

Worshipping the King

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[0 : 0 0] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 19th of August 2001.

The preacher is Lindsay Wilson. His sermon is entitled Worshipping the King and is based on Psalm 99. It's good to be back to Doncaster.

It's nice to look around and see some familiar faces too. And while Paul's probably sweltering in the heat in Nigeria, we're shivering in the cold of Doncaster.

I want to, this week and the next two weeks, bring you a series of sermons on the book of Psalms. It's not that I don't think that you have enough Old Testament here with Paul Barker.

I'm sure you have more than enough. But it's a good thing to do anyway and a rich part of God's Word. Today I want to look at worshipping the King.

[1 : 0 8] Worship is one of those words that sounds vaguely old-fashioned, doesn't it? It sounds like a word from a previous generation. But even within the Church, there are many people who are saying, should we spend less time talking about worship and more time talking about more practical things in the Christian life?

Do we need to spend all the time that we do worshipping God? Why don't we just get on and live as God's people? As for worshipping the King, isn't the King and calling God the King an outmoded form of expression in today's world?

After all, in the 21st century in Australia, we're talking about should we have a republic or not? Perhaps we ought to give up calling God King and start labelling him El Presidente.

That's not a course of action I want to commend, but more of that in a minute. There is something about God being King that I think is worth retaining.

When we were in England seven years ago, my youngest daughter, she's our closet royalist, and she was having her birthday. She was turning seven. Being over in England, we didn't have many friends that she knew, so she thought she'd aim high.

[2 : 3 1] She wrote a letter to the Queen, inviting her to her birthday party. Now, as the birthday party approached, we were getting rather nervous, especially Clarissa, my wife.

She thought, what if the Queen actually comes? How on earth are we going to get prepared? What are we going to wear? How are we going to tidy up the place? We just don't have enough time to get it all ready.

And we were rather gratified, although Samara was a little bit sad, and when we got a letter a few days before her birthday, a nice Buckingham Palace station is saying, the Queen thought it was really nice of you to invite her, but unfortunately she can't come.

I was over in England a couple of months ago, and working at a research library in Cambridge. At Tyndale House, I found out after I arrived that we were going to have a visit from the Duke of Edinburgh.

Not quite the Queen, but the next best. And it was interesting seeing all the preparations that had to take place for the Duke's visit. We were told how to dress.

- [3 : 40] We were invited to work in a gardening party. Not a garden party, but a gardening party. When I was working amongst the books in the library, there were sniffer dogs coming around to see if I had any bombs in my computer, and so forth.
- The library received a new coat of paint. We were gathered together. We were told how to address His Royal Highness, and so on.
- Many preparations. And you could see people were a bit nervous to make sure that everything was done right, because this was the first time, and they hoped not the last, that the Duke of Edinburgh would visit Tyndale House.
- There is something about preparing for the visit of royalty that is important. You don't lightly or flippantly go into the presence of someone who's important, someone who has a high status.
- And I think that we need to recapture some of that as we think about worshipping God as King. The psalm that we had as our Old Testament reading today focuses on worshipping the King, worshipping God as King.
- [4 : 54] It states at the very beginning that the Lord is King. And after each section of the psalm, and there are three sections in the psalm, there is a call for us to worship God and a reminder.
- In verse 3, Holy is He. Again in verse 5, Holy is He. And at the very end of the psalm, with a call for worship, there is a reminder, For the Lord our God is holy.
- This psalm wants to invite us to worship the King and to see the King as He really is, a holy, majestic God, a God who can't be approached lightly or flippantly, but a God who needs to be treated as the King.
- Here's the first three verses. The Lord is King. Let the peoples tremble. He sits enthroned upon the cherubim. Let the earth quake. The Lord is great in Zion.
- He is exalted over all the peoples. Let them praise your great and awesome name. Holy is He. You see here a picture not just of God being trapped inside a building, but God who is great over the nations.
- [6 : 18] And the people's right response to someone who is so great, so powerful, so majestic, is to tremble and quake. It's a picture of the awesomeness of God.
- That God is not merely localised, but over all peoples, even indeed over all heavenly beings. He is great or high over the people. And the nations, including God's own people, the Israelites, need to come before Him and acknowledge His kingship.
- But do you notice the response to God's kingship in this psalm? In verse 3, let them praise your great and awesome name. And they do so.
- Holy is He. The response to God's kingship is a call to worship. Then we come to verses 4 to 5. Mighty King, lover of justice, you have established equity, you have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob.
- Extol the Lord our God. Worship at His footstool. Holy is He. Here, I think, the worshipper is invited to recognise the character of God again.
- [7 : 33] Some think that this refers to the earthly king, but it makes much more sense to see that the God as heavenly king is still in view here. And it praises His justice and righteousness.
- In fact, it twice mentions God as a God of justice. God who treats people fairly. God who ensures that all get a fair go. This is an important part of the character of God.
- A God who brings about justice and equity throughout the land. And in response to God's character, set out as a God of justice and righteousness and equity, how are God's people to respond?

