

Sermon Notes

Our Glorious King & Great High Priest – Psalm 110

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The LORD says to my Lord:

“Sit at my right hand,
until I make your enemies your footstool.”

² The LORD sends forth from Zion
your mighty scepter.

Rule in the midst of your enemies!

³ Your people will offer themselves freely
on the day of your power,
in holy garments;

from the womb of the morning,
the dew of your youth will be yours.

⁴ The LORD has sworn
and will not change his mind,
“You are a priest forever
after the order of Melchizedek.”

⁵ The Lord is at your right hand;
he will shatter kings on the day of his wrath.

⁶ He will execute judgment among the nations,
filling them with corpses;
he will shatter chiefs
over the wide earth.

⁷ He will drink from the brook by the way;
therefore he will lift up his head. – Psalm 110, ESV

Introduction: Hope in Troubled Times

You probably won't be shocked and I doubt you'll disagree if I tell you I think we live in troubled and troubling times. Our culture is becoming increasingly divided to the point where people aren't even willing to listen to each other and to try to understand each other. Religious liberty is being taken away in ways that seemed impossible only a few years ago. Hostility to religious faith, and especially to the Christian faith, is growing day-by-day. More and more, those who believe in truths that had been widely held and commonly believed for centuries are labelled as intolerant, bigoted, hateful and extremist.

As Americans, we are facing the likely reality that the next president of the United States will be one of two people who have shown themselves to be among the most corrupt, dishonest, self-serving and unprincipled people to ever be the presidential nominees of major political parties.

In the midst of such troubled and troubling times, where can we look for hope? Where can we find security in such a world?

In such a world at such a time as this, Psalm 110 – much like Psalm 2, which we heard last month – comes to readjust our perspective, remind us of the truth and refocus us on the right King and His eternal kingdom, that our hope might be grounded in Him!

Psalm 110 is the ultimate Messianic Psalm. It is directly quoted or alluded to in the New Testament some 28 times. This makes it the most quoted and alluded to psalm in the New Testament. Verse 1 alone is directly quoted three times – by Jesus in the Gospels, by Peter in his Pentecost sermon in the Book of Acts, and in the Book of Hebrews – and is alluded to more than 10 other times. If we understand that Jesus is the exalted King sitting at the right hand of God the Father and our eternal Great High Priest, both of these central ideas have their origin largely in this psalm.

A. The Victorious King at God’s Right Hand, vv. 1-3

I. The Most Important Verse in the Psalms? (v. 1)

Based on how often it is quoted and the important truth it contains, verse 1 of Psalm 110 might be the most important verse in all the Psalms and one of the most important verses in the whole Old Testament. Jesus Himself quoted this verse when He was trying to explain who he was to the religious leaders of His day, in Matthew 22:41-45:

Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question,⁴² saying, “What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?” They said to him, “The son of David.”⁴³ He said to them, “How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying,

*⁴⁴ “The Lord said to my Lord,
“Sit at my right hand,
until I put your enemies under your feet”?”*

⁴⁵ If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?” (Matt. 22:41-45, ESV)

In verse 1, David writes of the LORD – YaHWeH – speaking to his Lord, his Master, which is the word “Adonai.” This makes this a unique and profound verse, because King David is speaking of the Messiah, his descendent, as his Lord, his ruler or master. This is a conversation

between God the Father and God the Son, and the unique language here means that this Psalm can only be rightly applied to the Messiah, to someone greater than David, the Son of God.

Most other Messianic psalms have possible interpretations and applications related to other kings, describing David or Solomon or some other king. But Psalm 110 is a pure Messianic psalm. In this opening verse, Messiah is given the place of highest possible honor and authority, at the right hand of YaHWeH, at the right hand of the throne of God Almighty, ruling over all.

God the Father sets Jesus at His right hand until His victory over His enemies is complete, until His enemies are a footstool for His feet. So not only does Jesus sit on the highest throne, but His reign will be unchallenged until He is granted full and final victory over all of His enemies. What follows verse 1 in the rest of the psalm is the unfolding of the two-stage reign and victory of King Jesus – now in the day of His power and in the future in the day of His wrath.

2. The King Who Rules in the Midst of His Enemies (v. 2)

Right now, from His exalted seat at this position of honor and power, Jesus is told by His Father that He is to rule in the midst of His enemies. He is able to do so because YaHWeH is sending forth Jesus' royal scepter from Zion over the nations. This is interesting imagery because the royal scepter is something that the King – in this case, Jesus – would hold in his right hand as a sign of his rule, of his power and authority. But here we're told that YaHWeH is sending forth the Messiah's scepter, meaning that YaHWeH is holding and stretching forth the scepter.

