

The King of Kings
Psalm 110
BPC June 21st 2020

Have you ever been stuck in traffic for what seems like an eternity, getting frustrated by the waste of time and seemingly endless line of other drivers, when that car or motorbike flies down the bus lane or emergency lane and continues on their merry way. It happened to me just last week.

It's frustrating isn't it, infuriating as you do the right thing and they fly off without any consequences. When someone cuts in right before the lights to get on the freeway rather than wait in the long queue like you did. It's one of those rare moments you wished the cops were there!

A moment where we long for justice! Now if you've had that longing and frustration like I have, there is a very satisfying YouTube channel of dashcam footage where these people DO get caught! It's so satisfying as you listen to cheers from drivers as the flashing lights turn on and justice is served.

And while this is a somewhat trivial example, this longing for justice has clearly been on display since the tragic death of George Floyd. As people took to the streets in protest with widespread grief and anger and countless more stories of abuse and injustice followed.

Yet what has followed has also shown how our longing for justice in broken world is fickle... Protest has led to riots, which has led to looting, theft, vandalism, and further acts of violence. The distinction between justice and revenge is so often blurred.

And the Christian is not immune from such questions. How often has the phrase "where was God" been heard from the mouths of victims or thrown at Christians when an individual or community grieves. How often have we ourselves asked this question when we see or suffer injustice?

Well Psalm 110 that we just heard read comes as one the pieces of the puzzle to the bible's definitive answer to that question. In fact, this Psalm deliberately follows and answers Psalm 109 where David cries out in distress to God for justice and vindication from his enemies.

David cries out to God then finishes in v.31 with a statement of confidence that God will act and answer him. David is confident God will do this and then Psalm 110 comes as the glorious yet surprising answer of how it will happen.

And this is such a good and important Psalm for us to wrestle with. It is the OT passage most quoted by the NT. It's on the lips of Jesus as he explains his own identity and mission, Peter quotes the Psalm in that first sermon at Pentecost, and is extensively used in Hebrews as the author implores Christians to keep trusting Jesus because he is better and worth following even if it's costly.

The Psalm takes us from Genesis to Revelation as it expands our understanding of who Jesus is, what he came to do and what he will certainly do when he returns. So it's important we've already prayed for God's help because we need strap in and do some heavy lifting and hard work in God's Word!

And so the Psalm begins with an important introduction that this is a *Psalm of David*. Now that could simply mean that it is about David or to David, but as we will see shortly, Jesus himself tells us that David wrote this Psalm. These are the words of Israel's greatest King.

Which what makes his opening words in v.1 so surprising and even baffling. *The LORD says to my lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet."* David functions as a prophet here as he writes down the words of the Lord. But that's what is so confusing as David says, the LORD, that is YHWH, remember that when we see LORD all in capitals it is the personal, covenant name of God that he revealed to Moses in the burning bush.

So the LORD, YHWH, says to my Lord. But who is greater than King David that he should call him Lord? How can this royal King speak of one who is greater than himself other than God himself? The King that David speaks of has a truly unique identity. On the one hand he's clearly a human figure, he's a Davidic king from Zion in v.2, who takes a drink in v.7, is a priest in v.4, is strengthened by God to fight in v.5. But on the other, although distinct from God, he seems almost equal to God.

He sits as God's right hand in v.1, it is the LORD who wields the sceptre in v.2 but it is this King who actually rules, and he lives forever in v.4. God himself and this king are presented as equal, working and acting together to the point that we are left asking who is he? Is he human or divine?

And this question continued for 1000 years as no King, not even Solomon lived up to such a description to the point where the Jewish leaders in Jesus' day still had no idea what to make of this king. In Mark 12 Jesus is getting interrogated by these Jewish authorities. His reputation is rising, he's gaining influence and they don't like it one bit so they seek to publically trap him in his words.

They ask him about paying taxes to Caesar, the resurrection which seems illogical to them, and about the greatest commands. And as Jesus knocks them all out of the park, flays them with his wisdom, he then pauses and asks them his own question. Mk 12:35, ³⁵ *While Jesus was teaching in the temple courts, he asked, "Why do the teachers of the law say that the Messiah is the son of David?"* ³⁶ *David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit, declared: "The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.""* ³⁷ *David himself calls him 'Lord.' How then can he be his son?"* The large crowd listened to him with delight.

How can the Messiah, God's promised anointed King who everyone knew would be a son of David, as God promised in 2Samuel 7, also be David's Lord? And this question, confusion, ambiguity, all comes into glorious focus through the apostles that Jesus is this King!

