

Christ in the Psalms

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Waxed Tablet Publications

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Contents

1	The Path to Glory	5
2	The Design of the Kingdom	21
3	Ground Rules	37
4	Subjects of the King	53

1 The Path to Glory

The Importance of the Psalms

So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: "Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them, who by the mouth of Your servant David have said:

*Why did the nations rage,
And the people plot vain things?
The kings of the earth took their stand,
And the rulers were gathered together
Against the Lord and against His Christ."* Acts 4.24-26

The greatest challenge

The greatest challenge facing the Church today is not the threat to our liberties which some see as an item on the agenda of secular and progressive activists.

It's not the challenge of staunching the flow of our young into lives of mere self-indulgence, which continues unabated at present.

The greatest challenge to the Church is not financial, and it has little to do with figuring out the next best way to attract people to our assemblies.

These are all legitimate challenges, of course, and I don't mean to minimize them. But the greatest challenge facing the Christian Church in America lies elsewhere. It has to do with the vision we entertain as our great hope and highest priority.

The greatest challenge we face is whether or not we can recover the Gospel of the Kingdom and a clear and compelling vision of Jesus Christ as Savior, Lord, and King.

At best we give lip-service to the idea that Jesus is King and we are His subjects. If He is our King, why are we so indifferent to His Law? So

reticent in proclaiming His rule? So manifestly incapable of bringing His righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit to bear on every aspect of life in our society?

The greatest challenge we face as believers in this generation is recovering a true vision of Jesus Christ as King, and His Kingdom as the highest priority of our lives.

To that end, I invite you to join me in an extended consideration of the teaching of the book of Psalms concerning the rule of King Jesus.

But why the psalms? Why begin in the psalms to seek a renewed vision of Christ and His reign?

The priority of the psalms

Several reasons may be cited.

First is the high place accorded the book of Psalms in the New Testament. The New Testament quotes or refers to the book of Psalms more than any single Old Testament book. There's something very important-sounding about that, I think you'll agree.

Beyond that, there is evidence that the people of the New Testament Church were raised on the psalms as a primary means of spiritual growth and worship. How else can we explain the fact that, as we see in the text opening this chapter, thousands of people, on cue, could begin praying together words from Psalms 146 and 2 in response to an emerging crisis?

The psalms have held this same high place throughout the history of the Christian movement. They have provided scripts and guidelines for prayer, singing, and worship; and they have maintained a high place in the work of setting forth the Church's theology from age to age.

The spiritual vision of the psalms

Even more important, the psalms provide glimpses into the unseen realm of spiritual realities which, as the writer of Hebrews noted, are the very foundation of true and lively faith (Heb. 11.1). If we want to see

through to the real world of Christ exalted, ruling over the world, advancing His Kingdom, subduing His enemies, building His Church, and all the rest, we can do no better than to begin that study in the book of Psalms.

Do we want to see Jesus? To understand the scope, nature, and power of His rule?

If so, the book of Psalms can be a sure and thrilling guide as we take up this greatest challenge facing the Church today – recovering a vision of King Jesus and His glorious rule.

Jesus in the Psalms

But to the Son He says:

“Your throne, O God, is forever and ever;
A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom.
You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness;
Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You
With the oil of gladness more than Your companions.” Hebrews 1.8, 9

Is that Jesus in there?

The book of Psalms holds a place of great importance in the life of the Church. It did in the New Testament, anyway, and throughout the course of Church history. The many beautiful prayers, songs, and meditations in the psalms have lent themselves to a wide range of uses in strengthening and expressing the faith of the Church in every age, including, teaching God’s faithful to look for and seek the Kingdom of God and Christ.

So we might expect the psalms to be a rich resource for beginning to gain a renewed vision of Christ as King and of His Kingdom as our highest priority in life.

But why should we make this assumption? Is it fair to read the psalms as teaching us something about Jesus? Should we really expect to “see Jesus” in the psalms, or to be able to find in them a rich resource for recovering our vision of the Kingdom of God?

The answer, of course, is Yes. Jesus said all the Scriptures teach about Him (Jn. 5.39), and that would be therefore true of the psalms as well. In addition, the New Testament makes rich use of the psalms to help us understand the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ, and nowhere in more concentrated space than Hebrews 1.

Hebrews 1: Jesus in the Psalms

In Hebrews 1, the writer cites five different psalms as referring specifically to Jesus, and, in particular, to His work as King. In verse 5, for example, the writer cites Psalm 2.7 as referring to the Son of God. In that psalm God is exalting His Son as King, and so, though the immediate historical context of the psalm relates to the anointing of a new king in Israel, the ultimate teaching refers to the exaltation of Jesus Christ as King.

In Hebrews 1.7 the writer cites Psalm 104.4 to indicate that all the myriad of holy angels serve the bidding and purposes of the Lord, that is, of King Jesus. We shall return to this theme a bit later in our series.

Psalm 45 comes into focus in verses 8 and 9 of Hebrews 1. Here Christ is described as anointed with gladness, exalted above all creatures, ruling on an eternal throne, and wielding a scepter symbolizing the righteous character of His Kingdom.

In verse 10 King Jesus is referred to from Psalm 102 as the Creator of the world, and in verse 13 the writer cites Psalm 110 to indicate the exaltation and enthronement of the Lord Jesus as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Jesus throughout the psalms

The writer of Hebrews saw in these five psalms clear and compelling references to the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. He employed these psalms precisely because he knew his readers would be familiar with them, and they would carry a great deal of weight in helping these people, who were being drawn away from the Kingship of Jesus, to recover their vision and return to the Lord with new confidence and power.

As these psalms – and many others – served the purposes of the writer of Hebrews, may they serve our purpose as well, by helping us to gain a renewed vision of Jesus Christ, exalted in glory, reigning over the world, advancing His Kingdom, and making all things new.

The Lord of the Psalms

... who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power... Hebrews 1.3

Jesus is the Lord

One of the clear teachings of the New Testament is that Jesus Christ is Lord. Peter proclaimed this on the first Christian Pentecost (Acts 2.36), and Paul insisted on it in Philippians 2.5-11 and elsewhere. Christians profess Jesus as Lord; but do we acknowledge Him to be the Lord Who is referred to over and over in the book of Psalms?

This is an important question. We do not want to lose sight of the historic doctrine of the Trinity. We are not modalists, believing that there is one God Who manifests Himself in different modes – Father, Son, or Spirit – on different occasions or for different purposes. We believe that God is three Persons in one eternal Being. As Augustine explained, the Father is neither the Son nor the Spirit; the Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son; and the Son is neither the Father nor the Spirit. There are three co-equal Persons in the one Godhead, and together they are Lord.

Jesus was put to death by the religious leaders of His day because He insisted that He was equal with the Father, being His Son, and having been sent by Him to earth with the message of the Kingdom of God. He was not the Father, but He was equal to Him, and He bore the Father's authority and, with the Father, poured out the Spirit into the world.

But is Jesus the Lord referred to in the Psalms?

Evidence of His Lordship

The answer is both Yes and No. Even when the divine Name is used, the Psalms do not always make it clear which Person of the Godhead is in view. We need the help of the New Testament to sort this out.

For example, Psalm 104 refers to the Lord (Yahweh) as He Whom the angels obey. The writer of Hebrews acknowledged this to be a clear reference to Jesus Christ, as we have seen.

In Psalm 2, however, the Lord (Yahweh) who speaks to the Son is clearly the Father, not Jesus Christ. However, the Lord (Yahweh) sets the Son up as King and Lord over all nations, both here and in Psalm 110, so that Jesus the Son rules on behalf of God the Father as Lord of all creation.

The Lord to Whom the suffering servant cries in Psalm 22 is certainly the Father, but the King Who rules over the nations, mentioned in that same psalm (v. 28), is the Lord Jesus Christ, as we have seen.

Simply put, the psalms do not always distinguish the Persons of the Godhead when the word, “Lord,” is used. Unless the distinction is clear – as, for example, mention of the role of God’s Spirit in Psalms 104 and 139 – we can assume, following the author of Hebrews, that the attributes and powers attributed to the “Lord” in any of the psalms can be applied to the Lord Jesus

He is Lord!

Moreover, certain psalms make direct reference to the exaltation and enthronement of the Lord, and these can only be referring to the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Pss. 45, 47). Those images in the psalms that depict the Lord on His throne, the Lord acting in relation to the nations, and the Lord sheltering and caring for His people – all these we may safely take as indicating the rule of our King Jesus in glory as He builds His Church and advances His Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

We must not allow the fact that the psalms were all composed prior to the incarnation of the Son of God as Jesus of Nazareth to keep us from seeing their value in understanding the reasons for His coming. The

psalms are rich with information concerning the rule of King Jesus, and they will provide us abundant insights into the nature of His rule and the implications of His Lordship for our lives in Him.

The Lord Who Suffered

My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?
Why are You so far from helping Me,
And from the words of My groaning? Psalm 22.1

The mystery of revelation

The book of Psalms raises many questions about the process whereby the Holy Spirit inspired the Scriptures.

For example, many of the psalms seem to have a clear historical reference attached to them, as when David was fleeing from his son, Absalom (Ps. 3) or responding to a rebuke from the prophet Nathan (Ps. 51). We can enter into these historical situations by going to other Scriptures and understanding more of the background which gave rise to the psalm. And we can see how the Spirit must have moved on the psalmists, giving them inspired words for just those occasions.

But then there are occasions that we can only say must have been given for some moment beyond the immediate experience of the psalmist, some transcendent moment or meaning when God would use the psalms to confirm His work, particularly with respect to His Son.

Psalm 22 is a perfect example of this. We cannot identify any historical circumstances in the life of King David that comport with the horrors we read about in this psalm. Here, and in other psalms, a portrait is drawn of One called to suffer at the hands of wicked men. We recognize this Suffering One to be our Lord Jesus Christ, and we are instructed by this and other similar psalms that the Lord's path to rule over the nations was to be by the way of suffering.

The sufferings of Jesus

The psalms show us the sufferings of Jesus Christ in lengthy expositions and furtive bits and snatches. Especially in Psalms 22, 69, and 88 the

nature and purpose of the Lord's suffering are made clear. He was to experience taunting, crucifixion, depravation, and torment. His friends would abandon Him, and God would look away from His pain, leaving Him to die alone, bearing the debt of sins others had incurred.

Nevertheless, in spite of His suffering, He would be exalted, filled with joy, and appointed to lead the people of God throughout the world in worshiping Him.

But there is more. The psalms indicate that the Lord would be betrayed by a friend, tried in a kangaroo court, and sacrificed during the high festival of the nation (Pss. 55.12, 13; 106.6-8; 35.11-16; 118.27). Jesus was well aware of these psalms and even seems to have been praying or meditating on them as He hanged on the cross. Hence His cry to God in the midst of His abandonment, His mentioning that He thirsted, and His committing His dying spirit to the Lord (Pss. 22.1; 69.21; 31.5).

Jesus earned the place of exaltation which we will be considering in the psalms by virtue of His coming among us, the Son of God in human form, to bear the sins and reproaches, the brutality and injustice of a sinful world, and to fulfill the righteous demands of God against the wickedness of men. The way to rule, according to the psalms, would follow the path of suffering.

A most worthy King

Having suffered, He died, but death could not hold Him. As Psalm 16 indicates, God would not allow His Holy One to see corruption. Peter interpreted this as evidence that Jesus had truly risen from the dead (Acts 2.22-28). God accepted His suffering and vindicated His holiness. Jesus was not lying corrupted in a rich man's grave. He Who had suffered so much was vindicated, raised, and exalted to glory.

