

Psalm 47 “The King of All the Earth”
Psalm 47
Matthew 21:1-17

August 5, 2012

Introduction

What does it mean to say “Jesus is Lord”?
What sort of kingdom do we pray for when we pray,
“Thy kingdom come”?

There is a current debate within the Reformed and Presbyterian churches
regarding the “two kingdoms.”

I think everyone agrees that there *are* two kingdoms:
but people can mean different things by this!

Some would say that the two kingdoms are the church and the state.
Certainly it is important to distinguish between church and state.
There are two distinct governments, civil government and church government:
the state should not try to run the church,
and the church should not try to run the state.

But it is not quite accurate to say that “church” and “state” are the “two kingdoms” –
because scripture does not portray “all the nations of the earth”
as a single kingdom,
except insofar as the kingdoms of the earth submit to the Lord’s anointed!

We get a little more help from Augustine.

Augustine spoke in the City of God about the “two cities” –
the City of God and the City of Man –
for Augustine, the City of God is the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem;
and the City of Man is the City of Destruction.

For Augustine, the City of God is roughly identical to the church,
but the City of Man is implacably opposed to God,
and is in rebellion against him.

So for Augustine, if you are a citizen of the City of Man,
then your destiny is eternal destruction!

As Augustine put it,

“The city of the saints is above, although here below it begets citizens,
in whom it sojourns till the time of its reign arrives,
when it shall gather together all in the day of the resurrection;
and then shall the promised kingdom be given to them,
in which they shall reign with their Prince, the King of the ages,
time without end.” (City of God, XV.1)

As we see in Psalm 47,

Augustine is thinking more biblically about the “two cities” – the two kingdoms – than most of those that have followed him.

So let us sing Psalm 47 to our Lord Jesus Christ
who is now “the great king over all the earth...Sing praises to our King!”

Sing Psalm 47

Read Matthew 21:1-17

Psalm 47 is all about the enthronement of God.

This may sound a little odd!
After all, God rules over all things –
and always has!

So why would Psalm 47 say that Yahweh has “gone up with the sound of a trumpet”?

It is not that God has only just *become* king.

But rather, the image is that of a conquering king returning to his city.
The triumphant king would return with great rejoicing,
and would go up with great fanfare to his throne.

No one imagined that his “going up” to his throne meant that he had only now “become” king.

There’s a hymn that expresses this idea very well:

#163 – “At the Name of Jesus”

In the third stanza it speaks of how Christ passed through death victorious.
And then in the fourth stanza, it addresses us:

“4. In your hearts enthrone him; there let him subdue
all that is not holy, all that is not true:
crown him as your Captain in temptation's hour:
let his will enfold you in its light and power.”

You might ask,

“How can *we* enthrone Jesus?”

In precisely the same way that Israel could in Psalm 47.

We declare the glory of the triumphant King as he sits on his holy throne.

Inscription:

The inscription of Psalm 47 reads:

“To the choirmaster. A Psalm of the Sons of Korah.”

The Sons of Korah were a family of Levitical musicians in the temple.

There are two collections of their Psalms in the Psalter:

Psalms 42-49, and Psalms 84-85, 87-88.

When we went through book III of the Psalter a couple years ago,

I suggested that there are some remarkable parallels between these two collections

Psalms 42-49 are the opening songs of Book 2 of the Psalter.

Psalms 84-89 are the closing songs of Book 3 of the Psalter.

Now, what do I mean by “book 2” and “book 3?”

Well, just as there are five books of Moses,
so also there are five books of Psalms.

And there is something of a story line to these five books.

Book I covers Psalms 1-41, and is made up primarily of Psalms of David.

Book II goes from Psalms 42-72,

and includes several Psalms of Asaph and the Sons of Korah.

Books I and II appear to be the oldest collections in the Psalter,

and they emphasize God’s covenant faithfulness to Israel
up to the time of David and Solomon.

Indeed, Book II concludes with Solomon’s great royal psalm that we sang earlier,

Psalms 72, that celebrates God’s faithfulness to David.

Book III, Psalms 73-89, then wrestles with the problem that David’s kingdom has failed –
does that mean that God’s promises have failed?

Book IV, Psalms 90-106, answers by refocusing on the kingship of God,
and God’s faithfulness through all of Israel’s history.

Book V, then, Psalms 107-150, contains several collections,
including several wisdom Psalms, the Songs of Ascents, etc.,
before concluding in a crescendo of praise in Psalms 145-150.

We’ll be spending the next few weeks in Book II.

Book II of the Psalter (42-72) opens with a number of Psalms of the Sons of Korah (42-49),
followed by a Psalm of Asaph (Psalm 50),

and then a collection of (mostly) Davidic Psalms (51-70),
and closing with Solomon’s one Psalm (72).