We heard it in Acts 2. As Jesus has died, risen, and ascended into heaven, the Holy Spirit is poured out and Peter preaches that first great sermon and declares, v.34, ³⁴ *For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said, he then quotes Psalm 110 and concludes, ³⁶ "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah."*

This King who is divine yet human so clearly fulfilled in the person of Jesus as God the Son takes on flesh, humbling himself to become a man. And that phrase David uses in v.1, *sit at my right hand*, is consistently used of Jesus in the NT. I've given you just some of the references in the handout!

Christ is seated at God's right hand showing he is greater than David (Acts 2:34), and greater than angels (Heb 1:13); it's a sign of his exaltation by God the Father (Acts 5:31), the basis for his ongoing intercession on our behalf (Rom 8:34) and signals the completion of his sacrificial work (Heb 10:11). And just as David says in v.1 of the Psalm, that the risen Christ is seated at the right hand of God the Father shows that he awaiting the surrender of all his enemies (Heb 10:13; 1Cor 15:25).

This King that David that points to and longs for is gloriously fulfilled in Jesus, the God-Man who rules. And what David says in the rest of the Psalm unpacks that He is the king who conquers.

In v.1 God promises the King that his victory is both certain and definitive. He is to sit at God's right hand until his enemies become a footstool. Now by footstool we might think of something quant like an ottoman. But it is a picture of total domination and control over them (Josh 10:24).

His future victory is certain in v.1 but in v.2, as the LORD strengthens him he even rules in the midst of his enemies. It's a stunning picture of this king surrounded by those who hate and attack him, yet he is in complete control and continues to rule and achieve his purposes. The language is very Psalm 2!

Psalm 2:¹ *Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain?* ² *The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the LORD and against his anointed, saying,* ³ *“Let us break their chains and throw off their shackles.”* ⁴ *The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them.* ⁵ *He rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying,* ⁶ *“I have installed my king on Zion, my holy mountain.”*

And isn't that the picture we get of Jesus? Who came into the world he made, only to be rejected, hated, and crucified, yet all the while was working out the salvation he had already planned? Ruling and saving as they nailed him to the tree as was foreordained according to God's purposes.

The King rules in the midst of his enemies not simply because of the Lord's strengthening, in v.3 we are told he has a willing army. One of my favourite movies has got to be Avengers Endgame. There is a climactic moment as captain America is beaten and exhausted he raises to see Thanos and his mighty army before him.

And as he looks at this great multitude and is hopelessly outnumbered, suddenly with the flicker of his radio there begins to appear reinforcements as thousands of troops including some fan favourites appear. It's the part of the movie when you let out a little squeal as Cap says "assemble."

There is a similar scene in the Lord of the Rings, as Minas Tirath is overrun and all hope seems lost then the army of Rohan arrive in such great numbers they cover the land. There is something enthralling, even majestic about a mighty army marching into battle.

But neither of these armies have anything of the troops of this King. ³ *Your troops will be willing on your day of battle. Arrayed in holy splendor, your young men will come to you like dew from the morning's womb.*

This king rules in the midst of his enemies through this army that aren't compelled or enlisted, but devout and willing. They are like of the *dew of the morning's womb*, that is, they are lively, energetic and fresh. They aren't equipped with swords or shields, but godly character: *arrayed in holy splendour*.

This is an attribute of God himself. So these willing and energetic troops are those in relationship with God who have been so transformed by him that they now reflect him in their character. They have changed hearts and a distinctive holy lifestyle as they now serve this King.

This is so beautifully seen as King Jesus comes not to be served but serve and give his life as a ransom for many. Bringing new birth, forgiveness and transformation through his saving work on the cross.

That's what you and I are or at least should be! Following King Jesus joyfully and willingly, indwelt and empowered by the Holy Spirit, sharing in his mission while adorned with Christ-like character. And it's quite a wonderful picture of Christians as we are changed by Jesus and share in his purposes in the world. Revelation 12 puts it this way, ¹⁰ *Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: “Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down.* ¹¹ *They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.*

But interestingly the focus here is not so much on a call to be part of the troops but just a statement of reality, a divine promise: the King will have a numerous and willing army to serve him.

And so we move from the King who is seated at the right hand of God until his enemies are completely conquered, who rules in the midst of his enemies with an mighty, energetic, and transformed army, to his final victory which is described in the vivid language of vv.5-6.

