew of your youth will be yours. The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind you're a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek and so on to the end of the psalm.

My first camera was an Instamatic. I got it from my Christmas when I was about 10 years old.

And you put a spool into it and you pointed it at whatever you wanted to take a photograph of and you pressed the button and you hoped for the best. Once you had finished your 24 photographs that you had on your spool, you would take the spool out and you would have to send it away to whatever. I think it was Boots or it was Kodak or whatever. I can't even remember.

It was that long ago. And then about two weeks later, you got your photographs back. And if you were lucky and if you had done the thing right, then the photographs turned out okay.

[1 : 56] But if you weren't and if you hadn't been very good at what you were doing, then too bad. You got 24 blank photographs back, which are a complete waste of money because you were charged for them just the same. Nowadays, of course, it's entirely different.

You have your digital camera and you simply point at something. You can see exactly what you're pointing at and you can take a photograph and you know that the photograph that you've taken is exactly what you've looked at. And sometimes it looks even better in its finished product than the real thing because you can do all kinds of fancy things to it on the computer. That's the day and age in which we live. And one thing that I still find difficulty getting my head around when I'm trying to take a photograph with a digital camera is the way in which the camera seems to focus on everything. If you have it in this position, it'll focus on what's ahead. And then if you shift it slightly, it tries to focus on something else. Well, trying to understand this, Sam, is like trying to take a photograph with a digital camera. You're not quite sure whether to look at it as a scene and to take a wide-angle photograph of it and to try and understand it as one psalm, as one unit, or whether to focus on the various things and the various people and events and words that are in it.

No sooner have you tried to focus on one that you focus on another and you're trying to make sense from the different elements that you're trying to focus on. And it's one of those mysterious psalms in which you have to look at it in the light of the whole Bible to try and understand.

And that's what I'm going to try and do tonight. I'm going to try and take a wide-angle shot of the psalm, but I'm also going to try and focus on the individual elements, the faces, the people, the events that take place from the beginning of the psalm to the end of the psalm and try and understand them in the light of the New Testament because this has to be understood.

If the psalm is mysterious to us, it was even more mysterious to the people who would have read it in the Old Testament. Because right from the very beginning, there's this statement, this opening statement, which nobody knew what it meant. It says this, the Lord, well, there's no question who that is, the Lord is God. The Lord says to my Lord, and this is David who's writing this, did he understand what he was saying? The Lord says to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool. So whilst the Lord is perfectly obvious as God, there is this mysterious character called my Lord. David says my Lord, obviously somebody who's superior to him. Otherwise, he wouldn't be calling him my Lord. Did he know who he was talking about? Did he know who that was?

[5 : 02] Did he know who it was that had the incredible privilege of being invited? Here is someone who's getting the privilege of God inviting him to sit at his right hand. And that, of course, as you

probably know, was the greatest honor anyone. If the queen asks you to sit at her right hand, that is no mean thing at all. You are to sit at her right. It's a place of honor, a place of dignity, and in this case, a place of rule. And it's only when you open the pages of the New Testament that you discover who this mysterious my Lord is. It's identified in the New Testament, he's identified as none other than Jesus Christ himself. This psalm was the best-known psalm in the New Testament. If I asked you what was the best-known psalm in the New Testament, you'd probably say, well, this must have been Psalm 23 because that's our best-known psalm. But not so. In the New Testament, this psalm is quoted more often than any other psalm in the book of Psalms. Because the New Testament church, the disciples and those who followed them, they knew, they all of a sudden understood what it was about, and they saw it unfolding before their very eyes. No longer was it a mystery, and it must have been a tremendous occasion of joy when all of a sudden the penny dropped, the mystery of what was written in all those hundreds of years ago, all of a sudden was made clear to them. And how much more clear is it to us who have the benefit not only of being able to read both Testaments, but the understanding that

God has given us through the ages. It's quoted often in the New Testament. I want us to divide it into three. I want us to see, first of all, that it begins with the Lord's invitation to his Son, verse 1. The Lord's invitation to his Son, Jesus. And then I want us to see from verse 2 to verse 4, the Lord's promise to his Son. And then I want us to see in the third place, the last place, the Lord's victory through his Son. So, the Lord's invitation to his Son, the Lord's promise to his Son, and then the Lord's victory through his Son. Well, like I say, the psalm begins with this tremendous invitation, an invitation from God himself to somebody to sit at his right hand. And the disciples all of a sudden came to know what these words, how they were fulfilled, when they reflected on something about the Lord Jesus Christ.

