

TRINITY LECTURE 1 - Bible Study

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[0 : 0 0] And let's pray. Our God, speak to us from your word now, from Psalm 47. Teach us its truth. Give us the wills and the strength to follow it and obey it and live by it.

For the glory of your holy name. Amen. Well, I'm a bit too young to remember the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II.

But those who remember it, and those too young to remember it but have seen the pictures, no doubt will remember seeing pictures of an occasion that is lavish and grand, sumptuous, and where people, in a sense, from the whole world have their focus on this young queen about to be crowned in Westminster Abbey.

You may remember the crowds lining the streets of London. The carriage, the jewels, the great joy, the applause as the queen went by. And all the nations of the world were represented there.

Well, kings and coronations are great events, lavish events. And if you've been to some of the great palaces of the world, Buckingham Palace or Versailles or the Topkapi Palace in Istanbul or other places, you'll remember seeing ornate, lavish, extraordinary buildings.

[1 : 2 6] And usually the highlight of them is the throne room where the sovereign, the king, the emperor, the queen, whoever would reign from. Psalm 47 is, in a sense, a celebration of a coronation.

The coronation of Israel's king. But don't get that wrong and think the coronation of David or Solomon or Josiah or somebody like that. But rather the coronation of God himself as the king of Israel.

For through the Old Testament, the ideal was that the king of God's people was actually God, not a human being. Part of when they chose a king in the first book of Samuel, it was a rejection of God's kingship that God expressed to Samuel in 1 Samuel chapter 8, as the people were asking to have a human king like the nations.

We see it too in the way that the temple and before that the tabernacle were constructed. So that at the center of the temple or tabernacle in the Holy of Holies was regarded to be the throne of God.

And under that throne, or in the Ark of the Covenant under that throne, were the Ten Commandments on the tablets of stone. And all of that symbolized, at least in part, that God was the ruler, the king of Israel, of God's people.

[2 : 5 0] And he ruled by his law, not by a human king, but by his law. God is king. And the heart of his throne from the time of Solomon onwards was Jerusalem and its temple.

Well, this psalm begins with a call to praise. Clap your hands, all you peoples. Shout to God with loud songs of joy. Notice to whom it's addressed.

You see, Israel, or the psalmist at least, is inviting the world, the nations, peoples of the world, to clap their hands and shout to their God with shouts of joy.

Now, back at the coronation of Queen Elizabeth, many of the nations of the world were represented. Their kings and prime ministers and presidents and so on were there. No doubt at some point they applauded and gave some due honor to the young Queen Elizabeth as she was crowned.

But this is more than inviting kings of other nations to come to Jerusalem for the coronation of Israel's king, or at least Israel's God as king. Rather, it's inviting the world to praise Israel's king as their king.

[4 : 16] So clap your hands, all you peoples. Shout to God with loud songs of joy. It's an invitation not just to take part in a neighborly way of a nation's celebration, but rather to actually acknowledge the God of Israel as their king as well.

Now, why is that the case? Why does Israel invite the nations to do this? Well, the next verse gives us a reason. See, verse 2 begins, For or because the Lord, that is the name Yahweh, the personal name given to Israel alone in the Old Testament, Yahweh the Most High is awesome, a great king over Israel.

No, a great king over all the earth. So the invitation to the nations to celebrate and rejoice in God as king is because he is a great king over all the earth.

So it's not an invitation to other nations to come and pay homage to Queen Elizabeth and the British Commonwealth or something, but in a sense stay removed.

But rather in a sense it's coming to the coronation of God as Israel's king, but joining in and saying he is our king. He's a great king over all the earth.

[5 : 33] The title, the most high in verse 2, is often used of the Assyrians, by the Assyrians in Old Testament times. The word awesome, which is very much in vogue today, is to be full of awe, full of majesty, beyond our sort of normal comprehension in a sense, and over all the earth, even where he's not recognised.

Now more reason is given for this, because at one level verse 2 could be an idle claim. By an Israelite, God is the king over the whole earth. Oh come on, surely not.

Prove it. Well, verse 3 gives us the evidence, if you like, for that claim. He subdued peoples under us and nations under our feet.

