

Psalm 72

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[0 : 0 0] Well, let's turn to that psalm, Psalm 72. A brief prayer.

Once again, our Father, we thank you for your word, which is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path and which is able to make us wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Open up the scriptures, we pray, as you opened up the scriptures to those two on the road to Emmaus, teaching them what the scriptures from Moses to, and all the prophets had to say about himself.

We pray, Lord, that as we look at this psalm, our hearts will burn within us this evening. Help us, O Lord, we pray. In Jesus' name, amen. Well, one of the wonderful things about the psalms, the book of psalms, is the variety of psalms that there is.

There's psalms for every possible mood and every possible occasion. There are laments where the psalmist cries to God in deep trouble, cries for help.

[1 : 1 6] There are thanksgivings where he expresses his gratitude to God for some deliverance. There are what we call psalms of confidence, like Psalm 23, where the psalmist doesn't seem to have many problems, but he's just confident in God.

There are penitential psalms where he confesses his sin. There are what we call wisdom psalms, like the first psalm, where we're simply instructed in poetry.

And the wisdom psalms are addressed not to God, but to the reader, to us. There are psalms about the word of God, like Psalm 19 and Psalm 119.

And there are also royal psalms. And royal psalms are psalms that were written by or about or to or for a king.

And some of them were probably written for coronations, and that may well be true of this psalm. It may well have been specially written for a coronation, just as in a coronation, at a coronation in our country, a special piece of music might be composed.

[2 : 3 4] I think one was composed, wasn't it? Can't remember what it was. There's an anthem called, I was glad when they said unto me, let us go into the house of the Lord. And that was written especially, I was either the coronation or for some special royal occasion.

So a top musician or a top songwriter would be asked to come up with something for a coronation. And it was probably the true in Israel as well. And the psalmist would come up with a psalm for a coronation.

Well, I think this is one of those psalms, Psalm 72. And if you look at the heading, it says, Of Solomon. So that means that this psalm was written by or about Solomon.

Increasingly, scholars are taking the headings in the psalms seriously. They didn't used to take them very seriously, but they're being found to be probably part of the original scripture.

And therefore, as inspired as the psalm. And this psalm was written by or about Solomon. And if you look at the conclusion of the psalm, verse 20, This concludes the prayers of David, son of Jesse.

[3 : 58] That, and probably verses 18 and 19 actually as well, Form the conclusion to the second book of the psalms. The psalms are divided into books, five books.

And this is the last of the psalms in the second book of the psalm. And those verses conclude not just the psalm, but the book. And it says, This concludes, verse 20, The prayers of David, son of Jesse.

So if you take the headings, or the heading and the conclusion seriously, it may well be that this psalm was written by David about his son and his successor, Solomon.

And it may have been used as Solomon's coronation, and it may well have been used at the coronation of other kings of Judah.

And therefore it expresses David's prayers and desires and hopes for his son, Solomon, king of Judah.

[5 : 06] And eventually Israel's prayers and desires and hopes for her kings in the future. And what are David's desires and prayers and hopes for his son, for his successor as the king of Israel?

Well, I think they are threefold. First of all, righteousness. Secondly, universality. And thirdly, longevity or longevity.

I'm never sure whether to say longevity or longevity. Please yourself. Righteousness, first of all. Righteousness. The psalm opens, verse 1, with the words, Endow the king with your justice, O God, the royal son with your righteousness.

The word righteousness means a sort of general attitude of rightness. Whereas the word justice is actual righteous decisions in righteous, in actual cases.

Just and righteous and good decisions. So David wants his successor, he wants Solomon, his son, to be a righteous king.

[6 : 29] That's the first thing he asks for. He wants his king to be endowed with righteousness. Now, kings in the ancient world were regarded as the representatives on even the incarnation of a god on earth.

And that meant that the king was meant to embody the character of the god that they represented. And, of course, for most kings in the ancient world, that meant power.

