

A Prayer for the King: The Christian Experience of the Attributes of God's Appointed King

Psalm 72:1-20

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Turn with me in your Bibles to Psalm 72. Let me just remind you that at the time of the response at the end of the service, after the benediction, that we'll sing the last stanza of that arrangement of Psalm 72. You will have noticed that everything we've sung tonight, except for the word before the Children's Devotional, is related to Psalm 72. We sang at the beginning of the service, Hail to the Lord's Anointed, which is four stanzas of—I don't know, about twelve or thirteen stanzas of James Montgomery's great hymn based upon Psalm 72. Really, it's just a paraphrase or a rendering of Psalm 72. We love to sing James Montgomery hymns. We don't have as many of them in our hymnal as you would find in British evangelical churches. He was one of the great hymn writers. We know Isaac Watts and William Cowper perhaps better than James Montgomery, but he was one of the great hymn writers, and this song, Hail to the Lord's Anointed, is reckoned to be his greatest hymn. And it's a beautiful setting. In fact, I'm going to quote some lines of it that you don't find in your hymnal. But we opened the service with that.

And then we sang, Jesus Shall Reign Where'er the Sun. We're used to singing that at Missions Conference time, and indeed it is a wonderful hymn to sing at the time of Missions Conference, but all it is, is Isaac Watts' paraphrase of the seventy-second psalm. He inserts the name of Jesus, because surely, as we're going to see, this psalm is ultimately about the Lord Jesus Christ and His reign.

And then, the song we just sang one stanza of is The Psalter of 1912 version of the seventy-second psalm. So you are being seventy-second-psalmed to death tonight in the worship service! And the whole idea is for us to catch something of the delight that this psalm is designed to evoke in the believer at the contemplation of the reign of God in His Son, Messiah. The Messiah King, Jesus Christ.

Now, you'll notice as you look at this psalm that it is titled, A Psalm of Solomon. Many of the psalms in the Second and the First Book have a name. Very often it's the name "David." And in the original it simply means "of David." Now, that

could mean “to David,” or “for David,” or it could mean “by David.” Typically we understand that phrase to mean “by David,” especially in the first two Books of the Psalter, the books that we’ve studied together on Sunday night over the last several years. That is, that the psalm itself was written by David. There are various reasons we read it that way. Sometimes it’s because of the content of the psalm itself. It may be autobiographical. It may be referring to events in the life of David. But other times it’s because the New Testament indicates that these were David’s words.

Now with this psalm it is a little difficult to know whether when it says “of Solomon” that it’s written by Solomon, or whether it’s written for Solomon. Either way would be a proper translation. If we follow the general pattern of that ascription in the First and Second Books of the Psalms that “of David” means “by David,” then we would lean to seeing this as a psalm written by Solomon. But of course, at the end of this psalm there is a doxology and a transition verse that was written to conclude the Second Book of the Psalms, and you’ll see it in verse twenty. And it says, “Thus ends the prayers of David.” Now that makes us wonder whether maybe this was a prayer of David for his son, Solomon the king, to reign in accordance with the principles of God’s justice. So, good commentators have differed on this. Is it a psalm of David written for Solomon, his son; or is it a psalm of Solomon, written about his own reign, and a prayer that he’s praying to God, that he would follow after these attributes of the ideal king? Or is it perhaps Solomon praying for his son?

Well, frankly, whichever way, it doesn’t matter, because, ultimately this song is about Jesus Christ. It is a Messianic psalm.

Before we even get into the psalm, I’d like to prove that point to you. Let’s first turn to Zechariah 9:9. In Zechariah 9, listen to this language:

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation, Humble, and mounted on a donkey, Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey. I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem; and the bow will be cut off. And He will speak peace to the nations; and His dominion will be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. As for you also, because of the blood of My covenant with you, I have set your prisoners free from the waterless pit. Return to the stronghold, O prisoners who have the hope; this very day I am declaring that I will restore double to you. For I will bend Judah as My bow, I will fill the bow with Ephraim. And I will stir up your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece; and I will make you like a warrior’s sword.

Now, you will see some of those same images for the King pictured in Psalm 72. He is going to be righteous, and yet He is going to be compassionate towards those who are oppressed. He is going to destroy the oppressor, and at the same

time He is going to make the land of God's people bountiful and peaceful. And those themes echo through Psalm 72. And as you know, in the Gospel of Matthew, we are told that Jesus is the fulfillment of this prophecy.

