



Sermon Transcript December 6, 2015

Jesus: The Good King Psalm 72

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on December 6, 2015, at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Dr. Scott W. Solberg. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio copy of the sermon on CD is available by request at (860) 563-8286. An audio version of this sermon may also be found on the church website at www.wethefc.com.

Sermon Text
Psalm 72

Of Solomon

- ¹ Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to the royal son!
- ² May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice!
- ³ Let the mountains bear prosperity for the people, and the hills, in righteousness!
- ⁴ May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the children of the needy, and crush the oppressor!
- ⁵ May they fear you while the sun endures, and as long as the moon, throughout all generations!
- ⁶ May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass, like showers that water the earth!
- ⁷ In his days may the righteous flourish, and peace abound, till the moon be no more!
- ⁸ 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!
- ¹² 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.
- ¹⁵ Long may he live; may gold of Sheba be given to him!
May prayer be made for him continually, and blessings invoked for him all the day!
- ¹⁶ May there be abundance of grain in the land; on the tops of the mountains may it wave; may its fruit be like Lebanon; and may people blossom in the cities like the grass of the field!
- 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!
- ¹⁸ 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!

²⁰ The prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended.

Introduction

This week I watched a video of Tim Keller talking about an essay that C. S. Lewis wrote back in the 1940's called *Equality*. In this article, Lewis argued that democracy was the best form of government. The reason he favored democracy over other forms of government may surprise you. For example, the eighteenth century French philosopher Rousseau argued for democracy because he believed in the general goodness and common wisdom of all mankind and so everyone deserved to share in the government. But Lewis embraced democracy for the opposite reason. He thought democracy was the best form of government because he believed in the Fall of Man. He wrote, "Mankind is so fallen that no man can be trusted with unchecked power over his fellows."¹ It was because democracy had a system of checks and balances, he felt it was the best we could do given the natural state of man's heart. As we know, even with all the checks and balances we have in place, this business of governance is still a very messy affair.

But here is what C. S. Lewis concludes about democracy. He said it is just medicine for what ails us, but it is not food that feeds us. It is just there to keep in check this human nature that constantly needs watching. Tim Keller explains what Lewis means by saying that democracy is not ultimate reality. Do you know why? We were made to be ruled. Keller goes on to say, "If you do not serve Jesus Christ as King, you will serve somebody. You will bow your knee to somebody, whether you admit it or not."² Lewis's point is that it is human nature to be ruled. We were created to be ruled. And so you will either eat food that will nourish you or you will gobble up poison that will kill you. It all depends on who you are serving. But make no mistake about it, human nature will be served. You are serving somebody. Therefore, at the end of the day, you and I need a king because we were made to be ruled.

During this season of Advent, we are spending time in the book of Psalms. We are calling this series "Psalms of Christmas" because these psalms ultimately point us to Jesus. When you read through the book of Psalms, you discover that there are different categories of psalms. For example, last week we looked at Psalm 25 and this was a "psalm of lament." Like many other psalms, this psalm is an honest cry of the soul over the suffering that is common to man. And yet in our suffering, we are encouraged to turn to God and to trust in God and to simply . . . wait. That is what the celebration of Advent is; it is learning how to wait as people of hope and faith on the fulfillment of the promise of God. Jesus came. Jesus comes,. Jesus will come again. And so . . . we wait.

This morning we are in Psalm 72 and this is not a “psalm of lament.” This is a “royal psalm.” It is part of a collection of psalms that celebrate and prays for the king of Israel. It starts out in verse 1, “*Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to the royal son.*” In verse 15, you can almost here that familiar expression, “Long live the king!” where it speaks of the king of Israel, “*Long may he live.*” This royal psalm is a prayer for the righteous and prosperous reign of the king of Israel. And lets be honest, as the king goes, so goes the people. We don’t just need a king. We need a king who is just and righteous. We need a good king to rule over us.

Do you bristle at this idea that you were created to be ruled? Do you chafe at the idea that you need a king? To be honest with you, this is not a very difficult reality to embrace if you believe that God created the world. The fact that we are creatures and God is the Creator, automatically puts us in a position where we are dependent upon God. Of course we were made to be ruled! Ironically, it is the secret to a joyful life. This was the discovery of King Nebuchadnezzar, after God humbled him in Daniel 4. Coming to his senses, this powerful king said of God, “*his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation; all the inhabitants of the earth are counted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand, or say to him, ‘What have you done?’*” And so this powerful Babylonian king joyfully concludes, “*I praise and extol and honor the king of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble.*”

