

Christmas Psalms: Singing to the King

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Preacher: Matthew Capone

[0 : 00] Pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church, and it's my joy to bring God's Word to you. Special welcome if you are new or visiting with us.

We're glad you're here, and we're glad you're here not because we are interested in filling more and more seats, but because we are following Jesus together as one community, and we're convinced as we're following after Jesus that there's no one so good that they don't need God's grace, and no one so bad that they can't have it.

And so we believe that everyone who's here, everyone in the world, needs to hear what God has to say to them. As Paul mentioned earlier, we've had two deaths this week in our church community. First, our founding pastor, Bob Stewart, who was the man who helped start this church over 20 years ago, and I had the privilege of meeting his wife, Dina.

I never had the opportunity to meet Bob, but just keep them in your prayers. Their hope is our hope, the hope of the resurrection. And of course, we also had our beloved deacon, Stephen Clark, in a very short battle with cancer on Thursday.

[1 : 09] And so, first of all, I want to make sure I let you all know that we are going to have a memorial service here at 6.30 this Wednesday at the church. And so I would encourage all of you to be there.

I'd love to see all of you there when we, if you were here, when we went through the book of Ruth, we talked about the difference between thick and thin communities. And one of the things that makes a thick community a thick community is that we are together, we're with each other in painful times.

And it is painful. Death is painful and it's brutal. And the reason it's painful and it's brutal is because it's unnatural. We're never, we weren't made to die. We weren't designed to die.

And that's not the way that God put this world together. And so when we encounter death, it, it jars us, whether we've encountered it many times before, whether it's for the first time.

And so just ask that all of you, if you're able, come and join us on Wednesday as we remember Stephen and celebrate his life. And it is that, it's that reality of death that is part of the tension that we, we experience at Advent.

[2 : 13] Remember we talked last week about the season of the Advent, the fact that we are in it right now. And Advent simply comes from a Latin word that means to come or to arrive.

And so we celebrate at Advent the fact that Jesus did come and he did arrive here on this earth. But the tension comes in the fact that while he did arrive, he is not here with us right now physically. He went back up into heaven. And so we're also waiting for him to come and arrive again. And Advent then is, is a season that reminds us of what's true of the entire Christian life, that we are always looking back and celebrating what God has done in the past.

And we take hope from that, take confidence from that. God has made a down payment, so to speak. He's put down earnest money, what he plans to do. But then we're always looking forward to what he is going to do in the future.

We're looking forward to when he is going to finally and fully defeat death. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15 that death is the last and final enemy. And so that's the tension that we find ourselves in Advent.

[3 : 16] We're always looking back and looking forward. You might remember I talked about Christians as people who are, in a sense, always crossing the street because we're always looking left and looking right. We're always remembering the past and the future as we live in the present.

We had another death this week in our nation. If you've been following the news, you know that George H.W. Bush, the elder, passed away.

And, of course, it's a sad time for us as a nation. It's also something beautiful that I love when a president passes away just because we get to see both sides of the aisle come together and get to see tributes.

People remember what was good and what was helpful and well about someone. We hear it from Democrats and Republicans because this is a time when we come together as a nation. And so whatever you think about George H.W., whether you liked him as a president, whether you didn't like him, whether you were not born yet, it highlights one thing for us, which is that we need, we desire, we long for good leaders, we want good leaders, we celebrate good leaders, we want people to lead us who look out for others' interests more than their own, we want people who are humble, who serve.

We need leaders. We don't just long for them, but we need them. We need people who will help us work and walk towards the future. And so you might wonder, what does George H.W. Bush have to do with Advent?

[4 : 47] Well, we don't have kings in the U.S., we have presidents, but it's the closest that we get. And as we think about Christmas, Jesus is also a king. We talked last week in the Psalms about our sorrow and the fact that we look at Jesus coming to give us hope in the midst of that, but that's not the only thing we look to.

We also look to Jesus as our king. If you were with us in the book of Matthew, this will be a review, so I'll go quickly, but we're told over and over, attended to and alluded to, that Jesus is the great king.

