

Sermon on Psalm 72 prepared by Jonathan Shradar

Psalm 72:1-20

Jesus is the King our souls long for.

This week Ewen and I attended a wonderful concert. It was a whole evening for us. Driving down I was struck by what I saw as the signs of distress among humanity. Dis-ease from running after whims and desires that leave us unsatisfied, sick and still longing.

Even in my own life I find myself chasing after things of self that don't match the need deep within me.

Then, sitting under the beautiful setting and music and singing at the concert I was struck by what was being sung. "Christ is lord."

For many making that phrase beautiful, they were doing so absent belief or understanding what it means. Not casting judgment on them but in the dark of Advent recognizing my own neglect of this truth and the tension of our world pursuing the object of the phrase without knowing it.

"During Advent, we occupy our greatest longings." – Ruth Haley Barton

See through this psalm the answer to our greatest longings.

Jesus is the King our souls long for.

During our long Advent, from the psalms we have been building a case for a King, for the One to make things right, the One who can lift our heads in hope and confidence.

Psalm 72 is the prayer of a father for his son, and something more.

This is the last of the psalms written by the historic David... closing a book of the psalter (this hymnbook of God's people). He prays a better prayer for Solomon than I do for my kids!

But in his prayer, there is more than desiring his son's reign be empowered by God - David points forward to another King who will occupy his throne.

The King of glory that is to come in - this is what his reign looks like.

While it may not be as self-evident as I think it is, the aches of our hearts, the longing of our souls are met here.

Following the text this morning we want to think through the promise of the King, recognize his arrival as the presence of the King, and cling to the hope of the persistence of the King as we await his return.

Promise of the King

Reading an article by an “executive coach” and she wrote, “By nature, humans always look to a leader to help them learn what to do. Children see their parents as leaders and employees see their boss as a leader. Throughout every aspect of a human’s life, they seek leadership. Even leaders learn their skills from other leaders. Leadership is a cycle and an important part of life. Without it, most people would be lost.”

Hint at our human inclination toward leaders, toward those that would forge ahead, teach us what is right, and give us what we most need. I think this inclination is built in that we might long for God himself.

All of Psalm 72 paints the promise of the best leader. Solomon as king had some of these things, but a reign lasting as long as the sun suggests another. “This extension of time beyond the lifespan of a mere mortal leads to the conclusion that this psalm looks past Solomon and his immediate heirs and ultimately to the Messiah.”

So who is he?

A King endowed by the Father with justice. A defender, a deliverer.

He is a good, righteous King. It is who benefits from his rule that is so counter to everything we know and even of what Israel knows as they sing this song.

Psalm 72:4 “May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the children of the needy, and crush the oppressor!” (ESV)

Psalm 72:12–14 “For he delivers the needy when he calls, the poor and him who has no helper. [13] He has pity on the weak and the needy, and saves the lives of the needy. [14] From oppression and violence he redeems their life, and precious is their blood in his sight.” (ESV)

As one of the so-called royal psalms, it is unique in emphasizing the king’s role in defending and protecting the weakest in society.

Real talk. We don’t like the poor. See them as problems to be handled, or responsible for their situation. We don’t naturally value their lives.

Even Israel, given such promise, instructed to bolster and care for the least, the poor among them. Yet Jubilee never happens, they oppress the least in the face of Yahweh's commands otherwise.

That is something broken because of sin. I love how Advent attempts to drive a wedge in the crack of this reality and stir a generosity in us, but this King doesn’t just seasonally help the poor. It is the hallmark of his reign.

“This prayer, then, seeks God to make the king one who does justice even for those from whom he stands to gain nothing. Equality before the law, without regard for social standing or the capacity to pay bribes, is precisely what establishes true justice.” Hamilton

We don’t even have the capacity to fully understand the ways in which this poverty is both physical and spiritual.

Rather than be served, this King serves the needy because that is all there is.

You may have no doubt where dinner is coming from, but the nearly universal struggle with anxiety in our day indicates there are things outside our control.

Romans 3:10–12 “as it is written:

“None is righteous, no, not one;

[11] no one understands;
no one seeks for God.

[12] All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;
no one does good,
not even one.” (ESV)

Romans 3:23 “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” (ESV)

Humbled by all of it, we see our need for this King.

This King saves and blesses his people.

Abundance, flourishing. The King gives provision, abounding grain, fruitfulness, it is a kingdom of thriving people.

Longing for this is not ancient myth, it is present reality.

The promise goes on. Not only is his reign just, and good for the people, his reign is global, universal.

Psalms 72:8–11 “May he have dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth! [9] May desert tribes bow down before him, and his enemies lick the dust! [10] May the kings of Tarshish and of the coastlands render him tribute; may the kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts! [11] May all kings fall down before him, all nations serve him!” (ESV)

Covering all the borders of the world. The riches of the world brought to him.

So much of our experience has been impacted by us or others getting power wrong. Worldly power gains strength by oppressing the least, “peace” is always absent and only promised through domination or “strength” as defined by the ability to subdue the other.

This King wields power differently. Peace comes as the oppressed are redeemed. His reign seems to be an embrace of weakness that brings prosperity.

Not a momentary peace of a ceasefire, this prayer is for peace to abound “till the moon be no more.” A peace that goes on forever.