The gods were all-powerful. God was all-powerful. And, therefore, if you were his representative on earth, you were all-powerful. You could have what you wanted.

You could do what you wanted. And so, for instance, Pharaoh, one of the pharaohs, who was regarded as a sort of semi-incarnation of an Egyptian god, when he died, he got them to build the great pyramid.

It took about 300,000 slaves to build the great pyramid. And the great pyramid was just for his dead body. 300,000 slaves building a pyramid for the dead body of one man who represented a god, Pharaoh, king of Egypt.

[7 : 58] But what the psalmist here asks God for with regard to this king is not just power.

First and foremost, it's righteousness and justice. The God of Israel, yes, of course, he is all-powerful. But he is also all-powerful justice and all-powerful righteousness.

And, therefore, the king of Israel was meant to be the embodiment of God's righteousness and justice. And, incidentally, this is still true.

It is still true of all governing authority. According to Paul in Romans chapter 13, it is still true of all kings, all emperors, all presidents, all prime ministers, all cabinet members, and even all members of parliament.

They're meant, according to Paul in Romans chapter 13, to be God's servants exercising his justice and his righteousness here on earth.

[9 : 08] And they don't seem to be making a very good job of it at the moment. But that's what they're meant to do. The king is meant to embody the righteousness and the justice of God.

Now, when you think of justice, don't just think punishment. We tend to immediately think of punishment when we think of justice.

The punishment of wrongdoers. Well, justice includes that. But it's a much wider idea in the Old Testament. Justice in the Old Testament is what we would call social justice.

Justice in the Old Testament is the redressing of human wrongs. It is righting what is wrong. It is ensuring that people are not wronged by others.

And it's putting it to right if they are wronged by others. So in the Old Testament, it means caring especially for, and looking out particularly for, for those who are vulnerable and weak and poor and less likely to be able to stand up for themselves and speak up for themselves against the rich and the powerful and the influential.

[10 : 23] And this is one of the great themes of the Old Testament. You can't read the Old Testament and miss this. It's just full of it. The law of Moses is full of it.

The prophets are full of it. The wisdom literature is full of it. In the Old Testament, God has two great complaints against his people, Israel.

One is idolatry, which is the way they treat him. And the other is social unrighteousness, which is the way they mistreat each other.

They mistreat other people. The God of the Bible, the God of Israel, is massively concerned about the poor, about the weak, about the widows, the orphans, the immigrants, who owned no land and therefore were vulnerable, the workers, the slaves.

He hates it when the rich use their money and their power to influence judges in their favor.

[11 : 34] He hates it when the poor are always at the back of the queue. He hates it when a blind eye is turned, when the rich exploit the poor.

There's masses of material about this in the Old Testament scriptures. The Old Testament, the God of the Old Testament is a God of righteousness and justice and the King of Israel was meant to embody this concern of God about justice and righteousness.

He was meant to rule on God's behalf as God's representative on earth. As I've already said and I'll say it again, in those days kings could do just about whatever they liked because it was widely believed that the king was virtually an incarnation of a God and for most people that just meant one thing, it meant power.

God is all powerful and therefore okay, I'm God's representative on earth and therefore I'm all powerful and I can do what I like and that idea of course, those of you who know your history, that idea even continued up until the time of King Charles I, the divine right of kings.

Kings can do what they like. Don't argue with a king. Don't oppose a king. Kings can do what they like because God is all powerful and therefore kings are all powerful and it was evangelical Christians of course who put a stop to that.

[13 : 14] that's why Oliver Cromwell's statue, a great evangelical Christian, a Bible-believing Christian, that's why Oliver Cromwell's statue is there outside the House of Commons today and can I remind you that independent congregations were making decisions by the votes of their membership long before politicians in this country ever thought of doing that.

So, for most kings being God's representative on earth meant power and that meant you could take advantage of the weak and the poor.

Just turn over to 1 Samuel chapter 8. 1 Samuel chapter 8. 1 Samuel chapter 8 verse 10.

