

December 5, 2021

OUR CONQUERING KING AND PRIEST
Psalm 110
(10 of 11 in a series of selected Psalms)

“That’s why you preach through the whole Bible.” I found myself declaring that to a group of interns a few years back. We were having our weekly conversation about the text that was being preached, and one of them was noting that many of the themes brought up in our text were so broad and had such far-reaching implications that he thought you needed to discuss all the texts and theological truths that could be derived from our sermon text that week. I made the point that though people in the congregation might say things like, “We’re not concerned about a long sermon, so feel free to take the time you need” those in the nursery were sure to disagree. The response, of course, was that there are so many things that could be said, things from connected texts that could be explained, and things that we wouldn’t get to if we limited ourselves to one even somewhat longer than normal sermon. And my response was, “That’s why you preach through the whole Bible.” It’s because you can’t do everything at once and can’t touch on every connected text in one sermon. But, given time, and a consistent working through book by book of the Bible, you’ll get there. Well, I’ve had to preach that message to myself this week.

Honestly, I feel like I could spend all day talking about themes related to this psalm and sketched out from this psalm in other biblical texts. It is the most quoted OT text in the NT. More than any other OT text, this Psalm 110 shaped how the apostles understood who Jesus was and is. And I can add that how I understand how the Bible is put together as a whole largely hinges on verse 4 of this psalm and how the author of the letter to the Hebrews explains its importance in relation to matters like the priesthood, covenant, and law. Moreover, my favorite topic to teach on is in the theology course at the seminary concerns who Jesus is—much of which rests on the teaching of Psalm 110. Therefore, as I’ve noted, I had to tell myself that I can’t try to say everything I want to say about the themes here and can’t throw in a sermon on Hebrews 7 while we’re at it—at least not and keep a good relationship with our nursery workers.

But this is a spectacular psalm, and if we are going to understand who Jesus is—as the apostles understood him—then we need to understand what this psalm teaches us. If we wanted to sum it up, I think the sermon title I’ve given is sufficient. Jesus is our conquering king and priest. First, let’s then see that Jesus is our reigning king.

Jesus is our reigning king

It’s helpful first to establish that this psalm is talking about Jesus, who is the Messiah. So let me show you that it is. First, we see in the superscription that the psalm is written by David. This is important because David is the king of Israel, and therefore there is no one above him. Let me show you what I mean. The psalm begins with David saying, “The LORD says to my Lord” (v. 1). Now, in that statement the first “LORD” is a reference to God. It is his covenant name, “Yahweh,” which the ESV translates as LORD (with four capital letters). But who is the second

Lord to whom David refers as “my Lord”? This is where David’s authorship of this psalm is key. If it weren’t the king writing this, we would say that “my Lord” is a reference to the psalmist’s master or king, right? But David is the king, and so there is no human authority in the kingdom above him. Who is David referencing then? Well, he’s referring to the Messiah—the promised one that God told him in 2 Samuel 7 would come from his line and be king over God’s kingdom forever. And the reason we know he’s talking about the Messiah (also referred to as the Christ) is because of the text that we heard read earlier in the service from Matthew 22.

In that chapter the Pharisees were asking Jesus questions, trying to stump him, and so he asked them a question, saying, “What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is he?” Now, before we get to their answer, take note of Jesus’ question. He’s asking about the Christ or the Messiah. This is important because when he goes on to reference OT texts, we know that he’s referencing OT texts that speak about the Messiah. Well, back to his question. Jesus asks whose Son the Christ is. And since the Pharisees were familiar with the promise of God from 2 Samuel 7 they rightly answered, “The son of David.” But then Jesus said to him, “How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying, ‘The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet’? If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?” And Matthew adds, “And no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions” (Matthew 22:41-46). Jesus’ point, of course, is that David’s son is also David’s Lord. But for our purposes, Jesus confirms for us that David is talking about the Messiah in Psalm 110:1, calling him, “My Lord.” And since we know that Jesus is the Christ, we can say that Psalm 110 is about Jesus. This is one of those psalms that speaks directly about Jesus and who he is. What then does the psalm tell us about Jesus?

Well, it tells us that God made an oath that the Christ would reign as king over all. That’s what is being said in verse 1 as David writes, “The LORD says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.’” The right hand was a place of honor and authority, and so we read this as the Father saying to Jesus to reign over all (as he does from heaven), waiting for the day when every enemy would be crushed under his feet—including death itself.

