

PSALM 72
JESUS – OUR KING?

Who is your ideal leader? Is there someone in a position of power or leadership today that you look up to and admire? Is there someone in the past, in history, that for you is the ideal leader, a king, a queen, or a president? History is littered with figures who were seen as great leaders for a time: Alexander the Great; Cleopatra; Julius Caesar; Napoleon; Winston Churchill; Nelson Mandela; Queen Elizabeth; and whole host of others that I've missed out. Some have been empire-builders and have made their countries great for a time; some have changed the way world is for a time; some have had influence for a particular time in history and then their influence has waned. All of them were leaders for a time; all of them were human with faults and failings alongside their greatness, but the world has been a changed place, some argue a better place or some would perhaps argue a worse place, for their leadership and influence.

How will people look back on our generation of leaders? What will history say about those who hold positions of power in our world? From where we stand today, so much of the answer to that is a matter of opinion and of political opinion, that I won't go there today; I have my views, you have yours and we may agree and we may not agree, but I'm not going there. One thing is sure: the world needs quality leadership; the world needs leadership with qualities; it is not enough to hold power and pass laws; the world will get by with leaders who do that; but we need leaders of quality whether in the political sphere, or in the church, whether on the grand scale of nations and the world, or on the local scale of communities, congregations, and councils. We need leadership with qualities.

As we said earlier, Psalm 72 has two themes to it. First of all, it was a prayer for the King, for Solomon in the first instance and then probably for his successors; it seems to have become part of the coronation ritual for new kings; it may even have been an annual reminder to the king of his responsibilities. People prayed for the king, that God would give him all that was promised! The second theme was to become the hope of an ideal king, the hope that became formed round idea of Messiah; God set in the hearts of His people the hope that one day the ideal King would come and this would be Messiah, the special one anointed by God to be King over His people, to be the King forever, to be the King over the whole world, to be the King who would care for people in need. Christians look at that picture and see Jesus; Jesus completes the picture of the ideal King. Let's tease out these two themes a little more.

First of all, Psalm 72 was a prayer for king. "*Endow...*" (*Psalm 72:1*) This sets the tone for the rest of the prayer: "let the king have the right kind of qualities; let him be the right kind of person". He should have a sense of justice, treating everyone fairly and equally; he should have a sense of what is right and wrong and look to be the right kind of person and do the right kind of things. This is a recurring theme through the whole prayer: let king be a good person. That sense of justice and what is right is spelled out in his care for people in need: "*He will...*" (*Psalm 72:4*) The psalm goes on to hope and pray that the king will last forever and that king will rule and reign across the whole world, but then comes back again and again to the king who cares for those who are in need. God has promised that the world will be blessed through this king and the people's prayer reflects that hope.

The title of the Psalm says "of Solomon". Now we can read very little into these titles; lots of them were added later, but if we run with it for a moment, this is perhaps a prayer for Solomon, maybe even penned by his father David; maybe it was written by Solomon for himself or for those who would come after him. Solomon was arguably Israel's greatest king; the golden age of Israel was when he was king. Solomon's rule and influence spread across the whole of the Middle East and even beyond, as he sent his ships across the whole known world to bring wealth and cargo back to Israel; people came from across the known world to visit Solomon and pay homage to him, the Queen of Sheba being the most prominent example, coming from

Africa. He was famous for his wisdom: there are examples of that wisdom in his story as well as in the book of Proverbs, gathering the wisdom of Solomon.

But Solomon also made mistakes. He became wealthy and continued to gather wealth and put on a show of opulence, but there was a cost. He built a grand temple in Jerusalem and a royal palace and furnished them richly, but built these grand buildings using slave labour, not from his own people but from the nations around about. Also he took so many wives, many of them from the nations around about and the story tells us that his heart was distracted from his love for God; his upright life and his integrity were lost as his heart wandered away from his faith. Ultimately this would be his downfall, and after Solomon the kingdom was divided and was never as great again.