Not the baby Jesus, not the Jesus of Nazareth around the Sea of Galilee teaching and doing miracles and feeding the 5,000, not even the Jesus on the cross giving his life as the sacrifice for our sin, not even the Jesus rising from the dead on the third day. But the Jesus that this psalm speaks about is the one who ascended up to heaven 40 days after he rose from the grave. That's what Luke 24 tells us.

After his work here was done in the world, after he had given his life and risen again on the third day, he went out 40 days later with his disciples and there after blessing them, he literally was lifted up into heaven. We don't know the science behind that. God doesn't depend on our science. God created science.

[9 : 20] It belongs to him. He knows this dimension and he also knows the heavenly dimension. So, for him, the transition or the transport of someone from this world into heaven is no problem.

He's able to do it. No problem. But what we read in Luke chapter 24 is that the disciples saw him rising up into the sky and a cloud enveloped him so they couldn't see him anymore.

What Psalm 110 tells us is what happened beyond the cloud, what the disciples couldn't see. So that when he rose and was lifted up from the earth, he went beyond the cloud. The cloud enveloped him, covered him, and then he left this dimension that we call earth and he went into heaven. I don't believe it's far away. It's a different dimension. It's a different existence. It's where God is, but God's not confined to any one place. But he entered into the presence, the glory of God. Hebrews chapter 1, the chapter that we've just read, it tells us that after making purification for sin, he sat at the right hand of God. But I would, without, and I know it's kind of dangerous to speculate, but I believe that this was a royal procession and that the host of heaven, all the millions and millions upon millions of angels were present, and they saw the Son of God having left heaven and come into this world to become a sacrifice for sin by laying down his life on the cross with all the humiliation and the shame and the pain and the suffering that he endured. Now he is coming back into heaven.

[11 : 13] His entrance back into heaven is a royal entrance, and there is a massive, massive noise. I want you to picture the opening of the Olympics if you want. I want you to picture a massive football match and all these thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands, tens of thousands, singing, but except they're not singing for a team, they're not singing for a runner, they're singing for Jesus, the Son of God, coming back victorious into heaven, having won the victory over death, having defeated death, and having secured the salvation of God's people, and having defeated the devil and all that he tries to do, and having secured his downfall, he makes that procession into heaven, he approaches the throne, and all of a sudden there is silence, and the Father opens his

mouth and says this, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool. Like I say, the person who sits at the king's right hand is not just a friend of the king, but he rules alongside the king. It's the greatest honor that you could ever have in royal terms to sit at the right hand of a king. God the Father was giving him a position of authority on the basis of what he had done. He says it himself in Matthew 28, all power is given to me because of what he had done on the cross.

And so that's the Lord's or the Father's invitation to the Son. Now let me ask you this question.

When Jesus rose to heaven again, when he was lifted up to heaven again, his disciples didn't see him anymore. Was that the end of Jesus' ministry or the beginning of Jesus' ministry?

Was it the end or was it the beginning? There's a sense in which it was both.

In one sense, it was the end of his having come into this world, being born in the world, and having died on the cross to give his life to remove our guilt and rising again.

That was the work for which he had come into the world to do. The work the Father gave him to do. He said it on the cross, it is finished. So that when, after rising from the dead, he left his disciples, they couldn't see him anymore, they wouldn't see him this side ever again until they themselves went to heaven, that was the end of him, as far as they were concerned, as far as they could see.

[14:11] And yet, in a very real sense, in just as real sense, it was the beginning. A new beginning. A new beginning. And the beginning of a new era. The gospel era. And that's the second part of the psalm, from verse 2 to verse 4, where God the Father, he promises his Son. And what's the promise? He says in verse 4, the Lord has sworn and will not change his mind. God never changes his mind. You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. Verse 2 tells us that as soon as Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father, the scepter, look at what it says, verse 2, the Lord sends forth from Zion your mighty scepter. What was the scepter a sign of? It was a symbol of the authority and the rule of the King. And from then on, something absolutely tremendous was going to begin. You read about it in the Acts of the Apostles. We saw some of it last week in Acts chapter 16. What happened 50 days after Jesus rose from the dead? The day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples and Peter stood up and he preached the gospel. And as a result of his preaching, 3,000 people were converted. And from then on, for 2,000 years, the gospel has been making progress in the world. Jesus has been building up his church. That's the era that you and I belong to, one in which you and I have heard the gospel. And many of us this evening, I hope most of us, and I hope one day all of us will have come to a personal faith in Jesus Christ, because that's what the gospel is all about. It's the most unstoppable, irreversible, irresistible power in the whole world. There is no influence and no power and authority that's greater than the power of