And the book of Psalms saw this all, well in advance of the incarnation of Jesus of Nazareth.

Exalted in Glory

*The LORD said to my Lord,
“Sit at My right hand,
Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.”* Psalm 110.1

The ascension of Christ

The doctrine of the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ is one of the most overlooked teachings of the Christian Church in our day. Having risen from the dead, Jesus was lifted up to heaven as the Apostles stood by, watching Him ascend (Acts 1.9). Luke leaves us, like the Apostles, looking into the heavens, staring at the cloud which took Jesus out of their sight, scratching our heads and wondering what happens next.

Beyond that lifting cloud a good deal more went on, and we can learn about the details of Christ's ascension and enthronement by looking into the book of Psalms. From what we see there, the exaltation of Christ to His throne of glory is much more important than most of us perhaps tend to think.

The order of the exaltation

Let's note first of all the *order of events* surrounding the ascension of Christ. The resurrection of Christ is foretold in Psalm 16.10, as Peter indicated, thus setting the stage for the events of the Ascension.

First, there is *Jesus' appearing in the courts of heaven*: “God has gone up with a shout, the LORD with the sound of a trumpet. Sing praises to God, sing praises! Sing praises to our King, sing praises!” (Ps. 47.5, 6) When Jesus emerged from that cloud into the unseen realm of God, the angels, and the departed saints, a great victory shout arose spontaneously, as all rose and applauded and sang and hurraed to welcome their triumphant King.

Next comes the *invitation of the Father*: “Sit at My right hand” (Ps. 110.1). This word from the Father, welcoming His King into glory, was to acknowledge that He had completed His work on earth, and now He was ready to continue His work from heaven. A place on the Father's

own throne, at the right hand of His power, was prepared for Him, and Jesus took His seat with great joy (Heb. 12.1, 2).

At this the Father solemnly *declared the purpose of Christ's enthronement*: “You *are* My Son...Ask of Me, and I will give *You* the nations *for* your inheritance, and the ends of the earth *for* Your possession” (Ps. 2.8). Lest there be any misunderstanding on the part of any creature, Jesus was now appointed to rule not only in heaven, but throughout the creation, over every creature and every nation. His mandate was, seated at the Father's right hand, to establish His rule to the very ends of the earth and, by extension, throughout the vast cosmos.

With that, Jesus was *anointed with the oil of gladness and given the scepter of uprightness* with which to rule and advance His Kingdom (Ps. 45.2, 6). The Kingdom of Jesus Christ is a Kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, which He is working to advance as He rides out among His people and equips them for Kingdom work (Ps. 45.3-6, cf. Rom. 14.17, 18).

Finally, the *session of Christ* began as He inaugurated His rule, enthroned over the nations, to carry out the purposes of His God-given mandate. In this regard, the ascended Christ gives gifts to all people, especially to His own, so that He may dwell in the midst of those gifts and make His glory known over all the earth (Ps. 68.18; cf. Eph. 4.8).

Unseen, but real

All this happened somehow, by some means, in the realm of unseen beings – God, angels, departed saints. Yet it's very real; indeed, it is the ground for all our hope as Christians. The psalmists use rich metaphors and vivid language to describe the splendors and glories of the exalted Christ (cf. Pss. 90, 93), but these are but feeble tools for communicating the richness and wonder of that unseen realm, and they cannot really convey to us the utter magnificence and overwhelming power of the rule of King Jesus.

Still, it's what we're encouraged to “see”, if only with the eye of faith. And we are called to see it, to set our minds, as Paul puts it, on these things above, where Jesus is seated in heavenly places, and from where

He is continuing His great work of making all things new (Col. 3.1-3). The more clearly we see these things, and the more firmly we believe them, the greater will be the evidence in our lives of the unseen, but very real power, of the risen and reigning Christ (Heb. 11.1).

Ruling in Glory

*The voice of the LORD makes the deer give birth,
And strips the forests bare;
And in His temple everyone says, "Glory!"* Psalm 29.9

A temple full of glory

In the psalms the dwelling place of the Lord is frequently referred to as the "temple." Sometimes this means the earthly temple, constructed in Jerusalem. Other times it refers to the temple in heaven, where Christ has taken His seat at the Father's right hand and is carrying on the work of advancing His Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

Since the earthly temple was not finished until after David's day, it's safe to consider that any psalms from his pen which mention the temple are thinking of the place of God's dwelling in the unseen realm. David seems to have known a good deal about this heavenly throne room, information he could only have received by inspiration from the Holy Spirit.

Suffice it to say that the glory in which Christ rules is altogether appropriate for a King of His stature. Let's take a look.

The throne room

The throne room of Jesus Christ is lavishly described in the psalms, in ways designed to appeal to our highest aspirations of beauty and delight. Psalm 45 describes palaces made of purest ivory, beautiful robes doused with sweetest perfumes, sweet music playing throughout every hall, and rich gold embroideries all around. There is a good deal of coming and going in the throne room of Christ, which seems to be a very busy place, indeed.

The place where the Lord sits enthroned is filled with thick darkness, yet fire and lightning go out from it over all the earth to accomplish the King's purposes (Ps. 97.1-3). Throughout the halls of the throne room, witnesses declare the righteousness of Christ, choirs sing psalms of praise to celebrate His glory, and splendor and majesty and strength and beauty adorn every nook and cranny (Ps. 96.6). Christ sits on a throne which has as its foundations righteousness and justice (Ps. 97.2), thus eternally declaring the ends for which He rules over all things.

From His throne

From this place of glory Christ exercises judgment over the nations (Ps. 9.7, 8; cf. Rom. 1.18-32). He rules as a shelter and refuge for His people, and a scourge for all who prefer evil ways. He invites His people to enter with Him into His glory (Ps. 15) and to contemplate the wondrous beauty of His temple (Ps. 27.4). From His sanctuary, He sends out help for His people in various ways (Ps. 20.2), grants the desires of His faithful subjects (Ps. 21.2), looks out on all the affairs of men and nations (Ps. 33.13, 14), and beautifies His people by His presence in their midst (Ps. 48.1-3). He commands His people to seek His face there and to find in Him all the goodness they could ever want (Ps. 2.:8-14).

Around the throne of Christ angels linger, awaiting some word from Him concerning a work they must do on behalf of His people (Ps. 104.4; cf. Heb. 1.14). The Spirit comes and goes to do the work for which He has been sent by the Father and the Son. New souls arrive daily in the heavenly court, and great rejoicing attends the arrival of each one.

Can you see it?

Over and over the psalmists direct our thoughts to the place where Jesus sits enthroned as King. They want us to be amazed at the glory, beauty, power, majesty, and might of the scene. And they want to assure us that all this majestic greatness is real, and all of it is working for our benefit who believe in the Lord and follow in His ways.

This unseen realm is real, even though it's unseen. But the extent to which the psalmists go in describing the glory of the exalted Christ should encourage us to seek this glory, to seek the Lord's face in glory, so that we might know all the benefits that are waiting for us there.

Thus Paul prayed for the Ephesians (Eph. 1.15-23); thus we should earnest to seek to know for ourselves.

The Lord's Agents

*He lays the beams of His upper chambers in the waters,
Who makes the clouds His chariot,
Who walks on the wings of the wind,
Who makes His angels spirits,
His ministers a flame of fire.* Psalm 104.3, 4

No idle King

It would be easy to get the impression that Jesus Christ, exalted in glory, has nothing else to do but bask in the admiring love of those who populate His throne room and temple.

That would only be half the story, however.

We have seen that heaven – the present dwelling place of the Lord – is a place of unimaginable beauty and glory, bustling with departed saints and holy angels who sing, praise, testify, and simply admire the Lord of glory as He sits on His eternal throne.

But the Lord is busy on earth, and to carry out the work He is doing there, He engages three primary agents: the Spirit of God, the angels, and the people of God on earth.

The work of the Spirit

The Psalms do not have much to say about the Spirit. We get a glimpse of His work here and there, and, joining what we see there with some other passages, we can get a sense of how the Spirit serves as the primary Agent for the progress of Christ's rule.

Jesus is said to *ride* or *walk* forth from His throne to carry out His work (Pss. 45.4; 104.3). John envisioned this as His riding a white horse, which would be an apt symbol of the Holy Spirit (Rev. 6.1). The Spirit is the Lord's means of conveyance for "getting around" amid the tumble

and tumult of human history. He roams throughout the earth as the “eyes of the Lord”, doing the Lord’s bidding and carrying forward the victory He has attained (Deut. 11.12; 2 Chron. 16.9; Ps. 34.15). In Psalm 104 the Spirit is likened to a chariot in serving the Lord as the means of conveyance by which the Lord is present on the earth.

The Spirit works in the souls of God’s people, watching over them, convicting and teaching them, granting them understanding and strength to do the work of Christ (Pss. 139, 51). The Spirit of God, poured out by the Father and the Son, is the operative Agent and effective Power of the Kingdom of God, the Means by which the Kingdom increases on earth as in heaven.

The work of the angels and the saints

Angels are spiritual beings of great power. They number in the myriads of myriads, according to Daniel 7, and are available at the Lord’s behest to serve the interests of His Kingdom. Here is not the place to outline in detail the work of angels. Suffice it to say that angels can be called into service to help the people of God with spiritual struggles, to exert power over the creation, and to thwart the designs of the Lord’s enemies. They are real, and they are really, really powerful.

In Psalm 45 the people of God are likened to the weapons by which the Lord conducts His ongoing conquest of the earth. This martial imagery was appropriate for David’s day, but now we are encouraged, by the apostle Paul, for example (Eph. 6.10ff), to think of our warfare in spiritual terms. The Lord is able, by His Word and Spirit, to teach, equip, send, and use His people to extend His throne of righteousness and justice to all the nations of the earth. For their part, the people of God must earnestly seek the Lord and learn everything they can from Him, so that they might walk in His ways and do His bidding (Ps. 25).

So the Lord Jesus is very active from His throne in heaven. All around us spiritual powers move and strive and work, according to Him Who works all things according to the counsel of His will (Eph. 1.11), to enable us who know the Lord to carry out the purposes for which He has made us His own people.

Our responsibility is to understand our calling and to embrace it readily, knowing Whom we serve and being committed to doing His work, on earth as it is done in heaven, as our highest priority.

For reflection or discussion

1. Why is the doctrine of Christ's Ascension so important?
2. According to the Psalms, what happened (that is, *would* happen) at Christ's Ascension?
3. Why are the Psalms so important as a resource for understanding the Kingship of Jesus and His Kingdom?
4. Summarize what we have learned thus far from the Psalms about the rule of King Jesus.
5. What has been the most important lesson for you to this point in our study?

2 The Design of the Kingdom

The Divine Economy

*And in Your majesty ride prosperously because of truth, humility, and righteousness;
And Your right hand shall teach You awesome things.* Psalm 45.4

Exalted and ruling

As we saw in the previous chapter, Jesus Christ has been exalted to heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father in glory, splendor, majesty, power, and might. Nowhere in Scripture is the reign of Christ more clearly portrayed than in the book of Psalms. We saw that New Testament writers – Paul, Peter, John, and the writer of Hebrews especially – as well as the Lord Jesus, turned to the Psalms to point people’s minds to the rule of Christ, which is the Kingdom of God.

We want to continue our examination of what we can learn about the Kingdom of God from the book of Psalms. In this chapter we will consider the overall design of the Kingdom – its character, purpose, and scope, as well as the pattern of its operation on earth.

