

Psalm 72

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 September 2013

Preacher: Nick Lauer

[0 : 0 0] Psalm 72. Let's pray as we come to God's Word together.

Lord, we indeed pray just that you would come and give your Word success. Lord, that you would penetrate the depths of our hearts with the truth of your Word. Lord, we want to see you afresh.

We want to know you more deeply. God, we want to live as your image bearers in a more rich and profound way. And Lord, we know that you have given us your Word to accomplish just that, to shape us, to mold us, to change us, to reveal yourself to us.

Lord, it is our sufficient and sure guide. So, Father, we pray that by your Spirit you would come and you would work in us through your Word this morning. For Christ's sake, amen.

Psalm 72. Let me read this for us. Give the King your justice, O God, and your righteousness to the royal Son. May he judge your people with righteousness and your poor with justice.

[1 : 0 9] Let the mountains bear prosperity for the people and the hills in righteousness. May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the children of the needy and crush the oppressor.

May they fear you while the sun endures and as long as the moon throughout all generations. May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass, like showers that water the earth.

In his days may the righteous flourish and peace abound till the moon be no more. May he have dominion from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth.

May desert tribes bow down before him and his enemies lick the dust. May the kings of Tarshish and the coastlands render him tribute. May the kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts.

May all kings fall down before him. All nations serve him. For he delivers the needy when he calls. The poor and him who has no helper.

[2 : 0 8] He has pity on the weak and the needy and saves the lives of the needy. From oppression and violence he redeems their life and precious is their blood in his sight.

Long may he live. May gold of Sheba be given to him. May prayer be made for him continually and blessings invoked for him all the day. May there be abundance of grain in the land.

On the tops of the mountains may it wave. May its fruit be like Lebanon. And may people blossom in the cities like the grass of the field. May his name endure forever.

His fame continue as long as the sun. May people be blessed in him. All nations call him blessed. 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. The prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended. Well, with that we come to the end of book two of the Psalms.

[3 : 15] And we come to the end of our series that we've been doing this summer in book two of the Psalms called Thirsting for God. You'll remember that way back in the beginning of the summer, if you've been with us, we began in Psalm 42.

And we heard the heart cry of the psalmist calling out, God, I'm thirsting for you. I'm longing for you. And we've seen that sort of journey throughout this book of the Psalms.

And finally, we come here to the end, to Psalm 72. And what do we find? We find a psalm for the king. A royal psalm.

Psalm 72 is essentially a prayer that ancient Israel would pray for their king. And my guess is that as we read this psalm today, most of us would find the idea of having a king to be a bit foreign, right?

I mean, do we really need a king? Do we really want a king? Of course, maybe we'd like one, but only to a point. I mean, with, you know, little George born this summer in England, you know, those of us on the other side of the pond think, oh, you know, maybe it would be kind of fun to have a royal family.

[4 : 24] It would add a little pomp and circumstance to public life. It would give the entertainment magazines something to talk about with at least a shred of dignity, right? It would give us a little more national identity. But at the end of the day, you and I don't really want a king, do we?

I mean, a figurehead is fine, great, but not a real king, not a king with real power and authority and all that. In fact, that whole idea just makes us a bit uncomfortable. This week, our small group went to see the production of Julius Caesar at Edgerton Park.

And if you're familiar with that Shakespeare play, you'll remember that the whole reason, or at least one of the main reasons, why the conspirators conspire together to assassinate Caesar is because they're afraid that he'll become a tyrant.

At least that's why Brutus does the deed. He's the one noble one among them all. In other words, if Caesar becomes emperor, as it looks like he will, they're afraid that they'll lose their freedom.

So they kill him. And isn't that the same fear under most of our misgivings about giving someone authority in and over our lives?

[5 : 39] Isn't that our misgivings about having, as we would put it, a king? Don't we fear that such authority over us will destroy our freedom and our potential to genuinely flourish?

But if someone has rights over me, then the only option is for me to diminish as that person increases. And yet there's a deep irony in the play.

After Caesar is assassinated, do you remember what happens? The whole country just descends into civil war. And the play seems to imply that the generals who end up on top in the end just might be worse tyrants than Caesar ever would have been.

And isn't there an irony in our culture too? You know, as much as we believe that individual autonomy is the real key to happiness and to freedom, don't we also know that our flourishing is completely bound up with the people who are in leadership over us?

I mean, think about it. Just think of how many books are written and sold every year on management and business leadership. Right? You go to Amazon and you look at the shelves of leadership and they just keep going.