Again, there's a call for the congregation to extol, to exalt, to lift up in praise the Lord our God. Here, worship is done by bowing at His footstool.

An image that's not very familiar to us, but would have been to those people who lived in the ancient world. The footstool is probably an image taken from that of ancient kings, which were pictured with their feet on a footstool.

[8 : 44] The Lord's footstool may well be the ark, sometimes described as a footstool of God, the temple in which the ark was placed, perhaps even Jerusalem, Israel, it may even be the whole world all variously described as God's footstool.

But the important thing is that the response to God's kingship, the response called for a second time in this psalm, is for God's people to bow down in worship.

Not simply to say, oh, isn't it terrific that God's a God of justice? Isn't it good that God's a God of righteousness? Let's get on with our lives. Pass the cucumber sandwiches, please.

No. Here is a call to worship God. If that's what God is like, I cannot be unmoved. But I need to come before him and bow down to him to worship him, to allow who God is to shape my life and shape the way that I respond to him.

Then we have a longer section, the third section. Moses and Aaron were among his priests. Samuel also was among those who called on his name.

[10 : 00] They cried to the Lord and he answered them. He spoke to them in the pillar of cloud. They kept his decrees and the statutes that he gave them. Oh, Lord our God, you answered them.

You are a forgiving God to them, but an avenger of their wrongdoings. And again, extol the Lord our God and worship at his holy mountain for the Lord our God is holy.

Here in verse 6 are some of the most important people in the Bible, aren't there? Moses, the giver of the law, the pastor on of the law. Aaron, the first priest.

Samuel, the prophet, the one who made and unmade kings, the one who insisted that a king like Saul could no longer remain as king because he was undermining the kingship of God.

These three figures that represent so much of the rich teaching of the Old Testament are called upon as examples of those who called upon God's name.

[11 : 08] That is, who worshipped God, who acknowledged that God indeed was king. We're pointed back to the time in the wilderness where God spoke to his people in a pillar of cloud when they had this visible reminder of God's kingship over his people and when the pillar of cloud rose and moved, they moved with him.

They went where the pillar went. They were people under the control of God as king. And they're reminded that God answered these people and the character of God is again evident.

Do you notice in verse 8, you were a forgiving God to them but an avenger of their wrongdoings. It's an interesting twist on what we've seen in the rest of the psalm, isn't it?

Since God is king, they and we are accountable to God and dependent on him. His kingship here means that he can forgive the sins of his people and yet also to weigh up their lives and judge their wrongdoing.

You see, both judgment and mercy are outworkings of God's kingship over his people. God isn't a God who's just wound up his world and lets us go in our own merry way.

[12 : 34] He's actively involved in the world, actively involved in extending mercy and extending judgment. God is not detached but involved for he actively rules as king over his world.

Sometimes I think the Bible writers think we're a bit thick. We've already been told twice to worship God but in case we didn't get it the first two times.

We hear it a third time, don't we? Verse 9. Extol the Lord our God and worship at his holy mountain for the Lord our God is holy. It makes it very clear that the response being called for in this psalm is to worship God.

He's told us in verse 3, he's told us again in verse 5 and he tells us as the psalm winds up here in verse 9, extol the Lord our God and worship at his holy mountain.

Here God's people dwelling in Jerusalem are called to bow down and bow down because God is holy. God is unlike us.

[13 : 47] God is other than us. God is not simply our buddy who is close although God is close to us but God is holy and majestic and magnificent and we need to respond to the one who is in charge of his world by worship.

I like this psalm because it expresses so clearly what I think is a key thought in the book of Psalms and that is that God is actively ruling over his world as king.

We see that especially in this part of the book of Psalms from Psalm 90 through to Psalm 106 a section that's devoted to the kingship of God at the very part of what God is like.

We see in Psalms 93 and 96 and 98 and 99 this strong theme that God is indeed king there is no other God is the one who rules.

We see in the Psalms after this in Psalm 103 how God is king and that manifests itself in his forgiveness of his people removing our sins as far as the east is from the west.

[15 : 00] That's how far God removes our sins from us. In Psalm 104 in a majestic psalm about God's work in creation we see that he rules over all of his creation as king.

And finally in Psalms 105 and 106 we see that God is actively at work in the history of Israel. In Psalm 105 God's showing his faithfulness to the successive generations of Israelites.

