



Week 5: Royal Psalms

Day 1

Psalm 2

God's Promise to His Anointed

¹Why do the nations conspire,
and the peoples plot in vain?

²The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers take counsel together,
against the Lord and his anointed, saying,

³"Let us burst their bonds asunder,
and cast their cords from us."

⁴He who sits in the heavens laughs;
the Lord has them in derision.

⁵Then he will speak to them in his wrath,
and terrify them in his fury, saying,

⁶"I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill."

⁷I will tell of the decree of the Lord:
He said to me, "You are my son;
today I have begotten you.

⁸Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage,
and the ends of the earth your possession.

⁹You shall break them with a rod of iron,
and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."

¹⁰Now therefore, O kings, be wise;
be warned, O rulers of the earth.

¹¹Serve the Lord with fear,
with trembling ¹²kiss his feet,
or he will be angry, and you will perish in the way;
for his wrath is quickly kindled.

Happy are all who take refuge in him.

Commentary

The final category of psalms that we are looking at are referred to as “Royal” psalms because they deal with the spiritual role of kings in the worship of God. The common element found in these handful of psalms is the charge of a ruler to rule his people in subjection to God’s will and law. The royal psalms are scattered around the entire collection of psalms in a way that suggests that these psalms are not only poetic relics from the days of the Davidic dynasty, but are also expressions of the ongoing hope that God will continue to manifest God’s sovereignty, in concrete ways, in the life of God’s people and in the life of the world in general.

When we say that we are “one nation under God,” or inscribe the words “in God we trust” on our currency we are echoing this prayer that ultimately we are being led by God and that our country’s leaders are seeking God’s wisdom and guidance for the future. This grouping of psalms is important theologically because it reminds us that ultimately God is in charge and all leaders on all levels should be subject to the coming kingdom of God.

Most scholars believe that Psalm 2 was written by King David at his son Solomon’s coronation ritual. The questions that today’s psalm opens with are timeless: who rules the world and who is really in control? Nations and leaders can plot and conspire but we must never forget that it is God who rules the world. This should be a comfort to those who put their trust in the Lord and a discouragement to those who think that the world revolves around them or that they are in charge of the universe.

Reflection Question

Who has God placed in authority over you? Say a prayer for them today, ask God to bless them with the ability to lead others in His will.

Day 2

Psalm 20

The King trusts in the Lord

¹ *The Lord answer you in the day of trouble!*

The name of the God of Jacob protect you!

² *May he send you help from the sanctuary,
and give you support from Zion.*

³ *May he remember all your offerings,
and regard with favor your burnt sacrifices. Selah*

⁴ *May he grant you your heart’s desire,
and fulfill all your plans.*

⁵ *May we shout for joy over your victory,
and in the name of our God set up our banners.*

May the Lord fulfill all your petitions.

⁶ *Now I know that the Lord will help his anointed;
he will answer him from his holy heaven
with mighty victories by his right hand.*

⁷ *Some take pride in chariots, and some in horses,
but our pride is in the name of the Lord our God.*

⁸ *They will collapse and fall,
but we shall rise and stand upright.*

⁹ Give victory to the king, O Lord;
answer us when we call.

Commentary

Today's psalm is an example of how the king would petition for the Lord's favor in battle. Some scholarship suggests that the first half was written before the battle, with the second half praising God for God's favor upon their victorious return.

This belief that "God is on our side and wants us to win" might make contemporary readers a bit uncomfortable. But like all other royal psalms, this psalm is really more about God than it is about the king. Ultimately the king lives in dependence upon God and God's loving purposes. This psalm should not be seen merely as militaristic; the purpose of the royal psalms is to remind us that God is in control and we are all in submission to God.

So opposing sides of a conflict may both believe that they are "in God's will" and pray for victory in battle, but in the end it is God's will, not our own, that will be accomplished. As followers of Jesus we will find ourselves on safer theological ground if our petitions are always grounded in the desire that God's will be done in the end.

Reflection Question

What is on your heart today? Ask God for what you honestly want, and then trust that God's knows what is ultimately best for you.

Day 3

Psalm 72

Prayer for Guidance and Support for the King

- ¹ Give the king your justice, O God,
and your righteousness to a king's son.
- ² May he judge your people with righteousness,
and your poor with justice.
- ³ May the mountains yield prosperity for the people,
and the hills, in righteousness.
- ⁴ May he defend the cause of the poor of the people,
give deliverance to the needy,
and crush the oppressor.
- ⁵ May he live while the sun endures,
and as long as the moon, throughout all generations.
- ⁶ May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass,
like showers that water the earth.
- ⁷ In his days may righteousness flourish
and peace abound, until the moon is no more.
- ⁸ May he have dominion from sea to sea,
and from the River to the ends of the earth.
- ⁹ May his foes bow down before him,
and his enemies lick the dust.
- ¹⁰ May the kings of Tarshish and of the isles
render him tribute,
may the kings of Sheba and Seba

- bring gifts.
- ¹¹ May all kings fall down before him,
all nations give him service.
- ¹² For he delivers the needy when they call,
the poor and those who have no helper.
- ¹³ He has pity on the weak and the needy,
and saves the lives of the needy.
- ¹⁴ From oppression and violence he redeems their life;
and precious is their blood in his sight.
- ¹⁵ 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 day long.
- ¹⁶ May there be abundance of grain in the land;
may it wave on the tops of the mountains;
may its fruit be like Lebanon;
and may people blossom in the cities
like the grass of the field.
- ¹⁷ May his name endure forever,
his fame continue as long as the sun.
May all nations be blessed in him;
may they pronounce him happy.
- ¹⁸ Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel,
who alone does wondrous things.
- ¹⁹ Blessed be his glorious name forever;
may his glory fill the whole earth.
Amen and Amen.
- ²⁰ The prayers of David, son of Jesse, are ended.