God as he works in the gospel. No one has ever been able to put a stop to it. There are more Christians tonight than have ever been in the world before. Now, I want you to notice how, between verse 2 and verse 4, that God describes this era, the era that we belong to. You see, this psalm is not some kind of theological exercise. It describes the days, the years that we belong to, the New Testament since Jesus, and it will continue till he comes again. He describes it, first of all, as Jesus' rule in the midst of his enemies. Verse 2, rule in the midst of his enemies. We've already seen how the scepter, it symbolizes that rule. Now, do you notice anything strange about that? Do you notice anything unusual about this statement?

Rule in the midst of your enemies. It's not normal, is it, for an army or for one nation to rule in the middle of their enemies. You get two countries that are opposed to each other and that are at war with each other. You'll get the battle line that was drawn. There's the frontier, the front line, and on one side is one army, and on the other side is the other army. So, you would expect that the Lord, if this was an ordinary battle, to say, rule on the one side and confront your enemies.

But that's not what he's saying. He's saying, go behind enemy lines, not just to infiltrate the enemy, but to actually be my kingdom amongst in the middle of your enemies. And he's not saying that anymore just to Jesus. He's saying it to the Lord's people, the church, those who have come to know him as their Savior and who are living for Jesus and building up his church and sharing the gospel with others. Rule in the midst of your enemies. And that's where we are tonight. The New Testament makes absolutely no mistake. It doesn't allow us to misunderstand that there is conflict in this world. We are not to be violent towards God's enemies. God's enemies are those who refuse to love him and obey him. You might say, well, surely that's up to them. Well, that might sound very plausible, but it's not. Because God, surely, having created us to be who we are in this world, surely our first priority should be to love God and to obey him. Surely our first, the first thing that we ought

to be doing this evening is to be honoring God and to be worshiping him and thanking him and loving him for what he has done for us. Surely it's the greatest act of hostility to be refusing to listen to God and living our own life, thinking that we know better, trying to create our own future and believing that our way is better than God's way. Surely it's the greatest insult, because whatever God says to us has to be right, has to be right, otherwise he's not God. And when we say to God, I don't want you,

I'm not going to obey you, I'm not interested in you, I'm not going to even believe in you, surely that's the greatest insult, the greatest act of dishonor and enmity. That's basically saying, I hate you. I am your enemy. I don't want anything to do with you. That's what kind of world we live in. It's in various different forms, disbelief, unbelief, alternative belief, no belief, you name it, it's there. And yet, here's the thing, that God's kingdom is in the middle of all that, all that hostility, all that conflict. And that's why John says in 1 John chapter 3, don't be surprised when the world hates you. That's why Jesus said to his disciples, don't be surprised, in this world you will have trouble, but fear not, I have overcome the world. That's why he says, if the world hated me, it'll hate you also. And that's why we read in Acts of the Apostles the way in which the Apostle Paul was hounded and hunted and persecuted and beaten and shipwrecked and attacked and imprisoned, and eventually he was put to death for his faith. And yet, this was the way that Jesus and his kingdom was ruling in the midst of his enemies. His rule is also by the means of his people.

[21 : 28] Jesus rules. He reigns through his people, through those who have given their lives to him and those whose hearts have been opened and who are forgiven by him. That makes us different from everyone else in the world. But I want you to notice what kind of people they are in this psalm. They're first of all, a willing people. Verse 3, your people will offer themselves freely on the day of your power.

What's the day of your power? Well, the way in which God works in this world is not the way, it's not in some kind of military way. There's no such thing as a holy war. I've said that before, but there's so many people that try to misrepresent the Christian faith. They think that somehow we're violent people.

We're trying to impose our way on others. We're trying to point the finger at other people and try to force them. That's never been, or it ought never to have been, the way that the gospel operates or advances. Rather, look at what he says here, your people will offer themselves freely. What that means is that when a person comes to Jesus, that person comes because he has been made willing.

He wants to. He's persuaded. God's word has spoken to him and moved him so much that his heart has been changed so that instead of opposing God, he now loves God because he started understanding what the gospel is all about. And nothing but the power of God can change a person's heart to make that person willing to embrace Jesus and to take him and to follow him. You look at the people who follow Jesus in the way when he was there. Their hearts, Zacchaeus, for example. When Zacchaeus, when he saw Jesus passing, when Jesus stopped, I reckon Zacchaeus had given up any hope for any forgiveness.

