

Psalm 93
Psalm 93
John 18:28-19:16

“The LORD Reigns”

November 12, 2017

Zechariah 14:16 says that after the restoration of Jerusalem –
after the restoration of the Davidic king –
“Then everyone who survives of all the nations that have come against Jerusalem
shall go up year after year to worship the King,
the LORD of Hosts,
and to keep the Feast of Booths.”

The Feast of Booths (or “Tabernacles”) was in the seventh month – in the fall.
Because Jesus rose from the dead at Passover,
we tend to think a lot about Passover.
And because the Holy Spirit was sent at Pentecost,
we tend to think a lot about Pentecost.
But Tabernacles tends to be the forgotten feast –
since there is no major NT event that happens at Tabernacles.

But Zechariah says that Tabernacles will be the *major feast* after the coming of the Lord.
Not Passover (the feast of the Exodus), nor Pentecost (the feast of the Conquest),
but Tabernacles –
the feast that celebrated how the LORD dwelt with them in the wilderness.

And Zechariah tells us that the centerpiece of the celebration of the Feast of Booths,
is to worship the King, the LORD of hosts.

The fact that Psalms 93-100 all focus on this theme of the Lord as King
has led some to suspect that they were written for the Feast of Booths.
But whether they were written for that purpose or not,
they fit very well here in Book IV –
at a time when Israel has no king.
The Son of David was exiled by the Babylonians.
Now, after the exile, we are back in the land,
but we have no king...

at least, no earthly king.

Nonetheless, in spite of the fact that there is no king on the throne in Jerusalem,
there *is* a king who sits on his heavenly throne!

We certainly experience the tension that Psalm 93 is wrestling with.
Yes, Jesus is King.
We *have* a son of David who rules from his Father’s throne!

But we do *not* yet see everything under his feet.
This is the point that Hebrews 2 makes so beautifully.
Jesus is King – but his kingdom is still in process.

“At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him.
But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels,
namely Jesus,
crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death,
so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.” (Heb 2:8-9)

Sing Psalm 93
Read John 18:28-19:16

We are so used to reading this story through Christian eyes!
David Bentley Hart asks us to see this story through Roman eyes:

“On one side...there stands a man of noble birth,
one moreover invested with the full authority of the Roman Empire,
endowed with the sacred duty of imposing the *pax Romana* on a barbarous people
far too prone to religious fanaticism.
On the other side there stands a poor and quite probably demented colonial of obscure origins...”

<http://churchlife.nd.edu/2017/10/26/human-dignity-rarity-before-christianity/>

In the ancient world, there is no such thing as “human dignity.”
There is a great cosmic hierarchy that stretches from the gods down to the beasts –
and some men are higher than others on this chain!
Those men who are nearer the gods have every right and duty
to treat those who are lower
more like the beasts!

Indeed, you see this in Pilate’s claim that he has the power of life and death in his hand!

And Jesus’s response – namely,
“that Pilate possesses no powers not given him from above
would have sounded, at most, like comical impudence on the part of a lunatic.
Could any ancient witness to this scene...
have doubted on which side the full “truth” of things was to be found?
After all, what greater measure of reality is there,
in a world sustained by immutable hierarchies of social privilege,
than the power to judge and kill another person?”

In the ancient world,
few people thought twice about doing some cruel action to an innocent person –
so long as that innocent person was below you in the great chain of being.

As Hart puts it,
“Seen from within a certain pre-Christian vision of reality,
Pilate’s verdict is perfectly just,
not because it imposes a penalty “proportionate” to the “crime,”
but because it reaffirms the natural and divine order of reality.
In consigning a worthless man to an appropriately undignified death,
and in restoring order through the destruction of the agent of disorder,
it proclaims once again that the order of the state
and of the hierarchy of social power
is nothing less than the order of the gods
transcribed into its appropriate terrestrial expression.”

But God overturns the social hierarchies of this age.
The crucified slave turns out to be the Son of God!
The forsaken one reveals the face of God.

