

A Great King: Riding to Victory, Riding to Die
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Grab a Bible and read with me Ps. 47 (READ). This psalm has a fairly simple structure. There are two sections (vs. 1-5 & vs. 6-9). Both sections start the same way. They both start with an invitation to praise God. *Invitation* doesn't quite capture the idea though. An invitation kind of sounds like this: "Well, if you're free and you can make it, we'd love to have you come and worship God with us." That's not quite what this is saying. Vs. 1 and 6 say, "Do it! Clap your hands, people! Sing praises! What are you waiting for? I'm not asking ya; I'm telling ya!" It's not just a "if you're up for it, join us;" it's a "You better," and "why wouldn't you?" And really, FBC, why wouldn't you (we're going to talk about the invitations more in a minute)?

Then, both sections give reasons why God is to be praised. Vs. 2-5 are the reasons for praise from the first section and vs. 7-9 are the reasons for praise in the second section. Friends, the Bible does this all the time and it's a hidden gift from God. Let me tell you why: your motivation for praise is probably more important than the praise itself. *Why* do you give praise? Let me tell you why this is important by talking about the Prosperity Gospel. The Prosperity Gospel teaches that God is great by emphasizing God's power to make you healthy, wealthy and fulfilled today. So, praise God when you get a new car, when you get a bigger home, when you get well, when you get the pretty wife or the rich husband. You praise God when you get all kinds of cool stuff now. What's so sinister and evil about the Prosperity Gospel is that it sanctifies/strengthens the very sinful, fleshly desires God is trying to kill in us. My love for the things of the earth, my desire for money today, health today, fulfillment today is exactly what tempts me away from God. So, my motivation in worshiping God under the Prosperity Gospel is my sinful desires satisfied. Can I ask you: is that a good thing to worship God for? Should we worship God for giving us our sinful desires? Of course not. Because God's not trying to do that; he's trying to do the opposite. So, when the Bible tells you why you should praise God it's shaping your motivation and your desires; God is actually trying to transform and change your heart. To what? To love God for who he is; to love God because he's God; not because he gives me all the stuff my carnal heart wants. And when God himself doesn't stoke my heart to worship God it's a gracious indicator from God that I need to repent of idolatry and sin. That's why passages like this are such a gift. We desperately need our lives shaped by the Truth and learning the truth about why God is worthy of praise is a mechanism God uses to align our lives to himself.

Here's my hope today: my hope is that this passage might lift our hearts to joy and worship of God in the midst of a confusing political year we already wish we could forget. When we catch a glimpse of God in all of his power and splendor, it lifts the hopes and joys of his people even the things on earth are less than to be desired. So, this message is about that; it's about getting our eyes in the right place.

That's how hope is created, friends? Do you think that you wouldn't be so hopeless if your choices for President were better? If political hostilities weren't so intense? Do we need Jesus more in 2016 than we did in 2012, 2008, 2000 or in 1980? What do you need to have renewed home? Friends, the political discouragement we are feeling is a gift. This discouraging political season is a gracious reminder to get our eyes off the temporal and limited power on earth and fix our eyes to heaven. That's where hope will come from and I'm happy to give you that vision today from the word of God.

I don't want to spend too much time this morning talking about these invitations because they really aren't the main point of the passage. But there isn't something unique or different about them. The first invitation in vs. 1 focuses on praising God with loud applause and cheers. When the psalmist says, "Clap your hands, all people!" he's not calling for rhythm clapping to music; he's calling for raucous applause. Imagine the most famous music band around (I guess that's different for all of us, right, based on when we grew up.... Beatles, The Eagles, Bon Jovi, U2, One Direction!) and the emcee is introducing them and calls them up on stage and bedlam breaks out. That's what the psalmist is saying. Put your hands together for God. That second phrase is actually better translated, "Shout to God with a noisy voice!" Cheers. Applause. Throw in some whistles, I suppose. That's how great God is. That's the first invitation to praise.

The second invitation starting in vs. 6 is focused on music. "Sing praise to God, sing praises!" could be translated "Make music to God, make music!" Break out the instruments; warm up your singing voice. God's worthy of this kind of music just like he's worthy of cheering. The psalmist is really emphasizing how praiseworthy and excellent God is with these two invitations. Cheer for him. Make music and sing about him. The only thing he's missing is some food.

So, what in the world is worth this kind of excitement and praise? You'd think someone just won the presidency? That's really the main point of this psalm; the reason for all this praise. And what is that? I'd probably summarize it this way: Praise God for his kingly power. That's the focus. The kingly power and reign; the exaltation and rule of our God and king!

Now what is that? This is kind of foreign to us, I think. God as king. What does it mean to be a king? And to have kingly power? We don't have royalty in our culture like they do, say, in England. Have you seen how big of a deal they pay attention to royalty across the pond? I don't get it, but man, oh man, prince this guy and princess that gal sure get a lot of attention. God gets that attention in our passage. Why? What does kingly power look like that's so worthy of praise?

The first emphasis of God's kingly power is in the celebration of his *subduing* power. Let's look at that in vs. 3-5 (READ). If you're going to be king, you better have the power to conquer. They only sing songs about kings who have the strength to win some battles. Do you remember the song the women of Israel sang about King Saul and their soon-to-be king, David? 1 Sam. 18:7 says, "And the women sang to one another as they celebrated, 'Saul has struck

down his thousands, and David his ten thousands.” That’s what kings do; they win our wars! And here the psalmist is saying, “God has subdued the peoples; he put nations under our feet.”