Moreover, we’re told in verse 2 that Jesus would reign from Zion over all. David writes, “The LORD sends forth [extends] from Zion your mighty scepter. Rule in the midst of your enemies!” (v. 2). The scepter is a symbol of one’s authority or dominion to rule over an area. And so David is saying that the Father’s declaration that his Son would reign from his right hand is not limited to reigning over Jerusalem (i.e. Zion). Rather, his reign extends from Zion over his enemies, which would suggest over all the earth.

But not only that, we’re also told that he will have followers, or disciples. David writes in verse 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.” When the Messiah is given authority to reign over all, he will draw people to himself, who will happily employ themselves in service to him. And his reign will not grow old or dim, which is most likely what David means in his reference to the dew of youth belonging to the king. So, if we put this together, the one who comes as the Messiah—as promised all the way back in Genesis 3:15—will one day be installed

as a king, and his authority will be over all. He'll be given authority to reign over all his enemies, and his people will happily follow him and serve him in his reign.

Now, before we jump to the NT and consider Jesus and his reign, let's note that the OT itself repeats this idea of the Messiah's world-wide reign in other places. For example, in Daniel 7, Daniel tells us that he had a vision of one coming to reign. He writes, "I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion [i.e. authority] and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed" (Dan 7:13-14). And so, if we're careful readers of the OT, we're looking for the Messiah to come and be given authority to reign over all as he is seated at the right hand of God, to have followers worldwide who will gladly employ themselves in his service, and who will one day destroy every enemy who stands against him.

Now, let's consider the NT and what we see with Jesus. After his death by public crucifixion, you can see why many of his followers began to doubt that he was the promised Messiah—no matter how much they had thought so to that point. After all, watching a man die while hanging on a cross, drowning in his own blood, as a symbol of shame and embarrassment, hardly fits the description of the Messiah from Daniel 7 or Psalm 110. And yet, the resurrection confirms that he is. Three days later, Jesus walks out of the tomb alive, and in Matthew 28:18-20 he gathers his disciples and presents to them a mission, but before he does, note what he says of himself. He says in verse 18, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." Now, we might paraphrase that as saying, "My Father has said to me, 'Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool,'"—in the words of Psalm 110:1—or we might paraphrase Jesus' words as, "I've been given dominion and glory and a kingdom that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve me"—in the words of Daniel 7:14. After all, dominion is just another way of saying, "Authority."

Consequently, if the OT says that the Christ will reign, having authority over all, and will have a people from the whole world happily serve him as his followers, then his command to make disciples from all nations is anticipated, isn't it? We expect Jesus to say this if he's the one who fulfills Psalm 110 or Daniel 7, and that's exactly what he's doing in Matthew 28:18-20.

That's who Jesus is according to Psalm 110:1-3. He's the king over all, who reigns at the Father's right hand, is gathering a people who are happily employed in his service, and is waiting for the day that every enemy will be crushed under his feet, including Satan, sin, and death itself. But there's more that this psalm tells us. Psalm 110:4 reminds us that Jesus is our great high priest.

Jesus is our great high priest

After David opens the psalm with a declaration of the Father concerning his Son in verse 1 (i.e. "the Lord says to my Lord"), David notes another declaration of the Father concerning his Son in

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

Well, this brings up a lot of issues and questions. Let’s start with perhaps the most obvious one. Who is this Melchizedek character? Well, he’s only mentioned one other time in the OT, and that is back in Genesis 14 where Abraham has a brief encounter with this odd character who just appears in Genesis without mention of his father or mother, birth, or death, and yet he’s obviously a prominent character because he’s the king of Salem and a priest of the Most High God.

Now, here’s where I have to resist the temptation to preach from Hebrews 7, so I’ll direct you to two sermons I preached on that chapter, which takes a deep dive into Melchizedek.¹ But there are a couple of keys we need to know about him. First, he’s a figure who was a type or picture of Jesus. We know this because the author of Hebrews tells us when writing about Melchizedek that he resembles the Son of God. And there are numerous ways he resembles the Son of God, from the fact that there’s no record of his birth or death recorded in the Bible to the fact that the translation of his name from Hebrew means “king of righteousness.” And the second key is that he was both a king (again, the king of Salem, which surely is the same territory later known in David’s day as Jerusalem) and a priest.

You see, by the time the law of Moses was put in place, no man could hold the office of king and of priest. The Davidic king would come from the line of Judah, but the role of priest was reserved for those from the tribe of Levi. And yet as David writes Psalm 110:4, thinking of this figure from Genesis 14, he realizes that it isn’t an utter impossibility that one might be a king and a priest. In other words, the law of Moses isn’t written as it is because it was an impossibility. And if this figure who resembles and points to the Messiah in so many ways can be both, then surely so will the Messiah himself. And so the Lord allows David to see in this moment that his great son to come—the Christ—would not only be the king to reign at God’s right hand, but he would also be a priest—but not according to the Levitical priesthood, but after the order of Melchizedek. And so David writes, that the Lord has made an oath declaring that the Christ is a priest after the order of Melchizedek.

