

"HIS THRONE SHALL BE ESTABLISHED FOREVER"

I. Introduction

- A. As I was thumbing through a homeschool catalogue this week, the title of one of the articles caught my eye.
1. It was called, "The Only Great King."
 2. When I turned to the article, I discovered to my surprise that it was about Alfred the Great, the ninth century king who is the only English monarch to be called "great."
 3. He is known as Alfred the Great because he was distinguished by his love of learning and his sincere piety.
 4. Still, there is really only one figure who can rightly be called "The Only Great King," and that, of course, is Jesus Christ.
- B. Psalm 89 points us to Christ our king, but it does so in a rather peculiar way.
1. It is obviously based on the covenant that God established with David in 2 Samuel 7.
 2. Psalm 89 stresses the certainty of God's covenant with David, declaring that the only way that covenant can be broken is if God were to lie, something that is utterly impossible.
 3. At the same time, this psalm faces up to the fact that at that particular point in Israel's history, God's promises seemed to be in doubt.
 4. In other words, Psalm 89 points us to Christ by dealing with the theological crisis that we experience when it appears that God is not being faithful to his word.

II. The Covenant-Making God (1-18)

- A. The psalm begins by focusing on the God who established the covenant with David.
1. The opening lines are especially significant.
 2. Here we see God's people expressing their intention to spend all eternity giving voice to the praise of God.
 3. They declare, "I will sing of the steadfast love of the LORD forever; with my mouth I will make known your faithfulness to all generations."
 4. Those words need to be read in light of the dark mood that dominates the psalm's closing section.
 5. Even though God's people are experiencing a crisis of faith, a crisis in which their experience does not seem to be measuring up to God's promises, they are still intent on giving glory to the Lord.
 6. This is an important lesson for us to take to heart.
 7. What do you do when you are faced with a crisis of faith?
 8. You might be tempted to say, 'I just don't feel like going to church today. I can't worship God in light of what I am experiencing. I don't see any point in praying or reading the Bible.'
 9. But God's Word calls you to remain steadfast in giving glory to God, even in the face of severe trials and the questions that they raise.
 10. At such times, your response is to be the same as that of Job when he declared of God, "Though he slay me, I will hope in him" (Job 13:15)
- B. We see a further affirmation of faith in verse 2, where the psalmist expresses his confidence that God's covenant love will continue until it

reaches its consummation.

1. This is underscored by the repetition of the words “steadfast love” and “faithfulness” all throughout this psalm.
 2. This places a strong emphasis on the reliability of God’s promises.
 3. God will be true to what he has said.
 4. Notice how the psalmist reminds himself of this in verses 2 and 3.
 5. In verse 2, he addresses himself, saying, “*For I said, ‘Steadfast love will be built up forever.’*”
 6. And then in verse 3, he says to God, “*You have said, ‘I have made a covenant with my chosen one.’*”
 7. This is how we stir up our faith.
 8. When our experience does not seem to line up with what God’s Word tells us, we need to remind ourselves of what it is that God has told us in his Word, and then we need to pray those things back to God.
- C. David’s name first appears in verse 3, where the Lord calls him, “my chosen one.”
1. This calls our attention to the gracious nature of God’s covenant with David.
 2. It was not because the Lord saw something special in David that he chose him.
 3. This was made clear at the time of David’s anointing.
 4. Unlike Saul and David’s older brothers, David did not possess the outward qualities that people in that day identified as kingly.
 5. David was Jesse’s youngest son, and he was a keeper of the flocks.

6. Of course it is true that God refers to David as a man after his own heart, but the only reason why this was the case was because God gave David a new heart.
 7. David's natural heart was polluted by sin.
 8. This was made abundantly clear when he committed his sin with Bathsheba.
 9. And when the prophet Nathan confronted him for that sin, he expressed his repentance by praying, "Create in me a clean heart, O God." (Ps. 51:10)
 10. The cause of God's covenant with David was not anything in David, but the grace of divine election.
- D. In verses 5 through 13, the psalmist focuses upon God's greatness and power.
1. God is worshipped by the angelic hosts.
 2. His glory is awe-inspiring and unparalleled, even among those heavenly beings.
 3. God displays his might in his works in nature and in his governance of history.
 4. The point being made in these verses is that nothing in all creation can prevent the Lord from doing what he says he will do.
- E. In verses 14 through 18, the psalmist highlights the blessings that come upon those who enjoy communion with the one true God.
1. The throne of his kingdom is founded upon righteousness and justice.
 2. All of his ways are characterized by his steadfast love and his faithfulness.

3. In light of this, those who worship and serve him live in the light of his face, and they are strengthened and protected by his mighty arm.