The Kingdom which Jesus received from His Father (cf. Dan. 7.13, 14; Ps. 110), which He has bestowed on His people by His Spirit (Dan. 7.18; Acts 2), and is advancing on earth as it is in heaven – this Kingdom marks a watershed in the course of human history. Whereas prior to the coming of Christ the world lay in darkness, captive to the deceit and destruction of the devil, Jesus has now bound that strong one and is plundering his holdings with true freedom and eternal life (Matt. 12.22-29). The Kingdom of God is the framework in which this liberating work of King Jesus goes forward.

The divine economy

The Apostle Paul explained that Christ has inaugurated a new “economy” on earth, one that will continue to unfold throughout these

latter days (Eph. 1.9, 10). An “economy” or “administration” indicates plans, priorities, protocols, and projects designed to accomplish particular ends. Jesus is ruling at the Father’s right hand to get certain things done, and the book of Psalms helps us to understand the nature of the economy He is pursuing.

It is an economy, the psalmists explained, designed to achieve “truth and meekness and righteousness.” The rule of Christ seeks to put away all deceit and every lie (Ps. 120.1, 2). The Word of God is the primary resource whereby Christ advances His truth against the lies, half-truths, and deceptions of the devil (Ps. 12). Christ is portrayed in Psalm 45 as wielding the Sword of the Spirit in the work of bringing truth to light and meekness and righteousness to the world, and He has placed that Sword into the hands of His people to further His work on earth as it is in heaven (Ps. 149.5, 6).

The word “meekness” here conveys the idea of peace. Christ’s rule, by His Word of truth, is unto peace – peace in human souls, peace with God, peace among men. Jesus is the Prince of Peace (Is. 9.6), and His people bear the fruit of peace as they seek His Kingdom in the power of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5.22, 23).

“Righteousness” conveys the same idea as “justice” and is the embodiment of the character and love of God in all aspects of human life, culture, and society. The Law of God, Paul reminds us, is righteous and good (Rom. 7.12). Jesus said that Kingdom greatness could be obtained by obeying and teaching God’s Law, not unto salvation, but for the righteousness of love for God and neighbor which the Law represents (Matt. 5.17-19; 22.34-40).

Called to the Kingdom

Jesus Christ has been exalted to heaven, and He is ruling on earth, by His Word and Spirit, in and through His people, so that righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit might become the new “economy” of the world. This, Paul says, is the Kingdom of Christ, and that which brings blessing to God and men (Rom. 14.17, 18). This is the Kingdom and economy to which all have been called who confess Jesus as Savior and King (1 Thess. 2.12).

Universal Sovereignty

*The Lord has established His throne in heaven,
And His kingdom rules over all.* Psalm 103.19

King over all

Jesus Christ has received a Kingdom from His Father and ours, and He is ruling over it for the cause of truth, meekness, and righteousness. This is the new divine economy which has been unfolding on earth, as it is in heaven, since the days of Christ's ascension. This economy was foreseen and prophesied in the book of Psalms.

But some might be tempted to believe that, since we are obviously dealing with spiritual matters and unseen things when we talk about the Kingdom of God, the extent of Christ's rule is somehow limited to spiritual things, and that only in those who acknowledge Him as King. The rule of Christ, in other words, is something to which one must willingly submit in order to gain the benefits of it. Otherwise, we are unaffected by it. We hear this thinking in the encouragement believers often to give to a seeking friend, "Let Jesus be the Lord of your life."

But to conceive of Christ and His reign as playing some kind of waiting game in which His rule only becomes effective as people allow, is to miss the teaching of the book of Psalms about the scope of Christ's reign.

According to the Psalms, Jesus is Lord over all, and His Kingdom rules over all. All – as in everything, everywhere, and at all times.

The rule of Christ in Psalm 148

Nowhere is this more clearly seen than in Psalm 148. Here the entire cosmos is called to acknowledge and proclaim the Lordship of King Jesus and to obey His bidding.

This includes all unseen spiritual beings, angels of every sort, and all those other "hosts" who have departed this life already (v. 2). The rule of Christ extends over the heavenly bodies throughout the vast cosmos,

which are commanded to praise Him because He created them, and He sustains their existence day by day (vv. 3-6).

On the earth all creatures – plants, animals, people of every sort, the weather, hills and trees, the young and old, the great and the meek – all are called to acknowledge Him as Lord because of the salvation He has accomplished for those who believe in Him (vv. 7-14). Clearly nothing that exists is outside the scope of Christ's rule. Nothing exists but by Him, through Him, and for His praise and honor and glory. His Kingdom rules over all!

Nations and peoples

The apostle Peter proclaimed, at the onset of the divine economy, that God had made Jesus, crucified and risen from the dead, to be both Christ and Lord (Acts 2.34-36). This announcement heralded the formal “bringing near” of the Kingdom of God in such a way as to leave every human being without excuse for failing to acknowledge and obey King Jesus.

Psalm 47 puts it this way:

*God has gone up with a shout,
The LORD with the sound of a trumpet.
Sing praises to God, sing praises!
Sing praises to our King, sing praises!
For God is the King of all the earth;
Sing praises with understanding.
God reigns over the nations;
God sits on His holy throne.
The princes of the people have gathered together,
The people of the God of Abraham.
For the shields of the earth belong to God;
He is greatly exalted. (vv. 5-9)*

From the perspective of the Psalms and the rest of Scripture, there is no “letting” Jesus “be Lord” of our lives. Jesus *is* Lord, King and Ruler over all creation; His Kingdom rules over all. As Dutch theologian

Abraham Kuyper put it, “There is not a single square inch of the whole creation over which Jesus Christ does not declare, ‘Mine!’”

We will look a bit more closely at this rule of King Jesus in the sections that follow.

Lord of All Creation

*Whatever the LORD pleases He does,
In heaven and in earth,
In the seas and in all deep places.
He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth;
He makes lightning for the rain;
He brings the wind out of His treasures.* Psalm 135.6, 7

The naturalistic view of the cosmos

The Scriptures present a very different economy and worldview from what we are familiar with in our day. This is particularly clear when we consider the naturalistic view of the cosmos which school children everywhere are taught as undeniable truth.

According to the secular, naturalistic view of the world, “the cosmos is all there is or was or ever will be,” as the late Dr. Carl Sagan so glibly put it. The present state of the world is the result of random events, billions of years in the past, which continue to play out their effects through the “laws of physics” in ways we are only beginning to understand. According to this view, matter – the “stuff” of the cosmos, is eternal and carries inherent properties and powers which, when acted upon in certain ways, produce the cosmos, the galaxies, earth and its moon, life, cream soda, and the recordings of Turlough O’Carolan which are playing in the background as I write.

The cosmos, according to this view, is held together by some material substance such as we do not now understand, cannot see, and only believe to exist because of the effects it exerts on what we *can* see. “Dark matter” and “dark energy”, as these mysterious, unseen powers are called, *have* to exist in order for us to make sense of the way time, chance, and matter interact to make the cosmos what it is.

This naturalistic view of the world is as much a matter of faith in unknown beginnings and unseen things as anything Christians proffer. This naturalistic view of the cosmos holds a triumvirate of impersonal deities – time, chance, and matter – as responsible for and explaining everything. Time they cannot define, or chance. And the vast majority of the “matter” of the cosmos – dark matter – they’ve neither seen nor understand. They simply believe it to exist.

And this is what they teach children in the name of truth.

Ruler of all creation

As we have seen, the Psalms present Jesus the Lord as Ruler of all creation. Nothing that has existence, whether seen or unseen, near or far, living or non-living, infinitely large or infinitely small – nothing has existence or being apart from the will and power of Jesus Christ. He is Lord of all. Nothing is outside His power. Everything depends on His Word and will.

He rules the planets and guides them through their courses day and night (Ps. 65.8; Ps. 104.19). The billions of galaxies that fill the night sky and beyond do not obey physical laws launched into effect by some Big Bang eons ago. They obey the Word of Christ, Who “speaks” continuously to them and to all the creation according to His steadfast love and faithfulness, making all created things servants of His Kingdom and economy (Ps. 119.89-91).

The winds, rain, hail, and snow – all forms of weather – come and go at the command of King Jesus (Pss. 29.3, 135.7; 147.15-18). Yes, it is indeed “mysterious” how Jesus can do this. But then the naturalistic scientist insists that the forces and powers of the material cosmos are also “mysterious” and only believed to exist because nothing *visible* to science can explain the cosmos as we observe it.

The naturalistic thinker mocks the Christian for believing in God and other unseen things. But he, having rejected God – for reasons related more to morality than science – creates impersonal “gods” and “unseen things” and puts his trust in them as the mindless, purposeless,

pointless, creators and sustainers of the cosmos. As Paul might say to such foolishness, “What you worship in ignorance, we are here to declare plainly and confidently: Jesus Christ is the Lord and Ruler of all creation!”

Lord of All Nations

*But the LORD shall endure forever;
He has prepared His throne for judgment.
He shall judge the world in righteousness,
And He shall administer judgment for the peoples in uprightness.* Psalm 9.7, 8

Ignored, but not dethroned

It seems almost ludicrous to insist, as the psalmists do, that Jesus Christ is King and Lord of all the nations of the earth. After all, not a single government on earth – our own included – actually acknowledges Him as Lord. Some give lip service to God, some serve other deities, while others worship at the altars of political power or economic progress. By and large, the nations and peoples of the world ignore the claims of Scripture that Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords.

But while they may ignore Him as Lord, they do not dethrone Him. And the progress of the divine economy, which is the Kingdom of God, is advancing even in those lands and nations where kings and rulers reject or resist the claims of Christ and His Word.

Jesus Christ is Lord of all creation, and He is Lord of all nations. Every government, all rulers and peoples, everyone on earth at all times lives under the sovereign and gracious rule of King Jesus, as He works to unfold the divine economy and advance His rule on earth as it is in heaven.

The Lord as Provider

The Psalms insist that Jesus Christ is even now ruling the nations of the world. This entails two aspects of Jesus’ sovereignty – His gracious provision and His sovereign judgment.

The psalmists teach that Jesus continues to show His grace and mercy to the nations even though they deny or resist Him (cf. Ps. 52.1). King Jesus commands His creation and it produces food, provides shelter, and brings forth an abundance of blessings for the needs of all men (Ps. 104.10-23). No human being could live except by the grace and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ. People are not here by chance, and their continued existence is not the result of their own cleverness or strength. The Lord gives life, the Lord sustains life, and the Lord fills the lives of people with blessings of every sort, even those who deny or despise Him.

The Lord as Judge

But the Psalms also show us that Jesus is the Judge of the nations. He has proclaimed His Word, and continues to proclaim it, so that the nations and peoples of the world are clear about Who He is and what He requires.

Nevertheless, nations and peoples go on about their business as though they were the lords and rulers of their lives. But Jesus knows how to frustrate their plans, bringing their counsel to nothing so that they should look beyond themselves for the wisdom and guidance only He can give (Ps. 33.10, 11). Nations are blessed and prosper precisely to the extent that they are guided by His Word – whether they are willing to be so guided or not (Pss. 33.12, 66.3; 81.15 NASB).

Lord of all nations

Jesus is patient and persistent in bringing His economy to bear among the nations and peoples of the world. He has secured the outcome of His rule, so that ultimate and complete victory is assured (Ps. 110). But He works by His Word and grace to woo the nations and peoples of the world, even bringing them to misery and shame so that they might seek Him and submit to His good and sovereign rule over their lives (Ps. 83.16).

