

Unimagined Greatness. Psalm 110

Boxing has been in the news of late, or at least on Netflix. [the Mike Tyson and Jake Paul fight]

And in Matt 22 Jesus has been in a bout with the reigning heavyweight champions in biblical interpretation of His day – the religious authorities of first century Judaism

They have done a few rounds in which the champions have tried to land their best blows on Jesus

Quizzing him about paying taxes to Caesar

Challenging him about resurrection

Trying to get him involved in a debate about which is the greatest commandment

All hot issues, polarising issues, in their community.

But they haven't landed a blow on Jesus

He is clearly ahead on points

And then in Matt. 22:41- 46 Jesus puts his opponents on the ropes and lands the blow that finishes the bout, with Him the clear victor

Matthew 22:⁴¹ While the Pharisees were together, Jesus questioned them, ⁴² “What do you think about the Messiah? Whose son is he?”

He starts off with a question that seems straightforward enough and that engages them with what we've been thinking about for the last few weeks – what Scripture says about God's promised Saviour, His anointed One, the Messiah or Christ

“What do you think about the Messiah? Whose Son is he?”

Easily answered – *They replied, “David's.”*

They had read 2 Samuel 7

They knew God's promise to David

2 Samuel 7: “The Lord declares to you: The Lord himself will make a house for you. ¹²When your time comes and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up after you your descendant, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³He is the one who will build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.’ ”¹

The one who rules on David's throne forever will be a descendant, a son, of David

But then Jesus lands the blow that silences them

⁴³ *He asked them, “How is it then that David, inspired by the Spirit, calls him ‘Lord’:*

⁴⁴ ***The Lord declared to my Lord,***

‘Sit at my right hand

until I put your enemies under your feet’?

⁴⁵ “If David calls him ‘Lord,’ how, then, can he be his son?”

With that, the bout is over, with Jesus the clear victor

v. ⁴⁶ *No one was able to answer him at all, and from that day no one dared to question him anymore.*²

You have to have some sympathy for the Pharisees.

To change the sporting analogy, in asking “If then David calls him Lord, how then can he be his son?” Jesus has just bowled up what seems the unplayable ball.

It is a question not so much about achievement as about descent, a question about from whom this promised one derives his life, his being.

In the Jewish understanding the ancestor, the founder of the house, was always greater, for all who follow get their inclusion in the family which is the source of their identity and privileges, get their life, from that ancestor.

In the case of the promised ruler, the Messiah – he inherits those great promises of eternal rule made to David by being a descendant of David, dependent on being a descendant of David for possession of His throne over the nations

But if he is dependent on David – how can he be David’s Lord, as David acknowledges him to be?

Whatever that descendant’s achievements, he cannot, by definition, be David’s Lord. He cannot be the superior of David on whom he depends for his place, his inclusion in the promises.

But here in Psalm 110 David is acknowledging this other one who will reign as King in Jerusalem, the one who will fulfill the promises of 2 Sam 7, as His Lord

And the Psalm is plainly talking about a King who will reign in Jerusalem

² *The Lord will extend your mighty scepter from Zion.*

Rule over your surrounding enemies.

A king who, like the promised Son of Psalm 2, will conquer and reign over the nations

This King at the Lord’s right hand

will crush kings on the day of his anger.

⁶ *He will judge the nations, heaping up corpses;*

he will crush leaders over the entire world.

And it is clearly no mistake.

Jesus says David is speaking in the Spirit, as David himself had claimed when at the end of his life he wrote

2 Sam 23: ² *The Spirit of the Lord spoke through me,*

his word was on my tongue. ³

For Jesus and the Pharisees this is a prophetic utterance, the word of God, wholly true.

“IF then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?”

It’s a puzzle

One the Pharisees cannot work out.

They just can’t imagine an answer, how it can be that the messiah will be David’s Son, as Scripture says, and the Messiah will be David’s Lord, as Scripture says

Those two things seem incompatible, one ruling the other out

The one easily grasped – David’s Son, a king like David – a righteous conqueror and destroyer of their enemies, here and now

The other, David’s Lord, much harder to imagine

And the challenge of seeing how what is said in Psalm 110 can be fulfilled and harmonised with everything else the Scripture says about the Messiah only gets greater the closer you look at it – which we are about to do

It’s not only the Pharisees who sometimes God’s word is puzzling.

It’s not easy for us to always see how everything God says fits together, can be fulfilled in the way it appears God has said it.

This time of year is a time when we think not just about Christ’s first coming, but His coming again

So think of these promises

Every eye will see Him when He returns Rev 1:7 – but He is in a real body – how can people all around the world see Him at once?