We could go also to Isaiah, chapter eleven. Let me ask you to turn there, Isaiah 11, and listen to these themes echoing from Psalm 72 in Isaiah's prophecy. Isaiah 11:1.

Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit. And the Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and strength, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. And He will delight in the fear of the Lord, and He will not judge by what His eyes see, nor make a decision by what His ears hear; but with righteousness He will judge the poor, and decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth; and He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked. Also righteousness will be the belt about His loins, and faithfulness the belt about His waist.

And we're used to that passage from Isaiah being sung at Christmastime in connection with the Lord Jesus Christ as we celebrate His coming into this world in the flesh and it is rightly applied to Him, as the New Testament makes clear.

And those great themes are themes found right here in Psalm 72. So in Psalm 72, whether it's David praying for Solomon or Solomon praying for himself or his own son, ultimately the psalm looks forward to the perfect, the great King of God, the Messiah King, the Anointed of the Lord, the One whose reign will never end.

Now as we come to the final psalm of the Second Book of the Psalms, let's pray before we read it, hear it, and hear it proclaimed. Let's pray.

Our Lord and our God, we thank You for the Psalms. We thank You, O God, that even as we have sung tonight, You have taken from us our sighs, and You have given us a song in their place. You have given us hope; You have replaced our mourning with joy; and You have replaced our sin and our sorrow with righteousness and gladness through the greatness of Your mercy to us in Jesus Christ. We pray that we would have some inkling of the experience of the hope and delight of the glory of the reign of Jesus Christ, even as we read and hear this psalm. Speak to us by Your word; cause Your word to go forth and not to return void, but to accomplish everything that You have ordained to be accomplished through it. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Hear the word of God. A Psalm of Solomon.

Give the king Your judgments, O God,
And your righteousness to the king's son.

May he judge Your people with righteousness
And Your afflicted with justice.
Let the mountains bring peace to the people,
And the hills, in righteousness.
May he vindicate the afflicted of the people,
Save the children of the needy
And crush the oppressor.
Let them fear You while the sun endures,
And as long as the moon, throughout all generations.
May he come down like rain upon the mown grass,
Like showers that water the earth.
In his days may the righteous flourish,
And abundance of peace till the moon is no more.
May he also rule from sea to sea
And from the River to the ends of the earth.
Let the nomads of the desert bow before him,
And his enemies lick the dust.
Let the kings of Tarshish and of the islands bring presents;
The kings of Sheba and Seba offer gifts.
And let all kings bow down before him,
All nations serve him.
For he will deliver the needy when he cries for help,
The afflicted also, and him who has no helper.
He will have compassion on the poor and needy,
And the lives of the needy he will save.
He will rescue their life from oppression and violence,
And their blood will be precious in his sight;
So may he live, and may the gold of Sheba be given to him;
And let them pray for him continually;
Let them bless him all day long.
May there be abundance of grain in the earth on top of the mountains;
Its fruit will wave like the cedars of Lebanon;
And may those from the city flourish like vegetation of the earth.
May his name endure forever;
May his name increase as long as the sun shines;
And let men bless themselves by him;
Let all nations call him blessed.
Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel,
Who alone works wonders.
And blessed be His glorious name forever;
And may the whole earth be filled with His glory.
Amen, and Amen.
The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended.

Amen. This ends the reading of God's holy, inspired and inerrant word. May He write its eternal truth upon our hearts.

What is God's ideal king like? What are his attributes? What are his qualities? What marks his character? What's his reign like; if he is reigning, what will his rule look like? That's what this psalm is about. It's a psalm that begins as a petition, a petition designed for the people of God to pray for their king and country. It does remind us, doesn't it, of the things that Solomon asked for himself when the onerous burden of the rule of the people of God was laid upon his shoulders. He asked for wisdom. He asked God that he would reign in righteousness, and that his judgments would be just. And this is a prayer of petition for the Lord's king to reign justly and wisely, and rightly, and for blessing upon the people of God. It's a wonderful prayer for king and country.

But it's more than that, isn't it, because none of the words of this psalm can be applied to their fullest to any earthly king. We may use honorific titles like were used in the days of the court of the kings of Media-Persia in the days of Daniel, where we address the king by saying, "May the king live forever!" But none of us believe that any earthly king will live forever. We may mean "may you live a long, long time, O king. May you reign with prosperity, and may that prosperity endure for years upon end." But we know that that king will never reign forever. And so the prayers, the words of this psalm, cannot find their ultimate fulfillment in David or Solomon or any king of Israel, or any human king, but only in the Messiah King. And so in this psalm the believer is being shown the attributes of Jesus the Messiah King, and the attributes of His rule. And it is not only lifting up prayer to the Lord to see these attributes of His person and rule displayed to their fullest in the world, but also is praying this prayer so that we might delight in the hope which has been set before us.