Jesus Whom we proclaim as Ruler of the cosmos is also Ruler of all nations. His Word is Law. His grace is constant and comprehensive. His judgment is sure. And His Kingdom continues to expand and grow,

until it shall one day extend to all the earth and its peoples, filling the world with His glory (Ps. 72).

This is the King we serve, and Whose rule we are called to proclaim to all the nations of the earth.

Lord of the Soul

*You have set our iniquities before You,
Our secret sins in the light of Your countenance.* Psalm 90.8

The all-searching King

Jesus Christ is Ruler of all creation. Nothing is beyond His reach, nothing is outside the purview of His economy. He rules all things by His Word and Spirit, and this includes the unseen depths of the human soul. The Lord sets the souls of men before Him at all times, and He rules their minds, hearts, and consciences, continuously appealing to them to turn from all wicked ways and to seek Him while they may (Ps. 27.8)

The Psalms are rich in teaching about the Lord's rule in the souls of men. He knows our souls. He is able to affect the way we think, the things we desire, and the values by which we live. The Lord holds men accountable for the shape of their souls, and He piques, goads, comforts, emboldens, and affirms them in their souls so that they will submit to His rule from the very depths of their being.

The rule of Christ in the lives of men is very much from the inside-out. He calls us to be devoted to Him with all our souls, and He rules in such a way as to make this truly possible.

The Lord rules in the heart

Central to the operation of the soul is the heart, that part of the soul which manages our affections and teaches us what to love and what to hate. God is Lord of the heart. He sees the hearts of all men, and He is able to influence their hearts to turn them to Himself.

The psalmists teach that the Lord from His throne in glory brings conviction of sin into the human heart, so that confession and repentance follow, restoring a right relationship with God (Ps. 51). The Lord is able to bring comfort to a troubled or lonely heart (Pss. 13, 42, 43). He knows the hearts even of those who despise Him, and He can quickly bring them to terror where terror never existed before (Ps. 14). The Lord can turn the hearts of men to love Him (Ps. 18), praise and thank Him (Ps. 21), and teach them what they must avoid in their hearts in order to know His favor (Pss. 1; 97.10).

The Lord rules the thoughts

A second component of the soul is the mind, which governs the thought life of a man. The Lord, enthroned in glory, teaches men to think His thoughts after Him. He can speak to our minds in ways that give us new insights and understanding into the divine economy and the will of the Lord (Pss. 19, 25, 119). God knows the thoughts of each person's mind, and He teaches men to see the folly of their way and to seek Him for salvation (Ps. 107). He is able to search both the mind and the heart, and to bring men to repentance and revival (Ps. 139.23, 24).

The Lord rules the conscience

The conscience is that part of the soul which harbors our highest priorities and values. It is home to the will and serves to sort out the affections of the heart and the thoughts of the mind, and to process them into actions that are consistent with the purposes of the divine economy. Christ is Lord of the conscience. He reveals our motives and values. He challenges our priorities. He teaches the conscience what to value and what to avoid; He holds up the standard of His Law to the conscience; and He enables the conscience to seek the Lord and His will. The Lord leads those who love Him to value His salvation above all else (Ps. 116.12-14).

The Psalms portray Jesus Christ as Lord and Ruler of the souls of men. He speaks to their minds, hearts, and consciences to persuade them of His steadfast love and faithfulness, so that they might know, love, and obey Him freely. When our souls are rightly submitted to Jesus Christ, He rules us unto uprightness, so that we realize increasingly, throughout every aspect of our being, the good purposes of God (Ps. 45.6). And

when our souls are not submitted to Jesus, He stands in judgment over them, warning all men everywhere to repent of all their wrong thoughts, affections, and values, and to seek Him while they may (Ps. 50).

The Pattern of Christ's Rule in Creation

*He sends out His command to the earth;
His word runs very swiftly.* Psalm 147:15

The upholding Word

The writer of Hebrews declares that Jesus Christ upholds the universe and everything in it by His Word of power (Heb. 1:3). This is a great mystery, which we shall never be able fully to understand. But this is the teaching of Scripture from beginning to end, and especially in the book of Psalms.

The workings of the cosmos, in all its various forms and creatures, are subject to the command and Word of Jesus Christ, enthroned at the Father's right hand.

The naturalistic view

According to the naturalistic view of the cosmos, what holds the universe together, sustaining all its actions and interactions, is the leftover energy from the Big Bang. Billions of years ago all the matter of the universe was by some means compressed to a single small point, whereupon it exploded and began rapidly to expand outward in all directions. From this initial explosion has come all that we observe in the cosmos, and all the operations by which the universe is sustained.

This view cannot be proven, of course. However, it can be demonstrated, at least, to an extent. From the beginning of the scientific enterprise scientists have been able to isolate and identify a good many "laws" of the universe – such as the "law of gravity" and the "law" which says that water boils at 212 degrees Fahrenheit under certain conditions.

The Christian worldview also acknowledges these operations, and even consents to refer to them as “laws of nature.” But the Christian knows that these are not laws somehow embedded in the cosmos itself and operating completely independent of other influences. These laws, the Christian understands, are mere descriptions of the way a loving and faithful King upholds the universe by His Word of power at all times.

Steadfast love and faithfulness

In the book of Psalms this constant ruling and governing of the universe by our Lord Jesus Christ is referred to as His steadfast love and faithfulness. By continuously loving that which He has made, and by faithfully enabling and empowering each creature, from the greatest to the least, to exist and fill its role in the cosmos, the Lord Himself keeps the universe going. He has vested certain generative powers in the creatures of the cosmos, but even these, and all “second causes” of operations, are subject to His commanding and sustaining Word.

We cannot demonstrate this in a lab, any more than a scientist could demonstrate the historical reality of the Big Bang or the existence of dark matter and dark energy. We believe what the Scriptures teach us about the scope, power, and pattern of the Lord’s rule over the creation, and we are content to know that we shall never be able fully to understand these operations.

This does not make us lazy concerning the work of science. The modern scientific revolution was pioneered and led by men who believed that Jesus is the upholding Word of the cosmos.

This is a great mystery, but we do not doubt the power of Him Who overcame death and the grave to support, sustain, fructify, and enlarge that which He has made and loves. Jesus is Lord of all, and He rules and sustains His creation with continuous words of lovingkindness and unfailing deeds of faithfulness. Were He to cease for a moment “speaking to the cosmos,” the whole of it, and everything in it, would cease to exist.

The cosmos exists and continues because the Lord of the cosmos exerts His power upon it by the decree and counsel of His Word, 24/7, 365, every day, in every detail, and all to the praise of the glory of His grace.

The Pattern of Christ's Rule in History

*Let God arise,
Let His enemies be scattered;
Let those also who hate Him flee before Him. Psalm 68.1*

The King in history

I get the impression that some people believe that Jesus is Lord of all creation and King of nations, but somehow, He is not active *in* history except in the hearts of those who know Him.

This is not the teaching of Scripture; it is not the teaching of the book of Psalms. According to the Psalms, Jesus rules the nations, as we have seen, and He is active throughout the course of history to extend His Kingdom and enrich His economy of justice and love.

The work of Christ in history follows a pattern, and we can see this pattern outlined in Israel's conquest of the land of Canaan, a great work of God recalled in Psalm 68, as well as in several other psalms. We want to consider four aspects of this work of the Lord in human history.

Invasion

The work of Christ in human history follows the pattern outlined in this psalm. It begins with *an invasion* of human history by the divine presence, for the purpose of bringing a new people into existence and a new economy to the world (Ps. 68.1-14). This was certainly the effect of Israel's invasion of the land of Canaan. God's presence with Israel foreshadowed both the coming of Christ in His incarnation and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit into human history. All three of these events saw God come among the nations in a new way, working through His people to accomplish the purposes of His new economy and Kingdom.

Subdue

Working through His people, the Lord of glory intends to *subdue* the world to Himself, to free men and their cultures from the madness and folly of unbelief, and to reconcile the world back to God (Ps. 68.15-23). Very often the psalmists depict this aspect of the Lord's operating in history in military terms, but this is only because that was the familiar way of advancing God's rule among peoples given to war and violence as Policy 1. Now the Lord works to subdue the nations by His Word and Spirit, as His people embody the grace and truth of the divine economy, proclaim the Kingship of Jesus, and call the world to submit to Him. This part of the pattern is certainly visible in the Psalms (cf. Pss. 71, 145), but it only comes to real working power with the outpouring of the Spirit on the first Christian Pentecost.

Renew

The third stage of Christ's work in history is that of *renewal*. What the Lord subdues to Himself He liberates from the constraints and corruption of sin and turns it to the worship and service of His name (Ps. 68.24-31). Men, cultures, societies, nations, and peoples are directed to serve the Lord with His gifts and bounty and to bask in His blessings, as His people lead them by word and deed into the new economy and Kingdom of the Lord.

Rejoice

The final stage of Christ's work in history is to bring men and nations to the place of *celebrating* His victory and Kingdom with great joy (Ps. 68.32-35). The pattern of Christ's ruling in history begins with a divine invasion of the earth. It culminates in a "human invasion" of the heavens, as men return to God the praise and thanks and glory which are due Him for His mighty work of redemption and renewal in their midst. Heaven comes down to earth in the rule of King Jesus, in order to raise the earth to the glories and joys of heaven.

Jesus Christ is very much at work *in* history, as we see throughout the Psalms. He is Lord of all creation, Ruler of all nations, Sovereign of the souls of men, and the Sustainer of the world. And in the course of human history He is making all things new, to the praise of the glory of His Father and ours.

For reflection of discussion

1. According to the Psalms, how broad is the scope of Christ's rule?
2. The Psalms both described the rule of the Word of God and prophesied its coming. Explain.
3. Why is it not problematic that Christians accept the rule of King Jesus, including His ordering of the vast cosmos, as an act of faith?
4. What do we mean by saying that Christ's rule in history brings His invasion of the world full circle?
5. What have you gained from this chapter? How do you expect to apply the things you've learned to your daily walk with the Lord?

3 Ground Rules

Rule by Decree

*Let them praise the name of the Lord,
For He commanded and they were created.
He also established them forever and ever;
He made a decree which shall not pass away.* Psalm 148.5, 6

Sovereign over all

We are considering the teaching of the book of Psalms concerning the rule of King Jesus. As we saw in the first chapter, Jesus is exalted in power and glory at the right hand of God. From there, as we saw in chapter 2 He rules all creation and all nations for the purpose of advancing His Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. The Psalms are rich with teaching to elaborate and clarify this idea, and in this third part of our study we want to consider more carefully just how Jesus rules “on the ground” in all the affairs of creation and history.

The sovereign rule of Christ over all things did not actually begin after His ascension. As the hymn, “Thou Didst Leave Thy Throne,” rightly puts it, “Thou didst leave Thy throne and Thy kingly crown,/When Thou camest to earth for me...” The Word of God ruled heaven and earth before His incarnation. Now, following His death and resurrection, His redemptive work complete, and He has resumed His throne for the fuller and, ultimately, final advancement of the divine economy.

He rules by decree

Foundational to the rule of Christ on earth as in heaven is the eternal decree which the Father, with the Son and the Spirit, declared from all eternity past. The idea of a “decree,” as we have it in Psalms 93 (v. 5) and 148 and elsewhere, is that God has determined, declared, and established an order, statute, or, if you will, an executive proclamation. It carries all the force of law over all that it affects, and it provides the

eternal and temporal framework for understanding the rule of King Jesus on the ground as well as in heaven.

This decree consists of four components which combine to make this an all-important measure. The first of these is that the decree of God is *eternal*. Creating a Kingdom and establishing it in heaven and earth is not something which suddenly occurred to God as an idea worth trying. Nor is it something which, once the earth began to reel with the effects of sin, God considered He ought to implement in order to set things right once again.