These Psalms have a number of phrases that connect them:

The phrase “the living God” occurs only in Psalms 42 and 84.

The idea of “appearing before God” (or seeing God) in Psalms 42 and 84
is only found in these Psalms.

The phrase “your tabernacles” occurs only in Psalms 43, 46, 84, 87 (and 132).
(It’s other usage is found in Ezekiel 37).

The phrase “city of God” is found in Psalms 46, 48, and 87 (nowhere else in OT).

“LORD of hosts” is only used in the psalms in 24, 46, 48, 69, and 84,

and the Sons of Korah always use the phrase “God of Jacob” –
rather than “God of Israel.”

The Psalms of the Sons of Korah are mostly designed for public ritual:

Psalm 42 remembers leading the people in public procession to the house of God.

Psalm 44 is a national lament.

Psalm 45 is a royal wedding song.

Psalm 46 is the people’s “hymn of confidence”

Psalm 47 is their celebration of Yahweh’s kingship.

Psalm 48 is their celebration of Yahweh’s city.

Psalm 49 then addresses the nations

with a call to heed wisdom in the face of death.

Today we are focusing on Psalm 47 –

the celebration of Yahweh as the “great king over all the earth.”

1. “A Great King Over All the Earth”: The Inheritance of Jacob (v1-4)

Clap your hands, all peoples!

Shout to God with loud songs of joy!

² *For the LORD, the Most High, is to be feared,
a great king over all the earth.*

³ *He subdued peoples under us,
and nations under our feet.*

⁴ *He chose our heritage for us,
the pride of Jacob whom he loves. Selah*

In the ancient world there are “kings” and there are “great kings.”

Any petty chieftain who ruled a tiny piece of land could be called a king

(think of the kings of Judah after the division of the kingdom,

ruling over a region the size of St. Joe and LaPorte counties together!),

but you would never call yourself a “great king”

unless you controlled a large number of lesser kings.

The only earthly ruler called a “great king” in the Bible is Sennacherib (2 Kings 18:19),

though Jeremiah says that it would take many “great kings”

to overthrow Nebuchadnezzar (Jer 27:7).

If you are a great king, then you have the power to enforce treaties/covenants on lesser kings.

Indeed, no king claiming this title could tolerate competition!

And that is why the only time you ever hear someone *besides Yahweh*

called a “great king” in the Bible,

it is on the lips of an unbeliever!

God alone is truly a great king over all the earth!

But notice *why* the Psalmist says that Yahweh is a great king:
“He subdued peoples under us, and nations under our feet.”

The occasion for this song is the triumph of God over the nations.
Indeed, part of the way that God demonstrates his kingship over all the earth
is by giving his people victory over the mighty nations
who sought to devour Israel.

And the “shout” in Hebrew is often associated with the battle cry –
and when you look at the context,
you can see that there is a connection to the battle cry here.
After all, the reason why we are shouting “with loud songs of joy”
is because “he subdued peoples under us.”

Notice the verbs in verses 3-4 – the things that God has done:
He *subdued* peoples under us, and nations under our feet.
He *chose* our heritage for us,
the pride of Jacob whom he *loves*.

All of these things exhibit the kingship of God:
the great king subdues his enemies;
the great king portions out the heritage for his people;
and the great king provides particularly for those *he loves*.

God’s mighty deeds in history are all designed for the benefit of those he loves.

(Think of Paul’s statement in Ephesians 1:4-5,
“he chose us in him before the foundation of the world...
In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ...”
or in Ephesians 1:22,
“He put all things under his feet
and gave him as head over all things to the church,
which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.”)

We saw earlier that the Sons of Korah prefer speaking of “Jacob” instead of “Israel,”
so when they say “the pride of Jacob,”
we should think of this in terms the twelve tribes united under David.

Now, a word on “pride” here in verse 4 of Psalm 47.
This word *can* be used to mean the “arrogance” and pride of the nations.
Or it can refer to the “majesty” and excellence of God.
So it probably should be understood here to say that this is the
“splendor” of Jacob (that’s the route the LXX took).
You could even say, “the beauty of Jacob whom he loves.”

God has made his people beautiful – glorious – majestic.

So the first point that we see in verses 1-4
is that God is a great king over all the earth, subduing the nations
for the sake of the beauty of Jacob, whom he loves.

Do you hear that?
God's mighty deeds in history –
his wondrous works in Jesus Christ on the cross –
were done because he *loves you!*

And therefore *all peoples* should clap their hands,
because the LORD is a great king.