We find out in the book of Matthew, the very first verse, which is a way of saying he is the one who's come to fulfill all the promises that God has given about a future and great king. This then leads straight into a genealogy in the book of Matthew, and this genealogy is filled with kings.

So if we had any doubt that Jesus was going to be a king, we have that. And then we read just this morning in our New Testament reading that why it's the king of the Jews that they're seeking. And they come bringing him gifts that are fitting for a king.

And so part of the tension that we experience in Advent is that we are living under imperfect, flawed, sometimes good, but sometimes evil, sometimes wicked leadership.

[5 : 58] And so that's part of the longing that we feel. It's not wrong to want good leaders. It's part of how God designed us. It's part of how he made us. And yet we often live in a world where we suffer under leadership that is at best imperfect and at worst wicked or evil.

And so part of what we're looking forward to, part of what we're longing for in Advent is we're longing for a king. We're longing for a good and true and righteous king that will do what is right and rule in ways that are right.

And so this is part of the prophecy. This is what we see in the Old Testament that talks about Jesus. It talks about him as this king. In Isaiah chapter 9, it says, And so we are celebrating the coming of a king when we look back to Jesus' first coming.

And we are anticipating the final coming and reign of a king when we look to his second coming.

And so that's where we're going to be in the Psalms this morning. Last week we were in Psalm 13. It was a psalm of lament.

I promise you we're not going to be in lament for all of Advent. And so we're not going to say how long every single psalm. And a royal psalm would have been a song sung by the Old Testament people of Israel to the king.

[7 : 19] We should talk to God. God gave his people models of how they should pray about their leaders, about their kings. Real prayers about real kings, but they're also prayers of longing. Because we're going to see in this psalm that there are things that are fulfilled in a man.

They have to be fulfilled in someone who's greater. And so we're in Psalm 72. Remember that this is God's word. And God tells us, Verse 5.

God told us to, Verse 8. May he have dominion from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth.

May desert tribes bow down before him and his enemies lick the dust. May the kings of Tarshish and of the coastlands render him tribute. May the kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts.

May all kings fall down before him. All nations serve him. Verse 12. Verse 15.

[9 : 04] And may people blossom in the cities like the grass of the field. May his name endure forever. His fame continue as long as the sun. May people be blessed in him.

All nations call him blessed. Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things. Verse 19. May the prayers of David, the son of Jesse, be ended.

Amen. Please pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word. Dear Father in heaven, we thank you for your word that gives us life.

And so we ask that you would do that now. That you would send your word to do what you did at the beginning of creation where you brought something out of nothing. And you brought dead things to life.

We ask that you would do that for us. That you would take the parts of us that are hard and hardened. That are numb. That are confused. That you'd send your word.

[10:00] And you'd give us life. We ask this in the name of your son. Amen. So I want us to ask one, maybe two questions as we look at this psalm.

First, what sort of world is Jesus meant to bring? I think what kind of king is he supposed to be?

What kind of king is he meant to be? And another way of asking that question would be, why, let's say that you are someone who has questions or doubts about Christianity.

Why should you desperately want Christianity to be true? What sort of world, what sort of kingdom is Jesus supposed to bring? And why would you desperately want that kingdom, even if you don't believe in it?

What is so good and so wonderful about Jesus as our king? We talked last week about the importance of repetition in the psalms and really in the Bible in general.

And we saw in Psalm 13 that the phrase, how long, was repeated four times as a way of underscoring and highlighting what was so important to the psalmist. And so did you notice this time, were you watching for what was repeated over and over?

[11:11] In the first couple of verses we see justice and righteousness repeated over and over. We see justice in verses 1 and 2 twice and then righteousness occurs three times in a row, verses 1, 2, and 3.

And so we find out that this king, what the greatest part of his kingdom is going to be, the very foundation, what comes before what we'll see later, what comes before prosperity, what comes before compassion, what comes before his defense of the poor.

And this king is going to do all of those things. But what comes before all of them is his justice and his righteousness. That there is nothing that can stand except on those foundations.