I reckon he assumed that Jesus would have nothing to do with him. He was such a cheat and a greedy man. Long since having forsaken what he knew to be right, he lived a life of lies and cheating and money and greed. And so that's so when he saw that Jesus walking underneath the tree, the last thing you expect in all the world was for Jesus, the son of God, to look up in the tree and say, Zacchaeus, come down because I must stay at your house today. I want you to be a new person. I want you to have and to know my forgiveness. Nothing could stop Zacchaeus. Why? Because he all of a sudden had seen the love of God in Jesus Christ and all of a sudden he experienced that his sins were gone. All his lies and his deceit, they were all taken away. And Jesus was making him a new person. You try and stop him from following Jesus.

[24 : 42] He was made willing. He didn't want anything else in all the world. It was the same with Bartimaeus. It was the same with so many of the people. The woman at the well, she ran to tell her friend. She wanted everyone else to have what she'd got. And that's the way with you, isn't it? I hope it is.

I really hope you've come to be persuaded that living for Jesus is the only way to live. It's the only way in which all our wrongdoing can be cleansed and washed away, never to be remembered anymore.

It's the only way in which our hearts can be renewed and recreated so that instead of serving ourselves and trying to please ourselves in this world, and it gives no satisfaction, does it? But rather, Jesus, all of a sudden you realize what's happened. You realize that you're in this world and nothing really makes sense until you come to know God through Jesus Christ. And you come to all of a sudden see that this is the way to live. That Jesus is the Son of God and that his death on the cross is God's way of changing you and bringing you to be a new person. And the life that he gives you is everlasting life.

[26 : 01] And you've come because you've been persuaded. You're willing. You want to come. There isn't a single person who's a Christian tonight but doesn't want to be a Christian. You can't force someone else to be a Christian. You can't coerce them into being a Christian. Someone who's a Christian is someone who's been persuaded by the Lord. And someone who's persuaded by other people who are Christians themselves and being able to share Jesus with them. And I hope we're active in our own way in sharing Jesus with other people so that they see that the life that they live is defective. It's not going anywhere. It doesn't give what they hoped it would give. And it's going to end up in judgment.

And in punishment. And in punishment. But now they see that there's another way. And they can only see that through you. You are the living example of what Jesus has done on the cross. You are the living proof of a changed life. Are you willing to share it? Are you open about your faith? I hope so.

Because not everyone reads their Bible. You might be the first spark of interest which your friend ever takes in the gospel. A willing people. And then it says this, from the womb on the day of your power in holy garments. From the womb of the morning the Jew of your youth will be yours. The womb of the morning the Jew of your youth will be yours. What that means is, well actually that's probably the most complicated verse in the psalm. And I certainly don't want to get bogged down in the different views that people have as to what the word means. But it first of all means that God's people must be holy. Now that doesn't mean that they separate themselves from everything else in the world that they live behind closed doors. They never have anything to do with the rest of society.

They don't have any Christian, they don't have any friends except Christian friends. And all they do is they come out the house only when there's a church service on. They go to church and then run back to the house. That's not what it means at all. If you want to see an example of what real holiness is, then you look at Jesus and the kind of life he lived. He was always amongst people. The people received him gladly. They listened to him with willing hearts. He was always approachable. He loved them. He came to seek and to save the lost. And we too, the challenge of the Christian life is to be in the world, interacting with the world in every way we can. And yet there have to be lines that we can't cross. Because if you cross the line, then you become like everyone else and nobody knows that you're a Christian. That's what holiness means. It means being clear about who you serve and what you are in this world. It means that as you live your life day by day, there's something different about the way you live. Your conversation is different. Your attitude is different. Your interest in people is different. Your way of life is different. And there are things that you won't do that other people do. But there are things you do that other people don't do. There's a difference in the way in which you live. That's what it means. That's the description that God gives to his people in holy garments. And he tells us that as he looks at his people, he sees them like the Jew of your youth will be yours. Whose youth? Jesus' youth. Can you think of Jesus as someone old tonight? He's not.

[30 : 03] Jesus never grew old. He grew to the age, as far as his human nature was concerned, of 33 years old. And that was it. When he rose from the dead, he is still as young today as he ever was. Jesus never changes.

Yesterday, today, and forever. He is the same with that same love for us as he always had. With that same eagerness and enthusiasm to do God's will and to collect people to himself. You remember the passion that he had for those who he knew were dying? You know how his heart went out to the woman whose son had died, the woman in Nain? You know how his heart went out to Mary and Martha at the loss of their brother? Jesus, the same yesterday, today, and forever. And though he isn't bodily in this world, yet there is a sense in which he is as present as he ever was. The Jew of your youth.

