

Lesson Fourteen: King Above All Kings

Focal Text: Psalm 93

Background: Revelation 19:6-7, 11:15; Luke 1:33

Main Idea: The Lord God is mightier than any human or natural power

Question to Explore: Do I consider the awesomeness of God?

Quick Read: The Eternal God reigns as the King of Kings forever and ever. Hallelujah!

Introduction

June 2, 1953, is a date that is etched into the minds and hearts of many people around the world. On that date, Elizabeth of the House of Windsor was crowned Queen of the United Kingdom and the British Commonwealth. Although she was declared Queen immediately upon the death of her father, King George VI, in 1952, her coronation did not occur until a year later.

This was the first televised coronation of a British monarch. Households all over the UK and the Commonwealth bought their first television sets for the occasion. Those who saw it were not disappointed.

The ceremony was anything but tedious. Elizabeth, who was all of 26 when she was crowned, received the Crown, the Scepter, the Orb, and the Robe with majesty. Viewers were riveted to the screen as they watched this young lady take center stage of the world, and with humility, honor, and grace, she vowed to lead the Kingdom to the best of her ability. Although she was so young, Elizabeth II would grow into the job, and she became one of the most significant figures of the Twentieth Century. The United Kingdom, the Commonwealth, and the world were in awe. Elizabeth was Queen. The world rejoiced.

Psalm 93 is a display of regal splendor even greater than the coronation of the Queen. In just five verses, the psalm shows an amazing display of God's majesty over the world. With God seated on the throne, the world is not a frightening place; instead, it is a place that squarely serves as the seat of God's governance. Because of God's power and strength, not only does the world remain calm and balanced, but His Word is also sure.

While Psalm 93 might be a reminder of a worldly coronation, it is anything but one. Instead, the psalm shows that God is the Sovereign of the universe, and He has no equal. Thus the psalm stands out as an amazing chapter in the entire book of Psalms.

Commentary

Psalm 93 is a hymn. Although it does not contain the familiar pattern of “Call to worship—Body—Conclusion,” it proudly details the accolades of God. The psalm appears to be part of a larger collection called the “enthronement psalms,” in which “God as King” takes center stage (Psalms 93-100). Many of the psalms in this collection use the same term: “The Lord reigns” (Psalm 93:1, 96:10, 97:1, 99:1). All of them in the collection show the majesty and glory of God, that God is greater than any creation. As the collection ends, the call is for the earth to “shout for joy,” to “enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise” (Psalm 100:1,4). These psalms are so powerful, many consider them to be the center-point of the entire book of Psalms.¹

It is because of this center-point that scholars of the early Twentieth Century thought that there might be more going on in the psalm than the text readily shows. Hermann Gunkel (1862-1932) was the first modern scholar to find uses for the psalms in worship. He categorized the psalms into hymns, thanksgiving, royal, and laments, and he asked how the psalms could be used in Temple ceremonies.² Among the hymns, Gunkel surmised that some of them were “enthronement psalms,” indicated by the royal metaphors on display throughout the psalm.

Gunkel’s pupil, Sigmund Mowinckel (1884-1965), believed that these “enthronement psalms” (forty in total) were used in the ritual of the Lord becoming King (*yhwh mlk*). Thus, he surmised that there was an annual “enthronement festival” whereby the Israelites would crown God as their King, and they would seat Him on the throne. These various psalms would be sung throughout the festival, which paralleled a similar enthronement festival found in Babylonian culture and literature.³

Such an Enthronement Festival became the fodder for much discussion throughout the Twentieth Century. Hans-Joachim Kraus, however, was able to place some finality to the discussion, by going against Mowinckel’s view. He provided four reasons for his disdain. First, he believed Mowinckel mistranslated the phrase “God has become king;” instead, it should be read (as was tradition), “God is king.” Second, Kraus wondered how God could be placed upon the throne when there was no image of this in Israelite culture as there was in Babylonian and Canaanite religions. Third, Israel did not believe in a God who died and needed to be “re-throned.” Fourth, the eternal kingship of God was and is always intact.⁴

Although Kraus posited that there was an annual festival, he believed it centered around the Ark of the Covenant, and that the priest would enter the Temple with joy. He believed this to be a “Zion Festival” that centered around the so-called “Zion Psalms.”⁵ Thus, Mowinckel’s theory of the Enthronement Festival had come to an end.⁶

Although Psalm 93 in the Hebrew Bible does not have a superscription, the Septuagint (LXX) provided one: “For the day before the Sabbath, when the land was inhabited; a praise song for David.”⁷ The superscription provides a link to Psalm 92, wherein its superscription states that it was written for the Sabbath Day. The Mishnah called on the people to recite Psalm 93 on Friday evening, and Psalm 92 on the Sabbath, since God completed the universe in six days, thereby to sit enthroned above it.⁸

Although the psalm is only five verses long, it contains three distinct divisions. First, the psalmist declared God’s Kingship, and how He created an unshakeable world (vv. 1-2). Second, the poet described the flood waters of the sea as great, but he also noted that God was greater than the sea (vv. 3-4). Third, God’s decrees are as certain as God Himself is (v. 5). The psalm described an amazing and sovereign God, who is King of the universe.