And so that is what is most important for this king that is going to come, that he would be a just king and a righteous king. Now when we talk about justice, when the Bible thinks about justice, it's pretty similar to what we would think about in our world.

If you're familiar with the famous images of Lady Justice, what is it that she always has besides the scales? She always has a blindfold.

[12:19] Because she is not going to give preference to the poor or the rich. She's not going to look and treat someone differently than another person.

And so this is why later we're going to see that this king is a defender of the poor. He's not someone that in this situation gives preference to the rich, to the powerful. Now there are other situations where someone in power might be tempted to give preference to someone who is poor or defenseless, but that's not usually the case.

And especially in the ancient world, it would have been the temptation for any leader or ruler to give a preference to someone who is powerful, who had influence. And so we find out that this ruler, the foundation of everything comes and the ability for him to bring true justice.

He's able to look and see everything as it is without giving preference or bias. But that justice, that looking at everything without preference or bias is also governed by righteousness.

And this righteousness in the Old Testament and the New Testament would have been simply the things that God loves. The king in the Old Testament would have been someone who was supposed to learn everything they could about God and his ways.

[13:28] In fact, we're told at one point in the Old Testament that the king is supposed to write down his own copy of God's law by hand so that he knows it so well. And then he's meant to represent God to his people.

And so this is someone who's not just just, but they're in line with everything God's in line with. They love everything that God loves. They understand the way that God has made the world, and they want the world to continue in that way.

And that's the foundation for everything that they do. And that's where the house here of this king is built. The foundation is going to be justice and righteousness. And then we see that this is not something that is clinical or cold.

It's not justice or righteousness that holds us at a distance. But it's justice and righteousness that bears fruit. And we immediately see the kind of fruit that it bears. Verse 3, the mountains are going to bear prosperity for the people and the hills.

So the first thing that's going to come when God's ways are followed is that God's people are going to see this king doing over and over. Verse 4, he's going to defend the cause of the poor of the people. He's going to deliver the needy and crush the oppressor.

[14:36] So this justice that's going to come, this righteousness, it's going to lead to blessing for God's people. That's going to be the natural fruit, the natural result of justice and righteousness. But it's also going to lead to people who are otherwise oppressed.

They're going to be protected instead. People who are poor and needy are going to be provided for. And there's going to be a double side. There's always two sides to the defending of the poor, and that's the crushing of the oppressor.

And so this is not just a warm and kind king, but this is a king who's willing to do what has to be done to destroy evil. So while he loves righteousness, and that means prosperity, the promoting of everything that God loves, it also means that he hates wickedness.

And so this is the foundation. This is the kind of king that God's people are praying for. This is the kind of king that we'll see in a minute is going to find his ultimate fulfillment only in Jesus.

Because that's the only person who's going to be able to do what we see in verses 5 and 11. Well, let's stop here for a second. We see several things right off the bat. First, it is right and good for us to pray for our leaders.

[15:48] While this psalm finds its fulfillment in Jesus, it was given to God's people to pray for their actual kings in actual space and actual time. So this was something that they would have prayed in their worship services, asking God to actually bless the king that was there with them now.

There's a lot of talk all the time in the Christian world about politics and what we should do about it. And there are people on one side who will throw stones at people on the other. Some people believe that politics is something we need to rush into.

Other people believe politics is something we need to stay away from. Here, I'm just going to stick with what this psalm says. We need good leaders. We need leaders who love justice and righteousness.

And it's not wrong for us to long for that. It's not wrong for us to want that. God has given us a psalm in his word where we do just that. And so it's appropriate for us to pray for the people that God puts over us.

We see the same thing in the New Testament. I believe it's in 1 Timothy 2. Paul tells the church that they should be praying for the people who have leadership over them. But secondly, I want you to imagine the best leader that you can think of.

[16:56] It might be a parent who always knows exactly how to settle disputes. Never prefers one child over the other but has wisdom about how to divide and encourage but also how to punish.

It could be a CEO or a leader who knows how to put his people ahead of him. Who does what we see in verse 4. He defends the cause of the poor and needy. Delivers the oppressor.