[6 : 57] It's incredible. John Maxwell has written like 4,000 books on leadership, like millions of pages on how to be a leader, right? And I think that's because it seems that we know that the well-being of a company depends on the right functioning of its leadership.

If the leadership is bad, the company is not going to succeed. And I think even more than that, we even harbor hopes that if we get the right leadership in place, it won't just grow a company, but it could even heal a company.

Take the recent events at the Washington Post, for example. Everybody knows that the newspaper industry is in trouble, right? But when Jeff Bezos bought the Washington Post early last month, some people were thinking, oh my goodness, maybe he'll just pull it off.

Maybe if the guy behind Amazon, the sort of genius behind sort of the digital age in some ways, at least in making money in the digital age, if he can get behind the Washington Post, no matter how broken the newspaper industry might be, maybe it just stands a chance of survival.

Maybe even it could flourish. And we know this principle is true not just in the corporate world, right? Think about other areas too.

[8 : 17] You know, when parents function like they should, doesn't it bring wholeness and healing to a family? Or when local government officials function like they should, doesn't it bring forth the possibility of healing in a neighborhood or in a city?

It seems there's an undeniable connection between the proper functioning, the rightness, the righteousness, if you will, of the leadership of a body and the peace and the wholeness of that body.

So when we come to Psalm 72, and especially these first four verses of this Psalm, and as we listen in of this prayer, into this prayer of ancient Israel for their king, we realize that on the one hand, what they're doing is completely in line with what we know and practice every day.

That good leaders, righteous leaders bring wholeness and healing and flourishing to their people, so they're praying for their king to be just that. But on the other hand, as we listen a bit more closely, we realize that this psalm is doing something completely radical with that idea.

You see, when Israel took up this prayer for its king, they weren't just praying for the peace and prosperity of their own little tribe in their own little corner of the world.

[9 : 44] You see, they were praying for a king who would be so completely fit for the task, so completely and genuinely righteous, that he would ultimately heal not just Israel, but the whole world.

Under the headship of this king, the needy would be provided for, the oppressed would be delivered, the nations would be united, and the creation itself would be renewed.

Look at verse 3. Even the mountains and the hills are brought into prosperity. Literally, the word there is peace, shalom, wholeness, because of the righteousness of this king.

And of course, their kings never lived up to it, right? Throughout the history of ancient Israel, most of their kings were weak or downright bad, and even the good kings couldn't finally prevent the downward spiral into captivity.

And it seemed that the truly righteous king would never come, and that might would continue to make right, and the brokenness of the world would remain. And yet, can't you imagine the faithful in Israel, through all those hard and disappointing generations, singing this song that God had given them, hoping and longing and yearning for the day when God would send them a true king, to bring justice at last, and to bring healing and wholeness to the world at last.

[11 : 33] And isn't that deep down what we're longing for, too? Just this week, we celebrated the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington, right? The 50th anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr.'s great, I Have a Dream speech, which stands not just as one of the examples of great American oratory, but one of the most moving and stirring visions of justice probably ever penned in our generation, our time.

And what's so moving and stirring about that moment and about that speech is because it connects with something deep within all of us that longs for what's broken and wrong in the world to finally be fixed and to be put right.

That someone, somehow, some way, would come and be able to heal what divides us and to right what is wrong.

And of course, the truly shocking thing is that when God's true king finally came to inaugurate God's kingdom of righteousness and peace, it wasn't like anything anyone had expected.

He lived in obscurity for 30 years, and when his public ministry started, he chose humble, common men and women to be his closest followers. And then he started eating with tax collectors and sinners.

[13 : 02] And he never rose an army, and he didn't try to overthrow the Roman oppressors. And in fact, he was rejected by the Jewish authorities and crucified by the Romans outside of Jerusalem and buried in a borrowed tomb.

And that would have been the end of the story. No one would have worshipped a crucified would-be Messiah, except that three days later, God raised him from the dead.

And in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, God's new creation kingdom of righteousness and peace was unleashed into the world. The prayer of Psalm 72 finally found its traction as God came in Christ.

And after being raised, Jesus appeared to his disciples, instructed them for 40 days, and commissioned them to go to the nations, proclaiming the forgiveness of sins in his name. And then he ascended to the Father and sat down in majesty at the right hand of God as king over all and poured out his Holy Spirit upon his church, empowering them to take the good news of the gospel of his reign to the very ends of the earth.

You see, friends, in Jesus, God's king has finally come, that truly righteous one who can cause not just a family and not just a city or not just a nation, but even the whole world to flourish under his kingship.