III. The Substance of the Covenant (19-37)

- A. After directing our attention to the God who made the covenant with David, the psalmist next provides a summary of the substance of what was promised in this covenant.
 1. This is the focus in verses 19 through 37.
 2. This section draw significantly from the story of David's anointing in 1 Samuel 16 and from the oracle that was delivered to David through Nathan in 2 Samuel 7.
 3. We are reminded here of God's choice of David, God's empowerment of David, God's protection over David, and the victories that God granted to David.
 4. We are also told that God's covenant with David included the promise that he would be counted as God's firstborn.
 5. In the ancient world, the firstborn son had special inheritance rights and was in a preeminent position.
 6. He became the head of the family when the father died, and he received a double portion of the inheritance.
 7. In calling King David his firstborn, God was promising to make him king over all the earth.
- B. The remainder of this section stresses the unbreakable nature of the promises that God set forth in his covenant with David.
 1. This covenant cannot be annulled by death, because God will establish David's offspring forever.
 2. This covenant cannot even be annulled by sin.

3. God was realistic about the fact that David's descendants would commit sin, but he also made it clear that this would not bring an end to the covenant.
4. When his offspring violate God's statutes, they will be punished.
5. This even applied to David's most famous offspring, to Jesus himself.
6. Though Jesus had no sin of his own, he was punished when our sins and transgressions were laid upon him.
7. Yet far from bringing an end to the covenant, that was God's means of fulfilling it.
8. Lastly, God told David that his covenant with him cannot be annulled by time.
9. David's throne will endure forever.
10. Its continuation is as certain as the sun and moon hanging in the skies.

IV. The Covenant in Doubt? (38-52)

- A. This brings us to the final section of the psalm, which begins in verse 38.
 1. Here we are confronted by a jarring contrast with what was said in the first 37 verses of this psalm.
 2. Those preceding verses were a celebration, but the remainder of the psalm is a lament.
 3. Take note of the literary artistry that the psalmist employs to set this contrast.
 4. Previously, the Lord was quoted as saying, "I will not remove from him my steadfast love or be false to my faithfulness. I will not violate my covenant or alter the word that went forth from my

lips.”

5. But this section begins with the psalmist saying, “you have cast off and rejected; you are full of wrath against your anointed. You have renounced the covenant with your servant; you have defiled his crown in the dust.”
 6. This is a theological crisis.
 7. God does not appear to be doing what he said he would do.
 8. Instead, it seems that he is doing the very things that he said he would not do.
- B. Now, we do not know the particular situation that gave rise to the writing of this psalm.
1. It appears to have been written sometime after the last of Judah’s kings was carried off into captivity.
 2. But the point that the psalmist makes abundantly clear is that God is behind whatever it is that has taken place.
 3. This is emphasized by the repetition of the word “you” in verses 38 through 45.
 4. “You have breached all his walls.”
 5. “You have exalted the right hand of his foes.”
 6. “You have made his splendor to cease.”
 7. “You have covered him with shame.”
 8. God is the one who has brought the Davidic dynasty to this low point.
- C. It is important for us to understand why this was such a big deal to the people of God.

1. The promises that God made to David were not just about David and the dynastic line that he produced.
 2. All of God's people have an interest in the promises that God made to David.
 3. Those promises were not ultimately about an earthly kingdom.
 4. They were about the kingdom of God.
 5. Because of this, during the Old Testament administration of the covenant of grace, the hope of having an inheritance in God's kingdom was bound up with the line of David.
 6. The psalmist and his fellow Israelites were experiencing a theological crisis because there was no heir of David on the throne.
 7. As far as they could tell, the Davidic dynasty had come to an end.
 8. But how could this be, when God had said that it would never end?
- D. This leads to the questions that are asked in verses 46 through 49.
1. These verses show us that it is not a sin to ask God questions in times of crisis.
 2. After all, when Jesus was dying on the cross he asked a question of God, saying, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mt. 27:46)
 3. Jesus did not ask that question out of unbelief.
 4. He asked it out of faith.
 5. The same can be said of the questions that are asked of God in this psalm.
 6. The fact that the psalmist asks "How long?" is a clear indication that he has not turned his back on God.

7. He refuses to believe that God will not be faithful to what he has promised.
 8. While Israel's present experience does not line up with God's promises, he expects the Lord to remedy this in his time.
- E. The answer to the question "How long?" is found in Jesus.
1. John the Baptist's father Zechariah understood this.
 2. After his son was born as the Messiah's forerunner, he said, God "has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us; to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant" (Luke 1:69–72 ESV)
 3. The old man Simeon also understood the significance of Jesus' coming into the world.
 4. As he took the infant Jesus in his arms in the temple courts, he blessed God, saying, "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel." (Luke 2:29–32 ESV)
 5. Those were two great instances of God's people seeing his promises come to fruition.
 6. Yet what would Zechariah and Simeon have thought if they had lived to see Jesus hanging on the cross?
 7. Don't you think they would have cried out to God, saying, "you are full of wrath against your anointed"?
- F. Or consider the disciples.
1. They had witnessed the resurrection.

2. Yet when Jesus was preparing them for his departure, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6)
3. Jesus answered by telling them that it was not for them to know this.
4. They would have to live with the tension of the question, "How long?"
5. So do we.
6. As it says in the epistle to the Hebrews, "At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him." (Heb. 2:8)
7. But a day is coming when we will see it.
8. The God of steadfast love and faithfulness will not fail to keep his promise.
9. For this reason, even though we must wait for the Lord to answer our cry of "How long?", the doxology that concludes Book 3 of the Psalter should continually be on our lips: "Blessed be the LORD forever! Amen and Amen."