There are five parts to this psalm.

The first part you'll see in verses one through four. It celebrates God's righteous rule through the Messiah King.

The second part you'll see in verses five to seven. It celebrates the endless reign of the Messiah King.

The third part you'll see in verses eight to eleven. It celebrates the boundless realm of the Messiah King.

The fourth part you'll see in verses twelve to fourteen. It celebrates the saving dominion of the Messiah King.

And the fifth part you'll see in verses fifteen to seventeen. It sets forth the enduring blessing of the Messiah King.

In each of these five parts, a different aspect of the reign of the Messiah King, the Lord Jesus Christ, is set forth: the righteous reign; the eternal reign; the universal

reign; the compassionate reign; and the blessed reign of Jesus Christ. All five of those qualities are celebrated in the psalm.

But you say to me, "You've not told me where verses eighteen to twenty fit in." Ah! That's coming next! Because those are the appendix not simply to this psalm, but to the whole of the Second Book of the Psalms. These are the closing words, the doxology. Each of the Books of the Psalms close with a doxology, and this psalm closes with a doxology and an ascription, a peculiarly appropriate ascription, by the way, as we will see.

And so the sixth thing that we will see tonight is not so much part of the psalm proper as it is the conclusion to the whole Second Book of the Psalms, but it is a perfect fit for the content of the message of this psalm. And that is, it envisages a worldwide doxology, an eternal, universal praise to the glory of God.

Let's look at these things for a few moments together tonight.

I. The believer delights in the knowledge of the eternal reign of Christ.

First let's look at the righteous rule of Jesus Christ as it's set forth in verses one to four. This begins as a prayer for the king to reign in righteousness: "Give the king Your judgments, O God, and Your righteousness to the king's son." You see the psalm begins as a petition. It's a petition to God that He would give His own judgments to the king, that the king's judgments would be God's judgments; that the king would make the kinds of decisions, that he would enforce the kind of judgments that God Himself would enforce. It's a petition for God to author the king's judgments so that they are righteous and just, and so that they bring peace and wholeness and prosperity.

Here we see either David or Solomon leading us to pray for the ruler of Israel, that he might rule in accordance with God's just judgment. But even as this petition serves as a prayer for king and country, it also points us to the just and compassionate rule of Jesus Christ, and so in these words, verses one through four, we see Christ's righteous rule. The believer, you see, delights in the knowledge of the just and compassionate rule of Jesus Christ. And both of these things are emphasized in verses one through four. The justice, or righteousness, of his rule is emphasized in verses one and two. "Give the king Your judgments, O God, Your righteousness to the king's son. May he judge Your people with righteousness."

Then at the end of verse two (and also in verse four), it is emphasized that his rule is not only just, it's not only in accord with God's principles of uprightness and truth, it is also a compassionate rule. Notice the end of verse two: "May he judge Your afflicted with justice." Verse four: "May he vindicate the afflicted of the people, save the children of the needy, and crush the oppressor." Note that the

king especially has a responsibility to give justice, to seek vindication, and to come to the rescue of the afflicted and needy. He is not only a military protector, he is not only to rule with justice, but he is to be compassionate to those who are weakest and those who are in need.

That very description reminds us of Jesus Christ, who comes conquering and to conquer; and yet “a bruised reed He will not break, and smoldering flax He will not put out.” The perfect combination of justice and compassion: strong enough to deliver us from every oppressor; gentle and tender enough to care for us in every trial. And in Jesus Christ we see this prayer fulfilled to its fullest. He will reign in righteousness and in compassion. And the believer delights in the knowledge of that righteous and compassionate rule of Jesus Christ. There is no one that the believer would rather have rule than Jesus Christ.

II. The believer delights in the knowledge of the eternal reign of Christ.

Then, if you look at verses five through seven, we see a second attribute of the rule of the Messiah King. It's eternal. His reign is endless. It's not only a righteous rule, it's an endless reign. And verses five to seven give us a prayer for an enduring and blessed reign of the king:

“Let them fear You while the sun endures, and as long as the moon, throughout all generations. May he come down like rain upon the mown grass, like showers that water the earth. In his days may the righteous flourish, and abundance of peace till the moon is no more.”