This is, after all, the entire premise of the book of Psalms. The book of Psalms is the longest book in all the Bible. It is composed of 150 chapters, called psalms. They are not haphazardly arranged. There is rhyme and reason to how they are assembled. The way they are arranged points us to the purpose and the secret of life. Psalm 1 and Psalm 2 form the introduction to the entire book. These two psalms present the pathway to blessing in life. Psalm 1 tells us that the man who is blessed is the one who lives according the law of the Lord. Psalm 2 finds God in heaven laughing at the notion of mankind declaring that they don’t need God or God’s rule in their life. And so the conclusion is found at the end of Psalm 2, “*Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.*” Does such language cause you to bristle? The book of Psalms begins with the premise that not only were you made to be ruled, but blessing in life comes from serving and worshiping God. And do you know what you find at the end of the book of Psalms? The last several psalms are filled with nothing but the voluntary and

joyful praise of God. They serve as a testimony that when you live your life under the good rule of God, you have found your purpose and your joy in life. That is how Psalm 72 ends. It ends with the voluntary and joyful song, *“Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things. Blessed be his glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory! Amen and Amen!”*

As we look at this “royal psalm” this morning, Psalm 72, I invite you to embrace the wonderful truth that you have been created to be ruled. The reason this is good news to embrace is because the one who is meant to rule your life is good. I am going to “spill the beans” right now and just tell you that the one Psalm 72 ultimately leads us to is Jesus. He is the one you were created to serve. When C. S. Lewis wrote the children’s book *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, you quickly discover that the lion is the Christ-figure in the book. His name is Aslan. Here is how little Susan first hears about this lion. She is told, “Aslan is a lion- the Lion, the great Lion.” “Ooh” said Susan. “I’d thought he was a man. Is he-quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion”...“Safe?” said Mr. Beaver ...“Who said anything about safe? ‘Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good. He’s the King, I tell you.”³ May you find this morning that Jesus our King is incredibly good and you can entrust your life to the good King, Jesus.

The Good King

One of the debates about Psalm 72 is over who wrote it. The title at the beginning of Psalm 72 says that this psalm is *“Of Solomon.”* At the same time, the last verse of Psalm 72 reads, *“The prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended.”* It is good to know that the book of Psalms is divided into five books and “Book II” ends with our psalm this morning, Psalm 72. So Psalm 72:20, where it mentions David, could be a closing summary statement for all of “Book II” and that doesn’t mean that every psalm in this section had to be written by David. So this could be a prayer of Solomon as he begins his reign over Israel. Or it could be a prayer written by David for his son Solomon as Solomon takes the throne. Whatever the case, it highlights the importance of the role of the king of Israel in God’s plan to bring blessing to the world.

This broken world needs the blessing of God. Whether we are talking about Syria or Paris or San Bernardino, CA . . . or simply the brokenness we find behind the closed doors of our own homes and families, it is quite clear this world is broken. This past week as I was watching the news break about the shooting that took place in San Bernardino, I was struck by the commentator trying to find explanation as to why this kind of violence has become commonplace in our country. I don’t want to be guilty of

throwing simple answers at complex issues, but could we connect the dots and at least conjecture and wonder if this is not the fruit of a culture that grows further and further removed from the good rule of God. Again, as we enter a season when we sing of “peace on earth and good will to men” we need to know where to actually find it.

The presence of the king in Israel is a sign of God’s plan to bring blessing to this broken world. Sure, we can and should explore different kinds of legislation that will help curtail these acts of violence. This is true whether it is homegrown violence like we saw in Sandy Hook a few years ago, or whether it is acts of terrorism like we saw in San Bernardino this past week. Government and political officials can and should assist in addressing these kinds of issues. It is part of the purpose for which God has ordained government. But there is something at play here that is beyond the scope of our political systems to solve. There is a need for a “cosmic king” if you will. There is a need for the governance of the heart and the soul in order to see that blessing of God and the change of man. There is something needed that is beyond the scope and the power of merely human institutions to address what plagues us. We need God!

This world has been broken for an awfully long time. What we are witnessing on the news is not something brand new to the human experience. Did you know that there are 1,189 chapters in the Bible? That is a lot of chapters representing the span a few thousand years. And we are 2,000 years removed from the writing of Scripture. And yet, you are only 3 chapters into 1,189 chapters and this world is already broken when man (that is you and me) decides that life would be better if we were free the rule of God in our lives. We were created to be ruled, but we declared our independence from God. So the rest of the Bible chronicles how this rejection of God leads to our misery and we are in bondage to the point where we can’t fix this broken humanity. In fact, our bondage is of such that we keep adding to the brokenness of this world, seemingly digging a deeper hole as the years go by. It is because God gives us over to ourselves.