This is a social revolution that transforms everything!
“We do not laugh at “the man of sorrows”
draped in a mock robe
and pierced with a mock crown
and jocosely hailed as a king by his persecutors.
For us, this figure possesses a grandeur that would have been quite invisible
to our more distant ancestors,
an ironic beauty that entirely and irrevocably reverses the mockery.
It is not he who is absurd, but rather all those kings and emperors
who preposterously celebrate their pedigrees,
and who rejoice in their power to command and to kill,
and who are therefore unaware that the pompous symbols of greatness
in which they drape themselves are nothing more than rags and thorns.”

Because God came in the form of man –
and not the noblest and best of men –
but the lowest of men – even the form of a slave –
therefore *all human beings* have worth.

There is *no other foundation* for the idea of a universal human dignity
than the incarnation of the Word who became flesh.

And *that idea* is at the very heart of Psalm 93.
Psalm 93 is all about *majesty* and *might* and *holiness*.
But what do Majesty, Might, and Holiness look like?

And especially, what do Majesty, Might, and Holiness look like
when the *throne* is vacant?

After all, this is Book 4 of the Psalms – where there *is* no Davidic king!
What does it mean “The LORD reigns!”
when to all outward appearances,
the Kingdom of God is in shambles?

So let’s look at Psalm 93:

1. The LORD’s Robe: Majesty (v1a)

*The LORD reigns; he is robed in majesty;
the LORD is robed; he has put on strength as his belt.*

The LORD reigns.

That’s a good translation – in terms of meaning –
but it would be more accurate to say,
“the LORD has become King.”

Of course, that sounds rather strange!
The LORD has *become* King?
When was he *not* King?!

God has *always* been King

in terms of his sovereignty over all things
(and you see this in the discussion of creation in verses 1-2).

And yet, there is a distinction between God’s sovereign rule over all things,
and the coming of his *kingdom* on earth.

The Lord may be the *rightful* king,
but that does not mean that the nations have accepted his lawful rule!
And so long as the nations reject God as king,
we are living in a world that is in rebellion against its Creator and King!

So there is a sense in which God *is* king –
but there is also a sense in which God must *become* king
as he subdues the world to himself.

As one commentator puts it,
“after defeating in battle and casting out the prince of this world,
he has reduced under his sway the kingdom that was always his possession.”
(Neale, 203)

But what does it mean to be *robed* in majesty?
Well, as the following line indicates,
“the LORD is robed; he has put on strength as his belt.”

Think about how the image of the “belt” is used in scripture.

Isaiah 11:5 says that righteousness shall be the belt of his waist.
Isaiah 11 is all about the “shoot from the stump of Jesse” –
the restored Davidic King that will reign *after* the exile.
Isaiah 11 speaks of the sevenfold Spirit
that will rest upon the LORD’s anointed.
He is the one who will have righteousness as the belt of his waist.

Now, Psalm 93 is operating in the context of a vacant throne in Jerusalem.
But Psalm 93 is also operating in the context of a *promised* heir of David
that will be endowed with the sevenfold-Spirit of God.

So Psalm 93 not only speaks of God’s eternal majesty.
It also speaks of God’s majesty *as the one who is becoming king* –
the one who is enthroned in history.

Sure, the incarnation hadn’t happened yet.
But the incarnation is the *only way* that Psalm 93 can be true.
The only way for God to become King in history
is for the eternal Son of God to take our flesh and bear our frailty.

I want you to take seriously what Psalm 93 is doing in Book 4:
Israel is confessing *The LORD reigns* – when his promises *are not happening on earth!*
Psalm 93 is *not saying* “we don’t need a Son of David because we have God!”

No!!

Remember what we’ve seen over the last two weeks from Psalms 91-92 –
there is that first person singular voice that has spoken in each Psalm:
“the LORD is *my rock*” –
and because there is the ONE for whom God is Rock –
to put it bluntly: because *Jesus* has found God to be *his* Rock,
therefore we have confidence that God will deliver us!

We don’t see a world that submits to God’s rule!
We see a world that continues to spiral out of control!

In that sense, we live very much in a world like Book 4 of the Psalms –
and for that matter – a world very much like Hebrews 2 –

We don’t yet see everything in subjection under his feet!