When did God do this? You can hear how the psalmist is talking about something God has already done. I think this is a reference to God leading the people from Egypt into the Promised Land; Pastor Tim just wrapped up his study in Joshua and one of the main themes was God’s covenant promise in bringing the people home to the Promised Land by destroying the people of Canaan. The heritage that God chose for the people referenced in vs 4 is probably the new land God gave to the people. God destroyed the nations in Canaan with a mighty hand. He brought his people in just like he promised. The nations who seemed to be like giants now lay under their feet. Why? Because of God the king. He subdues nations. As it says in vs. 5 “God has gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet.” No covert tactics needed for God; he marches in blowing his trumpet and wins the victory.

Now, since we begin Holy Week today with Easter next Sunday, let me remind you of our need for God to continue his conquering ways for our sake. We still need God’s conquering powers. We don’t usually think about that or celebrate God as a mighty conqueror. Jesus, meek and mild, hanging out with children at a petting zoo is the safe and politically correct image of Jesus in our culture; kind of like this picture (PIC). There aren’t too many pictures of King Jesus riding a cloud through rivers of blood with a sickle in his hands, right? But I did find one (PIC).

Things aren’t the way they’re supposed to be, are they? There are still foes that need conquering. But remember, FBC, don’t point the finger; point the thumb. The foes aren’t out there; the foes aren’t flesh and blood. The enemies are inside us; the rebel forces that King Jesus need to overthrow reside right here in this sinful pastor’s heart. Not the Democrats; not the Republicans. Not the special interest groups, university students or the media. Listen to how Paul puts it in 1 Cor. 15:22-26 (READ).

OK, there’s tons here that we can’t possibly look at today. Here’s the big idea to remember: there are still enemies of God. They are spiritual forces of darkness and evil that can’t be seen with these eyes. The last spiritual enemy is death. And what’s the good news? Jesus Christ will destroy every rule and power of evil including the last and greatest enemy, death itself. How do we know that? Because Jesus already lives; he already is alive; he’s already been resurrected proving that he’s already been victorious over death. He’s already put death under his feet and when he comes back he will put it under our feet, too. Praise God for his conquering power.

The second section emphasizes the kingly power of God, but in a different way. Let’s read that again (READ vs. 7-9). What happens as a result of God’s kingly reign over the nations in vs. 9? It says that the princes, the nobles of the peoples gather as the people of the God of Abraham. What does that mean and is it as cool and as amazing as it sounds?

It's one thing to conquer, it's another thing to unite. Bringing people together is a lot harder than destroying them, isn't it? In his last State of the Union address President Obama said this, "It's one of the few regrets of my presidency – that the rancor and suspicion between the parties has gotten worse instead of better....There's no doubt a president with the gifts of Lincoln or Roosevelt might have better bridged the divide, and I guarantee I'll keep trying to be better so long as I hold this office." That's a pretty humble admission; Presidents don't often admit regrets, do they? But this political divide in our country is a little too difficult to ignore; it's one of the things we are most discouraged by when we think of our country. Marco Rubio said at a rally a week ago, "We are now a nation where people hate each other." I think he's on to something.

Of course, the political divide in our country pales in comparison to the hostility and rancor in other parts of the world. China vs. Tibet. Iran vs. Iraq. Ukraine vs. Russia. Israelis vs. Palestinians; you think our divisions are deep. Finding peace, coming together has long been abandoned by many factions like these in our world. The only option is to survive and conquer. But God the King is different. God's kingly power is so incredible, so awesome, so divine and otherworldly that he gathers people together under one banner in unity. That banner is the glory of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Isaiah is a great book that highlights God's gathering power. In Isa. 49 when the servant of God is highlighted (who we know to be Jesus) and the work he will do, vs. 6 says, "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserve of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth." And then later, in ch. 54 after the the servant's suffering, it says, "Get a bigger tent! Stretch out the cords and pound in new stakes because I'm bringing more people in!"

If you want to hope in something audacious, but something that will absolutely come true, hope and believe in the unification of every nation on the face of the earth in worship of the One True God. That's what the servant of the Lord will do. Just like our passage says in vs. 9, the people of the earth will gather *as the people of the God of Abraham*. God's grace is so utterly amazing that it breaks down the walls of hostility and war that remain between peoples and unifies them in worship to God.

I'm discouraged by the division; I know so many of you are, too. And it's grown as such that it feels like it's never going to get better. It will get better. But not because of the power and persuasion of politicians. We can count on it because it's a promise of our God. Jesus said in John 12 (vs. 32), "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." And we know from the scriptures when he does, God's people, God's elect, all those whose rebellious hearts have been won over by the grace of God will unify together and give God praise as one people.

Do you see anyone ready and able to bring this unity? Do you have any confidence in any politician or party? Does anybody have the strength, the humility, the resolve to gather people together? I don't see anybody. But God will. Be amazed at him, FBC. Rejoice in him.

This psalm commands praise. It commands cheers; it commands music. And as I prepared this sermon and now as I've preached it, my heart has said, "Yes! King Jesus is worthy of praise!" I bet yours is saying that, too. So, let's obey God and praise him together.

Small Group Questions

In God We Trust: A Great King: Riding to Victory, Riding to Die

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1. How were you most encouraged or convicted by the message today?
2. How do we change when we get our eyes off or political solutions and put them on the provision and promises of God?
3. Why do our motives matter? Why does it matter *why* I praise God if I praise God? (or put another way: if I praise God, why do my motives for praise matter?)
4. Read Ps. 47 together as a group and answer the following questions.
 - a. How is applause or clapping/cheering worshipful? How does that give glory to God?
 - b. What stands out to you about God's subduing power highlighted in vs. 3-5? Does it feel strange or wrong to praise God for his conquering power? If so, where does that come from?
 - c. Read the promise of God to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3 and talk about that in light of vs. 9. What do you think is the big idea?
 - d. How does God's gathering power glorify him?
5. How might this message impact your political convictions or values?
6. How has God used this sermon series to change your thinking/feelings/actions?