[14 : 33] And that means that when we read Psalm 72 today, we're not just reading something that's merely a future hope, but something that is a present work in progress.

The truly righteous and rightful king now sits at the head of the universe, and we're shown here what sort of kingdom he's bringing about. In particular, I think we're shown three things about this kingdom, three things that Israel prayed for and longed for, which are now coming to pass in Christ.

So let's look at these three things briefly together. First, in verses 5 through 7, we see that Jesus' kingdom is an endless kingdom. In verse 5, we're told that the fear of this king, the reverence in all of him, will be without end as long as time goes on, as long as sun and moon continue their cycles, as long as one generation follows another.

In verse 7, we're told that in his days, the righteous will flourish and peace will abound till moon be no more. Which is a fancy way of saying forever and ever, right?

His kingdom is endless. And that means that, you know, if his kingdom is truly endless, then it means that it will last when all else fades.

[16 : 04] Think about it. Throughout the course of human history, countless kingdoms have come and gone. And those who have lived merely for the glory of those earthly kingdoms, sadly have largely lived their lives in vain.

How about you, friend? What are you living for? And are you living for what really is going to last? Because that which is done for Christ and for his kingdom is not in vain.

And that means as we approach our work for God's glory and for the love of our neighbors, it's not in vain. And as we seek to bear one another's burdens in the community of faith, though it's hard and though it takes a lot of us, it's not in vain.

And as we seek to extend the love of Christ to those who don't believe in word and in deed, it's not in vain. When we do anything for his kingdom's sake, it will last because his kingdom will have no end.

You know, sometimes people think that if you come to believe in the resurrection of Jesus and if you become a Christian, then you start to lose any motivation that you might have to work for change in the world here and now.

[17 : 27] Have you run into that kind of thinking that religion is merely an opiate for the masses, that you sort of believe in pie in the sky and you lose any motivation to sort of actually work and work for change?

But you know, in the Christian worldview, God's eventually going to renew the world, not throw it away. And the resurrection of Jesus and the establishment of his kingdom in the resurrection of Christ is a great sign of that fact.

In fact, if you think about it, nearly every other worldview gives you very little motivation to do the hard, long work towards changing how things run in the world as it is.

I mean, if in a handful of decades, you're just going to turn to dust. And if in a few hundred millennia, the earth's just going to freeze or be incinerated when the sun expands, what is the point of sacrificially giving your time and your energy and your money and your work to make it a better place?

You'll give to a point. But sacrificially? I mean, under that worldview, isn't it all just ultimately in vain? But not if what we're told here about the kingdom of Christ is true.

[18 : 45] If his kingdom will last forever, then our longing for justice actually makes sense. It actually connects up with something that is right and real.

If it's an endless kingdom and working for it can't be in vain and the sacrifices that we make for it will be worth it all in the end.

Of course, we don't know ultimately how all our labors are going to actually come together in Christ's kingdom when it's completed. I ran across this illustration a little bit ago and I thought it was helpful. It's sort of like the construction of an ancient cathedral are sort of labors for Christ's kingdom.

You know, when an ancient cathedral was built there were hundreds, just scads of workers who worked on these things. And some of them never even saw one another as they went about cutting stone, as they went about carving statues, as they went about preparing timber for the beams, as they went about doing all the sort of work that went into building this cathedral.

And many of them were not even sure how their particular job, how their particular piece was even going to fit into the overarching scheme. And many of them died before the thing was even completed.

[19 : 58] But you see, friends, the architect knows exactly how it's all going to fit together. And when it does, it's going to be glorious.

And each part will find its place. You see, our labor for the kingdom of Christ is much like that. We may not be sure how it will all fit in and all fit together when Christ returns, how our faithful mothering day in and day out is going to fit in, or how our private prayers morning to morning are going to come together in the glory of His kingdom, or how our consistent witness to our neighbors is going to find its place.

But friends, when it comes together in the glory of His kingdom, it will be glorious. And another thing, you see, if His kingdom is endless, as we see here, then we can be sure that nothing is going to turn it back and nothing is going to stop its growth.

It will go on and on. In verse 6, we're told that the king will be like continual, refreshing showers upon the earth, bringing new life to the dry and cracked land and bringing new creation to dry and bitter hearts.

Isn't that a beautiful image? Like rain on the mown grass. That's what His kingship is like. Even when the meadow is cut down low in the heat of the summer, He comes like a rain to soften the soil and to keep the roots from withering away.

