

The Victorious King

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[0 : 00] One of the challenges of my life this week was that I lost a lens in my bifocals. So I'm! I'm going to peer over my readers as I preach this morning. So it's not because I'm an angry teacher, it's just I need to read and I want to see you. So glad you all could make it through the snow this morning. We're going to turn now to God's Word and I'm going to ask for His help. So please pray with me.

Lord, thank you. Thank you that we are able to gather this morning. Lord, thank you for your Word that you have given us so that we might know you. And we pray for our time now as we look into your word together that you would fill us with your glory and your strength and your power.

Lord, that we might know you and in knowing you we might respond to you as we ought in worship, in adoration, in humble submission and in joy. We pray this in your name. Amen.

Amen. Long lay the world in sin and error pining till he appeared and the soul felt its worth. The thrill of hope a weary world rejoices for yonder breaks a new and glorious morn. The hymn writer of this great hymn reminds us of the world that we live in. We live in a world where sin abounds, where the worth of the soul of a human life is not felt, and where many of us feel the weariness of a broken world. You might feel this in the form of economic uncertainty. You might feel the weight of grief this morning as we read the headlines of shootings both near in Rhode Island and far in Sydney.

You might be bearing the weight of a personal trial or difficulty or concern about the polarization and acrimony of our political moment in this country. You might be aware of suffering and of persecution around the world.

[2 : 28] And of course, this is not new to our age. This is not new to our world. But this has been true since the very beginning. We have seen this happen over and over again throughout the ages. And as we will see tonight or this morning as we look into our word, it was true of Israel as they lived enslaved in Egypt, longing for freedom and escape. It was true in the first century when Jesus came under the oppression of Roman rule.

And in all of the times as we recognize the world that we live in, a cry rings out from our hearts. Oh Lord, come deliver us. Oh Lord, rescue us from this.

Oh Lord, come deliver us from this. And the Christmas story is a story that meets the heart cry of the world by giving promises, promises of a response to that.

If you've been here, you'll recognize that what we're doing during this Advent season is looking at some of the promises, some of the passages from the Old Testament that look forward to God's fulfillment of some of these promises. We have been picking ones that are not the sort of famous ones that are broadly quoted in regular Christmas stories, but some of the slightly more obscure ones. And today I think we're in the most obscure one. So we're in Numbers chapter 24, verses 15 through 19. That's page 124 in your pew Bible, if you would like to follow along with us.

And again, this might be an unusual Advent text, but I think we're going to get there. So hang in there with me. Let me begin before we read this passage by giving you a little bit of the context of where we are, where this passage fits in the storyline of the whole Bible, right? So in the book of Numbers, God's people are on the move. He delivered them from slavery to Egypt in the book of Exodus, and brought them out of that land, and they are now on this journey to a place that God has promised them a good place where they will be able to dwell secure and where He will establish them and a kingdom of Israel there when they get there, okay? But the journey has been fraught. They have faced their own failure of sin and unbelief, but also opponents and foes and obstacles along the way. The journey that should have been fairly short from your perspective, from Egypt right up to Israel, has been a very wandering one for lots of reasons. At this point in the story, they are approaching Israel from the east, and they are on the plains of Moab, and the king of that area, a man named Balak, is afraid of them. And so he wants to oppose them in their march

towards the promised land. And so he calls on a prophet named Balaam, not a prophet of Israel, but a prophet from the eastern provinces, maybe from Persia or the eastern areas at that point, to curse Israel and to help Moab defeat them militarily.

[6 : 06] But Balaam shows up and he says, I'm only going to say what the Lord tells me to say. And three times, Balak says, curse these people. And three times, Balaam says, I bless these people.