This language of God the Father and Messiah King Jesus both holding the same thing reminds me of John 10:27-30:

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one.” (ESV)

Here Jesus the Good Shepherd is holding His sheep in His hands, but also God the Father is holding the sheep in His hands, too. Then Jesus says, “I and the Father are one.” This is a double holding but really a single holding, and it's best understood when we understand the Trinity. Two persons are holding the sheep, just as two persons are holding the scepter, but the two persons are One God.

This language, both from Psalm 110 and from John 10, should give us great encouragement. How secure is Jesus' kingdom? He is holding His scepter, but God the Father is also holding it,

sending it forth. It is doubly secured, and yet the two persons who hold it are one, and so it is not as if they are in a tug-of-war or a competition for control, so it is really a single holding. That is powerfully secure. But we as His sheep, as the people of the kingdom, are as secure as the kingdom scepter, being held in the same way, by both Father and Son, who are One.

With the kingdom scepter so divinely secure, Jesus is able to reign in the midst of His enemies. This is describing His current rule, the rule that began as described in Psalm 2, when God installed His king on Zion, His holy hill. This is the ascension and session of Jesus, when He ascended to heaven and sat at the right hand of the majesty on high. He sits there still, ruling over all the nations, even in the midst of His enemies.

This verse does not deny that Jesus has enemies. Jesus' enemies may be powerful and strong throughout the earth, but King Jesus rules in their midst, overseeing and overruling their sinful rebellion to serve His greater kingdom purpose.

2. The King's People in Glorious Array (v. 3)

Verse 3 then turns our attention from the glorious reign of King Jesus to His people:

*Your people will offer themselves freely
on the day of your power,
in holy garments;
from the womb of the morning,
the dew of your youth will be yours.*

This verse is a portrait of the people of King Jesus, emphasizing four things:

1. Their willingness to offer themselves for their King's service.
2. Their beautiful holiness. ("in holy garments" or "in the beauties (or splendor) of holiness")
3. Their great number – like dew on the ground
4. Their youthful vigor and strength – "your youth," meaning healthy and vigorous young men.

The wonderful power of Jesus' rule is unlike any other ruler, because He is able to change the hearts of His people and make us all very willing, freely willing to offer ourselves. Earthly rulers cannot truly change the hearts of their people. They may engage in propaganda campaigns and public relations efforts, but they cannot really change hearts, and so they have to rely on coercion and consequences to compel people into service. Jesus and His people are so different. In love, He freely offers Himself to His people and He sovereignly changes our hearts and makes us freely willing to love Him and serve Him.

Jesus doesn't just make us willing; He also makes us beautiful. He gives us holy garments, but the word for "garments" is a word of beautiful ornamental clothing. Other translations render it "in holy splendor" or "in the beauties of holiness." Jesus' own perfect righteousness clothes us with perfection that is beautiful.

The last part of verse 3 is very difficult to translate and interpret accurately, but the interpretation that seems to for the context the best is reflected well in The Amplified Bible:

*"In the splendor of holiness, from the womb of the dawn,
Your young men are to You as the dew."*

Or in the NIV:

*"Arrayed in holy splendor,
your young men will come to you
like dew from the morning's womb."*

The picture being painted here is of a large army of strong and vital young men arrayed in beautiful garments. They are so numerous that they glisten in the sun like dew on the ground in the early morning.

Verses 1-3 are a picture of the present reign of Christ, and thus this picture of a vast multitude of willing, redeemed, holy young men prepared for battle is a vision of the church militant; the day of Christ's power is now, exercised not through literal military might but through the preaching of the Gospel in evangelism and missions, in the growth and advance of the Gospel kingdom in the midst of Christ's enemies in the world.

Do we see ourselves as part of Christ's massive, holy army taking His love, His gospel, His rule to the nations in eager willingness?

B. The Eternal Priest of a Better Order, v. 4

I. The Most Important Verse in the Psalms? (v. 4)

If a strong case can be made that verse 1 is the most important verse in the psalms, a very strong case could also be made for verse 4:

*The LORD has sworn
and will not change his mind,*

*“You are a priest forever
after the order of Melchizedek.”*

I would personally say that verse 1 is probably the most important verse and verse 4 might be the second most important. While verse 1 is quoted and alluded to more often in the New Testament, verse 4 serves as the background for a major section of the book of Hebrews and helps us understand much about the nature of Christ’s reign as the Priest-King over God’s people.