So the two kingdoms in Psalm 47 are Israel and “all the earth.”
But how are these two kingdoms related?

In verses 5-7 you see this distinction fleshed out,
as “Our King” in verse 6 is also “the King of all the earth” in verse 7.

2. “The King of All the Earth”: The Ascension of Yahweh (v5-7)

⁵ *God has gone up with a shout,
the LORD with the sound of a trumpet.*

⁶ *Sing praises to God, sing praises!
Sing praises to our King, sing praises!*

⁷ *For God is the King of all the earth;
sing praises with a psalm!*

“God has gone up with a shout.”

The shout is the war cry – which when uttered in times of peace
is a triumphant declaration of victory.

“the LORD with the sound of a trumpet”

James Newcomb gave us a demonstration of the *shophar* last Saturday.

It was not used as a melody instrument in those days,
but in order to blow loud blasts,
whether to call people to battle, to retreat,
or to summon people to worship and praise.

And, one of the chief reasons to worship God
is in order to celebrate his mighty victories.

In Psalm 47, the *shophar* is sounded because God has ascended –
he had descended –
he had “come down” in wrath against his foes,

and has subdued them under the feet of his people;
now he has arisen in triumph over his enemies,
and is once again seated in glory over all the earth.

Ernst Hengstenberg correctly notes,
“the going up of God to heaven, is his return to his heavenly throne,
his invisible procession to heaven,
which takes place after he had displayed on earth by outward deeds
his almightiness and love,
and carried there the interests of his people,
as a prelude to the ascension of Christ.” (158)

And so, in verse 6, the Sons of Korah call out:
“Sing praises to God, sing praises!
Sing praises to our King, sing praises!”
The fourfold repetition of “sing praises” – with a fifth repetition in verse 7 –
drives home the command.

How much do you sing?
Nowadays we tend to listen to a lot of music,
but we don’t do a whole lot of singing ourselves.
For some people, singing in church is the only place they ever sing!

Paul would find that strange.
He commands us to “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly,
teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom,
singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,
with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” (Col 3:16)

Notice that he’s not talking about what you do in the worship service on Sunday!
He’s talking about how you speak to one another!
He envisions that you will do the sort of thing in each other’s homes
that he did with Silas in the Philippian jail –
singing Psalms of praise to Christ.

John Chrysostom tells how in the 4th century
Christian parents taught the Psalms to their children.
(They may not have had “congregational singing” like ours –
but it’s clear that families would sing together!)

There are stories from England in the 1560s
of whole villages gathering on Sunday afternoons,
learning how to sing the Psalms together.
Indeed, much of my own love for the Psalms

came from singing them on Sunday afternoons at the Allison's place
during my first year at Notre Dame.

So, my question for you is: are you singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs in your home?

Are you singing praises to your King daily?

The music that lives in you will be the music that governs you.

(That's not to say that you can only listen to "Christian music" –
but it is to say that whatever you soak in
will be what you smell like!)

3. "God Reigns Over the Nations": the People of the God of Abraham (v8-9)

⁸ *God reigns over the nations;*

God sits on his holy throne.

⁹ *The princes of the peoples gather*

as the people of the God of Abraham.

For the shields of the earth belong to God;

he is highly exalted!

God is our king.

And that is the central point.

But not only is God *our* king –

he is also "king of all the earth."

So far we could think that *maybe* God is king over the nations only as Creator and sovereign.

But he is king over Israel – his people whom he loves – as Redeemer.

Indeed, some have argued that Christ is king over the church as Redeemer,

but king over the nations as Creator.

Of course, what this would mean is that Christ is king over the nations only as God,

and not as man.

Verses 8-9 help point us in the right direction:

The cry, "God reigns over the nations"

could actually be translated, "God has become king over the nations."

You might say, "but God has always been king over the nations!"

But the point of verse 8 is not that God has always been king.

The point of verse 8 is that *God has done something in history*

that has established his reign in a way that it wasn't before.

So – what is Psalm 47 pointing to?

What had God done that he hadn't done before?

Many scholars have chased rabbit trails on this one!
They try to find a particular event that the Sons of Korah are commemorating.
But that fails to do justice to the purpose and function of the Psalms.
Even when Psalms were written for a particular purpose
(e.g., Psalm 45 may well have been written for Solomon's wedding),
they were also written for Israel to keep singing over the centuries.
If the Sons of Korah didn't think that it was important to name that event,
then we probably shouldn't try to reconstruct it!

Instead, we should look at what they *do* say!

For instance, they talk about "the princes of the people
gathering as the people of the God of Abraham." (v9)

This is one of only two Psalms that name Abraham!