This is when Israel first asked for a king. and Samuel he told them what kings what they could expect from king.

Verse 10 1 Samuel chapter 8 verse 10. Samuel told all the words of the Lord to the people who were asking him for a king. He said, this is what the king who will reign over you will do.

[14 : 34] He will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots and horses and they will run in front of his chariots. Some he will assign to be commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties and others to plough his ground and reap his harvest and still others to make weapons of war and equipment for his chariots.

He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his attendants. He will take a tenth of your grain and of your vintage and give it to his officials in attendance.

Your men servants and maid servants and the best of your cattle and donkeys he will take for his own use. He will take a tenth of your flocks and you yourselves will become his slaves and when that day comes you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen and the Lord will not answer you on that day.

That's what to expect from human kings said Samuel. That's what you're asking for if you're asking for a human king. Because human kings felt that as divine representatives on earth they could do what they liked.

A good example of this is the story of King Ahab and Naboth's vineyard. Can you remember that story? King Ahab and Jezebel his wife they lived in a palace and next to the palace was a plot of land that belonged to somebody called Naboth.

[15 : 55] It was in his family. It was his inheritance. And in the Old Testament that's very very important. Your inheritance was God given. It was very very important.

And Naboth on his little plot of land had a vineyard. And Ahab decided he wanted Naboth that land next to his palace. He wanted to extend. He was rich and therefore he wanted to extend.

And he asked Naboth to let him buy his vineyard. And Naboth refused. It's in our family.

It's God given. It's our inheritance. Not giving it to you. And I think it says that Ahab turned his face to the wall. And he sulked.

And after you know it's like living with a man who's sulking don't you. And his wife Jezebel said come on Ahab you can have what you want.

[16 : 54] You're the king. You can have what you want. If you want that vineyard you can have it. Leave it to me. And Jezebel got together a sort of plot and it ended up with Naboth being killed and Ahab moving into his vineyard extending into his vineyard.

When he extended into his vineyard he arrived at the vineyard to have a look at it. And when he arrived there the prophet Elijah had got there before him. And the prophet Elijah said to Ahab these are my words just a rough translation you are dead.

You are dead because of what you have done. It's a neighbor. Now when you think of what Ahab had done up until that point killing or trying to kill the prophets of God introducing Baals into the nation of Israel he had done quite a lot of harm by then but the thing that clinched it was what he did to Nabal one man and Ahab thought because I'm the king I can do what I like and the prophet Elijah said no you can't and you are dead because of what you've done to Nabal and sure enough Elijah's prophecy came true just turn to Jeremiah chapter 22 Jeremiah chapter 22 Jeremiah chapter 22 verse 13 my word if only we had a few prophets like

Jeremiah today listen to this the chapter is entitled judgment against evil kings it is a prophet preaching to a king verse 13 does it make you a king to have more and more cedar did not your father have food and drink he did what was right and just so all went with him he defended the cause of the poor and the needy and so all went well is that not what it means to know me declares the Lord but your eyes and your heart are set only on dishonest gain on shedding innocent blood and on oppression and extortion this is what it means to know me declares the Lord to defend the cause of the poor and the needy to do what is right and just and you well you just want more cedar a bigger pallet more food and drink you set your heart and your eyes only on dishonest gain on shedding innocent blood and on oppression and extortion so the God of Israel is a God of justice and a God of righteousness and therefore

David's prayer and desire for his son is that he will embody God's justice and righteousness and he says a king like this a king of justice and righteousness when he comes into this world of oppression and injustice and war and violence and inequality and unfairness it will be like the coming of the rain the coming of shower look at verse six he will be like rain falling on a moon field like showers watering the earth in his days the righteous will flourish prosperity will abound till the moon is no more it's hard for us to imagine people wanting rain isn't it we where I live recently