The Kingship of God (vv. 1-2)

The psalm opens with an announcement: “The Lord reigns” (v. 1). Rather than a call to worship, this is instead an exclamation or an announcement.⁹ It is this affirmation that begins the setting of the psalm. Rather than moving through several accolades, the psalmist instead described God in a methodological way, just like a king. An English rendering of the Hebrew puts it like this:

*He is clothed in majesty,
He is clothed,
The Lord girds himself (in) strength.*

The Hebrew stated the verb “clothed” (“robed,” *labesh*) twice, not only for emphasis, but to describe the event. God, metaphorically, carefully put on His royal garments. Kings did not place their royal garments on quickly; instead, they were put on slowly to show their importance. “Armed in strength” is literally “girding himself in strength,” again visualizing a king putting on his royal vestments, ready to be seated at his throne.

“Indeed, the world is established” (v. 1). The “world” (*tebel*) is not the “earth” or “land” (*’eretz*); instead, this is the world of humanity—the geopolitical realm. Because God is King, robed in majesty and strength, the world is established, “firm and secure” (lit., “it will not be shaken”). The reason the world is secure—and the only reason—is because God has established it. This is similar to the everlasting nature of God, and the ephemeral nature of worldly powers. Chaos would not ensue because God is on the throne.

Not only is the world established, but “your throne was established from long ago” (v. 2). God was not new to His role; on the contrary, the psalmist could not see the beginning of God’s reign. At the same time, God was “for all eternity.” As far as the psalmist could see, God’s throne was from everlasting to everlasting.

In two verses, the psalmist has described the majesty of His God. God reigns (v. 1a). There was no need to explain or qualify the statement; it stands on its own. The next two lines of verse 1 show how God is clothed (v. 1a-b). He is robed in majesty and girded in strength. The final three lines (v. 1c-v. 2) spoke of His establishment (*kun*) of both the earth and His throne.¹⁰ The earth is neither in chaos nor confusion because God's strength and majesty have established it. His reign, and His throne, are from everlasting to everlasting.

The God over the Waters (vv. 3-4)

The psalmist, having described God's might, majesty, and everlasting nature, drew His attention to the sea. Using the same verb three times ("lift up," *nasa'*), the poet described the mighty sea. As he detailed the rising of the waters three times, it appears that he was mimicking the crashing waves and the wave-like surge that they brought:¹¹

*The floods have lifted up, O Lord;
The floods have lifted up their voice;
The floods lift up—roaring!*¹²

As the waves moved, sounding their "voice" against the rocks and the beach, the psalmist's audience could almost hear the waves themselves!

Such a raging sea was scary to even the most accomplished seafarer. Such visual poetry brings to mind the raging sea in the book of Jonah, where the sea was so violent that the "ship threatened to break up" (Jonah 1:4). Few people in those days knew how to swim, and even those who did would have had a healthy fear of the deluge that the sea might bring.

Although the raging sea was mighty and to be feared, God was mightier than it was. The psalmist declared to his audience:

*From the thunders of many waters,
Mightier than the waves of the sea,
Mighty on high is the Lord!*¹³

Such a verbal picture is reminiscent of Genesis chapter 1. In it, the narrator states that "the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters" (Genesis 1:2). Though the world was at its beginning, there was no chaos, because God's hand glided over the surface of the waters. In like manner, the sea was raging, thundering in chaos. It was a mighty force that no human could withstand. God, however, was greater than any raging sea. With God, there was no chaos. The sea was large; God was larger.

The Certainty of God's Decrees (v. 5)

As the psalm ends, the psalmist changed his emphasis from the chaos of the sea to the surety of God's decrees. In one sense, the verse seems out of place. How does God's decrees compare to His majesty and His strength? How do they compare with His handling of the sea?