Commentary

This psalm was likely a song or prayer that was repeatedly prayed at kings' coronations or for the king in general. It represents both admiration and praise for their king, as well as an idealistic understanding of who a God-fearing king should be. In other words, we may not think our king is actually living up to this psalm, but we proclaim that this is the standard to which we should hold our human rulers, politicians, and governments. Verses 12-14 remind us that a leader should lead with compassion for those who are weak or in need. Valuing the lives of all that God has placed them in leadership over.

We also should pray for our government in a similar way. We must be careful not to automatically assume the worst in our politicians, leading to further partisanship, but at the same time should hold them accountable for the way in which a leader should lead. In so doing we are once again saying that, though we are not perfect, we are striving for God's perfect will and look forward to the day when God's will is done and perfect peace and love is realized.

Reflection Question

What emotions arise in you when you think about our government? Pray for the leaders of our country today.

Day 4

Psalm 101

A Sovereign's Pledge of Integrity and Justice

¹ I will sing of loyalty and of justice;
to you, O Lord, I will sing.

² I will study the way that is blameless.
When shall I attain it?

I will walk with integrity of heart
within my house;

³ I will not set before my eyes
anything that is base.

I hate the work of those who fall away;
it shall not cling to me.

⁴ Perverseness of heart shall be far from me;
I will know nothing of evil.

⁵ One who secretly slanders a neighbor
I will destroy.

A haughty look and an arrogant heart
I will not tolerate.

⁶ I will look with favor on the faithful in the land,
so that they may live with me;
whoever walks in the way that is blameless
shall minister to me.

⁷ No one who practices deceit
shall remain in my house;
no one who utters lies
shall continue in my presence.

⁸ Morning by morning I will destroy
all the wicked in the land,
cutting off all evildoers
from the city of the Lord.

Commentary

This psalm is a profession of faith in God's sovereignty. The psalmist begins by affirming God's steadfast love and justice, aspects of God's reign, and the psalmist makes a commitment to pursue love and justice. This pledge from the king to follow God in the ways that he is led is a powerful example of humility that models how a ruler should approach their office of leadership. The king appears to see the importance of wise counsel as well as the dangers of allowing wickedness to pursue in the land in which he rules.

While idealistic in nature, the perspective of this psalm comes from the ruler himself rather than the people who are being ruled. Here we get the sense that the king realizes the weight of the burden of leadership and that the king's role is to be a servant to God in order to lead the people well. This is a refreshing reminder to us when we find ourselves in authority over others. Our authority is not granted to us in order that we might lift ourselves up, but that we might be used by God as a servant to others.

Reflection Question

Over what has God given you authority? How is God calling you to lead others in humility?

Day 5

Psalm 132

The Eternal Dwelling of God in Zion

¹ O Lord, remember in David's favor
all the hardships he endured;

² how he swore to the Lord
and vowed to the Mighty One of Jacob,

³ "I will not enter my house
or get into my bed;

⁴ I will not give sleep to my eyes
or slumber to my eyelids,

⁵ until I find a place for the Lord,
a dwelling place for the Mighty One of
Jacob."

⁶ We heard of it in Ephrathah;
we found it in the fields of Jaar.

⁷ "Let us go to his dwelling place;
let us worship at his footstool."

⁸ Rise up, O Lord, and go to your resting place,
you and the ark of your might.
⁹ Let your priests be clothed with righteousness,
and let your faithful shout for joy.
¹⁰ For your servant David's sake
do not turn away the face of your anointed
one.
¹¹ The Lord swore to David a sure oath
from which he will not turn back:
"One of the sons of your body
I will set on your throne.
¹² If your sons keep my covenant
and my decrees that I shall teach them,

their sons also, forevermore,
shall sit on your throne."
¹³ For the Lord has chosen Zion;
he has desired it for his habitation:
¹⁴ "This is my resting place forever;
here I will reside, for I have desired it.
¹⁵ I will abundantly bless its provisions;
I will satisfy its poor with bread.
¹⁶ Its priests I will clothe with salvation,
and its faithful will shout for joy.
¹⁷ There I will cause a horn to sprout up for
David;
I have prepared a lamp for my anointed one.
¹⁸ His enemies I will clothe with disgrace,
but on him, his crown will gleam."

Commentary

Like other royal psalms, Psalm 132 articulates Israel's conviction that the rule of God is manifested concretely in the world of people, space, and time. In building the temple, God's people made a home where God's presence dwelt among them. This image of God coming to earth is later echoed in the Christian understanding of Jesus Christ. In a real sense Jesus is the messianic fulfillment of the royal psalms. God has become flesh and dwelt among us; Jesus is the son of man who rules in perfect submission to the will of the father. The Kingdom of God has come and is coming, blurring the lines between heaven and earth until the day when they are indistinguishable. In the meantime, God uses us to lead the way for others to witness the coming Kingdom of God.

Royal psalms remind us that God cares about politics and God cares about the injustices and hardships of this world. Earth is not simply a holding pattern that we will one day leave behind; it is a place that is being redeemed back into the very Kingdom that God intended it to be. Amen.

Reflection Question

Where can you see the kingdom of God being realized today? Praise God and then join in the work to which God is calling you.