And what's the Jew? What's the Jew? Well, the Jew is the people. God's people. The church. You and I, if we belong to Jesus, he looks at us as Jew. What does this mean? Well, if you go out on a dry, cold morning, and you look at a grass, a large patch of grass, and if the sun is shining on it, then all of a sudden you see millions of droplets of dew. It's quite a beautiful sight. Of course, once the sun rises properly, the dew evaporates. You don't see it anymore. But it's just little droplets of dew, and the sun is gleaming, reflecting on all these millions. That's the way that God looks at us tonight. All over the world, there are God's people, people who have been redeemed and born again, and who have been changed, and they're living for Jesus, and they're letting their light shine, and they're sharing their faith with others, and living obediently to the Lord. And God looks at us like this gleaming dew that covers the earth. That's what he sees it. You might see your life in terms of all the difficulties. You might be tempted sometimes to despair as a Christian.

You think, I'm not going anywhere. I'm not doing anything. That's not the way God sees you. We're so tempted, aren't we, to lose sight of what we are as God's people in the eyes of God.

[32 : 44] And that's because we're so busy looking at ourselves in terms of what we are in the world that we fail, that we lose sight of what God thinks of us. Well, this is what God thinks of us.

And he's promised to the Lord, I've made you a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. Now, again, I could go off on a tangent here. We could talk about Melchizedek. You'll find him in Genesis, I think, round about chapter 18, I think it is. And he appears only once in the Bible. He was a king, the king of Salem. But the thing was about Melchizedek, he was a strange, mysterious character. Obviously, someone who worshipped and loved the Lord and who represented Jesus. It wasn't Jesus. Some people say that Melchizedek was Jesus. That's not the case at all.

Melchizedek, though, he represented Jesus. He bore some of the qualities that Jesus had. But the important thing to remember is that Melchizedek was a priest, and a priest is someone who represents us before God, a mediator. A mediator. And that's what each one of us need tonight. That's why we can never make our own way to God. You cannot by your own efforts or by your own good works or attempts to be the best person that you possibly can. You cannot get to God that way. You need someone to stand between you and God, and that someone can only be Jesus Christ.

That's what a priest means. But the great thing is tonight that if he is your priest, then you're absolutely secure because he's paid the price for your sin.

[34 : 32] And then lastly, as we come to the end of the psalm, there is that final section, God's victory through his Son. So far, we've been talking about the beginning of the psalm, which takes us into heaven after Jesus rises from the dead and ascends to heaven. We've also been thinking about the world in which we live in, the era, the gospel era, the New Testament. That's where we are right now.

But another time is coming, and that's described by, in verse 5 to verse 7, he will shatter kings on the day of his wrath. So far, we've been talking about the day of his power, and we've seen how the power means the persuasive power of God to bring people to know him, to win them over for Jesus Christ. But a day will come when that day will be finished, and it will give way to the day of God's wrath. When God, and that will happen only when and only when every one of God's people will be brought into his kingdom.

It's not for us to say we don't know when the end of the world will come. Jesus said, no one knows the day or the hour. You can speculate all you want, but it's pointless. But we nevertheless know it's coming. And the day, the end of the world will spell God's final judgment and the right punishment that he will give to those who have opposed him. The end of this psalm is uncomfortable to us. We don't like to think of what's being described here, the bloodshed, the destruction. But remember, this is God.

And everything that God does and will do has to be right. It has to be. And we have to remember also that God's justice is perfect justice. And God will not punish without good reason.

But he promises that a day will come when he will punish extensively and when the world will be destroyed and when, as Paul tells us, all of us has to stand at God's judgment seat.

[37 : 15] Verse 6, he will execute judgment among the nations. And the scene here is one of a battlefield where there has been an intense, a huge battle taking place and where there has been a victor and where the enemy has been totally wiped out and destroyed. The day will come when all those who have opposed the Lord will be destroyed eternally. And remember that when the Bible speaks about death, he talks about eternal death. We don't want to be amongst those who die

eternally, do we? Surely not.

Surely now is the time to come and to ask God's forgiveness for all our sin. Now is the day of salvation.

Now is the time. Now is the place where we ask God to change us, to make us into new people, to show us what he's really like, and to persuade us to follow him. I want to challenge you tonight to do that, to make your approach to God. You may have never done it before, but to make your approach to God and ask him to change you into whatever kind of person he wants you to be, and to show you how to trust and to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Let's pray.

Amen.