It says the treasures of the nations will come into the new Jerusalem [Rev. 21:24-26] – but this creation we are told will be consumed by fire 2 Pet. 3:7, 10-13

People speculate about these things – but we are not given a lot of information about the future in Scripture

And the one I have been thinking about a lot – especially as we know the grief of some we love not trusting in the Lord Jesus

He will wipe every tear from our eye Rev. 21:4

Revelation 21:4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; grief, crying, and pain will be no more, because the previous things have passed away.

Wonderful promise, but how can it be when some we love may be cast into the lake of fire for their unbelief and rebellion against God?

Sometimes it’s not easy to see how everything promised fits together

What should we do when we meet these puzzles,

When we can’t easily see how everything God’s word promises will be fulfilled together?

As we consider today the puzzle set by the Lord Jesus from Psalm 110 for his questioners, our first goal is to see the greatness of Jesus, a greatness beyond our imagining, which makes Him the one in whom we can see the answer to the question He Himself has posed

And then, seeing that greatness and the truthfulness of God's word, grow in humility before and confidence in all the promises of God, promises whose fulfillment we may have trouble imagining

Let's start by considering more fully Psalm 110, and if you have your bibles open at Psalm 110 it will help

What does the Psalm say about this coming one.

What Psalm 110 says

It is a Psalm of David – not just about David, but composed by David

In which, guided by the Spirit he makes two great prophecies of this coming one in verses 1 and 4, both of which are expressed as direct statements of the LORD.

In our English bibles where you have LORD in capitals it represents the Hebrew consonants for the name God gave to Moses by which He was to be known throughout the generations – that is Yahweh, Israel's God

The LORD who had rescued them from Egypt

The LORD who alone is God, the Creator of heaven and earth, the ruler over all the affairs of humanity [Is. 40:9-31, 45:18]

LORD stands for His personal name, and it is only ever used of God

Lord -Lord in lower case, means Lord, sir, master – a term of address for a superior. It is often used of God, who, for example, can be spoken of as Lord of lords [Deut 10:17]. Or Moses, when being commissioned can say

Ex. 4:10, 13

But Lord can also be used of people, an address by an inferior to a superior – someone addressing a king, or a servant his master [just as we might call someone we work for 'boss']

For example, Saul's retainers say to him

1 Samuel 16:16 "let our lord command your servants" to look for someone to play the lyre,

v. ¹ *This is the declaration of the Lord to my Lord:*

"Sit at my right hand

until I make your enemies your footstool."

In verse 1 the LORD addresses another person, a human, whom David calls 'My Lord'

To invite him to 'sit at my right hand'

To be sitting at the LORD's right hand is not only to be in intimate relation to the LORD.

The right hand is the place of authority, the position of the one who exercises the power of the King who sits on the throne

This Lord is being welcomed to exercise a heavenly reign, to exercise the reign of God

And it will be universal – there will be no one or thing that can defy the reign of this Lord.

The LORD, the Creator, who does whatever He pleases [Psalm 135-5-6], commits Himself to making all His enemies submit

And in verses 2 and 5-6 David speaks of the reign of this Lord who sits at God's right hand in ways that have already been used to speak of the reign of the promised Davidic king, the promised descendant of David who will reign in Zion

Like David in Ps 23:5, he will rule in the midst of his enemies

² *The Lord will extend your mighty scepter from Zion.*

Rule over your surrounding enemies.

*Psalm 23:⁵ You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.*

And in Verses 5-6, the Psalmist addressing the LORD God recalls the promises of Psalm 2 to describe the work of this coming ruler

⁵ *The Lord is at your right hand;*

he will crush kings on the day of his anger.

⁶ *He will judge the nations, heaping up corpses;*

he will crush leaders over the entire world.

*Psalm 2:⁸ Ask of me,
and I will make the nations your inheritance
and the ends of the earth your possession.*

⁹ *You will break them with an iron sceptre;
you will shatter them like pottery."*

This king will exercise the judgement of God over all who proudly resist His rule

In this Lord there is a merging of God's reign with the reign of this Davidic King. And he, v. 7, will never tire

His will be a Universal and eternal reign

One both secured by the LORD – who will make all His enemies submit

And achieved by His own victories vv. 5-6

This is a King who through His reign at God's right hand, a reign to which all who oppose Him must submit, will secure God's people against all their enemies

Make them eternally secure, give them a reign of eternal peace

And then in v4 there is another promise by the LORD God to the King

⁴ *The LORD has sworn an oath and will not take it back:*

"You are a priest forever

according to the pattern of Melchizedek."