But we see *Jesus* –
the one who came in our flesh – the one robed in humanity’s weakness –
which thus became his majesty!

As the LORD has become King!

2. The LORD's Throne: From Before the Foundation of the World (v1b-2)

Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved.

² *Your throne is established from of old;
you are from everlasting.*

Verses 1-2 then talk about the world and God's throne.

The world is established – it shall never be moved.

(This verse was used by those who wanted to say that the sun goes around the earth – but plainly “shall never be moved” has nothing to do with planetary motion!)

Rather, the point is that *God* has established the earth.

The world doesn't do *anything* outside of God's rule!

But the same word is used to refer to how God's *throne* is established.

Think about it.

The world is established.

God's throne is established.

And God *himself* is from everlasting!

God's works are consistent with God's nature.

The work of creation reveals who God is.

God's continued work of providence also reveals who God is.

Think of all the complexity of the universe!

Consider the immense power of galaxies –
the vastness of space and time!

All of this was created by God, and continues to be governed by his mighty Word.

But God's works are consistent with God's nature!

And so we should expect to see God's throne established in weakness.

Think of how God began to defeat the Philistines!

Samson was humbled, captured, and blinded.

Only then did he cast down the Philistine temple –
dying in the midst of his triumph!

Or a few years later, when the ark of the covenant was captured –
and the symbol of God's presence was humiliated –
brought into the temple of Dagon!

But what happened?

The image of Dagon fell to the ground before the ark of Yahweh!

God himself went before his people to defeat their enemies.

But how did he defeat their enemies?

Through his *own* humiliation!

Yes, there is a majesty of splendor and glory –
but you only get there through humiliation and suffering.

Yes, there is a resurrection –
but you only get there through the cross!

We see the Might of the LORD in verses 3-4

3. The LORD's Might: Mightier Than the Floods (v3-4)

³ *The floods have lifted up, O LORD,
the floods have lifted up their voice;
the floods lift up their roaring.*

The term translated “floods” is the ordinary word for rivers.
The reason why “floods” is appropriate is because the image here
is of the rivers lifting up their *waves* (the word means “crushing” or “dashing”).
So we are not talking about an ordinary river flowing peacefully along!

This is more like the terrifying power of a river at full flood stage –
overflowing its banks and dashing everything to pieces.

The hillsides of Israel are well-known for their flash-floods.
Have you ever seen a flash flood?
The rain can be elsewhere – so it can even happen on a sunny day!
But all the rain in the distant hills can gather together into a mighty torrent
and wash out everything in its path!

That's what seems to have happened in the book of Judges –
when Sisera was overthrown by Deborah and Barak.
When Deborah told Barak to take his stand on the hilltop,
Barak thought she was crazy.
Sure, they were safe from the Syrian chariots as long as they stayed on top of the hill,
but at *some point* they had to come down!

But then the heavens fought for Israel!
A flash flood turned the little brook Kishon
(it's what is called a “wadi” – a dry river bed)
into a raging torrent –
and the chariots of Sisera got stuck in the mud.
All of a sudden, the invincible chariots of Sisera were transformed into infancy.
And heavy infantry stuck in the mud is vulnerable to light infantry!

That is the sort of flood that the Psalmist is speaking of!

And yet the LORD is mightier still!

⁴ *Mightier than the thunders of many waters,
mightier than the waves of the sea,
the LORD on high is mighty!*

When it comes to creaturely things that you are likely to encounter in person,
the thunders of many waters, the crashing waves of the sea
are likely one of the mightiest things that you will see up close!

Have you ever stood entranced by the crashing waves,
pounding the rocks on the shore?

Sure, a strong wind can do a lot of damage.
But the relentless pounding of the waters wreaks *havoc* on anything!
Waves pound away at the cliffs – and the cliffs fall into the sea!
At the same time, the rivers carve away the land,
and deposit silt at the ocean's edge –
adding miles and miles to a river's length!
(The city of Ur, in Abraham's day, was near the sea –
today the site is 150 *miles* from the Persian Gulf!
The only reason why the city of Ur is now 150 miles from the sea,
is because the Euphrates River keeps depositing silt!)