⁵ *The Lord is at your right hand; he will crush kings on the day of his wrath.* ⁶ *He will judge the nations, heaping up the dead and crushing the rulers of the whole earth.*

In a mixing of the metaphor from v.1, it is now the Lord, YHWH, who is at the King's right hand which guarantees his victory on this day of final judgement and wrath. And it is both universal and horrifying: all the nations are included as the dead are heaped up from the whole earth.

In v.7 he takes a drink and lifts his head high. The sense is his victory is so certain and complete that the King can even have a refreshing beverage while taking in the view of his triumph.

And as confronting as the language might be, the NT continues this promise that one day Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead as he brings justice to a world in rebellion against its maker.

The language is strikingly similar to Revelation 19. ¹¹ *I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war.* ¹² *His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself.* ¹³ *He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God.* ¹⁴ *The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean.* ¹⁵ *Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty.* ¹⁶ *On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.*

And I actually think it's quite easy to forget this even as Christians. Our world dismisses Jesus as irrelevant, his views and his people are archaic at best, intolerant and oppressive at worst. And we can find ourselves just drifting into a view of Jesus where he matters to us and that's enough.

But Jesus, the King of Kings, will return in judgement to bring justice and nothing and no one can stop him as he needs only to speak to strike down the nations. All, you and I, will give an account to him.

And so it is to our great detriment if we forget! If you were to guess how many times the word 'Hallelujah' is used in the New Testament, what would you think? 10? 30? Closer to 100? Used in virtually every Christian song you'd think so right? But it's actually just 4 and all in Revelation 19!

Rev 19:¹ *After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting: "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God,* ² *for true and just are his judgments.*

When Jesus comes in judgement heaven rejoices as justice is served – and although it might sound shocking I suspect that many in our world will too. Think of the families of victims of major terrorist attacks like in the Westgate Shopping Mall attack in Nairobi in 2013, when 68 people were killed by the group al-Shabaab simply because they didn't know the name of Muhammad's mother.

Or the families of those who were attending church in Peshawar Pakistan when Tallaban suicide bombers detonated killing 127 people. Don't you think they will celebrate God's justice? Still today there are countless horrendous crimes where there are no consequences and no accountability.

God will judge and that is good – for only God is wise and knowledgeable to get it right. Only he is powerful enough to actually enforce it. And so this rejoicing in justice is not cruel laughter as people are judged and punished, but utter joy as Jesus puts an end to all evil and wipes away every tear.

How important is that day to you? How central in your thinking? As David cried out for vindication and relief in Psalm 109 he is certain that this day of justice will come. And how much more confident can we be knowing that Jesus has already come, risen from the dead and promised he will return?

But we have overlooked one key aspect of the Psalm. Before outlining this final victory and day of wrath in vv.5-7, David gives us a second promise from the LORD about this King in v.4. *The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind: "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek."*

The language of v.4 is meant to highlight for us what a big deal this promise from the LORD is. He has sword and will not change his mind – this king will also be a priest and will be so forever.

And it's important to see how strange that must have sounded for God's people in the OT. You'll recall that Israel had 12 tribes and to be a King you had to come from the tribe of Judah – while priests had to come from the tribe of Levi – the descendants of Aaron, Moses' brother.

And so a priest could never be king or vice versa. And in fact, King Saul had sought to mix the office of king and priest and was rejected by God himself for it (1Sam 13). So this is an astonishing thing to say!

And not to mention the roles are completely different. The King rules God's people on behalf of God himself while the priest mediates to God on behalf of the people. And if all this wasn't surprising and confusing enough, David tells us that that the king will be a priest *in the order of Melchizedek*.

Who is that? Well Melchizedek appears in Genesis 14 and has a somewhat strange encounter with Abraham – who is still called Abram at this point. Let's turn there. For context, Abram has just defeated 4 kings and their armies to save his nephew Lot. He's just returned in v.17 and we read:

¹⁸ Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, ¹⁹ and he blessed Abram, saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. ²⁰ And praise be to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand." Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

And that's it. 3 verses and no mention again until here in Psalm 110, then not again until the book of Hebrews some 1000 years later! So what is in David's mind as he writes this? Notice three things!

1) Melchizedek is King of Salem, which is short for Jeru-salem. He's king of Jerusalem, 2) he's priest of God Most High, and he's a priest-king that, 3) is even greater than Abraham who pays him a tithe. And as we look at Melchizedek David tells us, in v.4, that one day there will again be a King in Jerusalem who is also a priest. Now much more could be said about Melchizedek and Hebrews has much to say in unpacking Genesis 14 and applying it to Jesus (references in handout + podcasts).

But before we look at some of those references we need ask what difference does it make? Why does it even matter that the King is also a priest? Because it actually changes everything...