But not only that, he notes that he will live forever. After all, David writes that the Father tells him, “You are a priest *forever*,” and you can only be a priest forever if indeed you live forever. Consequently, we can say that Jesus is not only the king who reigns over the world, is gathering a people, and who will put all enemies under his feet, but we can also note that he is our high priest who lives forever.

But what does this mean for us? Well, in order to understand that, we need to consider what a high priest is. And Hebrews 5:1 tells us that a high priest is a man appointed to act on behalf of

¹ <https://cccjackson.org/sermons/melchizedek-and-the-superior-priesthood-of-christ-part-1> and <https://cccjackson.org/sermons/melchizedek-and-the-superior-priesthood-of-christ-part-2>.

men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. In other words, he's one who represents us before God in dealing with our sins. And typically the high priest would take a lamb, shed its blood, and offer it as a sacrifice to God to act as atonement for sins. Additionally, he would offer up prayers to God on behalf of the people he represents, interceding for them before God so that God might continue to dwell among them.

Now, let's consider Jesus as our high priest. He doesn't simply offer a sacrifice of a lamb or bull or the sort. When he goes to atone for our sins, he offers the perfect sacrifice of himself. He lays down his own life so that our sins might be atoned for. There is no sacrifice needed after that, since his death is perfect and once-for-all sufficient. Second, he then intercedes for us, and because he lives forever and serves as our high priest forever, he is able to intercede for us *forever*.

So what this means for us is that the one who is God's appointed king, who has dominion over all things, has died for us, been raised and seated at God's right hand, and is interceding for us forever so that every moment of our existence—both in this life and in the next—is filled with Jesus living as our representative before God and interceding for us so that we might know that we are forgiven and saved, and that it is forever. That's why it's important that Jesus is our high priest. If there were a lesser representative, we'd be in trouble. If there was a less-than-perfect sacrifice, we'd be in trouble. And if the one interceding for us ceased from being able to do that task for even one moment, we'd be in trouble. But Jesus is our perfect high priest in every way so that we might know that our salvation is sure and certain and that we are always approved of before our heavenly Father. So, Jesus is our king. He is our high priest. And he is the one who will conquer his enemies.

Jesus will conquer his enemies

David ends Psalm 110 by noting that the Christ will destroy his enemies, because the Lord will be at his right hand. He writes, "The Lord is at your right hand; he will shatter kings on the day of his wrath. 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" (vv. 5-7).

We are coming up on the time of year when we remember that Jesus came meek and mild, born as a baby to a virgin. But his second coming will not be like that. He will come as a warrior and judge, a king who is ready to put down his enemies. He will come shattering his enemies—to use the language of verse 6. And no one who has failed to take refuge in him will be exempt. David pictures the Lord filling the nations with corpses as he comes in wrath. And he will be satisfied in his work of judgment.

Now, we've mentioned this before that we don't often dwell or like to dwell on this reality, but God's work of saving his people involves the work of judging his enemies. Right now God's people are mocked and humiliated, suffer and are killed. But one day their vindicating king will

come and let his enemies know that they have not won. One day even Satan and sin and death will know that they do not reign.

And this means for us a few things. One, we need to make sure that we are seeking refuge in the Son. We need to make sure that we're trusting in the one who lived, died, was raised, and reigns at God's right hand for our salvation. We do not want to be found to be his enemies on the day of judgment. So repent and believe and cling to him as your only hope. Second, we need to preach the gospel and plead with others to bow the knee to him as well. One of the tasks of the great commission is to go to our neighbors and the nations with the message that Christ is king, is coming to judge his enemies, but has made a way for us to be reconciled to him if we'll bow the knee to him in faith. That is the nature of our evangelism. We're not offering a more convenient life or better way to handle the pressures of the world. We're holding out hope for men to be reconciled to the reigning king before he comes and brings his judgment on his enemies. And in that day it will have been better not to have been born than to be outside of Christ. And, finally, this should lead us to hope.

This life is full of sorrow. We see the reign of Satan, sin, and death all around us. Tragedy is seemingly followed by tragedy. Rebellion is constant. And yet it is coming to an end. Our lovely king and priest is coming. And when he comes to judge enemies, he is also coming to get us. So let us be ever faithful to love him with our hearts, souls, minds, and strength as we await that glorious day when his enemies will be made a footstool for his feet. And until then, we cry out with all the saints throughout the ages, "Lord, come quickly." Amen.