We are mesmerized by the power and might of water in action!

But mightier than the thunders of many waters,
mightier than the waves of the sea,
the LORD on high is mighty!

Think of the armies of Egypt – and how the thundering waves overwhelmed them!
Think of the great Flood in Noah's day – and how the waters drowned them.
The LORD is King.
The LORD *reigns!*

And yet, the Lord commanded us to use *water* in baptism.
1 Peter 3 uses the imagery of the Flood as a type of baptism.
1 Corinthians 10 uses the imagery of the Red Sea as a picture of baptism.

In your baptism, the waters of judgment – the mighty waters –
come crashing down on your head!

How can you survive the Flood?!
When the mighty waters come crashing down on you –
how can you survive?

Only because there was *one* who went before you!
Only because at the Jordan River,
 Jesus was baptized by John.
The One who was with the Father before all ages –
 he was baptized for us – *he* passed through the waters of judgment!
And because *Jesus* has passed through water and fire
 therefore the water of baptism *cleanses* us –
 and the fire of the Holy Spirit *purifies* us!

And that's where we go in verse 5:

4. The LORD's Decrees: Holiness (v5)

⁵ *Your decrees are very trustworthy;
holiness befits your house,
O LORD, forevermore.*

It may seem odd to shift from seas to decrees in verses 4-5,
but then again, Psalm 19 had spoken of the sun moving in its course,
and then shifts to God's law.
Psalm 93 does the same sort of thing!

As one commentator puts it:

The Psalmist is saying that “there is a correspondence between the Lord himself,
his attributes, and his works,
 which makes the transition easy between one sort of reality and another.
The world the Lord has created,
his own inherent greatness,
 and the laws he has uttered,
 may all be described with equal truth as *firmly established*.
When God's Spirit reshapes people's lives according to those laws,
the result is a holiness that is equally permanent,
 and will adorn God's house *for endless days*.” (Wright, 86)

It's important to see how holiness relates to the whole Psalm!

The LORD is robed in majesty – the idea of holiness includes the idea of splendor!
 (Think of the seraphim declaring “Holy, Holy, Holy is the LORD God Almighty,
 The whole earth is full of his glory!”
Holiness includes the majestic splendor of God!

But of course, as we have seen throughout this sermon,
God's majesty is seen precisely in his humility –
 in the incarnation – and in the resurrection – of Jesus.

And holiness also includes a moral quality.

The decrees of God – his rules, his statutes – are trustworthy.
God’s way of doing things is trustworthy.
As the incarnation reminds us,
sometimes God’s ways seem very strange!

And that is no less true today!
Devoting ourselves to the apostles teaching and fellowship,
to the breaking of bread, and the prayers,
does not seem very exciting in our day!

Now devoting ourselves to the teaching and fellowship of Notre Dame football,
to the tailgating and cheering on the Fighting Irish!
That seems exciting!!

Many have pointed out that we catechize our children into our devotion for sports
far better than we catechize our children into our devotion for Jesus!

But where does it lead?
We are willing to endure great physical pain for the sake of sport –
but are we willing to endure *anything* for the sake of holiness?

Think about what Paul says to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:8
“train yourself for godliness;
for while bodily training is of some value,
godliness is of value in every way,
as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.”

Godliness – piety is actually a really good translation here –
piety means a life that is characterized by love for God and neighbor –
a life that is lived in proper harmony with God and others.

That sort of godliness is of value in every way!

And that’s *exactly* what Psalm 93:5 is saying:
“holiness befits your house, O LORD, forevermore.”

Holiness certainly has a moral quality to it.
(That’s why it occurs in the context of talking about God’s decrees!)
But holiness befits God’s house –
and you *are* that house!
This again is temple language –
but temple language applied to the people of God.
(In Joshua’s words, “As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”)

Consider the way that you are leading your family!

As for me and my house, we will serve...

Well, whom do you serve?

If you look at the way that you use your time –
what do you *devote* yourselves to?

I fear that most of us – and I include myself in this! –
most of us have a pretty mixed track record!

God decrees are very trustworthy.

Holiness befits your house, O LORD, forevermore.