[21 : 52] He will make sure that His kingdom endures. So you don't need to be worrisome and you don't need to be anxious when you feel like you're not sufficient for the task, when you feel like you've really blown it this time, when you can't possibly see how good could come out of the situation.

Friends, His kingdom goes forth and it is endless and nothing will turn it back. So that's the first thing we see in this psalm, that the kingdom of Christ will be endless, that it's for all times.

But next the psalm turns and shows us that the kingdom of Christ will be a boundless kingdom, not just an endless kingdom, but a boundless kingdom. In verses 8 through 11, we see that His kingdom is for all nations, that it will extend to the ends of the earth.

And that was always God's plan from the beginning, you know. The prophets all foresaw a time when the Gentiles would come streaming in and worship the one true God.

So it comes as no surprise that after the resurrection, Jesus commissions the church to make disciples of all nations and to be His witnesses, not just in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria, but to the ends of the earth.

[23 : 12] And what this means is that Jesus is the rightful king over every nation and over every person. And everyone is called to submit to Him as Lord, regardless of nationality, ethnicity, language, or culture.

And of course, as we ponder that fact at first glance, it sounds a bit scary, doesn't it? Well, isn't that the sort of tyrannous rule that we were worried about in the first place? This is why we assassinated Caesar, and now you're saying that Jesus is going to rule over everyone without remainder?

But friends, look again. Look again at why the nations are shown as willingly submitting to this king. In verses 12 through 14, we're told that the nations come for He delivers the needy.

When the needy calls, the poor in Him has no helper. Yes, this is a righteous king who brings healing to the world, and it will be without end.

But this is also a massively compassionate king, a king of mercy and love. You see, the boundless nature of His kingdom is undergirded by the boundless nature of His compassion.

[24 : 44] He has rightful authority over everyone, yes, but you see, His authority is ultimately for everyone to deliver, to save, to redeem, to liberate.

This was one of the things that Jesus' disciples during His earthly ministry had such a hard time grasping. While they were on their way to Jerusalem for the last time, do you remember James and John approaching Jesus and saying, Jesus, when you enter into your kingdom, let one of us sit at your right hand and one of us sit at your left hand.

We want to be close to the center of power once you kind of come in and do whatever you're going to do. And we know it's probably going to look like a massive military coup. But they didn't realize that Jesus wasn't going to Jerusalem to stage a coup, but to go to the cross.

And as the disciples start bickering with one another and getting into an argument and getting indignant at James and John for getting to the, getting to Jesus first and asking for something they were kind of wanting probably to ask Jesus, what does Jesus say?

He says, that's how the Gentiles lorded over their subjects. But you see, the Son of Man has come not to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many.

[26 : 05] Friends, the present reign of Jesus is a reign of grace. He's come for the weak who know they can't rescue themselves.

And He's come for the poor who admit that they're out and that they're sinners. And He's come for the helpless who've laid down their attempts at trying to earn God's approval.

And He's come for the oppressed who know the weight and gravity of their lost condition before God. And through the cross, He redeems their life.

He pays the cost to free them from their debt and from their oppression and from their tyranny of sin and death and separation from God.

And why does He do this? He does it because He loves them. Their blood is precious in His sight.

[27 : 10] He's not the sort of king who views His subjects as just so many expendable pawns in a game of conquest as stepping stones to His own greater glory at their expense.

No, friends, you are precious in His sight and at His own expense. He lifts you up. And He does whatever it takes to redeem and to deliver and to save.

Do you see now why people from all nations come streaming in to worship and to serve this king? It's because no other kingdom works like this.

Every other kingdom assigns you your place and your value based on your performance or your usefulness to those who happen to be in charge.

And when you've outlived your usefulness and when your performance falls below the par, you're forgotten or you're replaced. And many of us still treat Christianity as if it's all about our moral performance.

[28 : 19] That if I live a good life, then God will accept me into His kingdom. But isn't that just the opposite of what we're seeing here? That this kingdom is not based on your performance but on His performance.

Friends, here's what we bring to the kingdom. We bring our weakness and we bring our poverty and our need and our sin. And what does He bring?

He brings His righteousness and He brings His compassion and He brings His love and He brings His spirit and He redeems us and He clothes us and He brings us in and He grants us a place of dignity not because of what we've done but because of what He's done for us.

And He finds you precious in His sight before you could do anything good at all. And this is why His kingdom has no bounds.

Because the only requirement for entry is admitting your need and accepting what He's done on your behalf. There's no cultural requirement.

[29 : 38] There's no ethnic requirement. There's no moral requirement. There's no educational requirement. Simply the humility to come in repentance and belief.