This King is also a priest forever after the pattern of another King-Priest

Melchizedek, whose only other mention in the Old testament is in Genesis 14:18-20.

There is not a lot of detail about the nature of this king's priestly activity, or how he becomes priest.

But what does a priest do?

He makes sacrifices that deal with sin and intercedes with God for the people

This promised Lord will not only secure people from the threat of their enemies, from those who would seek to oppress and destroy them

He will secure the people in their relationship to God, make it possible for people to live at peace with God

And he will do it eternally.

This one David speaks of, calls his Lord, is truly great

A universal reign, never to be overturned

An eternal priesthood

One who would bring his people peace forever, in whose reign God would reign

Yet how can this be?

He is a human – mortal, but a heavenly reign

Of David's line – not Levi's – yet a priest

Of David, but David's Lord

Jesus' challenge to the pharisees

⁴⁵ *"If David calls him 'Lord,' how, then, can he be his son?"*

Was an act of mercy.

Showing them a bit of the prophetic puzzle they couldn't fit into their scheme gave an opportunity to acknowledge they didn't know it all,

to open their minds to the possibility that God may intend to do things differently to what they imagined,

To recognise a King who was greater than the picture of him painted by their own constrained imaginations

For that is what Psalm 110 speaks of

One greater in His person, reign and work than the Pharisees could imagine, than any of us could imagine

Recognised only as God Himself fulfills the word the Spirit of God spoke through David

The greatness of Jesus

That fulfilment starts by sending His Son into the world, born of David's line – but Son of God

As the angel said to Mary after speaking of how her child reign on the throne of his father David

Luke 1: ³⁵ The angel replied to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God."

Jesus will unite in Himself the reign of God and the reign of David because He has first united in His person manhood and deity.

the eternal Son sent by the Father, He is David's Lord,

Whose being is not derived from or dependent on David, but one who has life in Himself, given Him by the Father eternally

Infinitely greater than David, greater than all created being [Hebrews 1, Col. 1:15-20]

And, Surpassing David in faithfulness of life, Jesus' achievement and reign will be infinitely greater than David's

He will die a death that defeats death – and sin and the devil

The enemies that repeatedly dispossessed God's old covenant people of what God had promised them, who robbed them of peace as they fell into disobedience and judgment

Enemies not just of the Old Testament people of God

The enemies that hold all people in bondage to death, for we all die for our sin

But Jesus, Dying our death, destroyed the one who had the power of death and held our race in bondage to the fear of death

Heb 2: ¹⁴ Now since the children have flesh and blood in common, Jesus also shared in these, so that through his death he might destroy the one holding the power of death—that is, the devil— ¹⁵ and free those who were held in slavery all their lives by the fear of death.

Dying in our place He freed us from the power of sin

In weakness the Lord Jesus secured a victory infinitely greater than any human ruler or power

And Risen he assures all who believe in Him that the day will come when death itself is placed under His feet [1 Cor 15:20-26]. As Paul writes

1 Corinthians 15: ²¹ For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead also comes through a man. ²² For just as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.

²³ But each in his own order: Christ, the firstfruits; afterward, at his coming, those who belong to Christ. ²⁴ Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, when he abolishes all rule and all authority and power. ²⁵ For he must reign until he puts all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be abolished is death.

Jesus secures God's people, all who acknowledge Him as their Lord, from all their enemies

And HE has an eternal reign, exercising all the authority of God

The authority to judge at the last day, give the final judgment, and to forgive [Acts 10:42-43, John 5:21-23]

Our finite minds, conditioned by a world where sin and death are ever present, even as we hear Jesus' reign proclaimed, have trouble grasping its greatness

And at the same time as He reigns the Lord Jesus is an eternal priest after the order of Melchizedek

Explaining how Jesus is that priest is the major part of the book of Hebrews

The author starts at chapter 7 saying that the description of Melchizedek in Genesis 14 was written to point to Jesus, made to resemble the reality of the Son of God

Hebrews 7: For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of God Most High, met Abraham and blessed him as he returned from defeating the kings, ² and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. First, his name means king of

righteousness, then also, king of Salem, meaning king of peace. ³Without father, mother, or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest forever.

Then by comparing Jesus to the Levitical priests who operate under the law he speaks of the wonder of having one who is qualified to be priest by possessing, risen from the dead, a deathless life

Heb. 7:²³ Now many have become Levitical priests, since they are prevented by death from remaining in office. ²⁴But because he remains forever, he holds his priesthood permanently. ²⁵Therefore, he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, since he always lives to intercede for them.