Verses which most likely point back to the exodus from Egypt and the conquest of Egypt when that happened, as well as the conquest of the land in the time of Joshua and the defeat of the Canaanites and Amorites and so on in those days.

It's probably not limited to those references, but they'd be the prime ones. Back to the exercise of dominion by Israel's God over the great nation of Egypt and over the nations of the Promised Land or Canaan or Israel, as it is later called.

[6 : 57] So he subdued other nations and he subdued their peoples. That's why he's a great king over all the earth. But more than that, in verse 4, he chose our heritage for us, the pride of Jacob whom he loves.

Notice the idea here. God of Israel has chosen a land for Israel, a heritage. The pride of Jacob is referring, I think, to the land of Israel.

Israel-Jacob being, in effect, the same identity. And he loves, in particular, those people. But the very nature of doing that for them shows that Israel's God is king over the whole earth, not just the king over Israel.

The very fact that the God of Israel gave Israel its land, its heritage, and expressed his love for them shows the dominion of God over the whole earth because the possession of Israel's land shows the dispossession and conquest by Israel's God over other nations.

So the past events of history Israel is claiming here give evidence and demonstration that God is universal in power over the whole earth, greater than other nations, greater than their kings, greater than their gods.

[8 : 19] So God has gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet. Maybe using coronation sort of language, gone up to the temple, up to the throne, or something like that.

It's language like, is used in 2 Samuel 5 when the ark is taken into Jerusalem. So it's probably remembering that when Solomon brought the, or David rather, brought the ark into Jerusalem, in Solomon's day into the temple, in a sense God now enthroned in the midst of a temple in Jerusalem, that's the language that verse 5 is evoking, I think, for the Israelite listener.

Remember that the ark is, in a sense, the footstool of God's throne in the centre of the temple. The pattern of this psalm repeats itself from verse 6 onwards.

It's like two stanzas in a way. So verse 6 parallels verse 1. Sing praises to God, sing praises. Sing praises to our king, sing praises.

The repetition, four times, sing praises, shows an emphasis but also an urgency. There is a real plea here, not just to Israel but to the nations, to sing praises to the God of Israel, to Almighty God.

[9 : 43] And then again we get a reason in verse 7. Just like verse 2 began, for or because, this reason, now verse 7. Because God is the king of all the earth.

Sing praises with a psalm. And like verse 2, verse 7 is general as a statement of the universal sovereignty of God. God is sovereign or king of all the earth.

And that's reinforced in the next verse. God is king over the nations. God sits on his holy throne. It's a challenging idea, I think, for ancient Israel.

Israel, who would have thought of God sitting on his holy throne in the midst of the Jerusalem temple as being God ruling over Israel alone. But here it is God ruling not only over Israel and the nations, but for Israel and the nations.

Israel is, in a sense, bracketed with all the nations of the earth in many respects in this psalm. The psalm finishes then with a climax in verse 9.

[10 : 46] The princes of the peoples, notice how it uses princes and not kings, even though they might have claimed to be kings and emperors and so on. They are, in a sense, mere princes because the king is God himself.

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.

Now we need to understand the fullness of what's being said in this verse. It's saying at one point that the leaders of the nations of the world gather before God's throne in Jerusalem.

That is, the princes of the peoples gather as verse 9 begins. But they're not gathering as just mere visitors like the foreign rulers would have gone to London in 1953.

But rather, they are gathering as the people of Abraham. That's an astonishing claim, actually, in this verse.

[11 : 54] The princes of the peoples, that is, if you like, admittedly we're talking poetic language, but it would be envisioning the pharaoh of Egypt, the emperor of Babylon, the leader of Assyria, and Syria, and all the other nations of the Middle Eastern world.

Often, so often, enemies of Israel, enemies of Israel's God. So often, nations against whom Israel fought and fought. You can imagine the leaders of the people of the Philistines, the Ammonites and Edomites.

So often, Israel's enemies as well. And here they are gathering as the people of the God of Abraham. That's an astonishing idea that's being anticipated in this verse.

They're gathering not as enemies against Israel or Israel's God. They're not merely gathering in a sort of social nicety. They're gathering as the people of Abraham.