The decree of God to bring all things under His sovereign rule existed even before *anything* was created. The rule of God unto His glory describes the orderly relations within the Trinity by which God loves, serves, and glorifies Himself at all times and in every way. His eternal decree established that this divine rule of love and truth should extend beyond Him into everything He would create, that He might share His love with and refract His glory through whatsoever He would create.

Second, the decree of God is *comprehensive*. It is a proclamation and eternal spiritual measure affecting everything in heaven and earth, all creation and culture, and every person and nation. Nothing is outside the framework on which the decree of God is focused.

Third, God's decree is *fixed*. God has declared His will and purpose for all things. He will not change His mind. We cannot bargain with Him. He will not listen to any of our "good ideas" concerning how the world should be or how we ought to live in it. He has made up His mind and His mind does not change (Mal. 3.6).

Finally, the decree of God is *inviolable*. This is not to say that men do not tear God's decree off its posting-place and stamp their feet upon it, declaring themselves, and not God, to be lord (Ps. 2.1-3). They do, every day. But they do not do so without consequences, for in the eternal decree of God He anticipates the rebellion of ungrateful men and has determined from all eternity past how He will deal with them.

Secure in the divine decree

The fact of God's eternal, comprehensive, fixed, and inviolable decree might give some people pause. But for those who know God as loving Father, saving King, and gracious and comforting Spirit, nothing could provide more security for our souls or hope for our future. We might thus add, concerning God's decree, that it is *good* in every way. God has decreed all things whatsoever will come to pass, and He has enthroned His Son, at His right hand in heaven, to ensure that that eternal decree shall not fail in any way.

Ruling toward His Promises

He is the LORD our God;

His judgments are in all the earth.

He remembers His covenant forever,

The word which He commanded, for a thousand generations,

The covenant which He made with Abraham... Psalm 105.7-9

An eternal covenant

The book of Psalms is rich in teaching about the promises God has made to those who trust in Him. Many of the Psalms remind us that Israel was not always faithful in seeking those promises (cf. Pss. 78, 106). But even those Psalms, and others, point to the faithfulness of God in carrying out His decree according to the Word He spoke to Abraham long ago.

God has determined not to leave human beings in the dark concerning His decree and plan which He is fulfilling through His King, Jesus Christ. Instead, His purpose is to invite men to "participate" in Him and His glory, to know God and enjoy Him as our greatest and purest pleasure (Ps. 16.11). To that end, God points men along the trajectory of His eternal, comprehensive, fixed, inviolable, and good decree by holding out promises of blessing and bounty for those who will journey with Him in His way.

The promises to Abraham

The promises by which God intends to guide men into the blessings of His eternal decree were first declared to Abraham (Gen. 12.1-3). The

apostles Paul (Rom. 4) and Peter (2 Pet. 1.4) explain that these same promises, fulfilled in Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 1.20), are held out for all who believe in Him and obey His will.

God made six promises to Abraham. First, God promised to *create a great nation* within which to spread His grace and truth around. God intends that multitudes of people should share in the loving order which He has known eternally in the divine Godhead.

Second, God promises to *bless* this people, to engage, immerse, surround, enrich, and sustain them by His presence, in His glory, for their joy and peace.

Third, by giving this blessed nation a *great name*, God intends to reach through and beyond them to offer Himself and His good plan and bounty to others, that they might come to know Him, even to those who continue to deny and despise Him (cf. Ps. 52.1; Pss. 66.3, 81.15).

Fourth, God promises to *make His people a blessing*, that is, to equip and provide for them in such a way as that they might actually be channels of the outworking of His eternal decree.

Fifth, God assures His people of His *provision and protection*. He will direct the patterns of creation, the course of history, and the affairs of men and nations so that those who know and trust Him will not fail or want for anything they need within the framework of His decree.

Finally, God promises each generation of those who seek Him and His promises, that a *legacy of blessing* will extend through them to the world and the future. All nations and peoples – those in our own time and those yet to come – will know the goodness of the Lord through the faithfulness of His people as they walk the path of obedience toward His promises.

The way of promise

All the promises of God may be reduced to a single motto, which recurs throughout Scripture: “I will be your God, and you will be My people.” The Psalms, consistent with the rest of Scripture, explain two additional

matters concerning the promises of God. First, they are obtained and realized through obedience to God's Word and decree. And second, such obedience is only possible because of the suffering, death, resurrection, and rule of our eternal King, Jesus Christ. As Paul insisted, all the promises of God come to "Yes!" in Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 1.20).

God has decreed that men and women in every age and nation may enter into His joy, pleasure, and goodness, as they pursue His promises through Jesus Christ, His King.

A Scepter of Uprightness

*Your throne, O God, is forever and ever;
A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom.
You love righteousness and hate wickedness;
Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You
With the oil of gladness more than Your companions.* Psalm 45.6, 7

Not the way it's supposed to be

In his book, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be*, Neil Plantinga explains that the world has been knocked off course and is in desperate need of correction. It has not careened outside the framework of the divine decree. Nor is it beyond the reach of His covenant and redemption. But it has gone seriously awry and is "not the way it's supposed to be."

Solomon and, much later, the Apostle Paul, traced the problem back to mankind's determination to find a different course, one other than what God offers in His promises. As Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes 7.29 (ESV), "See, this alone I found, that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes." The "many schemes" by which men try to make their way in life apart from God constitute rebellion against Him and His good purposes, and so it's no wonder that men and everything they touch – including the whole vast creation – are suffering the effects of this rejection of God's eternal, comprehensive, fixed, inviolable, and good decree, and all His promises of blessings and life.

God's solution to this cosmic catastrophe is to have established His King on His throne, and to have invested Him with all authority in

heaven and on earth to enforce and advance His eternal decree. He has given to King Jesus a “scepter of uprightness” (not “righteousness, as in NKJV), so that He might restore fallen men and teach them to live in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Holy, righteous, and good: Psalm 19

Jesus is ruling the world according to the promises of God. We may expect to know these promises, first, by submitting ourselves to Jesus and receiving the grace of His redemption, and then by submitting ourselves to His holy and righteous and good Law, so that we might live the good works for which He has redeemed us (Rom. 7.12; Eph.. 2.10). The book of Psalms stresses the importance of learning, loving, and living within the framework of God’s Law. Especially do we see this in Psalms 19 and 119.

Psalm 19 marks out the benefits of living within God’s Law, and they are remarkably in line with the promised benefits of God’s covenant. The Law of God revives the souls of those who submit to it, daily renewing them in the grace and goodness of the Lord (v. 7). God’s Law grants wisdom for knowing and doing God’s will to all who obey it (v. 7). It teaches them the way to live uprightly before God so that they may know fullness of joy in Him (v. 8). The Law expresses the truth of God into the human situation (v. 9); it marks out the way of righteousness (v. 9). Thus, we must learn to love and delight in God’s Law if we would know the benefits of His promises and dwell within the framework of His decree (v. 10).

Psalm 119

Psalm 119 provides an even fuller and more complete exposition of how those who would know God’s blessings must relate to His Law. The teaching of this psalm is richer and fuller than can be unpacked in a small space. Suffice the following: The Law is more valuable than any created thing. We must seek to fill our minds and shape our hearts and consciences by it. It will guide our steps in the way of joy and true life and keep us from the ill effects of a world gone awry. Keeping the Law of God will free us from lives of sin and make us a source of help and joy to others who are seeking to know the promises of God.

The Law of God will not save us. However, once saved through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, we, in gratitude, must seek to live in a manner consistent with what pleases Him. And our King loves righteousness and hates wickedness. His scepter of uprightness points us to His holy and righteous and good Law, so that, by walking within it, we may both follow in His paths (1 Jn. 2.1-6) and grow in holiness and fruitfulness before Him (Ps. 1).

As the Psalms make clear, the Law of God outlines the way which we must live “on the ground” if we would know the promises of God and become great in His Kingdom (Matt. 5.17-19).

He Rules in Compassion

*The LORD is high above all nations,
His glory above the heavens.
Who is like the Lord our God,
Who dwells on high,
Who humbles Himself to behold
The things that are in the heavens and in the earth?
He raises the poor out of the dust,
And lifts the needy out of the ash heap,
That He may seat him with princes—
With the princes of His people.
He grants the barren woman a home,
Like a joyful mother of children.
Praise the Lord! Psalm 113.4-9*

Firm, but loving

From what we’ve seen thus far, it might seem that our God is a fairly stern and unbending master. He has determined the course of all things, set His King on the throne, issued His Law, and He will brook no opposition to His plan. He has all power and authority, and He is not shy about thwarting those who resist His purposes and plan.

All this is true, but we must not lose sight of the fact that God is loving, true, good, and full of compassion. All His plans, purposes, and protocols are unto these ends, that the loving order God enjoys within

the Godhead may become the privileged possession of multitudes of men and women.

God is firm in His rule, but He is full of compassion. This is the consistent teaching of all the psalms. The rule of King Jesus on earth is like His rule in heaven, full of grace to lift men out of the snares of sin and death, so that, in His presence, they might enjoy all the blessings of His covenant and love.

The all-seeing Lord

The psalms insist that, by some means unknown to us, Jesus our King watches all people on earth and is able to see into their hearts and minds (Ps. 33.19). Undoubtedly this involves His Spirit and angels, as they roam about the earth to do His bidding. But more than this is involved. Since He upholds the cosmos and everything in it, King Jesus has all knowledge. He sympathizes with those who are suffering and oppressed (Ps. 10). He comforts the hearts of those who are distressed (Pss. 42, 43). He lifts the lowly and humble (Ps. 113). He hears the cries of those who plead for revival and renewal (Ps. 126). He shares Himself and His presence with all who walk according to His promises and Law (Ps. 15). Our Lord the King forgives our sins (Pss. 51, 130). He routs our enemies (Pss. 35, 54), covers us with His Word and love (Pss. 12, 21), fills our lives with abundant blessings (Ps. 103), and makes even our difficult journey a way of rejoicing (Ps. 84).

King Jesus is caring and compassionate as He rules on the ground to carry out the eternal decree of God.

Even to those who despise Him

This compassion extends even to the enemies of God. The psalms explain that King Jesus is patient with those who oppose Him. He sends His people out to engage the rebellious for the sake of His Kingdom (Ps. 45.4, 5; Ps. 60). He extends the benefits of His people's obedience even to those who are doomed to eternal judgment because of their rebellion (Ps. 81.15). He works to bring the rebellious to their senses, so that they might seek Him (Ps. 83.16). And He sustains the whole cosmos with abundant blessings, so that His lovingkindness reaches to all people (Ps. 104). He even takes upon Himself the debt of sin which others have

incurred, so that they might be released to seek and know Him in all his goodness and love (Ps. 69.4).

Our King is firm in His decree and how He works to bring it to fruition. His will and ways are unchanging and sure. He will have His way, in the end and at all times. Of this there can be no doubt.

But King Jesus is full of mercy, compassion, grace, and patience to all human beings. Any who will may seek Him and find themselves wrapped in the loving arms of our eternal King, where they may know and enjoy Him forever.

Complete Dominion

*He shall have dominion also from sea to sea,
And from the River to the ends of the earth.* Psalm 72.8

A Kingdom vision

Psalm 72 is a psalm of David (cf. v. 20). He wrote it as a kind of dedication or memorial to his son, Solomon, expressing in this psalm his vision for the Kingdom God had entrusted to him and his offspring forever (cf. 2 Sam. 7). As such, Psalm 72 looks *through* the Kingdom of David and Solomon to the unfolding of the greater Kingdom of God on earth, as it is in heaven. David's prayer for Solomon the king is, at the same time, a prayer for the Kingdom of God and the rule of King Jesus on earth (see especially vv. 17-19).