That intercession is always holding before God the effectiveness of His sacrifice of Himself by which He has atoned for all our sins, brought into being the new covenant in which our sins are forgiven forever. [Heb. 9:24-26, 10:18]

Heb. 10:¹¹ Every priest stands day after day ministering and offering the same sacrifices time after time, which can never take away sins. ¹²But this man, after offering one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God. ¹³He is now waiting until his enemies are made his footstool. ¹⁴For by one offering he has perfected forever those who are sanctified.

As our priest, always interceding for us, having offered the one perfect sacrifice, He is the Source of an eternal salvation, the source of eternal peace and security

Now at this point you might be thinking Stop – you are piling on big idea after big idea

We can get the words but to sense, to feel, their meaning

it is too much, too much to get our heads around,

At this point in my preparation that is what I was feeling

And that is the point

The surpassing greatness of Jesus

An Eternal reign, uniting in Himself the reign of God and the promised reign of David

An Eternal priesthood

Which means those who believe in Him are eternally secure, eternally at peace, protected from all their enemies, at peace with the almighty, just creator God, enjoying His blessing, His favour, forever

Because He is the Son of God, the Saviour from eternity, David's lord

And it is all there in Psalm 110 – there in Scripture, deliberately spoken by God hundreds of years before

A puzzling scripture, whose fulfillment defied the imaginations of those who confessed it to be true

Jesus pointed out the implications, yet it was only as Jesus fulfilled it in His person and work that both the absolute truthfulness of what God had spoken and the full extent of the greatness of the one who was promised, became clear

The Pharisees were stumped by greatness

The Unsurpassed greatness of God's Saviour

Which was outside their experience and beyond their imagination

When we see this fulfilment, when we see how the Lord Jesus provides the answer to the challenge He has set – how should we respond?

More than we can ask or think

Praise

Firstly with praise – or as Simon would teach children to say “Wow”

Psalm 110 is an opportunity to pause to let ourselves bathe in the greatness of our Saviour

The Lord Jesus’ greatness, revealed in the Psalm, is not just the greatness of a greater man than David, He is not just a bigger and better version of ourselves

His is the greatness of God, infinitely greater, the greatness of the Creator, when all the rest of us are creatures

He is David’s Lord – in Himself,

Just as He is Caesar’s Lord, Putin’s Lord, Xi’s Lord, Trump’s Lord, every human’s, every creature’s, Lord

And that greatness is there at every step of the gospel story

In His birth by the Spirit, the birth heralded by the angelic choir giving glory to God

In His life, where He speaks and the storm is silenced, He commands and the demons flee, where death itself is undone

In His death, where His weakness and foolishness is seen to be stronger and wiser than any human might and wisdom, for on that despised cross HE wins a victory no one else can and saves His people forever by bearing their sins and destroying the devil’s hold on our race

See the greatness

Human conquerors win by killing, He by dying

Whatever their achievements and boasts, the great ones themselves end in the tomb, captured by death

But Jesus bursts from the tomb, the source of never dying life

And Rising He ascends to the right hand of the Father

To await the day when every knee will bow to Him

When all His enemies, death itself, is subjected to Him

When was the last time you thought of Jesus and went wow

Thought the One you pray to, the One who sympathises with our weaknesses

Is truly, incomparably great

What would giving yourself time to let His greatness sink in, to praise Him, do to your anxieties and fears – whether about yourself and your health, or about death, or the future of the planet

Death itself will be subjected to Him who has conquered death, nothing is outside His rule

What would giving yourself time to reckon with His greatness, to praise Him as He deserves, do to your casualness in following Him, where it could appear that being Jesus’ follower sits lower down your priority list than sport, or family, or finding security in money or identity in work

To grasp the greatness of Jesus is to know that being amongst His people by faith, the faith that obeys, is worth everything, for it is eternal peace and security, a sure hope of life

And if you are not yet a believer in Jesus

Don't bother disbelieving in a small Jesus

Some small pallid do-gooder, some moral teacher amongst many

That was never the Jesus of the gospel

He is the Lord at God's right hand who will judge the nations, and who alone has authority to forgive

Recognise what the stakes are

All His enemies, all who persevere in ignoring and disobeying Him, defying His word

Will be made a footstool under His feet, Will be removed from His kingdom in His judgement, but His people will know eternal peace

Better to make peace with Him now by asking Him to forgive you and include you amongst His own people – which He will do for all those who call out to Him

And if you are not sure that what I am saying is true, come and talk

Or find out more by reading a gospel with a Christian friend

And after you have gone Wow to Jesus, praised Him, honoured Him with the honour due to the Creator God

Tremble before the greatness of God's word, the greatness of the One who speaks it

Here was a word that defied people's attempts to make sense of it

"If He is David's Son, how can he be David's Lord"

And if He is David's Son, how could he ever be a priest?

