

SERMON TITLE- "The Royal Psalms"

TEXT- Psalm 24

PREACHED AT- Neighbourhood Church

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Impunge

Today we are looking at a category of the Psalms that is probably the most challenging to easily define- except very specifically by content- as opposed to their theme.

So far we have looked at themes-

-Wisdom

-Remembrance

-Thanksgiving

In the weeks ahead we will look at-

-Lament

-Pilgrimage

Each of these has a theme that has a connection to our lives but today we are looking at a category that is strictly about content- and a content that on the surface has very little connection to most of our lives.

The theme we are looking at today is "The Royal Psalms."

Now it is very easy to see why this is a Psalm category, after all Psalm after Psalm talks about the King. But there is an argument that says, "If you are going to categorize things that way- you could look for "Daytime Psalms" vs "Nighttime Psalms"- "City Psalms" vs "Country Psalms"- or "Plant Psalms" vs "Animal Psalms."

At first I was a little frustrated by the category but it does have a rationale- after all in ancient times the royal court and the king were a key component of society.

We don't have royalty in the same way today but at a certain level we can understand it. We may not all be Canadian Monarchists but most people feel a level of pride in the monarchy and its ceremony. I happened to watch part of Queen Elizabeth's wedding ceremony and was reminded what an ornate affair that was.

Ancient Israel had its counterparts to that in its Royal court. And there were songs and ceremonies that went with it. A classic Royal Psalm that reflects this is- Psalm 45

Its subtitle gives an indication of how it might have been used. Imagine a grand royal wedding and a hymn of celebration.

Psalm 45 For the director of music. To the tune of "Lilies." Of the Sons of Korah. A maskil. A wedding song.

**My heart is stirred by a noble theme
as I recite my verses for the king;
my tongue is the pen of a skillful writer.
You are the most excellent of men
and your lips have been anointed with grace,
since God has blessed you forever.
Gird your sword upon your side, O mighty one;
clothe yourself with splendor and majesty.
In your majesty ride forth victoriously
in behalf of truth, humility and righteousness;
let your right hand display awesome deeds.**

Psalm 45:1-4

It is a Psalm of celebration of the King. It is the kind of things that are said about monarchs and leaders that we are proud of. It is what we hope our leaders will be.

Similarly, a Psalm that was possibly composed by David for the upcoming reign goes like this-

Psalm 72 Of Solomon.

**Endow the king with your justice, O God,
the royal son with your righteousness.
He will judge your people in righteousness,
your afflicted ones with justice.
The mountains will bring prosperity to the people,
the hills the fruit of righteousness.
He will defend the afflicted among the people
and save the children of the needy;
he will crush the oppressor. Psalm 72:1-4**

**Praise be to the LORD God, the God of Israel,
who alone does marvelous deeds.**

**Praise be to his glorious name forever;
may the whole earth be filled with his glory.
Amen and Amen.**

**This concludes the prayers of David son of Jesse. Psalm
72:18-20**

Both Psalms celebrate the royal government of Israel, as it is represented by the King. We can understand this.

It is what we do whenever we sing “O Canada” and “God Save The Queen.”

But in the case of the Bible, there is more to the story. Whenever Israelite kingship is mentioned those who are familiar with the Bible will remember that any human king was not God’s plan.

That part of the Biblical story was also burned into the soul of the Israel people. For the first 1000 years that God had called the children of Abraham into being they had no king. They were specifically to be a people lead by God.

But 1000 years after Abraham the people decided that they wanted a king. The story is told in the book of 1 Samuel.

So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. They said to him, "You are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have." 1 Samuel 8:4-5

6 But when they said, "Give us a king to lead us," this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the LORD. 7 And the LORD told him: "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. 8 As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you. 9 Now listen to them; but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will do." 1 Samuel 8:6-9

Their reasoning was profoundly superficial. They did have their own problems with the sons of the judges but in the end they wanted a king because “**all the other nations have**” one.

This is such a common rationale for doing things as we observe by who are now clambering over the iPad.

This is the beginning of Israelite kingship and that is never to be forgotten. God never designed His people to live under a king.

And yet the Royal Psalms celebrate the king.

So why the great hymns of blessing on the King? The answer is throughout the Bible as neatly spelt out by Paul-

I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. 1 Timothy 2:1-4

The kings of Israel where sometimes good but often bad but the bottom line for God’s people is that they are to see the king/govt as God’s agent.

There is no ambiguity-

#1. We Are To Bless And Support Our Governments

The king, even though he was instituted in a way that God had not intended, was set in place by Him. Once he is so set in place by God, it is the kingship is now something that God’s people are to take extremely seriously. Authority, the Bible teaches, is something that reflects God’s right to tell His creation what right and wrong is.

All authority comes from the place of God as Creator.

The idea that we support institutions that have ignoble beginnings is very important.

Equally important is the fact that even authorities who violate the principles that the Creator has set in place, do not with each violation, lose their place of authority.

In other words, the fact that a government might pass a law that we don’t agree with, morally, does not make them illegitimate.

As God’s people we live in a world that is a mix of good and evil. We can’t turn over every rock and only support those things which pass our purity test.

There come points in time when we, without equivocation simply support those who are in authority. We celebrate and bless them.

I think that is a lesson that God’s people need to be reminded of. This doesn’t mean that we don’t critique what is ours to critique- but in every case that critique comes under the umbrella that our leaders are in the place that they are, under God.