His reign then is eternal.

Psalm 72:5 “May they fear you while the sun endures, and as long as the moon, throughout all generations!” (ESV)

Psalm 72:17 “May his name endure forever, his fame continue as long as the sun! May people be blessed in him, all nations call him blessed!” (ESV)

More than hyperbole for Solomon’s reign... The King above all kings.

Never looking for another. Satisfied, valued, helped, prospering.
This King is good. And he is not imaginary. He has come!

Presence of the King

Psalm 72:8 is almost identical to the second part of Zechariah 9:10, which belongs to a passage that is explicitly messianic. Since the psalm prays for the Davidic king, it predates the postexilic prophet Zechariah, and thus the prophet employed the words of the psalm, taking it as pointing forward.

Zechariah 9:9–12 “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. [10] I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations; his rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. [11] As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit. [12] Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope; today I declare that I will restore to you double.” (ESV)

If the prophet saw this Psalm as promising the Messiah, then we can as well. It is all about Jesus, the King who takes on our flesh and knows our need, who gives of himself to bring peace.

Another prophet expanded even further on this promise.

Isaiah 9:2–7 “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone. [3] You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil. [4] For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. [5] For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire. [6] For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. [7] Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.” (ESV)
The increase of his government and of peace, of his kingdom, there will be no end.

On David’s throne, ruling with justice and righteousness. All David prays for, all the prophets point to, is provided in Jesus.

The zeal of the Lord will do it! He has done it.

Luke 2:1–14 “In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. [2] This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. [3] And all went to be registered, each to his own town. [4] And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, [5] to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. [6] And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. [7] And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

The Shepherds and the Angels

[8] And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. [9] And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. [10] And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. [11] For unto you is born this day in the city of

David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. [12] And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” [13] And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

[14] “Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” (ESV)

When the night is dark, this is the light we need.

Salvation, forgiveness of rejecting God as king, freed from the oppression and violence of sin, given the gift of peace, and his presence in us.

“The psalm imagines a land in which people flourish economically and the needy are protected (Ps. 72:3, 4). By his word and example, Jesus announced a kingdom that brings relief, healing, and life to people physically as well as spiritually (Luke 4:18–19).”

When we sing that Christ is lord it’s meaningful. He is meant to be the rule of our hearts and lives. The anchor of our souls.

Our Psalm looks forward to a worldwide rule that embraces in full what the Messiah will accomplish: the OT anticipates the ultimate heir of David, who will take the throne and bring the light of God to all nations (cf. Isa. 2:1–5; 11:1–10), and the NT is careful to explain that Jesus, by virtue of his life, death, resurrection, and ascension has begun to fulfill this task through the Christian mission (cf. Matt. 28:18–20; Rom. 1:1–6).

All of this keeps us steady as we wait for the experience of his eternal reign.

Persistence of the King

Jesus shall come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom shall have no end.

Jesus is the Messiah promised to right that which has gone wrong, to draw all people to himself, to bring us back to the garden where we are meant to dwell with God.

“Christians who sing along with Psalm 72 confess Jesus to be the hoped-for Messiah; they confess as well that the hints of divine honors are manifested fully in the Incarnate One. Christians ought to seek to have their corporate life reflect the goodness and justice described here, and they ought as well to embrace their role as God’s instruments for bringing his light ultimately to all the nations of the earth.”

He is the King we can give our lives to.

Matthew 16:24–27 “Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. [25] For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. [26] For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? [27] For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.” (ESV)

From His promise and presence we recognize His way and we live in it.

We live for the things his Kingdom is about, the least, rescue, renewal, belonging.

“The church is not called to be a “change agent”—God is the agent of change. The Lord of the kosmos has already wrought the Great Exchange in his cross and resurrection, and the life of the people of God is sustained by that mighty enterprise.²⁶ The calling of the church is to place itself where God is already at work.” — Fleming Rutledge, *Advent: The Once and Future Coming of Jesus Christ*

Advent is a time of aligning our lives with our King. Only Jesus can satisfy the longing of our souls for a good King, for one to rescue us.

The invitation is to let him reign in your heart and to join in what he is doing through his persistent kingdom.

In your need, call out to Jesus. Experience his peace, and bring his light wherever you go.

Jesus is the King our souls long for.

Isaac Watts "*Jesus Shall Reign*"

“Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
does its successive journeys run,
his kingdom stretch from shore to shore,
till moons shall wax and wane no more.

To him shall endless prayer be made,
and praises throng to crown his head.
His name like sweet perfume shall rise
with every morning sacrifice.

People and realms of every tongue
dwell on his love with sweetest song,
and infant voices shall proclaim
their early blessings on his name.

Blessings abound where'er he reigns:
the prisoners leap to lose their chains,
the weary find eternal rest,
and all who suffer want are blest.

Let every creature rise and bring
the highest honors to our King,
angels descend with songs again,
and earth repeat the loud amen.”

May we be those that put ourselves where God is already at work, that give our lives for the glory of our King.

And, may he whose second coming in power and great glory we await, make you steadfast in faith, joyful in hope, and constant in love.

Psalm 72:18–19 “Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things. [19] Blessed be his glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory! Amen and Amen!” (ESV)