[21 : 12] I think you've been doing alright in Whitby actually but where I live in Kenya we get plenty of rain thank you very much and it's the sun we like occasionally but you know in arid countries it's the rain that sets people rejoicing I remember once I've been to Kenya twice to do some bible teaching and the first time I went the rain hadn't come at the usual time it had been delayed and there was a lot of prayer for rain in the church and I remember driving with somebody across completely dry riverbed where normally there would be water flowing and you could just drive across the riverbed and then on my last night in Kenya the rain came unfortunately I was in a little house with a tin a corrugated iron roof and it absolutely pelted down actually it did come to think of it last night coming here between

Scotch Corner and Gisborough I've never driven through such torrential rain and lightning and it was like that and I literally never slept a single wink all night because of this rain the noise was horrific on this tin roof but everybody was rejoicing except me everybody everybody was rejoicing the rain at last and that's what it's going to be like when this king comes says the psalmist his rule will be like the rain at last this rain of righteousness and justice and it'll be good news for the oppressed and for the weak and for the vulnerable verse 4 he will defend the afflicted among the people and save the children of the needy he will crush the oppressor verse 12 he will deliver the needy who cry out the afflicted who have no one to help he will take pity on the weak and the needy and save the needy from death what a king this is not this is not your average ancient near eastern king but this king will take pity on the weak and the needy and save the needy from death he will rescue them from oppression and violence listen to this for precious is their blood precious is their blood in his sight just turn to 2 Samuel chapter 23 2 Samuel chapter 23 2 Samuel 23 verse 2 says at the beginning of the chapter these are the last words of David verse 2 the spirit of the lord spoke through me his word was on my tongue the god of israel spoke the rock of israel said to me when one rules over men in righteousness when he rules in the fear of god he is like the light of morning at sunrise on a cloudless morning like the brightness after rain that brings the grass from the earth righteousness that's the first desire of David for his successor

Solomon secondly universality I'm not going to spend as long on the next two secondly universality the next great hope that David has for his son is that he will reign universally and it's great to have a righteous king a king who rules in justice and righteousness but if there are rival kings rival kingdoms then his reign will not necessarily be secure and so David's prayer is that there will be no rival kings there will be no rival kingdoms and that all the kings of the earth will either be conquered by this king and subdued by him or will voluntarily acknowledge his reign and become part of his kingdom and so you've got the other kings of the world paying homage to this king look at it verse 8 he will rule from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth the desert tribes will bow before him and his enemies will lick the dust the kings of

Tarshish and of distant shores will bring tribute to him the kings of Sheba and Seba will present him gifts all kings will bow down to him and all nations will serve him Tarshish probably probably in southern or western Spain remember when God called Jonah to go east to Nineveh he got a boat west to Tarshish and it was about as far west as you could go in those days America hadn't been invented and as for those little islands just west of the coast of Europe those misty little islands where people painted themselves in blue paint and offered human sacrifices at Stonehenge nobody wanted to go there so Tarshish was the furthest you went west and so when the psalmist wants to imagine the whole world worshipping this king he says

Tarshish they'll recognise his rule and pay tribute to him the kings of Sheba and Seba Sheba probably what we would call Arabia or Yemen exotic places where they produce spices and things Seba I'm told I had to look this up probably Ethiopia nowadays the most exotic places the most far off places Tarshish the most exotic places Sheba and Seba from the river that's the river Euphrates to the ends of the earth from sea to sea even the desert tribe even the desert tribes verse 9 will bow before him those desert tribes of wild hostile travelling nomads who acknowledge nobody's rule over them but they will acknowledge the rule of this king kings will bring tribute to him incidentally this probably lies behind the legend that the magi or the wise men who brought their gift to the infant

[28 : 34] Jesus were kings we three kings there's no evidence in the new testament that they were kings it's probably based on the reading of this psalm kings kings will bring their tribute to this king verse 17 is particularly important the end the second part of verse 17 all nations will be blessed through him and they will call him blessed that's important because it's a clear reference back to Genesis chapter 12 Genesis chapter 12 God's wonderful initial covenant promise to Abraham through your offspring I will bless all people all the peoples of the earth will be blessed through your offspring Abraham it's a most amazing amazing passage Genesis 12 Genesis 15 Genesis 17 the promises of God to Abraham first 11 chapters of Genesis you've got man's fall man's sin