But our support of the government also does come from a very specific place. As God’s people must never forget where all this comes from. Because of that, even as we bless our governments we-

#2. We Acknowledge The King Of Kings

This acknowledgement is woven into each of the Royal Psalms but in some of them this theme dominates. Such is Psalm 24.

What this Psalm does is give us a foundation from which to understand the Royal Psalms, both in the time of the Kings of Israel in which they were written, and how that translates to us today.

It begins-

Psalm 24

The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters. Psalm 24:1-2

This is the foundation for everything that we do. God's people do nothing without this reminder. This is a Royal Psalm but it begins before the king came to be. In fact it begins before any of us came to be.

God comes first. But what this means is this-

God's people are therefore to be the king/government's most loyal servants but their loyalty is never unqualified. We do not submit to the government for its own sake- we submit to it and support it because, even though it comes as a 2nd choice, it is still the plan that God has placed His blessings upon.

And so the Royal Psalm quickly shifts to a Psalm that celebrates who God is- God as the founder of everything.

If this is the case a question follows is-

Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? Psalm 24:3

And the Psalmist responds with his answer-

He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false.

He will receive blessing from the LORD and vindication from God his Savior.

Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek your face, O God of Jacob. Selah Psalm 24:4-6

The question has an answer with 2 sides-

First- regarding the king.

What a blessing a nation has if the King or its leaders have clean hands and pure hearts. That too is our prayer for our leaders.

But back to reality- even the best leaders have feet of clay and the worst . . . No matter what the reality we lift this standard up before our leaders. This was God calls leaders to- those who call Him, Lord and those who don't.

The test of honesty is a primary test of leadership. This is one that we need to apply consistently and fairly to our leaders. This of course is not an easy test to apply and we must of course, be careful to be simplistic in our application.

But this challenge does not simply go out to leaders. It is a challenge that turn right back on us. And so it has another side- Second- regarding ourselves.

As important as it is that our leaders are honourable people, it is interesting that the focus of this Psalm is not just on the leader but on all of us. It is less important that our leaders have clean hearts than it is that we do. This theme too reoccurs again and again in the Scriptures.

A kingdom does not rise and fall, simply on the merits and failures of the king. It rises and falls on the basis of what you and I do. We can make sweeping indictments of our society but in end none of that matters very much. What matters is the state of our hands and our heart.

In end, you and I are called to ascend the "hill of the Lord." In the end you and I are called to "stand in His holy place."

That is the basis on which the rising and falling of fortunes is based.

But this is a Royal Psalm and so it carries on-

Lift up your heads, O you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Psalm 24:7

And now we see why this is a Royal Psalm and not just one of the many Psalms praising God. The scene is that of the King being installed into the seat of power.

This is a picture that every person living in ancient and even modern times can understand. A symbol of leadership is a giant gate, the symbol of the gate of the city, through which the Ruler enters.

It as there in ancient Israel when David took the throne.

He would bring his son Solomon through it, as would countless kings and conquers in the next 1000 years.

When Jesus completes His ministry He too rides into Jerusalem on a donkey, accompanied by cheering crowds, who recognized the sign of a king entering the Royal city.

Even on modern times symbolic gates are erected as symbols of government. Possibly the most famous one of our time is the Arc de Triomphe in Paris. Through its gates leaders and conquerors have paraded for 200 years.

And Psalm 24 paints this picture beautifully and comprehensively.

Who is this King of glory? Psalm 24:8

And you can almost hear the cry of the excited people responding in question and answer-

The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle.

Lift up your heads, O you gates; lift them up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in.

Who is he, this King of glory? Psalm 24:8-9

Again, in this Royal Psalm there are 2 sides to the answer. The first is, this is to be the Psalm and prayer for God's people with the installation of every leader that rides through the gates of leadership.

We hope and pray for each one, that they govern in peace and with wisdom. We bless them with every blessing we have.

But there is another side to the Psalm that reminds that no king and ruler will ever truly stand in God's place.

And because of that with the installation of every king and government we bless we close our prayer off with the answer-

**The LORD Almighty—he is the King of glory. Selah
Psalm 24:10**

Note the shift from “the Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle” to “the Lord Almighty”. The first applies to 1000s of kings and presidents who have been strong, mighty, effective leaders. We hope that our leaders combine that with Godly integrity.

But the second, doesn't refer to any of these- but to God Himself.

And with this the Royal Psalm also redirects our focus in a way that the Bible consistently does. We work with every ounce of our energy to bless and repair the world we live in but we do so fully aware that the ideal that drive us come from another Kingdom and-

#3. We Look Forward To Another Kingdom

From the very beginning the prophets of God reminded God's people that they were to be pilgrims and strangers here- and the Royal Psalms with all their pomp and circumstance always focus God's people back to that.

The more extravagant the ceremony the more ironic the contrast. It is why, for example, when Jesus, the King of Kings rides into His seat of government, He rides in, not on a charger but on a donkey's foal. He comes in not at the head of an impressive army, but with a crowd of ordinary people waving palm branches.

In many ways this is captured in another Biblical picture. Kingship has always been symbolized by great arches of Triumph and power and authority by a door.

In the end however, it is another door that symbolizes the deepest challenge to us. In the last book of the Bible- the Revelation.

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. Revelation 3:20

Ultimately that is the Arch of Triumph that Jesus came to earth to enter.