This is a prayer for dynastic endurance, and it's more than just a courtly, polite word, or a courtly extravagant word: ‘O David, we want you to live forever!’ No, this word is ultimately realized in Christ. You remember the background to this part of the psalm is found in II Samuel 7, when God promises David a son who will reign forever on the throne in Jerusalem. And that promise is fulfilled only in Jesus Christ, and so the hope of this passage is fulfilled only in Jesus Christ: “Let them fear You while the sun endures, and as long as the moon throughout the generations.”

This is why Isaac Watts can render this “Jesus shall reign, where'er the sun does his successive journeys run....” He'll reign as long as the sun, and longer. His reign will know no end.

You remember, in the midst of the French Revolution when Voltaire and others overthrew— or attempted to overthrow—the Christian religion and replace it with a religion of reason, and temples to reason were built, that he made the great pronouncement that “there would be a day when the name of Jesus Christ would be remembered no more.” I've told you the story of a minister who was being taken on a tour through the Louvre in Paris, and the tour guide said, “And that's

the chair where Voltaire pronounced that there would be a day when Jesus Christ and Christianity would no longer ever be remembered—it would be part of the dust of history.” And the minister said, “That chair is where he said that?” “Yes, that chair right there.” And he leapt over the rope, and he sat in the chair, and he said, “Jesus shall reign where’er the sun does his successive journeys run!” Jesus’ reign will never end. And the believer delights in the knowledge of that eternal reign.

III. The believer delights in the global, the all-embracing kingdom of Jesus Christ.

And so His reign is righteous and it's eternal, but that's not the only thing. Look at verses eight to eleven. It's a universal reign. His realm has no bounds. It is a boundless realm. This is a prayer for a universal sovereignty for God's Messiah King.

“May he also rule from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth. Let the nomads of the desert bow before him; and his enemies lick the dust. And the kings of Tarshish and of the islands bring presents; the kings of Sheba and Seba offer gifts. And let all kings bow down before him, all nations serve him.”

You see, the believer delights in the global, all-embracing kingdom of Jesus Christ. And even as this was a prayer for the extension of the empire of God's chosen king, it is fulfilled in the reign of Jesus Christ. You know, even in Solomon's day you couldn't have conceived of Solomon's rule stretching to the ends of the earth. Oh, sure, the Queen of Sheba came from far, far away to bring him gifts. Yes, from Ethiopia came gifts to the king. But in no way could one consider Solomon's empire a worldwide dominion.

And yet this prayer is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. And you have already sung it in the refrain of Christ Shall Have Dominion. “Christ shall have dominion over land and sea; earth's remotest regions shall His empire be.” What's Matthew telling you when he tells you that this little boy received gifts of gold, and frankincense and myrrh from Magi in the East? What's Matthew telling you? He's telling you that this is the King of Kings spoken of in Isaiah 11, spoken of in Isaiah 60-62, spoken of in Zechariah 9, and spoken of in Psalm 72. He's saying, “Listen, Israel: here's the King we've all been waiting for, and He will rule the world.” These words—“May your rule be from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth”—these are not just polite niceties of the court. This is a true petition for the universal sovereignty of God's King. And so the believer delights in seeing the global, all-embracing kingdom of Jesus Christ.

IV. The believer delights in the tender care of the sovereign Savior.

And so His reign is righteous, and it's eternal and it's universal. But it's also compassionate. Look at the themes of verses twelve to fourteen. We've seen them already in verses two and four, but they're elaborated upon in twelve to fourteen:

"...He will deliver the needy when he cries for help and the afflicted also, and him who has no helper."

He is a compassionate protector King. And this is a prayer that the king would be a compassionate protector king; that his dominion would not be an oppressing dominion, but a delivering dominion, a saving dominion, a rescuing dominion; that it would be a blessed rule and dominion for his people. And the believer delights in the tender care of the Sovereign Savior.

And you know, this is the whole of the picture of the gospels, isn't it? You have this longing for a Messiah King to come and deliver Israel from the political bondage that she had endured in the exile, and now in the occupation of the Roman forces.

And when Jesus comes, what does He do? Does He go about gathering up cavalry and infantry to drive the Romans out of Palestine? No, He goes around healing the sick, caring for widows and orphans, raising the dead...showing mercy to those who are most oppressed, most marginalized. And in that, He is showing a picture of His compassionate rule. He cares for all of Israel, even the least of Israel, and He comes as a compassionate protector king. And the believer delights in the tender care of the Sovereign Savior.