That is, it's a picture of conversion, in a sense. It's a picture of foreigners, pagans, idolaters of other nations, often Israel's enemy, coming to God's throne as his people, as the people of Abraham.

[13 : 12] And the reference to Abraham here points back, of course, to the book of Genesis, and in particular, to the promises made to Abraham in Genesis chapter 12. The last of which is that those who bless you, I will bless.

And the one who curses you, I will curse. Referring to the nations of the world. So often, our thinking, as well as Israel's thinking in the Old Testament, was that those promises to Abraham in Genesis 12, which are so pivotal and programmatic for the whole story of the Bible, New Testament as well as Old, were really about, in a sense, the specialness and privilege of Israel.

But actually, the purpose of Israel being chosen and loved by God from the beginning was a universal purpose. That many nations, all nations, people of every nation, tongue and tribe, would actually come and worship the God of Israel.

That is, that whole set of promises in Genesis 12, which at a superficial level we often think are privileging Israel, are actually about God's mission purpose for the whole of the universe.

That through the people of Israel, God will reach out and bring to himself loyal subjects from every nation, tribe and tongue in the universe.

[14 : 32] God's purpose was world blessing when he chose Abraham and Abraham's descendants. And indeed, as you read Genesis 1 through to chapter 12 at least, we recognize that that's what's going on.

The promises of Genesis 12 are God's way of dealing with the fall of Genesis 1 to 11, the failure of humanity, the whole universal humanity in Genesis 1 to 11.

Sometimes we fail to see the connection and somehow separate Genesis 1 to 11 as mere prologue and then think the story really starts at chapter 12.

But when God chooses Abraham, he's actually choosing to love the whole world in order to counter the effects of the fall of humanity that we read about in the first 11 chapters of Genesis.

By and large, the way this occurs in the Old Testament is what we call centripetal motion. It's not exclusively so, but centripetal motion is motion towards the center.

[15 : 40] That is, it's a magnetic or attractive motion. That is, that God would choose Israel as his people to be a light for the nations, to draw them to Jerusalem, to draw them to worship God, that by their righteous character and behavior, by their righteous laws, other nations will take notice, see God's blessing and be drawn in.

That's the overriding movement, I think, through the Old Testament. We see only mere glimpses of that being fulfilled. Perhaps in Ruth, most notably probably the Queen of Sheba, coming not just to pay homage to Solomon's wealth and wisdom, but to Solomon's God as well.

But largely it's an ideal that we don't see realized in the Old Testament, not because God abandons that strategy, but because Israel is faithless and somewhat, in a sense, selfish in thinking that their privilege means a disdain for other nations.

God, who made the nations of the world, wants then to honor and worship him. But notice too the second part of verse 9. For the shields of the earth belong to God.

That is, all power belongs to God. The rulers of the ancient world would pride themselves on their military might and strength and power. But they're mere princes, not kings, as the beginning of verse 9 says.

- [17 : 12] And their shields, so often used in warfare against Israel, actually in the end belong to God. That all power belongs to God, for he is highly exalted.

That is, it's a God-centric picture. God is highly exalted, honored or in glory before all the nations of the world.

It's quite a challenge to our thinking. So often our vision, our vision even of heaven, is actually very self-centered.

Our vision of heaven is where we are comfortable, free of pain, free of worry, with our loved ones around us. But the biblical vision of heaven doesn't have us in the center at all.

It has God in the center. The throne of God and the throne of the Lamb. We often think of salvation as being God's generosity to us for our benefit and comfort.

- [18 : 15] Well, it is for our benefit. But the primary focus of God's action, the primary motive of God's action through the whole scripture, is that he is seen to be highly exalted by the peoples of all the world.

The key idea at the end of the psalm, the climax of the psalm, is that God is highly exalted. That is, all the honor and homage or power and strength or glory belong to him.

It is thoroughly God-centered, God-focused in this vision of this psalm. And we see that back in verse 5, which in some sense parallels verse 9.

God has gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet. So what we find in this psalm is that God's enemies, the people's enemies, which are subdued in verse 3 in past history, come in a sense willingly to worship God as their God because they belong as the people of Abraham.

In both pictures, verse 3 of the subjugation of the nations and in the picture of the princes coming to pay homage to God, we get a picture of every knee bowing before God, willingly in defeat, sorry, unwillingly in defeat in verse 3 or willingly in praise and honor in verse 9.