Psalm 72 thus teaches us how to think and pray about the coming of Christ's rule on the ground – what we should expect as King Jesus unfolds His rule among the nations of the world.

Much of what we see in Psalm 72 is consistent with what we have already considered in this study. The King rules in righteousness, for example – that is, according to the Law of God (vv. 1, 2). He brings blessings and prosperity to His people and shows compassion to the poor and needy (vv. 3, 4, 12-14). He causes peace to flourish where His rule obtains (v. 7), and He brings His enemies into submission to His authority (vv. 9-11).

But a primary teaching of this psalm is that David envisioned the rule of God's King extending to all nations and peoples, and to every place on earth. We need to take a closer look at this.

The ultimate objective

David's sense of the universal extent of the Kingdom of God on earth is very clear in Psalm 72:

v. 8, *He shall have dominion also from sea to sea,
And from the River to the ends of the earth.*

v. 11, *Yes, all kings shall fall down before Him;
All nations shall serve Him.*

v. 17, *His name shall endure forever;
His name shall continue as long as the sun.
And men shall be blessed in Him;
All nations shall call Him blessed.*

v. 19, *And blessed be His glorious name forever!
And let the whole earth be filled with His glory.*

Clearly, David – like Daniel (Dan. 2.44, 45) and Isaiah (Is. 9.6, 7) – envisioned the Kingdom of God as realizing its full unfolding when the whole earth and all its peoples and nations would be brought under the rule of God's anointed King.

This vision extends far beyond anything David or Solomon – or any king of Israel – ever realized. It sounds much more like the parable of the wheat and tares which Jesus taught (Matt. 13.31-33, 36-43). This is a defining parable in the Lord's teaching, since it speaks to the extent of the Kingdom from the days of His appearing to the end of time; it addresses all people who will live on the earth during that period; and it relates to the whole world and every nation. In this parable Jesus was only teaching the vision of David concerning the Kingdom of God, and applying it to Himself and His mission as Ruler in heaven and on earth.

Ultimate, but not proximate

But when, we might ask, should we expect this vision to be realized? If we follow the parable of the wheat and the tares, when the King returns to claim the world, there will still be many pockets of resistance to His rule. The field He comes to harvest will be clearly seen to be a wheat field, and not a field of weeds with a few sprouts of wheat here and there. However, there will still be plenty of the field – large portions of the earth – where the eternal rule of King Jesus is yet to be established. That will be realized only after He comes again, and only in the new heavens and new earth.

Complete dominion over all the earth must await the return of the Lord. It is the ultimate, not the proximate, objective for which we pray and labor.

But we must take up the vision and prayer of David, and seek the Kingdom of God toward ever-increasing realization of His presence, promises, and power. Evil and rebellion will always be with us, but this must not keep us from following the vision of the Kingdom, and the rule of King Jesus, which the book of Psalms unfolds for our consideration.

His Enemies under His Feet

*The LORD said to my Lord,
“Sit at My right hand,
Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.”* Psalm 110:1

A continuing struggle

Psalm 110 provides a capsule overview of the work of King Jesus as He rules from the right hand of God.

He extends His scepter of righteousness, declaring His intention of furthering the eternal decree of God unto the restoration of the world for God’s pleasure and glory (v. 2). He is commanded to rule even in the midst of His enemies, to take the fight, as it were, to the very gates of those who oppose Him (v. 2).

He carries on this struggle through His people (v. 3), who offer themselves freely to Him, day by day, to be used for His purposes in seeking the progress of His rule on the ground as it is in heaven. The people who know their King go forth, clothed in the righteousness of God's Law (v. 3), in the power of His Spirit (v. 3), to bring the refreshing and renewing grace and truth of Christ to the whole world (v. 3).

Meanwhile, the King intercedes for His people, representing their interests according to the promises of God in line with His eternal decree (v. 4).

The King brings His rule to the kings of the earth, as His people wield the Sword of the Spirit to bring the light of truth and the weight of judgment against every person on earth (vv. 5, 6; cf. Ps. 149.6-9). When all is done and every enemy has been subdued, King Jesus will refresh Himself with His people besides the waters of life, and lift up His head and theirs in joy (vv. 6, 7).

The nature of the struggle

In the book of Psalms, the Lord's struggle against the rebellious people of the earth is described in military terms. This was necessary for the time in which these psalms were given, because the Spirit of God had not yet been given, and military conquest was the only means for subduing those who opposed the Lord and His people.

But we must read these psalms more broadly, in the light of the Spirit's coming and the spiritual warfare in which we are incessantly engage (Eph. 6.10-20). How, in that light, does God the Father subdue the enemies of King Jesus, and what is our part in this struggle?

First, the Lord in the psalms calls us to *prayer* against the wickedness and rebellion of the enemies of our King (cf. Pss. 3, 72, 137, etc.). We are not able to mount this struggle in our own strength. We need the help of the Lord and His angels if we are to prevail against powers spiritual and temporal as they stand in the way of the progress of God's Kingdom.

Second, the Lord uses *His Word* to shield His people from the lies of an unbelieving age (Ps. 12) and to fit them with wisdom and understanding (Pss. 19, 119) to be able to proclaim the works and rule of God (Ps. 66) and to exercise righteous judgment in seeking the rule of Christ on earth as it is in heaven (Ps. 149).

Third, Christ our King *deploys His angels* to act on behalf of His people as they struggle for the progress of His rule (Pss. 35, 91). We do not often, or even at all, discern the angels' work on our behalf, but they are ever serving as the Lord's ministers to perform His bidding in advancing His rule (Ps. 104.4).

The Lord overcomes His enemies by converting many of them so that they come to trust in Him (Ps. 107) and by shaming others so that, if nothing else, they will seek Him (Ps. 83.16). Sometimes, when His people are able to gain a controlling interest in the affairs of men and nations, King Jesus subdues His foes by persuading them to "go along" with the divine economy, as in their own best interests, though they yet harbor hatred of Him in their hearts (Ps. 81.15).

Make no mistake about it: The enemies of Christ are fleeing before Him in this Kingdom age (Ps. 48.4-8). The Light of Truth has dawned, and the darkness is being driven back increasingly, over all the earth (1 Jn. 2.8). Though it may be hard to discern such progress at times, it is truly happening, and we who have embraced the rule of King Jesus are called to engage this struggle and seek His Kingdom faithfully, every day of our lives.

For the Glory of God

*All Your works shall praise You, O LORD,
And Your saints shall bless You.
11 They shall speak of the glory of Your kingdom,
And talk of Your power,
12 To make known to the sons of men His mighty acts,
And the glorious majesty of His kingdom. Psalm 145.10-12*

Glory all around

God's purpose in issuing His decree, holding out His promises, providing His Law, showing compassion to the nations, and putting all His enemies under His feet is that His glory might be known to all men, and that at least some might enter into that glory unto their everlasting joy and peace.

Even now, God is continuing to show forth His glory in the things He has made (Ps. 19.1-4). All the works of His hands declare His glory (Ps. 145.4-7). In heaven "Glory!" is the continuous cry of saints and angels (Ps. 29.9). Christ Jesus rules in glory, by glory, and unto glory. His purpose is that the knowledge of the glory of the Lord might cover the earth as the waters cover the sea (Hab. 2.14).

But did you catch that important change between what God is doing with His glory and how His glory is being received? God is *showing forth* the glory of Christ and His Kingdom in all the works of His hands. But the people of the world have not yet come to *know the glory* of God as He is determined they should. As Paul explains in Romans 1.18-32, many – perhaps most – people, having turned away from God to worship and serve idols of various sorts, are completely ignorant of God's glory.

But a day is coming, Paul insists, in which every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2.5-11). On that day, however, it will be too late for those who have failed to enter the glory of God in this life. They will be separated from God and His glory forever, because they have refused to know and serve Him here and now.

Where we come in

This is where the people of God come in. Psalm 145 explains,

*One generation shall praise Your works to another,
And shall declare Your mighty acts.
I will meditate on the glorious splendor of Your majesty,
And on Your wondrous works.
Men shall speak of the might of Your awesome acts,*

*And I will declare Your greatness.
They shall utter the memory of Your great goodness,
And shall sing of Your righteousness. (vv. 4-7).*

Here is God's plan for making His glory known. He shows His glory – His powerful, beautiful, overwhelming and transforming presence – in all the works of His hand. His people, who know Him and seek Him continually, enter into that glory with great joy and holy pleasure. Then they go forth to declare the glory of God to the world and the generations to come. Men may deny their explanations and proclamations, but they will at least have been told that the glory of God, especially in the Person of King Jesus, is continually around and upon us, and those who fail to acknowledge and embrace it must perish in their rebellion and sin.

Proclaim the glory

Those who know God and who have submitted to His gracious King must make His glory known. By our words and deeds, in imitation of God's eternal decree and in line with His own manifestations of goodness, justice, and love, we must show the world a refraction of the glory of Christ's eternal throne and Kingdom. The Apostle Paul echoes the psalmist in calling the followers of Christ to meditate on the works of God and consider how we might show forth His glory in even our most ordinary, everyday tasks (1 Cor. 10.31).

As we worship God in glory, meet with Him in His glory, study His works and glory in creation and culture, and are transformed by His glory through the work of His Spirit, we fulfill our calling to bring the eternal decree of God to completion, by showing the glory of the eternal God, and of our glorious King Jesus, to the people over whom He rules on the ground in this world. The glory of God is the end toward which Christ is unfolding His Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven, and we have important roles to fulfill in seeking this end with Him.

For reflection or discussion

1. What is the glory of God? How do you experience His glory?

2. Meditate on 2 Corinthians 3.12-18. What is meant by the phrase “from glory to glory”?
3. In what sense is the glory of God “hidden” from many people? Where *should* they expect to encounter God in His glory? How does the glory of God, which He has decreed and is revealing throughout creation, come to the attention of people?
4. Meditate on Psalm 145, Proverbs 25.2, and 1 Corinthians 10.31. What are some of the ways we might fulfill what you read in these passages?
5. What are the most important lessons you’ve learned from this chapter? How will you make these a part of your daily life in the Lord?

4 Subjects of the King

Seek the Lord

When You said, “*Seek My face,*”
My heart said to You, “Your face, LORD, I will seek.” Psalm 27.8

On earth as in heaven

This study has been considering what we can learn from the book of Psalms concerning the rule of Jesus as He reigns over His Kingdom at the right hand of the Father on high. Chapter 1 showed us from the psalms that Jesus is exalted in power and glory; He is the Lord so frequently referred to in the Psalms. In chapter 2 we saw that Christ rules as King over all creation and all nations. In the previous chapter we considered the means whereby Christ is advancing His rule on earth as it is in heaven.

The story outlined in the book of Psalms makes it clear that Jesus Christ, King of kings and Lord of lords, is busily at work on earth as in heaven, advancing His rule, extending His domain, and carrying out the purpose and promise of the divine economy. He is making progress, and no one is exempt from the implications and reality of His rule.

That being so, we must consider what our response should be to the Kingship of Jesus Christ. And, once again, as in our previous series, we’ll look to the book of Psalms to guide us in learning how we, as subjects of King Jesus, must fulfill the duties of our citizenship in His Kingdom, and of our ambassadorship to the world.

And those duties begin and end in an ever-deepening relationship with this King of glory.