I think of Jim Senegal. He's the former CEO of Costco. And he was famous for accepting a salary that was exponentially lower than that of other CEOs who had a status similar to his.

If you compared him to other stores that were similar in size, he made a salary that was probably three or four times less. And on top of that, he became known for paying his employees a higher rate than anyone else in their whole industry.

And I'm going to head in an opposite direction than what I usually do with an illustration. This king in verses 1 through 4 is going to make Jim Senegal seem very, very boring.

[18:05] He's going to make the greatest parent, the greatest human leader that we can think of seem just commonplace. Maybe even not quite up to the standard.

And so another way of saying it is this. Think of a good and righteous leader that's a person. And then think this. How much greater and better must God be as a king?

If we can see and find human examples of kingship that are good and just and right, and that's what the psalmist is praying for here, how much greater must Jesus be as a king?

If he is the king of kings and lord of lords, how much more just? How much more righteous? How much wiser? If Jim Senegal can bring prosperity to Costco, how much prosperity can this king bring?

How much more? And so as we look at good kings, at good rulers, we can say, how much more will Jesus be than that? And as we look at bad kings and bad rulers, we can long for Jesus knowing that he's going to come and do what we see here in verses 1 through 4.

[19 : 21] Now, I said that this was a prayer for real kings that also looked towards the ultimate king, and that's what we're going to see in verses 5 through 11.

We see that this is going to be a king not just founding his rule and reign in righteousness and justice, but he's going to be a king everywhere, all the time, over everyone. That's basically the summary of verses 5 through 11.

He's going to rule while the sun endures and as long as the moon, also known as a really long time, throughout all generations, also known as forever. He's going to have dominion from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth, verse 9, also known as everywhere.

These images we have of desert tribes coming down before him, these kings of Tarshish and the coastlands, this is the known world. This is what the psalmist knows. And so he's saying, as far away as I know, people are going to come to this king.

We see that. We saw that in our New Testament reading today, that when the Magi are coming, they are coming to worship God as a king, worshiping Jesus, and they are coming from far away.

[20 : 34] And so they're just a small taste, they're just a small sampling of what is going to ultimately be fulfilled in this greatest king.

Just as the Magi came from a far away land, everyone is going to come to this king from every land. He's going to rule forever, and he is going to rule over everyone.

And so that's where we see that this is a king who cannot be seen and found in an earthly man.

This is how we see and know that this king is coming, and it's going to be more than just a good CEO, a good ruler, a good president, a good father, a good mother.

This is going to be an even greater king. Now, if you think that this sounds a little far-fetched, so we just think about this on the face, right?

Jesus is someone who came, we celebrate him in the past. It would be tempting to think, okay, this sounds a little bit strange, Matthew. You believe that this man who came as a baby 2,000 years ago is also going to come back and return to the earth, and he's going to fulfill our hopes for good leadership.

[21 : 53] And so I'll ask you a question. Which requires greater faith? To believe that Jesus is going to come back and be our great king and restore everything?

Does that require greater faith? Or does it require greater faith to believe what many people believe today, that somehow we as people are going to be able to create this kind of world?

Which is there more evidence of? Is there more evidence of our capacity as human beings to create a perfect world of justice and righteousness? Or is there more evidence that Jesus could come back and create a perfect world of justice and righteousness?

I'll make a bold claim. There is no proof that we as human beings are going to be able to create a world of perfect justice and righteousness. There's no proof in the history of the world.

There's no proof right now. There's no proof that we can look to. However, we do have reason to hope in Jesus as our king. What we're celebrating in Advent is that Jesus actually came as an actual man 2,000 years ago.

[23 : 04] That he lived a perfect life on this earth. That he then died the death that we should have died. That he died. And after that, he rose from the dead. And that's not a pie-in-the-sky belief.

Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15 that there were hundreds of witnesses who saw Jesus after he rose from the dead. And he was writing this at a time where many of those witnesses would have been still alive.

And so the point is, if you don't believe me right now in the first century, you should go ask some of those people. So this psalm presents to us the greatest and not just the greatest, but the only fulfillment of a longing that God has put in our hearts.