2. An Unchangeable Oath

First of all, the language used in verse 4 is striking for the strength of the oath God makes:

*“The LORD has sworn
and will not change his mind,”*

God has fixed His will regarding Jesus firmly. Contrast this with what happened to the first two priests under Aaron’s high priesthood, Nadab and Abihu, who offered strange fire before the Lord and were killed as a judgment. God could not promise such an unchangeable oath to anyone except Jesus, because everyone else can be unfaithful in their character or in the discharge of their duties. Jesus would never be unfaithful in either.

3. A Better Priesthood

Just as the oath God makes regarding the priesthood of Jesus is unchangeable and thus superior to any other covenant made with any other priest, so also the nature of Jesus’ priesthood is better than that of the priesthood of Aaron. This is really one of the central themes of the Book of Hebrews, which unpacks this verse in chapters 6-10, explaining why Jesus is a better High Priest:

“You are a priest forever” – Jesus alone remains High Priest forever, because He never dies. He remains our eternal High Priest by the power of his indestructible life.

“According to the order of Melchizedek” – Melchizedek was priest of the Most High God and King of Salem – that is, Jerusalem. His name means “King of Righteousness” and King of Salem means “King of Peace,” as in King of Shalom. He is the only person in the Old Testament who was both king and priest. The Law of Moses forbid anyone from holding these two offices together. There were a couple of priests who were also prophets, but no one could be both king and priest. Even Moses, who led God’s people politically and gave them the Law, had to give the priesthood to his brother, Aaron.

Jesus alone is King and Priest today and forever, both reigning over His people in power and glory and offering intercession and blessing for His people on the basis of His once-for-all sacrifice of Himself.

C. The Final Victory of Our Warrior Priest-King, vv. 5-7

Verses 5-7 then go on to paint a portrait of the final victory of our glorious Priest-King. If verses 2-3 are a picture of Jesus' present, hidden, heavenly, spiritual reign over His people and the nations, then verses 5-7 are a picture of His Second Coming, when He will gloriously and finally conquer all of His and our enemies forever.

Verses 2-3 depict the "day of your power," by which we can understand the power of salvation in the Gospel and the Holy Spirit, but now we come to "the day of his wrath."

I. The Day of His Wrath (vv. 5-6)

*The Lord is at your right hand;
he will shatter kings on the day of his wrath.*

The first question we need to answer is who is the psalmist addressing in verse 5 and who is "the Lord" who is "at your right hand." Well, "the Lord" here is Adonai and not YaHWeH, and so it would seem to be most consistent to see "the Lord" here as a reference to Jesus. And at whose right hand is Jesus? Well, according to verse 1, He's at the right hand of God, so this would seem to be addressed to God the Father. So, it would mean that Jesus is at the right hand of God the Father and that he will shatter kings on the day of His wrath.

This seems consistent with the picture of Jesus we see at His Second Coming in Revelation 19:11-16:

¹¹ Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. ¹² His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. ¹³ He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. ¹⁴ And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. ¹⁵ From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. ¹⁶ On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords. (ESV)

This is not the picture of Jesus most familiar to us in our culture. We are more accustomed to gentle Jesus, meek and mild, than the Jesus of wrath and judgment. But the Bible is clear: Today is the day of salvation, a day of mercy and grace. Today, the door to God's throne of mercy is wide open to all who will come through Jesus Christ, the Great High Priest and King. But one day, this same Jesus will return and he will judge with fury, for the world is indeed full of evil and His enemies will know His power.

2. The Completeness of His Victory (vv. 6-7)

Verses 6-7 tell of the completeness of the victory of Jesus:

*He will execute judgment among the nations,
filling them with corpses;
he will shatter chiefs
over the wide earth.
He will drink from the brook by the way;
therefore he will lift up his head.*

Jesus' victory over all of His enemies among all of the nations of the world will be complete. The final verse, which can be a bit confusing, is an image taken from ancient warfare of the victorious king who pursues His enemy with such zeal and vigor that He stops just briefly to drink from the brook by the way and then he continues his pursuit.

Conclusion: Kiss the Son

So how do we respond to this bold, triumphant psalm? This psalm has many parallels with Psalm 2, which we heard a few weeks ago. You've probably already noticed many of them. So perhaps the best place to end this message is with the invitation that concludes 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.

To “kiss the Son” is to offer Him humble homage, religious worship and heartfelt affection. We do so because his wrath is indeed quickly kindled when it finally comes but also because we believe the final line that “Blessed are all who take refuge in Him!”

So, where do you stand with this King?