It doesn't work very well. Balak is not getting his money's worth. And after the third oracle of blessing, he then voluntarily gives one more. And that's actually the passage that we're looking at today. So this is the last word of Balaam to Balak about what God is up to in this journey of the people of Israel towards the promised land. So that's where we're at. Let's read our passage together today. Numbers, chapter 24, starting in verse 15. Actually, you know what? No, yeah, we'll just stay there. So here we go. And he took up his discourse and said, and he is Balaam. He said, the oracle of Balaam, the son of Baor, the oracle of the man whose eye is open, the oracle of him who hears the words of God and knows the knowledge of the Most High, who sees visions of the Almighty falling down with his eyes uncovered. I see him, but not now. I behold him, but not near. A star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel. It shall crush the forehead of Moab and break down all the sons of Sheth. Edom shall be dispossessed. Seir also, his enemies shall be dispossessed. Israel is doing valiantly, and one from Jacob shall exercise dominion and destroy the survivors of the city. The good news of Christmas is the coming of a victorious king. And Balaam, in this prophecy, is looking ahead to the coming of that king. So we're going to look at this in three steps. This is your outline, if you're an outline taker. We're going to look at the promise of the victorious king. We're going to look at the problem of the victorious king.

And then we're going to look at the paradox of the victorious king. So, firstly, the promise of a victorious king. The setup of this passage is actually in verse 14, and I almost read it, and now I'm going to read it for you so you can get the context.

Balaam says to Balak, and now behold, I am going to my people. Come, I will let you know what this people, that is Israel, will do to your people, that is Moab, in the latter days. So he's telling Balak, you're the king of Moab. You're trying to resist these people. Well, let me tell you what's going to happen. This is what's coming. And he says, there's a king who is coming. Not now.

[9 : 17] It's not going to happen right now. But in the future, there will be a king that will rise up. He will be like a star from Jacob, Jacob being a metaphor for the people of Israel, the descendants of Abraham. He will come with a scepter, which is a common metaphor for kingship, kind of like in England today. You might use the crown to refer to the queen or the king of England.

A scepter would be clearly a picture of a king. And this king is going to come with fierce and complete victory. If you're looking at the text, look at the language that Balaam uses. This king will crush Moab. It will break down all the sons of Sheth. Sons of Sheth is another metaphor for the people who lived in that area. Edom shall be dispossessed. Seir also shall be dispossessed. That is, they will be removed from their land. Israel is doing valiantly, and one from Jacob shall exercise dominion and destroy the survivors of cities. It is a picture of victory. And remember, I told you, Israel had been wandering in the wilderness. These are all the nations that they had just encountered, and some of them they had to go around because these countries refused to let them come through the land. And so they made it a more circuitous route, and some of them attacked Israel along the way trying to defeat them or to drive them out. And the promise here is that this king is going to come and bring complete victory over these people.

And Balaam says to Balak, this is what's going to come. A king is coming, and you will be destroyed. Now, we know that there are multiple fulfillments. As we read our Bible, there are often times when the Bible predicts things that are coming in the future, and sometimes there are various ones of them. It's like looking at a mountain range. You can see the front range clearly. You can't always see the peaks in the background as clearly. And that's what we have here in prophecy because we do see that in 2 Samuel chapter 8 verse 2, David, as he is establishing himself as the rightful king of Israel, defeats the Moabites. And that's the end of them. They are gone. Their kingdom never returns, right? So we see that there is an initial fulfillment in the kingship of David, which would be ballpark, well, a couple hundred years at least after that. But then you also see that there's a greater fulfillment of this, right? The story that we know of Christmas in Matthew 2. What did the wise men say? We saw a star rise, and we've come to worship the king that is signified by that. And that's what Balaam said.

There will a star will rise out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise. And so they came, these three wise men, from the same place that Balaam came from, looking for a king, a new king of Israel. Now, what kind of king do you think was envisioned? David won with his armies. In the first century, probably was envisioning again a king who would raise up a great army and win a military victory, riding on a white horse in a triumphant entry.

[13:14] Do you ever get excited about the vision of this? A king riding in on a white horse with an army at his back? Do you want to stand up and cheer to welcome and applaud this coming king?

Maybe some of you do. But I think many of us feel reluctant to get up and cheer about this thing. So I want to talk for a few minutes about what the problem of a victorious king is in our own hearts. Because this is the prophecy. There's a great king coming. How do we respond to that? Well, I think we often have a number of things that we might wrestle with with this image or with this idea. Why is this not good news to us? So I have three ideas. It probably isn't comprehensive. There may be more out there. But first, I think we have a problem with this because we aren't sure we want anyone to come and claim sovereign power over us. Because that's what kings do, right? And we're Americans. You know, we were formed... our country was formed out of rejecting a king and creating a country where every individual... well, okay, it's a messy story, but you guys know what I mean. The idea is that our individualism, right, our individual rights and individual autonomy was highly valued, right?