Because if this King of Psalm 110 is not a priest it certainly isn't good news for us! If he's only a king then we live terror! He will bring justice, he will bring judgement, and that will include us! Because you see asking for justice from God while seemingly obvious is also to invite judgement.

Although our default position is to think we are ok, even impressive to God, in reality we fall short and are deserving of wrath. So if this mighty King is going to come in great victory and bring justice, we need him to be a king-priest who can spare us from that judgement. That's what we have in Jesus!

Listen to what Hebrews says about Jesus the Melchizedekian priest (turn there!). In 7:24 the author says, *because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. ²⁵ Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. ²⁶ Such a high priest truly meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens.*

Do you see why it matters so much that the king is also priest forever? He truly meets our needs. We love to speculate about our greatest need don't we. Currently it's a vaccine or economic recovery, but usually it's self-fulfilment, the perfect life of comfort, safety, and health. But they don't last or deal with eternity.

Yet it is the Priest-King Jesus alone who truly meets our needs: for he alone can offer forgiveness without compromising justice as he takes our punishment on himself. This makes sense of the whole Psalm and it looks forward in hope not misery to the coming of Jesus who judges justly.

Only Jesus can have the army of v.3: for he the priest-king who atones for sin by offering himself on the cross, achieving for us an eternal salvation and brings a new covenant where our hearts are transformed by grace to now share in his mission to bring people to know and trust him and find life.

And so how then shall we respond to this the priest-king Jesus? Well first and foremost we must turn to him and find the salvation he offers. One of the strange things about this change to livestream and preaching like this is I have no idea whose listening or watching.

Yet I imagine that there will be some who either are uncertain about or perhaps even know for sure that Jesus' coming in judgement is not good news for you. You are not right with him, you haven't turned to him, and by His standards you will be found guilty.

And if that is you, then hear the words that Peter spoke in the passage we heard read in Acts 2. As Peter preached at Pentecost and quotes Psalm 110, many were cut to heart, knowing their guilt before King Jesus. And they ask the perfect question: *what shall we do* (v.37).

And Peter tells them in v.38, *Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*

Turn to Jesus in repentance, make him the Lord of your life, and find forgiveness. A grace filled and sure promise from the one who took the judgement your sin deserved on himself. There is nothing better, no greater comfort, no surer hope, than to entrust yourself to Jesus – the king who will judge and have all enemies as his footstool, but who rules even now by offering forgiveness and changing hearts. As 2Peter 3 says, his delayed return is for salvation!

Now is the time to turn to him for he will come. Acts 17: ³⁰*In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.* ³¹*For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead."*

And for those of us that have done that, I think there are two things we should do with this Psalm. Firstly, we like David, must entrust ourselves to this King. As David longed for justice and vindication, he confidently waited. And we too must trust the king who will return and call all people to account.

In the face of injustice and evil, even personal attack, we are assured and must remember that he will come. Romans 12: ¹⁷*Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone.* ¹⁹*Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.*

As we long for justice and the end of evil, as we wait for Jesus to bring the new heaven and earth, we trust him and pray as many before us have those final words of Revelation, *Come Lord Jesus!* (22:20).

And because we are assured of what he is doing and will do, we can throw ourselves into his service. Just two weeks ago a man named Kumar in a small village in Sri Lanka was on his way to church with his family when they were attacked and beaten for their faith. The village has been in lockdown for over 2 months due to covid19 and many are struggling.

With help from a mission agency, Kumar and others from his church were able to provide rations for over 100 families in the village, including those who attacked them. The pastor of the church said, "Doing this

gave us more opportunities to share the gospel and show the love of Christ and now more people are eager to know the Lord.”

Just as there might be some watching now who have not responded to Jesus and will not escape his judgement, there are certainly many who haven't and won't in our work, neighbourhood, uni, and even family. Many for whom that final day will be terror and wrath as they stand before the King.

As we trust Jesus and wait for his certain coming, we are to be his willing troops. As his saved, redeemed, and regenerate people, we are ushered into his service and share in his mission. Psalm 110 has told us that Christ's rule in this world until he comes is expressed through his people.

And so we must gladly throw ourselves into telling others about the King of Kings who died in their place and will set them free. We must be adorned with Christ-like character and gracious speech knowing our saviour reigns and nothing happens outside of his control, and he is coming.

And as we let this Psalm grow our vision of our glorious and reigning priest-king, who he is, what has done, is doing, and will do, we will actually be able to!

Colossians 3 says, *Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.² Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.³ For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.⁴ When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*