And yet, at the same time, as the story unfolds, we see how God graciously and lovingly moves towards us to bring us back under his good care and his good rule. God begins to move towards this broken world by first forming a people, the people of Israel. They were to be a people who were set apart from this world because they were to live under the good rule of God. At the giving of the Ten Commandments, they enter into covenant with God, to be God’s people and God’s source of blessing in this broken world. Through Israel, God promises to bring blessing to this world. The only problem is, the people of Israel are just as broken as everyone else. If you know their story, they too kept rejecting God’s good rule over their lives. They too have a broken and

rebellious heart. So how in the world is this broken people, the nation of Israel, going to bring hope and blessing to this broken world? They ended up being no different than the world around them. As the story unfolds, we begin to see that the promise of God's blessing to this world is going to come through the king of Israel.

Here is what you find in this "royal psalm." It is a prayer for the righteous and prosperous dominion and reign of Israel's king. It starts out with a prayer that the king himself would be righteous in character. During the political cycle of election in our own country, the question is often asked, "Does character matter?" The implication of the question is that as long as the leader can get positive results for us, does it really matter what his character is like? It mattered to Israel. It matters to the bringing of God's blessing to Israel and the world. The prayer in verse 1 is, "*Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to the royal son.*" This world does not just need a king. It needs a good king.

In Deuteronomy 17, we find instructions for the eventual kings of Israel imbedded in the law of God before Israel even had a king. In these instructions, the king was told to take out a "pen and some paper" and to write from his own hand a copy of the law of God. He was to handwrite the first five books of the Old Testament; that is Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Then he was instructed to take that copy written in his own hand writing and read from it every day. The reason for this instruction was so that he would learn to fear God and not abuse his power by thinking that he was better than the people he served. This was God's way of saying to the kings of Israel that character matters and character is formed as one lives under the rule of God. Here is what we learn from their history. As the king goes so goes the people.

What you discover is that when this king of Israel is marked with this godly character it impacts the way he governs. When you read verses 2-4 you say to yourself, it would be great to find someone who would not only run on this platform but also one who is able to deliver it. "*May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice! Let the mountains bear prosperity for the people, and the hills, in righteousness! May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the children of the needy, and crush the oppressor!*" He is able to bring about justice and prosperity and security. And when you get down to verse 12-14 you discover that the king is motivated out of genuine pity and care for the people and particularly the poor who are often taken advantage of and forgotten. "*He has pity on the weak.*" I love what it says in verse 14, "*From oppression and violence he redeems their life, and precious is their blood in his sight.*" A righteous king governs his people motivated out of love for the people.

The king has the power to direct the destiny of the nation for good or for evil. You can see in Psalm 72 how God has not lost his intention to bless the world through the people of Israel. But you can also see that the king is the source of this blessing. It says of the scope of the reign of the king of Israel in verses 8-11, *“May he have dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth! May desert tribes bow down before him, and his enemies lick the dust! May the kings of Tarshish and of the coastlands render him tribute; may the kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts! May all kings fall down before him, all nations serve him!”* In fact, in verse 17, you can pick up echoes of what was promised when God called Abraham and began to form a people all the way back in Genesis 12. *“May people be blessed in him, all nations call him blessed.”* And so the blessing that was to come to this world through the people of Israel, is actually going to come through Israel’s king.

But just like the nation of Israel, a king of this character was hard to find. David, characterized as *“a man after God’s own heart”* was flawed. Solomon, seemed to start out pretty well, but he didn’t end very well. In fact, the kingdom was split in two after Solomon’s reign. So just like the people of Israel, the kings were flawed and broken. So where is this good king going to come from who will bring the blessing of God on his people and restore this broken world?

In 2 Samuel 7, King David was promised that he would have a descendant who would sit on his throne forever. That either means that there is an unending line of sons who will continue to occupy the throne forever, or else we are talking about a unique son who will literally reign forever. It is at this point we begin to hear the prophets speak of a coming divine-king from the line of David. For example, it is during this time of year that we often hear Isaiah 9:6-7 quoted, *“For unto us a child is born and unto 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.”* This is no ordinary person for these are divine names. *“Of the increase of his government 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 righteousness from this time forth and forevermore.”* Can you hear the language of Psalm 72 in this word from the prophet?

When you come into the New Testament and read about the events surrounding the birth of Jesus, one of the things you discover is that Jesus is “that king” through whom the blessing of God will come to this broken world. Here is what the angel Gabriel told Mary when she was told that she would conceive a child through the power of the Holy Spirit. And here is what was said of this child, the baby Jesus, *“He will be great and will*

be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” When the wise men come into Jerusalem in Matthew 2, they come asking “*Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?*” When Jesus begins his earthly ministry he comes announcing that “*the kingdom of God is at hand.*” God’s blessing has come to this broken world through Jesus, the Son of David, our king.