Friends, isn't that a wonderful thing? Show me a kingdom that operates on these principles. And friends, as you think about entry into this kingdom, let me ask you this morning, is it true for you?

Have you called out to Christ in that way? In your need and in your weakness to take what only He can give and to know the joy and the freedom that comes in receiving His redemption and His forgiveness?

We often think that admitting our weakness and our need is a sign of failure. That if we actually were to open up and to admit that we're broken, that our hopes of being loved and accepted and of flourishing would just go right out the window.

And yet, in the moment when you call out to Him in your weakness and need, He comes and He clothes you with His righteousness, and His peace, not to shame you but to receive you and to restore you.

[31 : 08] And that leads us to our last point, that Jesus' kingdom is not just an endless kingdom and it's not just a boundless kingdom but finally it's a blessed kingdom. Verses 15 through 17, look at all the images in this passage that are just overflowing with joy.

The people come and they gladly bestow their gifts on their King and their prayers and their blessings and they're finding their joy in Him. And the King bestows His gifts upon His people.

He lavishes them and loves them. And we see something here that's shocking. We see here that like an upward spiral in His kingdom, His greater fame means our greater flourishing.

that these two things are not in competition. That as He is exalted and loved and as we find our joy in Him, that we find our own hearts being lifted up and our own blessing increasing.

Look at the images that we're given. The fields and even the mountains are covered in grain and the cities are flourishing with people who are as glad and as beautiful and free as the grass of the fields.

[32 : 25] Friends, this is what the gospel can do. Don't you see? It can create a people and it is creating a people who will blossom in the cities like the grass of the fields.

Christian, do you realize what you've been entered into, what you've become a part of in Christ as He's brought you into His kingdom? You've been ushered into the great plan of God to reclaim His creation and to share His joy.

It's sad that many people view Christianity as a dull and lifeless thing when in fact at the heart of Christianity is nothing but joy and newness of life.

Not the cheap sort of happiness that comes and goes but the very blessing of God. Verse 17 ends, may people be blessed in Him and all nations call Him blessed.

You know, this verse connects up with one of the most important promises in the Old Testament. Remember, when God called Abraham, He promised him that Abraham himself would be blessed, but in and through him, in and through his offspring, all the nations of the earth would be blessed as well.

[33 : 53] That is, this curse of sin would be lifted and the favor of God would be granted. And what this psalm is saying is that this promise of divine approval and acceptance that our hearts are longing for comes at last through the true offspring of Abraham and the true king of Israel, Jesus Christ.

Christ, that in Him, the truly blessed one, we are truly blessed. That darkness is lifted and hope is restored and sins are forgiven.

And people blossom in the cities like the grass or the fields. Friends, this is what the gospel can do in our city as we think about being the people of Christ here in our place and in our time and amidst these people in this corner, in this aspect of Christ's global and universal reign.

Here it is as His blessing goes forth in the gospel blossoming in the cities like the grass of the fields. the gospel is taking people who are broken and making them whole.

And it's taking people who are weary and searching and giving them rest. And it's taking people who are religious and who are proud and are making them soft and humble.

[35 : 27] This is the vision of renewal that comes with knowing Christ as King. This vision of indestructible and ever-spreading joy.

In a moment, we're going to go to the Lord's Supper together and we're going to celebrate our King at the table. We're going to celebrate the King who died for us so that He might grant us this joy.

We're going to celebrate the One whose kingdom is for all time and for all people and for our everlasting joy. But before we do that, just look at the last few verses of our psalm.

These last few verses, most commentators say, will bring not just Psalm 72 to a close, but bring this whole book of psalms to a close. All of book two comes to its rousing conclusion in these last few verses.

And as we've been reflecting on Jesus' kingdom, isn't it a fitting way to conclude? May the whole earth be filled with His glory. Amen and amen.

[36 : 38] Let's pray together. God, this morning as we've entered into this ancient prayer of Your people for their true and righteous King, Lord, we pray that our own hearts would grow with a longing to see the reign of our Lord Jesus grow.

Lord, as You show us it is endless and it is boundless and it is blessed, Lord, I pray that we would be captivated by the scope and by the depth of the reign of our Lord Jesus.

Lord, we want to live and we want to work and we want to rest in the great and loving knowledge that we have such a King, a King who is righteous and a King who is righteous not just over us but even for us, that in His righteousness we are found, sinners that we are, to be righteous, to be blessed.

Lord, we thank You for all these things. In Christ's name, Amen.