V. The believer delights in the thought of the blessing of and to the Messiah King.

And so His reign is righteous, and it's eternal, and it's universal, and it's compassionate. But it is also blessed. And you see this is verses fifteen to seventeen. Here we have a prayer for an enduring, blessed reign of the king:

"So may he live; and may the gold of Sheba be given to him; and let them pray for him continually; let them bless him all day long. May there be an abundance of grain in the earth on the top of the mountains; its fruit will wave like the cedars of Lebanon; and may those from the city flourish like vegetation of the earth. May his name endure forever; may his name increase as long as the sun shines; and let men bless themselves by him; let all nations call him blessed."

And so this prayer longs to see the blessing of the king, and also the blessing to the king: the blessing that the king brings to the people and to the land, but also the blessing that the nations bring to the king. He will bless...he will bless, and he will be blessed. That's why James Montgomery in the hymn we just sang said

that He would be “all blessed and all blessing.” He would be blessed by all, and He would be a blessing to all. That’s the longing, that’s the desire.

The figures of this blessing are striking, aren’t they? He wants even the mountaintops of Israel to be filled with grain. Now there are many things that you’ve seen in the course of your life, but I’ll guarantee you that one of them that you haven’t seen is a high mountain filled with that crop of grain. You go out to those magnificent mountains in the West—Homer Lee, you’re going to be there for a month—and they are staggering in their majesty. But you won’t see trees, and you certainly won’t see good crops on the top of them. You go to Scotland and you’ve seen the Cairngorms and the Cuillins, and they’re striking—but you won’t see any crops on the top of them. You go to the Alps, and they’re striking and they’re majestic, and they’re big and they’re towering, but you won’t see any crops on them.

And the picture here is even the mountains bearing a harvest of blessing for the people of God. Mountains all over the world—they’re majestic sights. But it’s not the kind of land you want to graze cattle on, and it’s not the kind of land that you want to try and raise a crop on. It’s above the tree line in a lot of places. It won’t grow anything. And the psalmist has this picture of the blessing of Israel in terms of even the mountaintops bearing crops of grain for the blessing of the people of God. And you see, the believer delights in the very thought of the blessing of the Messiah King, the blessing that He will bring, and the blessing that the nations will give to Him.

And then, this psalm and the whole Second Book of the Psalms, ends with this doxology, and with this ascription. And it’s a worldwide doxology. It’s a prayer for an enduring and blessed reign of the King, the eternal, universal praise of His glory.

“Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who alone works wonders. And blessed be His glorious name forever; and may the whole earth be filled with His glory. Amen, and Amen.”

You see, it’s the believer delighting in the hope of the everlasting, universal rule of God’s kingdom.

You remember in the midst of Jesus’ interrogations, in the Gospels, when He said, “Behold, you shall see the Son of Man coming on clouds with glory.” We will see with our own eyes the coming of the glory of the Lord. We’ll see with our own eyes the reign—the everlasting, the universal, the righteous, the compassionate reign, the blessed reign of Jesus Christ. And the believer delights in the very thought of that universal rule.

“From earth's wide bounds, from ocean's farthest coast; through gates of pearl stream in the countless host, singing to Father, Son and Holy Ghost, ‘Alleluia! Praise to the Lord! Alleluia! Praise to the Lord!’”

We'll see that.

And my friends, that hope is essential to our service now. Because however much we see the reign of Christ in our hearts and in the assembly of God's people, and even stretching out as His kingdom impacts this world, we still live in a fallen, a hard, a harsh world. And we will not serve Him with the energy with which we ought unless we see that hope set before our eyes.

And then there's that ascription, isn't it? “The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended.” I told you it was an appropriate ascription. Let me tell you why. It is only in the realization of the hope of verses 18 and 19, it is only in the realization of the hope which is set forth in verses 18 and 19 that the prayers of David are completed; because he longed for the day when the Son would be set on his throne who would reign forever. And only in the eternal reign of Jesus Christ are those prayers ended, do they find their realization, do they find their goal. And so it is so appropriate that the Second Book of the Psalms would finish with this picture of the righteous, eternal, universal, compassionate, blessed reign of Jesus Christ the Messiah, the King. May God give you the hope of this Psalm. Let's pray.

Our Lord and our God, we thank You for the hope that Your word gives us in the midst of our own troubles and sorrows. We pray that You would bear us up by Your Spirit, and that You would make us to believe the promise of Your word and the future glory of the coming of Jesus. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Would you stand for God's blessing?

Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, through Jesus Christ our Lord; until the daybreak and the shadows flee away. Amen.

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