Seek the face of the Lord.

Our calling as citizens and ambassadors begins and ends in the same place – seeking the face of the Lord, seeking Him in His glory (Pss. 27.4,

63.1, 2). Devotion and worship are the beginning and end of life in the Kingdom of God and of the Christian worldview.

But what does it mean to “seek the face” of our Lord Jesus? It must be a worthwhile undertaking because the Apostle Paul assures us that we can discover glory to strengthen and sustain us in the face of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4.6). The psalmists in many places declare their intention of seeking the Lord, so this must be a matter of high importance for fulfilling our callings as subjects of the King.

In Scripture, besides the obvious spiritual encounters with the face of Jesus, as He is described in the Word (cf. Ps. 45; Rev. 1; Is. 53; and all the gospels), the “face” of our Lord – His glory – is reflected in three places, His Word, His works, and His Spirit. In Psalm 119.135 we read, “Make Your face shine upon Your servant, and teach me Your statutes.” The face of King Jesus is engraved in the Scriptures and is always reflected there for those who know how to seek it.

His face and glory are also to be discovered in the things He has made, and which He rules and sustains at all times by His steadfast love and faithfulness (Ps. 19.1-4).

Finally, the face and glory of our King are also implied in the presence and work of the Holy Spirit, as is suggested in Psalm 80.3: “Restore us, O God; cause Your face to shine, and we shall be saved!” The Holy Spirit is the divine instrument of salvation and revival, and it is He Who seems to be in focus in passages such as this. This idea, by the way, is corroborated in Ezekiel 39.29 where the Lord declares, “And I will not hide My face from them anymore; for I shall have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel,” says the Lord GOD.”

Seeking the face of the King

The citizens of Christ’s Kingdom are commanded to seek His face, and we may expect to “see” His face radiating gloriously out to engage and direct us through the words of Scripture, the works of creation and culture, and in the power of the indwelling Spirit.

Thus, we must apply ourselves to every means whereby we may expect to encounter the Lord and His glory. We must establish and preserve such disciplines as will enable us not only to *engage* the face of the Lord, but to *refract* His glory through our own lives, as the light of His resurrection power works in and radiates through our own unique gifts, personalities, and callings.

As subjects of the King, our first and constant duty is to seek the face of the Lord and His glory.

Know the Lord

*Be still, and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth!* Psalm 46.10

A day of rude awakening?

Surely the most troubling teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ is that which He declared in Matthew 7.21-23. Here, at the day of judgment, some people will come before Jesus boasting of the many good works they have done in His name. But His response is chilling: “Depart from Me; I never knew you.”

It seems that seeking the face and glory of the Lord are not enough. The *work* of seeking the Lord is intended to result in our actually *knowing* Him.

Most of us understand the intimacy implied in that word, “know.” It is used in Scripture to refer to the kind of relationship the Lord commands us to have with Him; but it is also a primary way of describing the intimacy of a husband and wife in marriage. The Lord commands us to *seek* Him so that we might *know* Him, for when we truly know the Lord, when we are intimate with Him and living in His glory, the Kingdom over which He rules advances in and through us unto righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

So to avoid a possible rude awakening on the coming day of judgment, we must earnestly *seek* the Lord in order that we might *know* Him.

But how can we know?

I think we can all agree that David and the other psalmists will most certainly be counted among those who know the Lord on the day when the hearts and deeds of every person are exposed for all to see. We can learn from the psalmists, therefore, what our citizenship in the Kingdom requires in the way of truly knowing the Lord in the way He intends. Here I want to mention four primary indicators which can assure us that we truly know the Lord.

First, those who know the Lord *delight to be in His presence*. David declared that in the presence of the Lord we may know fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore (Ps. 16.11). He longed to know the beauty of the Lord's presence (Ps. 27.4) and to exult before Him in complete and unbounded joy. Because the Lord is all glorious, loving, kind, good, compassionate, and holy, it only makes sense that being intimate with Him would spark within us affections of great joy and delight. We can be sure that we know the Lord when we delight in Him and in His presence.

But we also know the Lord when we *delight in His Word*, because His Word is the primary mirror in which we may see His face and glory reflected to us (Ps. 119.24, 47, 77, 97, etc.). If we are really meeting the Lord in Scripture and seeing His face there, we will certainly want to spend as much time as possible reading, studying, meditating in, and talking about the Word of God. As we do we can be certain that the reason is because we *delight* in the Word, and thus we may be assured that we truly know Him.

We may also be assured of knowing the Lord when we rejoice to walk in the path which He has marked out for us (Ps. 119.35). We want to go where the Lord has gone, to follow where He leads, so that we might always be sure of being with Him where He is (Pss. 15, 84) and living according to His will (Ps. 119.59, 60; Ps. 19.7-11). They who know the Lord will cry out continuously for His Spirit to search them and show them any ways they may be deviating from the path He would have them to walk (Ps. 139.23, 24).

Finally, we can be sure that we know the Lord when *we boast in Him and all His goodness* as the normal outflow of our daily conversation. The psalmist declared in Psalm 71.24, “My tongue also shall talk of Your righteousness all the day long...” We shall have more to say about this later.

Seek Him to know Him!

It is expected of the subjects of Christ our King that they will seek Him earnestly. But that seeking must be in order to know Him, to be intimately engaged with His mind, heart, purposes, plans, and presence, and to know the fruit of His presence and Spirit coming to bloom in our own lives.

When this is happening, we will surely delight in the Lord and His Word; we will hasten to do His bidding; and we will find our daily conversation increasingly filled with boasting about Him.

Sing to the Lord!

Oh come, let us sing to the LORD!

Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation.

Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving;

Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms. Psalm 95.1, 2

The Lord delights in singing

For whatever reason – and I hope to indicate several good ones – King Jesus commands His people to sing. By my count, following my trusty Cruden’s *Concordance*, Scripture features several dozen exhortations, commands, and examples of God’s people singing to Him or about Him. Christians have always been a singing people, and this suggests that, in every generation, believers have understood that singing is one of the distinguishing marks of our citizenship in the Kingdom of God.

Indeed, the Apostle Paul goes so far as to insist that singing is evidence of the filling of the Spirit and is therefore surely a valuable means for expressing our delight in the Lord and enjoying an intimate relationship with Him (Eph. 5.18-21). Put succinctly, in terms of our present series, the subjects of King Jesus, in response to and as expressions of His rule

on earth as it is in heaven, will sing to Him songs of praise, celebration, intercession, and supplication.

Now why should this be so?

The benefits of singing

Many practical benefits may be gained by making singing a more consistent expression of our devotion to the Lord and our citizenship in His Kingdom.

First, singing engages more of the human person than either talking or thinking. Singing taps the mind, recalling important ideas, themes, and events in words easy to remember and powerful to proclaim. Singing also revs up the affections, as anyone knows who simply can't get through certain hymns without choking back tears ("More about Jesus" for me). Singing opens the vistas of our imagination and lifts us into the unseen realm with real power. Singing requires strength of body, as we exert our lungs and vocal cords, and perhaps even our hands and feet to lift our praises to the Lord. Singing engages the whole person, and when we sing together with other believers, we declare and share in the bonds of oneness which exist between us in the Spirit of God (Eph. 4.3).

Singing allows us to proclaim what we believe, learn new truths about our faith, instruct one another, preserve the heritage of our faith, lift and nurture our souls and those of others, and reinforce our commitment to the Lord and our oneness with the long heritage of His saints. Singing is just plain good for us, as the Lord well understands, which probably explains why He so frequently commands us to engage in it.

Where? What?

The Psalms offer some helpful instruction concerning the discipline of singing. They tell us, in the first place, *where* it is appropriate for us to lift our voices to the Lord. We should sing in His presence, according to Psalm 95.1, 2. We should sing within our own hearts and when we're with other believers. Many of the Psalms are intended for personal devotions, while others are obviously written for the use of the whole congregation. Psalm 146.1 suggests that we should always have a song

in our hearts or on our lips as a kind of badge of our citizenship in the Kingdom of God.

As to what we should sing, take the entire book of Psalms! For nearly 2,000 years the Psalms served as the primary hymn book of the Church. Christians sang the Psalms, chanted parts of various ones of them, and used them as a base on which to construct new songs to the Lord. Only over the last generation has it become fashionable among worship leaders to lay aside the Psalms and the rich heritage of Christian hymns and to replace these with more contemporary music to the churches. This is good, of course; the Church should always be writing new songs to the Lord. But we ought not be so quick to abandon the vast and rich heritage of Christian hymnody, and especially of singing the Psalms.

When singing the Psalms, you can find a word from the Lord for every mood, situation, or heartfelt desire to praise. God is gracious not only to have commanded us to sing as citizens in His Kingdom, but to have given us a hymn book as well. “Sing to the Lord,” our King commands, and hands us His own words to use in making a joyful noise back to Him.

His true subjects will recognize that singing to the Lord is *integral*, not *incidental*, to the presence and progress of His Kingdom.

The Kingdom and the Law

*Blessed is the man
Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,
Nor stands in the path of sinners,
Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;
But his delight is in the law of the LORD,
And in His law he meditates day and night.* Psalm 1.1, 2

Kingdom greatness

Our Lord Jesus Christ declared that greatness in His Kingdom is a function of learning, obeying, and teaching His Law (Matt. 5.17-19). The people to whom He declared these words did not doubt that they were true. They did not gasp and protest, “But we’re not under Law; we’re

under grace!” And when Zacchaeus, the great sinner, declared His faith in Jesus as Lord and promised to get his life in line with the Law of God, Jesus commended him and declared him to be a true citizen of His realm (Lk. 19.1-10).

The Law of God has fallen on hard times of late among the members of the believing community. Not many of us know or study the Law. We certainly do not understand how the Law of God relates to the rest of Scripture, and many of us have come to regard the Law as a kind of yoke of oppression rather than the law of liberty about which the Apostle James wrote (Jms. 2.12).

But the Psalms are quite clear on this matter: The subjects of King Jesus will delight in His Word, and they will love His Law (Ps. 119). They will see in His Law a reflection of His love and justice, and a path to lead them, not to salvation, but to righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Law and Scripture

The Law of God – the first five books of Moses – is to the rest of Scripture as the acorn to the oak. All the great themes of Scripture are packed into the Law, and all the prophets, writings, gospels, Acts, epistles, and Revelation bring to bloom and fruition truths first articulated in the Law. The Law, through a kind of spiritual osmosis, leaches forward through the history of redemption and establishes its presence in every section of the Scriptures. Thus Jesus referred to the Psalms as Law in John 10.34, and Paul appealed to the Law to bring holiness and justice to the Lord’s churches (cf. 1 Cor. 5, 9). James insisted we will all be judged by the Law, and Jesus declared that any works done in His name must be according to the Law of God if they are to be acceptable to Him. Indeed, failure to keep the Law, Jesus insisted, will lead to a failure of love (Matt. 24.12).

We need to reassess our attitudes toward and use of the Law of God. If we look to the Psalms to guide us, we will discover that reading, studying, and meditating in God’s Law are indispensable to living as subjects of King Jesus.

The functions of the Law

According to Psalm 119.59, 60, the Law of God is able to show us when we have strayed from the path which is pleasing to our King, and then to guide us back onto it again. The Law does not save us. Christ Jesus saves us. But His Law guides us in the way of salvation, which is the way of love, and whenever we turn on to some other path, the Spirit of God uses the Law to search, convict, and correct us (Ps. 139.23, 24; Ezek. 36.26, 27). The Law convicts of sin, we might say, and directs us in the way of the Lord (cf. 1 Jn. 2.1-6).