Cain and Abel tower of Babel the flood you've got cursing and then out of nowhere Genesis chapter 12 verses 1 to 3 God calls one man out of her of the cold he says I'm going to bless you Abraham you don't deserve it but I'm going to bless you because that's the kind of God I am and I'm going to bless your offspring and I'm going to bless all the peoples of the earth through you and your offspring Abraham and this verse verse 17 is clearly a reference back to Genesis chapter 12 and we learn from verse 17 that it is through the king who will come from the offspring of David that the offspring of Abraham sorry that all the nations of the earth will be blessed God is going to bless the world the earth through the offspring of Abraham and through the offspring of this king through this king in particular that's what verse 17 teaches so universality

Solomon actually did reign over the whole territory that God had originally promised to Abraham and other kings and queens did bring tribute to him you can read about the queen of Sheba bringing tribute to Solomon in the book of king and then longevity or longevity longevity the problem with kings even good kings is that they die and the book of kings is full of short reigns one king only reigns a week before he's assassinated some of them have longer reigns but they die and even good kings die like Hezekiah or Josiah they die and very often if you read the book of kings their sons are nothing like their father and they proceed to undo all the good that their fathers have done and very often the death of a king spelt disaster it would lead to a power struggle a blood bath all the sons and descendants of that king would be put to death so that the new king would have no rivals to the throne the death of a king was a disaster and even the best kings with the longest reigns died we know that because

Isaiah says in chapter 6 in the year that king Uzziah died I saw the Lord even Uzziah died and he was the king with the longest reign in the Old Testament but even he died and Solomon reigned for 40 years and he died and his son was a fool he was called Rehobo and he listened to his youthful advisors who advised him to be even more oppressive than his father Solomon and the result was a split in the kingdom his son was a fool so if you've got a righteous king and a universal king what you want next is a king who isn't going to die because if he dies there's trouble so this psalmist you always use exaggerated language when you're talking to a king verse 5 he will endure as long as the sun as long as the moon through all generations it's a long time isn't it long may he live verse 15 long may he live verse 17 may his name endure forever may it continue as long as the sun that's how you talk to kings isn't it if you read the book of Daniel you'll find that they go into the presence of the king and they say oh king live forever you don't actually want him to live forever

I mean Nehemiah was the king's wine taster which meant that lots of people didn't want the king to live forever which is why Nehemiah had to taste the wine before the king did and if there was anything wrong with it Nehemiah would suffer and not the king so people talk like that to kings I don't know whether this psalmist actually believed that this king would reign forever or not but that's his wish that's his wish that's his prayer that's what he would love a king who is righteous and just and who has a universal and rival reign and who lives forever that's the king we want the psalmist said so the most likely candidate for whom this psalm may have originally been written was indeed Solomon the son of David he started well he was renowned for his wisdom his kingdom actually reached the extent that had been promised to

[34 : 51] Abraham and his offspring foreign kings brought him tribute he was prosperous he was wealthy built the temple and it must have been during the reign of Solomon that this psalm had largely been fulfilled that David's prayer had been answered but no at the height of his power everything went pear shaped he married he married and foreign concubines and they brought their religions into the country and so Solomon's reign ended in religious compromise and growing idolatry he became oppressive with these building projects taxing the people conscripting forced labour not unlike the pharaoh who built that great pyramid not quite on the level of that pyramid but he was heading in that direction towards the end of Israel and he died and his son was a fool and split the kingdom and the kings went from bad to worse and in the end the

Davidic dynasty came to an end when the nation of Israel was taken into Babylon into exile they lost their temple they lost their land they lost their king the last king of Israel or Judah was called Zedekiah and he was taken into exile into Babylon and they executed his sons the successors to the throne of Judah they executed his sons and then they put Zedekiah's eyes out so that the last thing he saw was the death of his son and that is how the kings the house of David ends in the Old Testament long centuries passed and how does the New Testament open how long have I got did we start at six o'clock