And that is the longing for true justice and true righteousness. For a king that is actually going to put his people above himself.

And Jesus is our best and greatest hope for that. In his coming, in his first coming that we celebrate at Advent, in his death and his resurrection, he put down what we could call earnest money.

[24 : 12] He made a down payment. He did enough to show us that he was not just serious, but he had the ability to do what he now promises us he will do.

If someone can rise again from the dead, then I don't have a problem believing their claim. That they're going to come back again. That is the down payment, the earnest money, the proof that God has given us.

That this is where we are going to find the fulfillment of our longing for a true and perfect king. It's in Jesus. Now there's a distrust that we have of authority.

There's a dislike that we have of it. That's for multiple reasons. So some of it's for good reason, right? Some of us have experienced, probably all of us have experienced bad authority, imperfect authority. Whether it's rulers or parents or teachers or officials of any sort, we've encountered someone who cared more about their own needs than our needs.

So there are right reasons that we distrust authority. There's also wrong reasons, right? We're sinful people, and so we don't like even a good authority. We don't like someone telling us what we need to do.

[25 : 24] We don't like someone telling us that we're wrong. So there's good and bad reasons for distrusting authority. What this psalm is telling us is that there is going to be a king who is only a life-giving authority.

That this king is going to be someone who will have no good reason not to trust and love. This will be someone who puts, as we talked about in Philippians, others' interests ahead of his own.

But one of my favorite definitions of perfect authority comes from a man who puts it like this. The greatest authority, the greatest leader, is someone who cares more about you, not just more than... They don't just care more about you than they care about themselves. They care more about you than you care about yourself. They don't just care more about you than about themselves.

They care more about you than you know how to care for yourself. And this is what the just and righteous king does because he wants righteousness and justice for you even when you don't.

[26 : 34] He wants everything good that God has for his people even when we don't. And so that's what we see in this king. We see not just that he's going to rule everywhere over everything, but then we see he's going to be a different kind of king in verses 12 through 14.

He's going to be a king who delivers the needy and the poor. He's going to have pity on the weak and the needy. He's going to deliver from oppression and violence.

You notice that 4 at the beginning of verse 12? That's telling us this is the reason he's going to be the king over everything and the king everywhere.

Now if we naturally think of someone who's going to be the king everywhere over everything, we might think of someone like Alexander the Great, someone who has great military skill or prowess, someone who's a large personality.

You might say he's going to rule everything over everywhere because he's unstoppable. Or he's going to rule over everything everywhere because of his strength of personality. But here we have a very different 4.

[27 : 46] He's going to rule over everything everywhere because, wait for it, he delivers the needy when he calls. And the poor, he has pity on the weak.

In other words, what's going to take this king and thrust him to the greatest place and give him the ultimate authority is not going to be his strength of personality.

It's not going to be his military prowess. It's going to be because he's going to save the people who are crushed. That's what we saw in Philippians chapter 2.

It's Christ's humility. That's the reason that God gives him the name that's above every other name. But it's also what we see in the story of Advent. We have a king who comes and is born in a manger rather than a palace.

We have a king who doesn't come and conquer his enemies, but he lets them kill him instead.

When he rides into the city that he's supposed to be a king over, he doesn't come on a war horse.

[28 : 52] Instead, he comes on a donkey. And so this is what Paul tells us about in 1 Corinthians. He says that the gospel is foolishness.

And what he means is that, as one person has put it, he means that Jesus takes an instrument of torture and he turns it into an instrument of salvation. And so this greatest king, this great authority

that we long for is going to be the great king for reasons different than any other king. He's going to be the great king because of his deliverance of the needy. That's how he's going to bring about his justice and his righteousness. That's what's going to bring prosperity. And so while this is a psalm that is about an earthly king, it looks for its fulfillment in a heavenly king. And so as we look through in verses 1 through 4, first we see that this king needs justice and righteousness, righteousness, but he's also a king that takes the penalty of justice and righteousness on himself.