If character matters to you, then this Jesus is a king for you! “*He was tempted in every way, but was without sin.*” He is unlike any other king because this king is from heaven. He is God in the flesh. This is what makes him a good king. And if you wonder if he fits the description of Psalm 72 where it says of Israel’s king, “*From oppression and violence he redeems their life, and precious is their blood in his sight*”, well then this is indeed the king for you. For king Jesus rescues us from the tyranny of the devil by dying for us. Jesus laid down his life for us. On the top of the cross, appropriately was a sign that said, “*This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.*” Can you believe it? Usually it is the subjects of the king who lay down their life for the king. But our king, Jesus, died in our place so that we could be set free from the bondage of sin, death and the devil. And surely you know, after spending the past few months in the book of Acts, by rising from the dead Jesus is declared to be our Savior and our Lord. He is that king through whom the blessing of God comes into our lives. We were created to be ruled. Behold your good king!

Here is what happens. When you repent of your sin and turn in faith to Jesus who died on the cross for your sin and then submit to him as the ruler of your life, your sins are forgiven and God begins to fix the broken pieces of your life. You begin to learn what it is like to live under God’s good rule—to be ruled as you were created to be ruled— and God changes you for the good on the inside. Then you become an agent of hope in this broken world. You become “contagious” because you are a carrier of the kingdom of God. We, the church, become God’s answer to this broken world as we proclaim the good news of Christ the King!

Long Live the King

When you read Psalm 72 you get the impression that the writer must be talking about someone greater than Solomon. The language he uses could be described as “over the top” if it were not referring to someone much greater than Solomon. Speaking of this king in verse 17 it says “*May his name endure forever, his fame continue as long as the sun.*” So when you read this royal psalm, you can’t help but think of what Jesus said in Matthew 12:42, “*Someone greater than Solomon has come.*”

You have been created to be ruled. You will not find yourself until you find the one you were created to follow. May you know that the message of Advent is that the blessing of God has come to this world through Jesus our king. He is a good king and you will find rest for your soul if you bow your knee to him. Very simply, this truth leaves us with some practical thoughts.

Obey him: It doesn't get much more simple than that. The definition of a disciple of Christ is a follower of Christ. In Matthew 28 this is someone who has been baptized and who seeks "to observe" all that Jesus has taught us. To obey Jesus it to treat Jesus as a king! Do you know what that means? You do what he says, whether you like it or not. You do it because you trust him and you know that he wants what is best for you. He may call you to do something that is different than what everyone else around you is doing. But that is part of following Jesus. Over time you will discover that following Jesus as your king is what brings real peace and joy in life. It is not a problem free. It is not without suffering. But following Jesus gives you something that can handle the rough moments of life. At the end of the day, you will find yourself voluntarily and joyfully singing of the goodness of God.

Expect Great Things from Jesus: When you pray to him approach him as your king. Remember our king is good. Remember that we can readily approach our king. Pray to him like he is your king. John Newton wrote the hymn *Amazing Grace*. He also wrote a hymn called *Thou Are Coming to A King*. That is a great title to remember when you come to Jesus in prayer. You are coming to the divine king who can do above and beyond what you can imagine. Listen to the second stanza of this great hymn:

Thou art coming to a king
Large petitions with thee bring
For his grace and power are such
None can ever ask too much
None can ever ask too much

Every year I begin a new journal and I adopt a theme for the year. Here is the theme I adopted for this year. "Attempt great things for God." We are free to do that because we serve Jesus, the king! This building project we announced to you this morning is something I am excited about. I think it is attempting great things for God. When you hear me lay out our vision in the beginning of January, you are going to hear how I believe God is positioning us for regional influence for the sake of the kingdom of God. God is doing something unique here. I don't know how we will get it done. But I do

know who our king is and we should be so bold as to attempt great things for his glory.

Anticipate His Soon Return: Someday God's rule will be fully established on earth as it is in heaven. There will be no more news reports that have become so common place. This whole world was made to be ruled by God. Creation groans as it eagerly awaits that day when Jesus returns and permanently fixes this broken world. *"Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things. Blessed be his glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory."*

Isaac Watts wrote a hymn that is a popular Christmas Carol *Joy to the World*. It is really not about the first advent of Christ. Rather it is taken from Psalm 98. It is a song that glorifies Christ's triumphant return at the end of the age. In this song, the nations are called to celebrate because of God's faithfulness to the house of Israel because he has kept his promise and brought salvation to the world. Do you what gets married in this song? The coming rule of God to this world is celebrated and it is married to the joy of man. There is no need to bristle at the thought that we were created to be ruled. As you sing this song, take note that our joy is rooted in the one who rules our lives and this world.

Conclusion

You were made to be ruled. You are serving someone. Turn to Jesus and find that his rule is what your heart longs for. He is the good king!

¹C. S. Lewis *Equality* reprinted from the Spectator CLXXI (August 27, 1943) p.192
http://www.tlchrist.info/cs_lewis.htm

²Tim Keller <http://resources.thegospelcoalition.org/library/tim-keller-christ-is-your-king>

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