- [19 : 47] Something we don't see, of course, on earth. The nations of our world tend to shake their fist at God, even those that sometimes try and claim some special blessing or privilege from the God of the Bible.

We very often see outright defiance against God. But the day, of course, is coming when the expectation of this psalm will be realized in history. The day when all the people of this world will bow before the throne of God, whether willingly or not.

And in preparation for that day, we are to be proclaiming the glory of God and of his gospel. The New Testament strategy develops from the old by way of bringing God's good news or saving plan or glory or salvation or praise to the world.

It sharpens the picture in the New Testament, of course, but we ought not to lose sight of the fact that so often, especially in the Psalms, the people of God are to praise God publicly in a sense to draw other nations to God.

That is, our praise of God has got a missional component to it. Yes, our praises of God together corporately are about us acknowledging God, but there is something in the exhortations in the Psalms, for example, but not just there, that gives it a missional focus.

- [21 : 19] So, clap your hands, all you peoples, here, we find other Psalms, you know, Israel sing praises to God in the sight of all the nations. So, our praises to God, our lives of praises to God, not just singing hymns and songs, but our whole lives of praise to God are to be somehow missional or evangelistic in drawing the nations to God.

But, of course, the picture here of God rising up on the sound of a trumpet in verse 5, the nations of the world coming before God at the end of the psalm, we find a sharper focus in the New Testament.

Not a different picture, but it's brought into clearer perspective. God is exalted when his son, Jesus Christ, is exalted. Jesus is coming again with the sound of a trumpet in glory.

The day to which I think this psalm ultimately looks forward. Jesus has gone up with the sound of a trumpet in a sense already in his ascension, but also in his return, I think, is in mind.

And, of course, we know those famous words of Paul to the Philippians, that at the name of Jesus, every knee will bow. Our role is not primarily centripetal indirection as it was in the Old Testament.

[22 : 39] For there, it was about the people of God living righteous lives that would attract others. That's still an important dimension in the New Testament. We find it in several places, in the epistles in particular, not least saying 1 Peter 2, that the church is God's people is to live holy lives in praise of God that will draw others from other nations, from other religions and other gods and idols to the worship of God and of Jesus Christ.

But maybe the most striking word that Jesus said was when he said, go, go into all the nations. Because the motion that is centripetal, while it remains at a level of our righteous living and praise of God to draw others to God, there is a fundamental change of direction that we are to go with the gospel.

Well, in conclusion, three dangers that this psalm addresses. This addresses the danger that we somehow localize or diminish our view of the sovereignty of God.

That God may be king over us or over our church, forgetting that God is the universal king over all the nations. This psalm challenges us again to have a global perspective on God's sovereignty.

Secondly, it challenges us to remember that God is sovereign. Because when we look around our world with its wars and its hostility, its terrorism, its anti-God stance in so many different ways both in West and East, this reminds us that despite appearances, despite what we read in the papers, God is king over all the earth today, tomorrow, and every day for the rest of eternity.

[24 : 29] Nothing happens outside his universal sovereignty. And thirdly, this psalm challenges us against the wrong view that somehow everything revolves around me.

God is the center. It's somewhat easy to be motivated by our own comfort or our own pleasure, but this psalm reminds us that God is the focus.

It is he who is exalted and that we are to live for his praise and honor whether we're drawing people to him or going out to bring people to him.

In 1953, all eyes were on the young Queen Elizabeth as she was crowned in Westminster Abbey. She was the object of attention, of adulation, and applause.

On the final day, to an even greater degree, by far, the kingship of Jesus will be the center of all attention. He will be our focus and our joy and our praise.

[25 : 32] He will be the world's attention for people of every tongue and nation and tribe. He will be exalted above all kings and princes and emperors.

He will be exalted among all nations. Let's pray before we sing. O God, our Father, we thank you that you are king and highly exalted.

We pray that we may live lives of submission to your sovereignty, of praise to your honor, and holy lives that will draw others to you.

But Lord God, let us also be people with a heart for the nations who do not know you, that we may be willing to go for their sakes and for your glory's sake.

Amen.