Yet God proved it true, every word

God's word, including His words that speak of the future and things unknowable by us, is given by the one who knows the end from the beginning, knows it because in His almighty power He brings about what He reveals through His prophets

What He says of what is to come is not an approximation, a best guess

It is written, hundreds, even thousands of years before, to conform to what He knows He will do at that time

Just as the portrayal of Melchizedek in Genesis 14 was written to conform to the Saviour, the Son of God, whom the LORD knew He would send into the world at the right time.

His Word is thoroughly true

Every promise God makes, everything He says, He will fulfill

And our being unable to see how it can be, to imagine how it fits in with the rest of what God has said, won't stop it being true.

We should recognize how different God's word is from ours, especially when we speak of the future, and tremble before it

For what God says will be, where our speaking of the future is just best guesses, often wrong
 And recognizing the difference, honour His word in our humility before it and our confidence in it

Humility

The worst kind of pride before God's word is to know and understand what God says and choose to reject and ignore it. That is to claim that you, the creature, know better than the Creator

But there are other expressions of our pride in dealing with God's word, particularly in relation to what God says of the future, whether in promise or warning.

We can dismiss it. It makes no sense to me – God couldn't have spoken it

We can marginalise it. It doesn't fit my system – it can't mean what it says, or I will just exclude it from consideration – the way the Pharisees treated Psalm 110

And there is a third way – being dogmatic about the details of our interpretation, being overconfident in our imagining of what the fulfilment of certain passages will look like, identifying our interpretation with God's word

And then declaring that those who don't agree with us don't believe in Scripture as the word of God.

That too is an expression of pride that can breed quarrelling [1 Tim. 1:3-7, 4:7, 6:4; Titus 3:9-11] and frustrate the obedience the Lord calls for, the obedience of love

It is good to meditate upon the Scriptures, especially God's promises

The picture, for example, of the heavenly city in Revelation 21 is full of wonder and comfort

But as we meditate, as we let our imaginations dwell on the pictures and promises of the future we are given

We should acknowledge two things

Firstly, We are not told much about what the promised future will be like, not given a lot of details – and I suspect that is because it is so different from our present experience that we would not understand at all.

Secondly, we shouldn't confuse our thoughts with His thoughts, for as the Lord has said

Is. 55: ⁸“For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
 and your ways are not my ways.”

This is the Lord's declaration.

⁹“For as heaven is higher than earth,
 so my ways are higher than your ways,
 and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Do you doubt that? Then ask

Who of us would have imagined that God would come amongst us as a baby – God with us, and then that God with us would die in humiliation on a cross, or that He would rise in the body in which He died

If we are honest, who amongst us would have thought the holy God could love us, people who cannot plumb the depths of our own selfishness and unbelief - enough to give His Son for us

God alone knows how He will fulfill all that He has promised

But God does know, and that means even as we humble ourselves before His word and admit that we can't see in detail how it will all work out, we should have absolute confidence in His word

Confidence

What God promises He will certainly do – to the letter, and it will be better and greater than we can imagine

If He is David's Lord, how can He be His Son?

Scripture said both

And a good response to Jesus' question would be – I don't know, but I know all God says will prove true

For God did fulfill His word - Himself

Our God is committed to His word – tells us that again and again

The certainty of His fulfilling His promises, prophecies and warnings doesn't depend on our capacity to see how He will do it

Just on the fact that the living God, the God who was and is and is to come

Has said it

What we can't imagine, He will do for He is the living God, the God who does more than we can ask and imagine.

Every eye will see Him

We will see His face

And yes, He will wipe every tear from our eye

So you and I can grieve now, like our Lord, for those who will not listen and turn and trust Him as we declare the greatness of Jesus

Grieve to the depths of our being and long for people to be saved

We do not need to shield ourselves from that grief

And yet know there will be that day when all things are made new, when there will be no grief in our hearts, when we will know that our God is better and greater and wiser and mightier than we can imagine

And our joy will be without a shadow

We should be Confident

Not just because we see here God's faithfulness to His word

But in the fulfilment of this word we see the greatness of Jesus, the Saviour the LORD sends into the world

The One to whom all His enemies, even death itself, will be subjected

The One who is a priest forever, who always lives to intercede for us and is able to save us completely and for all time

David's Lord

The greatness of the Lord Jesus revealed in the gospel, in whose face we see the glory of God, is the guarantee of God that everything He has said will prove true, and will be better than we can imagine