The answer appears to come from his integrity. If God's majesty is secure, if His strength cannot be conquered, and if He can handle the raging seas and their mighty waves, then His Word is certain. The people could trust His "testimonies" (statutes), because they came from the same God who commands the universe from on high.

Not only could they trust His Word, but they could also enter His presence. "Holiness befits your house for endless days" (v. 5b). As God was adorned with majesty and strength, His Temple was filled with His holiness. With a God who was as secure and strong as Yahweh, His worshipers did not need to fear. Instead, they could rely on His Word with confidence, and they could worship the Lord in His Temple.

Because God is King, the universe has a reliable stability to it. Followers of God did not need to fear the world, because God was in charge. Disciples of the Lord could trust God's decrees, for they were as stable as he is. The Temple of God could be a place they could worship God, knowing full well that He could be trusted, and that He was trustworthy.

Conclusion

*O that with yonder sacred throng
We at his feet may fall;
We'll join the everlasting song
And crown him Lord of all.¹⁴*

The words of the majestic hymn, "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name" is reminiscent of the scene in Psalm 93. The psalm describes the day when Jesus would be seated at the right hand of God, and, one by one, all of the world would hail Him as the King of kings and Lord of lords. It is an "enthronement song," full of majesty and coronation.

However, while the hymn may sound like Jesus is "being crowned," the Bible in many places (John 1:1 being among them) states that Jesus is already King. He may be placed in robed, royal splendor, but He is Lord already. Because He is Lord, there is no need to fear. Life is certain because the God of the universe is certain. He is from everlasting to everlasting. Such a revelation can cause an epiphany for those who truly hear it for the first time.

In 1953, twenty-seven-year-old Frederick Buechner¹⁵ was at a crossroads in his life. Having already written two novels, one critically acclaimed (*A Long Day's Dying*), he sought to replicate his fame by writing another successful book. During an agonizing writer's block, wherein he lost

any creativity to write, he looked for other ways to make a living. After applying for jobs from advertising to the CIA, none of them gave him a sense of peace.

While job-hunting, Buechner found himself attending church regularly for the first time in his life. Down the street from his apartment, he went to Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church, where the great George Buttrick was the pastor. He was riveted by Buttrick's eloquence and imaginative style, and it kept him coming back each week.

Soon after the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, Buttrick preached on Jesus, who had been crowned in the heart of those who believe in Him. Buechner then heard Buttrick's words that seared into his soul: that Jesus' coronation takes place "among confession, tears and great laughter." Buechner recalled:

...and at the phrase *great laughter*, for reasons that I have never satisfactorily understood, the great wall of China crumbled and Atlantis rose up out of the sea, and on Madison Avenue, at 73rd Street, tears leapt from my eyes as though I had been struck across the face.¹⁶

Make no mistake: The Lord is King; The Lord reigns! That fact permeates the lives of all who are willing to hear it, and it will change them forever.

1. W. Dennis Tucker Jr. and Jamie A. Grant, *Psalms*, vol. 2, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 382.

2. A nice summary of Gunkel's early work is found in William Sanford LaSor, David Allan Hubbard, and Frederic William Bush, *Old Testament Survey*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 432–34.

3. LaSor, 434–35.

4. See Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Worship in Israel*, trans. Geoffrey Buswell (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966), 205–7; Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, A Continental Commentary, trans. Hilton C. Oswald (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 467. In addition, Samuel Terrien, *The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 659, reminds the reader that in Hebrew syntax, verbs normally precede the noun, not follow it. Consequently, the syntax is a shout of exultation "that proclaims, not a renewal every year, but a duration for eternity."

5. For more information on "Zion Psalms," see LaSor, 442–43; Kraus, *Worship*, 208–18.

6. Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary*, vol. 3, *The Writings* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2019), 223, sums up the end of the theory in proper fashion: "[It] has

come more and more to seem like a scholarly exercise in historical fiction because there is no evidence for the existence of such a rite in ancient Israel.”

7. As noted in Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, Word Biblical Commentary 20 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1990), 472; see also *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1997), footnote on Psalm 93:1, 1175.

8. See Tate, 476–77.

9. Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73–150*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 369.

10. Tucker and Grant, 372–73.

11. Alter, 224.

12. The author’s personal translation.

13. The author’s personal translation.

14. Edward Perronet and John Rippon, “All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name,” in *The Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1991), no. 202.

15. The following is an adaptation of Frederick Buechner’s experience, as recounted in *The Sacred Journey* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982), 107–10, and in Philip Yancey, *Soul Survivor: How My Faith Survived the Church* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 249.

16. Frederick Buechner, *The Alphabet of Grace* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1970), 44.