And here's the thing. It's not just Americans who feel like this. It's humans. Because humans have a heart that rebels against their creator king. This is what Adam and Eve did in the garden. And all of our hearts. And we all know it, don't we? When someone comes in and tells us what to do, and we think, who are you to tell me? Who died and made you king? Right? This is our human heart. We struggle at times to see because we know that human kings can often be self-serving and cruel. So, for all these reasons, we just... we're uncomfortable with the idea of someone having that authority over us. Now, the second reason why we might feel uncomfortable about this is because we misunderstand what kind of kingdom the fulfillment of this prophecy in Numbers would look like. And I think this is a problem that is particularly poignant or current today in the church. So, I want to step back and spend a few minutes talking about this. In the progress of redemptive history, that is how God did what He was doing throughout history, in the Old Testament, God chose to do... to work through a people.

[16:00] A particular people that He made a nation state. He took the descendants of Abraham, and when He brought them out of Egypt and put them in the Promised Land, He made them a nation state.

And He gave them a king, and they developed an army, and they were a political, social nation like what we see today.

They had a land. They had a capital. They had a government. They had a king. They had an army. And it's understandable that some people might think, this is what God's going to do fully. This is the fulfillment of it. And we need to get back to that and somehow create a theocracy where God's people are ruling in a sociopolitical way.

And in His coming, there's a turning point in how we understand. Just like the prophecy has this this mountain, multiple vistas, Jesus comes and says that was... in the Old Testament, that was how God was working for a season. But that was a stepping stone towards a greater kingdom, a different kind of kingdom. Jesus did not come as a politician or a military leader.

His strategy was a proclamation of truth and a love for sinners and the outsiders. His strategy was making disciples, not winning victories.

[17:36] His legacy, the church, was a transnational gathering of people from all the world who would be those who would proclaim that Jesus is King, that Jesus is Lord to the ends of the earth. When Pilate asked Him at his trial, he said, my kingdom is not of this world.

I don't want to supplant you, Pilate, and your Roman rule. Jesus' kingdom comes by the proclamation of the gospel.

And throughout the church age, this has been misunderstood, right? There have been human rulers and nations that have thought they were the fulfillment of God's kingdom in their sociopolitical form. And there have been times when the church has tried to take up and create a sociopolitical fulfillment of these promises.

But that is not what the Bible teaches. We need to beware that we as a church are not to use political and social power to establish the kingdom of God.

This is not what the New Testament teaches. The church's mission is to bring Jesus' kingdom by Jesus' means. And that's a huge sermon that I'm not going to preach this morning, but I'm going to take us to one place in the epistles to try to clarify what this looks like. In Ephesians chapter 6 verse 12, the apostle Paul says this, For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

[19 : 39] In the New Testament, the greatest enemies of the people of God are not nation states, but they are spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

They are not flesh and blood. And though there may be manifestations, there will always be people, and you see this in the New Testament as well as the Old Testament, there are always people who will oppose God's work, who will persecute God's people, who will reject God and assert their own human authority to rule and to reign.

God knows all this. Those things are true, but our battle is not physical against them. Our battle is spiritual, and we fight this battle on our knees in prayer and with love for our enemies and with a courageous conviction of holding on to God's word and His truth.

And ultimately and mostly by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ, the good news that He has come as King. And I'm going to come back to that in just a second, and I will unpack it because my third problem that I think we have with kings dovetails with that to where we're going to end this sermon.

Because the third thing is that we're just uncomfortable with the violence, violent language that is used in this prophecy. Right? Crushing, destroying. How do we do that? How do we understand this?

[21 : 21] Well, see, the New Testament understands that though there were in the Old Testament, these were physical pictures. Israel was a physical picture of the kingdom of God. The New Testament, it translates into a different way of understanding it.

What we see is that the greatest enemy of God is spiritual rebellion. Sin is an immeasurable offense, a fundamental wrong. And God declared from the very beginning that the right consequence for rebellion against God, the Lord of life, is death. And so Adam and Eve were cursed with death as a consequence for their sin.

Sin. Right? And so we need to recognize that the violent language reflects the greatness of the offense of sin against God himself.