We should immediately think about God's promise to Abraham
the promise of the land, of the seed, and of the blessing to the nations.
God told Abraham that "those who bless you will be blessed,
and those who curse you, I will curse."

There are lots of events worthy of this sort of commemoration.

Two are especially appropriate:

the Conquest – where God subdued the nations under Israel's feet;
and the reign of David – where many nations humbled themselves
and accepted the rule of David – the Seed of Abraham –
and embraced (in some sense) the promise to Abraham!

Of course, there are many other times

when various nations humbled themselves before the Son of David.

⁹ *The princes of the peoples gather
as the people of the God of Abraham.
For the shields of the earth belong to God;
he is highly exalted!*

But what would it mean for the "princes of the peoples" to gather
"as the people of the God of Abraham"?

Derek Kidner suggests that "The innumerable princes and peoples are to become one people;
and they will no longer be outsiders but within the covenant:

this is implied in their being called the people of the God of Abraham.

It is the abundant fulfillment of the promise of Genesis 12:3;

it anticipates what Paul expounds of the inclusion of the Gentiles
as Abraham's sons (Rom. 4:11; Gal. 3:7-9).

But characteristically the psalm relates this to its theme, the kingly glory of God.

Its comment is not 'the nations will be at peace', true though it would be,

but instead, he is highly exalted....
Meanwhile the gospel will reveal the unexpected kind of 'exaltation'
which will begin the process of 'gathering' the peoples:
'I, when I am lifted up . . . , will draw all men to myself' (Jn. 12;32). (p. 178)

The lifting up of Jesus on the cross is the beginning of his exaltation –
because the cross is the place where he subdues the powers of sin and death,
where he crushes the head of the serpent under his feet.

And then, after he triumphed over the powers on the cross,
after he humbled himself "becoming obedient to the point of death,
even death on a cross,"
then, in his resurrection and ascension,
"God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,
so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2:8-11)

This is what Zechariah spoke of when he said,
"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."

Zechariah was speaking of the restoration from exile –
how God would redeem his people
"because of the blood of my covenant with you,
I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.
Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope;
today I declare that I will restore to you double."
The double portion of the firstborn –
the double portion that we saw a couple weeks ago in Job's restoration –
is what Jesus received in his resurrection.

As Zechariah 9:10 says,
"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."

In other words, the universal rule of God as the Great King over all the earth
is precisely what this king who rides a donkey shall wield.

And this is what Matthew cites regarding the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem.
The kingdom of Jesus is nothing less than a world-wide universal kingdom

which includes all of his people in all times and places.

This kingdom is not be contrasted with the “state” –
but with the kingdom of Satan.

And, as Abraham Kuyper said so well,
“there is not a square inch in the whole domain of human existence
over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, ‘Mine!’”

The whole idea of the “new creation” is the restoration and renewal of the first creation,
which, as Kuyper put it, “always involves the struggle with and the atonement
for the sin that incessantly seeks its ruin (*Pro Rege*, 3.23).”

Psalm 47 does not go into all the details of what this looks like.

We’ll get some help in coming weeks as we look at other Psalms
that deal with aspects of the kingship of Christ,
but Psalm 47 prepares us to see
what Zechariah 9 and Matthew 21 show us more fully:

Christ is King.

It is not the eternal Son of God is king over the nations,
and Jesus is Lord over the church!

No, Jesus Christ is King over all!

One place where this is clearly seen is in Colossians 1:13ff

Paul says that God the Father
“has delivered us from the domain of darkness
and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son,
in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

Right there you see that Paul is talking about “two kingdoms”
in terms of the “domain of darkness” and the kingdom of Christ
(very much like Augustine’s two cities).

But then in verses 15-17 Paul goes on to talk about this “beloved Son”:

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.
For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth,
visible and invisible,
whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities –
all things were created through him and for him.
And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”

Plainly these are things that the “beloved Son” did *before* he came in the flesh.
So it is certainly true that the Son of God was the agent of creation
before he was the incarnate Word.

But then listen to verses 18-20 –

“And he is the head of the body, the church.
He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead,
that in everything he might be preeminent.
For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,
and through him to reconcile to himself all things,
whether on earth or in heaven,
making peace by the blood of his cross.”

So although the beloved Son was Lord of Creation from the beginning,
he is *now* King and Lord of all the earth
in a way that he was not before!

But it’s not that he rules over the nations *now* as God,
and only rules the church as the Lord Jesus Christ!

No, as Paul says in Ephesians 1:22-23,
God “put all things under his feet and gave him as head over *all things* to the church,
which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.”

In other words, the church is now supposed to be a place where the glorious Kingdom of Jesus
is beginning to take shape.