In Psalm 106 as he judges the successive generations of Israelites who are unfaithful to him. But in all these situations in the universe as we know it in our everyday life what some people call history God is actively ruling as king.

And the response we see in this Psalm is that we're to bow down in worship. Is this a concept that we can give up without losing the heart of biblical faith?

I think not. Queen Victoria was once present in Westminster Abbey when Handel's Messiah was being performed. The whole congregation rose to their feet when at length the organ began to play for the hallelujah chorus and they stood up as one except the queen.

[16 : 27] She alone was seated as was then the custom. It was kind of a royal privilege. But soon the choir began to sing He shall reign forever and I'll say it to you I won't sing it to you.

He shall reign forever and ever King of kings and Lord of lords forever and ever hallelujah hallelujah and at those words the queen rose not to stand up with the rest of the people but to bow down in humble worship for she realised that even earthly monarchs cannot bow too low when they're in the presence of the one who is King of kings and Lord of lords.

This teaching of the kingship of God is filled out in the New Testament too where the New Testament affirmation that Jesus is Lord invites us to see his majesty and to bow before him in worship.

When Thomas sees the risen Jesus he worships him and says my Lord and my God. And when Paul in Colossians chapter 1 verse 15 to 20 sees Jesus pictured as Lord over creation and redemption really over all there is he describes him like this he says you are the firstborn over all creation in him all things hold together in everything that he might have the supremacy reconciling all things by his death on the cross.

And there's that great picture in the last book of the Bible the book of Revelation in chapter 5 the picture of the slain lamb the Lord Jesus on the throne.

[18 : 18] We see him there in charge of all history and all peoples. And what kind of response do we see from the people gathered in front of the throne? Worthy is the lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing than I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea and all that is in them singing to the one seated on the throne and to the lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might for ever and ever.

And the four living creatures said amen and the elders fell down and worshipped. Worship is at the very core of the people of God and their response to the true and living God.

Of course there are a number of responses that people can make to the kingship or the kingly rule of God that grounds so much of the Bible. In the book of Proverbs I think God's kingly rule is pictured as providing order in everyday life.

In the book of Job an awareness that God is in charge grounds Job's persevering faith. In many of the prophetic books of the Old Testament it grounds their hope for the future.

But in this and many Psalms it is very clear that the proper response the fundamental or the foundational response of the people of God once they acknowledge that God is indeed king and actively ruling as king over his world is to bow down and worship and praise and exalt and extol him acknowledging who he is acknowledging his worth acknowledging his great holiness.

[20 : 11] God's kingly rule which we see evident in creation and in daily life in our own lives as we've come to trust the living Lord Jesus leads us neither to be afraid of God nor taking God for granted thinking that we can be over familiar with God.

Primarily and firstly it leads to adoration and thanks and praise and that's filled out in the whole Bible terms after the Psalms when we see that God's kingship climaxes in the sending of the Lord Jesus to deal with sin on the cross to be victorious in resurrection over sin death and the devil and to promise the full realisation of his kingly rule when he returns.

Why do I talk about worship to a group of Christians gathered amongst other things to worship God? It is I think because sometimes the evangelists were not terribly good at worship.

We enjoy our Bible studies we enjoy our evangelism well some of us do but worship is something that we don't warm to but certainly if we are serious about knowing who God is and responding to that in a biblical way we will be wholeheartedly committed to worship to worship God as we gather as his people today and to worship God in our everyday lives both in our own times of prayer and Bible reading but also in our whole lives as we seek to acknowledge God's worth as we allow him to shape our lives.

The kingship of God must lead us to worship worshipping the king must sound like a group of old fashioned words but the concept is absolutely crucial and central to who we are as God's people.

[22 : 24] Right worship of God humble worship of God is never an optional extra but it's the heart of who we are as God's people.

If we don't get that right we'll get nothing else right in our lives as God's people. We must be enriched in our inner lives with God. We must acknowledge who he is.

We must come before him and acknowledge his mercy, his forgiveness and his judgment. To acknowledge his character as a holy and majestic God and to allow that to so shape and mould who we are as his people that we want not only to bow down before him in worship but to live our lives out before him in glad adoration.

Worship is the first and important step in living as God's people in God's world. When we start with the right worship of God as king, we'll be empowered to live wholeheartedly as his people.

Let's pray. Our Lord and God, we thank you for this great call to worship in the book of Psalms.

[23 : 47] Sometimes we feel like worshipping you and never stopping but at other times we come reluctantly to worship you and we sometimes forget to do it at all.

Please enrich and renew our lives with genuine heartfelt worship of you so that we may be empowered to be your active people living under your kingly rule for Jesus' sake.

Amen.