That while he upholds justice and righteousness, the way that he does it is by dying, by taking the penalty of justice and righteousness. And so he's a righteous king who gives us his righteousness. [30 : 15] He's a king, in verse 4, who crushes his enemies, but he's also a king who lets his enemies crush him. For the sake of his people. And in verse 17, we see an echo, if you're familiar with the Bible, an echo of what we saw in Genesis.

It says, May his name endure forever. His fame continue as long as the sun. May people be blessed in him, and all nations call him blessed. How are all nations supposed to be blessed in this king?

This is the promise that was given to Abraham, that all nations would be blessed through him. And the reason the way that all nations were going to be blessed through Abraham was because Abraham's line was going to lead to King David, who was then going to lead to Jesus.

And so Jesus was going to be a blessing to all the nations because he was going to invite not just the Jews, but everyone else to be a part of his kingdom. And so that's the promise.

That's the promise that this psalm holds out for us. that Jesus is willing to take the punishment of justice for anyone from any nation who is willing to come and join him, willing to admit that they need him, that they need deliverance, that we need a king of justice where we're not just.

[31 : 35] We need a king who doesn't come showing his might through force, but through his willingness to die. And so what kind of king is Jesus going to be?

He's going to be a king who brings blessing to all peoples, to all people who are willing to trust in him. And why should we desperately want Christianity to be true?

Why should we desperately want Jesus to be the king even if we don't believe right now that he is?

We can desperately want Jesus to be king because he is the only one who is going to be able to bring justice and righteousness on the earth.

He's the only one who is capable of fulfilling everything that we long for in our leaders, in our world. And so what does this have to do with Christmas and Advent?

One of my favorite stories is the Chronicles of Narnia and I know it's a little bit of a cliché, I'm sorry. I promise to only use Narnia illustrations very sparingly.

[32 : 44] But growing up, my dad would read them to my brothers and I and if you're familiar with the Lion and the Witch and the Wardrobe, you know that they are living at a time where the white witch is in control over Narnia.

And there's something of a resistance that goes on. The trees talk to each other and you know that the beavers are standing very strong against the white witch and her rule. And one thing that's interesting is the fact that they are able to keep hope and stay strong.

They've lived under the white witch's rule for a long time and so how is it that they are able to keep believing even when there's a time that's described as always winter but never Christmas?

Well, it's because there's a prophecy. And if you remember the prophecy, you know that what the beavers hold on to, what they cling to is the knowledge that one day there is going to be two sons of Adam and two daughters of Eve on the thrones at Caer Paravel.

And they know that when that happens that is going to be the time when the white witch's spell is over when it's broken. When she has power no more. And so even as they're living in a world where it feels like it's always winter and never Christmas that prophecy is what keeps them going.

[33 : 58] It's what keeps them hoping. Because they know one day Aslan is going to come back. One day they are going to sit on the thrones and everything will be made right. And as they go through the book there comes a time when they know that those prophecy has not been fulfilled.

Those people are not sitting on the thrones yet. And yet in this world where it's always winter and never Christmas they run into most surprisingly of all Father Christmas. And so they know that the spell is beginning to break.

The thrones are not filled yet. But Aslan is on the move. And so what we do when we look back to Jesus' first coming is we celebrate the fact that the spell is beginning to be broken. That's what Paul refers to as the fullness of time. But it's not over yet but we have hope because we look forward to the time when the great and ultimate king will come again. And so as we see the spell beginning to break we still have hope. we can keep hoping and longing knowing that one day the king is going to come back. He's going to come back and make everything right.

[35 : 11] And so that is how we live with hope between Jesus' two comings. And that's how we live in Advent. Looking back. Celebrating what God has done. And looking and longing for the true king. we're going to end with the hymn Jesus Shall Reign and what you may not know about this hymn is that it is drawn directly from Psalm 72 but takes it and applies it to Jesus. And so we're going to sing that song to him now. Before we do please pray with me. Dear Father in heaven we thank you that you are the true and great king and that you are coming again. we ask that you would help us to believe and to hope in you. We ask this in the name of your son. Amen.