Now, we just feel so uncomfortable with this. And do you know why? Because we're fallen and imperfect people. Because if I were the judge of right and wrong, I would be terrified that I would get it wrong, that I would misunderstand, and that my judgment would come unfairly or too laxly, that I wouldn't protect the vulnerable or the weak or the oppressed, or that I would be too harsh and disproportionate in my judgment against others. But the Bible reminds us that God is perfect in all of His ways. And He sees the good and the bad. And so when He says something is sin and worthy of death, when He chooses to bring judgment, this violence of language, or this language of violence, is appropriate in that it reflects how heinous sin is and how vile it is as an offense against the kingdom of God.

This is the broken world that creates our heart cry. God, bring us a righteous king who will make all these things right, who will stop sex trafficking, who will stop warfare, who will create a righteous society.

[23 : 47] This is what our hearts cry out for. But we don't trust anyone to do it perfectly. But the fulfillment is that Jesus will come, and other prophecies will say that He is a righteous branch.

Of the house of Jesse. That He will come in perfection to be the king over the whole world. And so, we've talked a little bit about why it is we might have problems with this king.

The fulfillment and the hope of the scriptures. My third point is that there is a paradox at the core of this coming king that makes him the best king we would ever imagine. Because the one who comes with a scepter out of Israel did not come as a general, but he came as a baby. And the way that he achieved his victory was not in the way that we would expect.

He did not come with armies at his back, but with shepherds at his manger. He did not come by leveraging the power of the world, but by loving service.

And ultimately, Jesus went to the cross offering himself up for us in our place to bear the wrath of God against our sin. His death for us is the fulfillment of all of this violent language against sin and evil and wrongness. Because Jesus said, I will stand in your place and take that judgment for you.

[25 : 50] Jesus died on the cross to be a great and paradoxical king. And then he rose from the dead.

He rose the dead so that we would know that the kingdom that he establishes is a kingdom of life. A kingdom of freedom from sin.

A kingdom of freedom from evil. A kingdom that will bring goodness and life both now and eternally. And this is the paradox.

Is that the king who came is a king who came and died. For us. He conquers through weakness. He triumphs through sacrifice. He establishes a kingdom of truth and love. Not of power and might. And he's defeated sin and death.

[26 : 50] On our behalf. And so we sing. Born thy people to deliver. Born a child and yet a king.

Born to reign in us forever. Now thy gracious kingdom bring. By thine own eternal spirit. Rule in all our hearts alone.

By thine own sufficient merit. Raise us up to thy glorious throne. Friends. Friends. This is the good news.

Of the king who comes. The victorious king who comes. At Christmas time. How do we live in light of this? I have three really quick thoughts. Practically.

I'm trying to get practical for you all. Not just theoretical. Here we go. So a couple of things. For some of us. When we feel like we are despairing. When it feels like darkness. And evil.

[27 : 47] And sin. Are winning in the world. In your own life. Or in the world overall. Know that the king has come. And the kingdom that he has brought. Has begun.

And he is working it out. In this world. And he will return one day. And he will establish it.

Completely. And fully. And finally. And what a glorious hope. This is.

So don't despair. Don't give up hope. Because the victorious king. Has already gained that victory. And he will bring it. To completion.

Secondly. For those of us. Who may be in positions. Of worldly power. Let us use this. To bless. And to redeem. Not to posture.

Not to defeat. Or own. The other side. But by. Like Jesus. Laying down our lives.

[28 : 45] To serve others. To see. Dependence work. In his paradoxical.

Victory. Over sin and death. Let that be true. In our lives. And let it be. The song that we proclaim. The word on our lips. As we celebrate this Christmas season.

Let me invite up the worship team. To lead us. As we sing our final closing song. Come thou long. Expected Jesus. The first verse goes like this.

Come thou long. Expected Jesus. Born to set thy people free. From our fears. And sins release us. Let us find our rest in thee.

Israel's strength and consolation. Hope of all the world thou art. Dear desire of every nation. Joy of every longing heart.

[29 : 44] This is my prayer. Is that he might be the desire of our hearts. And the joy of our hearts. This morning. So if you are able to stand. Let me invite you to stand. As we sing together.

Bluetooth Bluetooth Bluetooth Bluetooth Bluetooth Bluetooth Thank you.