Pray for our leaders. We complain about our leaders but we should pray for them too, perhaps we should even pray for them before we complain about them. What do we pray? We pray the same as people prayed at the start of Psalm 72: *“Endow...” (Psalm 72:1)* Pray for our leaders to be people with good qualities in their hearts and minds and lives. Political leaders make lots of promises, but the proof of them is in the kind of people they are; they may say grand things, but how do they behave? Are they being fair, being honest, being concerned with what is right, being concerned for the weakest and lowest in society? We have all seen or heard of leaders who line their own pockets, who make themselves rich while their people grow poorer and poorer. We have all heard leaders make promises and now we even hear leaders tell lies and they know that they are lies and people know they tell lies, but they still elect them – what does that say about our world? Take this picture of the ideal leader and use it to pray for our leaders, national, international, political, church, community leaders, to be people with these qualities regardless of politics!

Secondly, there is the ideal king, the hope that grew of Messiah. Wise men came travelling, following a star, bringing gifts. *“Where is...” (Matthew 2:2)* That was a question that sent shockwaves through the king’s palace in Jerusalem, that disturbed Herod and his palace. *“What new king? We don’t know of any new king! There is nothing to see here!”* Instead they found an old prophecy that spoke of a King being born in Bethlehem, a king who would shepherd God’s people and bring peace. The wise men travelled on and found Jesus and gave Him their gifts, including the gift of gold, a gift fit for a king. They bowed down and worshipped Him, body language fit for a king’s presence. Their search is complete; they found what they were looking for; not in the royal palace, but they found Jesus and saw Jesus and knew in their spirit that this is what they have been looking for. *“Here is our King!”*

The earliest Christian confession was very simple: *“Jesus is Lord!”* It means same thing! The say *“Jesus is King or Lord”* carried lots of meaning to it, but one thing it certainly meant was a commitment in the Christian to be the kind of person Jesus wants. To say *“Jesus is Lord”* commits us to learn to be the kind of people Jesus wants us to be, that we not only say *“Jesus is Lord”* but that we actively make Jesus Lord of our lives. In order to make that happen, several things need to fall into place: we need to listen to things that Jesus says about life and way we live it: *“follow me; love your neighbour, love your enemies”* so that we know what is expected of us. Not only do we listen to Jesus, but we watch Him in action: not only does He talk about love, but He models love perfectly, He does what He says; we see Him as the perfect role model for life and faith. Then when we’ve listened and watched and when we understand what is expected, we need to put it into practice, to make Jesus King and Lord of our lives by doing what He says and by doing what we see. So often it’s this last step where we fall down, because it is hard to do and because we make mistakes and get things wrong and come up short.

What makes all of that work and what holds all of that together, is desire. We actually want Jesus to be King and Lord of our lives. That’s not as straight-forward as it might seem: there’s something in our human nature that doesn’t like being told what to do; we can run our own

lives in our own way; there is something in us that looks at Jesus' teaching and thinks it is way beyond us and so we rebel; or there is something in us that is content with things the way they are and any notion of change in our attitudes, or our ways, or our life is something we don't want. We can say "we don't want Jesus to be our king!" and even if we never say it our loud using words, our life says it; it is seen in what we are and do or perhaps more in what we are not and what we don't do! The best people we can be is to be people with Jesus as Lord of our lives, a challenging task but a blessing to ourselves and others.

Here are two challenges with which to start 2020. The first is to pray for people in positions of power and leadership: in Scotland, in the UK, across the world; some will make news headlines often, some maybe only once, some perhaps never – pray for them; some are honest, others are corrupt – pray for them; pray for justice, fairness, and equality; pray for them to know what is right and to be who love what is right and be people who do what is right. Our second challenge: to make Jesus King of our lives and to live by that. Let us say this morning again that Jesus is Lord; maybe we will say for the first time "Jesus is Lord of my life" and then the challenge is to live by that; there will be times when we fail, or times when we fall short, and times when we need to pick ourselves up and start again. Listen to Jesus, look at Him – what do we hear and see? Our challenge is to be like that! Here are two challenges – look for signs of light in dark places, to see where God is at work to answer our prayers; two challenges – let's rise to them and see God bless the world by our prayers and by our lives.