Delighting in God's Law and obeying it in our daily lives causes our souls to prosper and leads us to bring forth the fruit of righteousness, according to Psalm 1. This is not our doing, but the work of the Spirit of God within us, as Paul explained in Philippians 2.12, 13. We give ourselves diligently to the task of working out our salvation – seeking the Lord, praying earnestly, studying His Law and all His Word – and the Spirit of God works in us, using all these resources, to make us willing and able to do what pleases the Lord.

We cannot ignore or neglect the Law of God and hope either to understand the Scriptures as a whole or to walk in a manner pleasing to Christ our King. Subjects of King Jesus will embrace the Kingdom civics by which He rules, and they will take up the Law and all the Word of God, in order to learn those good works which are in keeping with our citizenship, profitable for our neighbors, and honoring to our King.

Proclaim the King!

*Let the redeemed of the LORD say so,
Whom He has redeemed from the hand of the enemy,
And gathered out of the lands,
From the east and from the west,
From the north and from the south.* Psalm 107.2, 3

The Good News of the Kingdom

Our Lord Jesus, when He walked among us, devoted Himself to proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom of God (Matt. 4.17). The Kingdom is, indeed, good news. The devil's grip on human souls has

been broken. Death and the grave are rendered powerless. Forgiveness of sins is granted to all who repent. Righteousness, peace, and joy are available to all people everywhere. Now we may know the Lord, enjoy the Lord, and, in the power of the Lord, share the Good News and reality of His Kingdom with all the people in our lives.

And this is what the redeemed of the Lord do, according to the book of Psalms. The subjects of King Jesus do not keep to themselves the wonder, glory, majesty, joy, power, and blessings that come from knowing Him and living within His realm. Rather, they sing their salvation to the nations and call all people everywhere to join them in the Lord's presence.

Psalm 71 is typical of many of the psalms which exhort and encourage us to proclaim our King and His Kingdom to the people around us. Let's have a look at how this aging prophet declared his resolve.

The ground for our proclamation

Notice first the ground of salvation. The psalmist finds in the Lord a sure refuge from danger (vv. 1-4) and a joyful hope for all of life (v. 5). He belongs to the Lord and hopes day by day to know Him in His glory:

*But I will hope continually,
And will praise You yet more and more.
My mouth shall tell of Your righteousness
And Your salvation all the day,
For I do not know their limits.* (vv. 14, 15)

Our psalmist is not some new convert, brimming with the excitement of forgiveness and the prospect of a new life in the Lord. He is an old man who has walked with the Lord from his younger days and is determined to continue in Him, and to proclaim His glory, even unto old age (vv. 9, 17, 18).

The message of salvation

And what is the message this psalmist teaches us to proclaim? It is a wonderful message, indeed. God is our rock and refuge, our Savior, and guardian (vv. 1-3). He upholds and cares for those who seek Him (vv.

4-6). He is with us always to guide and guard (vv. 1-14). He is righteous (v. 19), powerful (v. 19), sustaining and reviving (vv. 20, 21), and a righteous Helper all the day long (v. 24). He gives meaning to our lives, fills us with joy and purpose, and enables us to leave a legacy of blessing to the generations to come (vv. 17-24).

This psalmist was so deeply immersed in God that he resolved that his mouth would be “filled *with* Your praise, *and with* Your glory all the day” (v. 8). Here, truly is a devoted subject of the King, one who knows His blessings, understands the implications of His Kingdom, and is determined to make this Good News known for as long as the Lord gives him breath.

An unchanged mandate

This mandate to bear witness to the Lord and His Kingdom continues in our own day. We stand in the grace of the Lord Jesus and the hope of glory (Rom. 5.1, 2). We know the presence and power of His indwelling Spirit (Acts 1.8). We have the assurance that His Word, as it goes out through our lips, will accomplish the purpose for which He sends it out (Is. 55.10, 11). We know Him to be at work within us, willing and doing of His good pleasure, and bringing forth righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit through His rule in our hearts and lives.

So we know that His redemption is real, His reign is universal, His Word is living and powerful, and no one is able to resist His will. We have been sent like Jesus into the dying world to proclaim the Good News of a new beginning and a new life for all who believe (Jn. 20.21).

So let the redeemed of the Lord say so! For this is our calling and privilege as subjects of the King of glory.

Wait, I Say, on the Lord

Wait on the LORD;
Be of good courage,
And He shall strengthen your heart;
Wait, I say, on the LORD! Psalm 27.14

Not good at waiting

Americans are not a people who are good at waiting. We run on tight schedules and don't like to waste time (or so we say). We are clock-watchers, multi-taskers, and go-getters. We want what we want now. We do not want to wait any longer than is absolutely necessary. And if we can avoid or eliminate waiting at all, well, so much the better.

No wonder we have such a tough time adjusting to life in the Kingdom of God.

One of the principle duties of the subjects of King Jesus is to wait. The Psalms repeat this command to wait on the Lord over and over. Psalm 25: "Indeed, let no one who waits on You shall be ashamed..." (v. 3); "On You I wait all the day" (v. 5); "Let integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait for you" (v. 21). Psalm 37: "Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him..." (v. 7, ESV); "...those who wait on the LORD, they shall inherit the land..." (v. 9); "Wait on the LORD, and keep His way, and He shall exalt you..." (v. 34). Psalm 52.9: "I will wait on Your name, for *it is* good..." Psalm 62.5: "My soul, wait silently for God alone..."

It seems fairly clear that, whatever this "waiting" requires, it is the duty of all who are subjects of King Jesus to "wait" upon Him as He commands.

But what does it mean to wait on the Lord? And where can we look for guidance in understanding what this requires of us?

The waiting creation

We have seen that the Lord and His glory may be known through His Word, His works, and by His Spirit. We've said a good bit about the work of the Word or Law of God and His Spirit in helping us fulfill our Kingdom citizenship. I want to say a few words here about what we can learn from the creation concerning what it means to wait on the Lord.

In Romans 8.18-25 the Apostle Paul says that just as we "wait eagerly" for the full adoption God has prepared for us, the creation also waits to share in the glorious liberty we know as citizens of the Kingdom of God:

“For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God,” the Apostle observes. But the creation is not idle, not standing around glancing at its watch, tapping its feet impatiently, or begrudging the time allotted it to “wait.” Has God hidden in the creation some guidelines to help us in understanding what it means for us to “wait” on or for the Lord (Prov. 25.2)? Allow me to make five observations.

1. The creation “waits” by bearing patiently with the sinfulness of the age, without complaining, continuing to bring forth fruit and to show the glory of the living God (Ps. 145.5-7).
2. The various creatures of the creation serve the Lord and His purposes (Ps. 119.89-91), devoting all their strength to being the unique creatures He has made them, without wishing or longing they might be something other than they are.
3. The creation shares its bounty with all its creatures, so that they might prosper. The rains, sun, fields and soil; the leaves that produce oxygen; the animals that benefit from the fruit of the ground and replenish the nutrients of the soils – all creatures in their living and dying give back to the creation and thus to the larger purposes of God and His glory.
4. The creation somehow longs for the coming day of full redemption. It looks forward, by some means, to sharing in the full liberty and glory of the sons of God. It signals this oncoming new day with each new plant, new life, and new spring. The creation “works toward” that coming day, so to speak.
5. And finally, the creation “waits” by doing the same things, pursuing the same patterns, engaging the same routines and disciplines, over and over and over (Ps. 104). It faithfully fulfills its appointed tasks.

The applications to our own calling to wait may perhaps be obvious. Waiting on the Lord is not an exercise in curbing our impatience. It is discipline for devoting every moment of our lives, all our attention and strength, and all the fruits of our existence to knowing, expressing, and advancing the rule of our glorious King.

So hurry up, beloved – and wait.

Worship the Lord

*Gather My saints together to Me,
Those who have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice.”
Let the heavens declare His righteousness,
For God Himself is Judge. Psalm 50.5, 6*

Assembled before the Lord

Kingdom living begins and ends in worship. Day by day we draw near to the Lord, pressing into Him and laying hold on His glory, as His Word, works, and Spirit bring us face-to-face with our King. And at least once a week we assemble with other Kingdom citizens to worship our God and be renewed in Him.

Worship. I’m reminded of the Spaniard, in *The Princess Bride*, saying to the Sicilian, “You keep on using that word. I’m not sure it means what you think it means.” We could say the same for “worship.” Week after week congregations of the Lord’s people gather to “worship” Him. But do we really understand what we’re doing? How can we be sure that the “worship” we’re offering the Lord each week is the “worship” He is seeking from us?

One way might be to look into the book of Psalms to see what we can understand about worship here. And in the book of Psalms, the place to begin in trying to understand what the Lord seeks in our worship is Psalm 50.

Who’s the Judge?

As a pastor for many years I confess that I grew weary of hearing worshipers say, from time to time, that they “didn’t get anything” out of the worship service. And for many of them, if they continued not “getting anything” out of worship, they would simply head off to some other church in town.

But I wonder who ever told these folks that it was their privilege and responsibility to sit in judgment on the worship of God’s people?

According to Psalm 50, when God calls His people together for worship, *He* will be the judge of whether or not the worship is what it ought to have been (vv. 1-6). When we come to worship, do we come in the expectation of meeting the God described in vv. 1-3?

*The Mighty One, God the Lord,
Has spoken and called the earth
From the rising of the sun to its going down.
Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty,
God will shine forth.
Our God shall come, and shall not keep silent;
A fire shall devour before Him,
And it shall be very tempestuous all around Him.*

God comes in might and power to judge the worship of His people. Probably it's a good idea we should try to get this right.

What God comes to judge

Psalm 50 points out three things in particular which Christ our King is looking for in our worship. First, does our worship include the proper elements and forms? Evidently, in Psalm 50 the Lord was pleased to see the appropriate sacrifices and other elements of worship present. He did not intend to rebuke them for this part of their worship (vv. 7-11).

What about us? Do our worship services include all the elements and forms the Lord has set forth in His Word? And have we arranged them decently and in order to please Him? Or do we just choose whatever we want to do, in whatever order or manner, as long as people can “get something” out of the worship?

Second, the Lord is looking on our hearts (vv. 14, 15, 23). God reminded the people of Israel that, while they were right to offer their sacrifices and to fulfill the required forms of worship, God did not need these. He had not given these to Israel so that they could somehow make Him happy. *They* needed these elements of worship in order to express outwardly the condition of their hearts before Him. God was looking for gratitude in their hearts and devotion in their lives, and the forms of

worship were intended as means for them to demonstrate their deep love and fervent commitment to Him.

Finally, as the people of God came to worship He was looking on their lives through the rest of the week (vv. 16-22). Our King frankly rejects the worship of those who do not live as His subjects in all their relationships, roles, and responsibilities. Their singing and listening and giving on Sundays may be earnest and sincere, but if their everyday lives reflect the ways of the world rather than the ways of the King, they are in danger of being sent away: “I never knew you.”

Worship is the heart of Kingdom living, beloved. And worship – true and glorious worship – is *unto* God, *before* God, and *for His praise and glory alone!*

For reflection or discussion

1. What are our responsibilities in seeking the Kingdom of God?
2. What do you understand by “waiting” on the Lord? Is waiting something we do only at certain times? Explain.
3. Do you think it would make a difference if we came to worship asking not, “What am I going to get out of this?” but “What will I be giving to God today?” Why or why not?
4. What is the most important lesson you’ve learned from this study?
5. How are you planning to make this lesson a more consistent part of your walk with the Lord?

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.