I can never remember whether it was half six or six o'clock I have to start thinking about finishing you get to the New Testament how does the New Testament start it starts with a royal genealogy you probably thought well the beginning of Matthew a bit boring not at all a royal genealogy and that genealogy is summed up in the first verse of Matthew the genealogy of Jesus the son of David the son of Abraham in other words things are happening here God is about to fulfill his promise there are predictions of the birth of a king in the city of David he will be great and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David he will reign on David's throne and sure enough Gentiles come to this king with their gifts gold and frankincense and myrrh where is he who is born the king of the

Jew and Jesus grew up and as we saw this morning when he commenced his ministry his first recorded words were the time is fulfilled the kingdom of God is at hand repent and believe the good news the kingdom has come the king is here and his gospel the good news is described as the gospel of the kingdom the good news of the kingdom this kingdom that we've been talking about tonight is here says Jesus and Jesus his favorite self designation was son of man people think oh yeah Jesus just claimed to be the son of man and you Christians you're always going on about him being the son of God he just claimed that he was the son of man what did he mean when he said he was the son of man just turn to Daniel chapter 7 we've nearly finished Daniel chapter 7 interesting chapter

Daniel Daniel chapter 7 it's a vision and it's a vision of a series of kingdoms or empires and each one gets worse and worse and worse and it's symbolized by a monster an inhuman monster verse 4 the first was like a lion and it had the wings of an eagle verse 6 one that looked like a leopard and on its back four wings like those of a bird and so it goes on and they get worse and worse and worse and then the last kingdom comes the last empire comes and you're expecting something even worse what do you get verse 13 in my vision in my vision coming with the clouds of heaven he approached the ancient of days and was led into his presence he was given authority glory and sovereign power all peoples nations and men of every language worshipped him his dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed

[40 : 37] Jesus claimed to be the son of man the king and after his resurrection he said all authority is given unto me go into all the world as my representative and we saw this morning and I haven't time sadly this evening to go into it again but we saw this morning how contrary to all expectations this king instead of going to Jerusalem to set up his kingdom went to Jerusalem warning his disciples that when he got there he was going to be killed he was going to suffer he was going to be put to death and this king as I tried to explain this morning suffered for his subject died for his subject we couldn't be part of his kingdom as we are unforgiven under God's judgment under God's wrath rebel and so the king came and took what we should have had took what we deserve died for us

God raised him from the dead and enthroned him at his right hand Jesus is the king and you should extol him and give him the glory and honour his name he will come again and the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of our God and of his Christ his anointed one his Messiah and he will reign forever and ever and do you know the church is the sign of this coming kingdom that's what it's meant to be it's meant to be the sign of this coming kingdom what is the kingdom of God going to be like well it's going to be a bit like the church not a lot but a bit like the church it's going to be much better than the church but the king but the church ought to give some idea of what the kingdom of God is going to be like justice righteousness whether poor are welcome whether weak are cared for and loved and provided for where there's peace and unity and love instead of war we should be pointing people to the kingdom of God not just by preaching the kingdom which we must do but by also demonstrating the life of the kingdom in our churches and showing people what being under the rule of

King Jesus is life until he comes again can I just say this and then look I'm closing my Bible so you know I'm really finishing can I just say this French resistance second world war they were under the rule of Charles de Gaulle Charles de Gaulle was in London he was in exile in London they were under his rule responsible to him in communication with him in various ways obeying his order in various ways and working for the day when Charles de Gaulle would be able to come back to Paris and set up a new government in France and meanwhile their job was to make life for the Nazis as difficult as possible blowing up railway lines you've seen it on the telly making life as difficult as possible for the

Nazis that's us we are God's agents the agents of God's kingdom here behind enemy lines waiting for Jesus to come back and until he comes back making life as difficult for the devil as we possibly can amen so let's