

THE LORD REIGNS

SERIES: LET US KNEEL BEFORE THE LORD, OUR MAKER



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Psalm 93-96
5th Message
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Matthew's Gospel tells the story of Persian astrologers who traveled thousands of miles following the stars, seeking to know, "Where is the one born King of the Jews?" (Matthew 2:2). They were convinced that the King had come. The message in the heavens confirmed the promise of Scripture. Gabriel announced a royal birth, "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end" (Luke 1:32-33).

Americans are justifiably proud of our constitutional democracy, and periodically anxious about the state of the union. But we, as citizens of this country, like citizens of every country, need to know that no merely human government will have the final word. Jesus is Lord.

The pictures and music of Christmas often focus on the loving embrace of the mother and child. "Holy infant, tender and mild." But these lovely scenes should never obscure the magnitude of the incarnation. God has become man and He will reign forever and ever.

The Psalms are Israel's music of the King. This study is the fifth in a series on Book Four of the Psalms. We previously noted the arrangement of texts into clusters that should be read together. Here we consider such a grouping, taking two weeks on Psalms 93-100.

Consider the opening line of Psalm 93, a phrase repeated throughout these psalms.

Psalm 93:1:

**The LORD reigns, he is robed in majesty;
the LORD is robed in majesty
and is armed with strength.
The world is firmly established;
it cannot be moved.**

Psalm 96:10:

Say among the nations, "The LORD reigns."

The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved;

he will judge the peoples with equity.

Psalm 97:1:

**The LORD reigns, let the earth be glad;
let the distant shores rejoice.**

Psalm 99:1:

**The LORD reigns,
let the nations tremble;
he sits enthroned between the cherubim,
let the earth shake.**

Joy to the world, the Lord is come, let earth receive her King.¹

The fact that God reigns means that every other claim to sovereignty is false, therefore, conflict is inevitable. The rule of God also means that the world will one day be put right. Conflict: 'the Lord reigns, let the nations tremble' (Psalm 99:1), and redemption: 'the Lord reigns, let the earth be glad' (Psalm 97:1). Today we will note the conflict, next week the peace that follows.

Let me go back and read all of Psalm 93:

**The LORD reigns, he is robed in majesty;
the LORD is robed in majesty
and is armed with strength.
The world is firmly established;
it cannot be moved.**

**Your throne was established long ago;
you are from all eternity.
The seas have lifted up, O LORD,
the seas have lifted up their voice;
the seas have lifted up their pounding
waves.
Mightier than the thunder of the great
waters,
mightier than the breakers of the sea—
the LORD on high is mighty.
Your statutes stand firm;
holiness adorns your house
for endless days, O LORD.**

Consider the challenge described here. “The LORD reigns . . . the world is firmly established, it cannot be moved” (Psalm 93:1). Yet in defiance “the seas have lifted up their pounding waves” (Psalm 93:3). In the Old Testament the rolling sea always represents chaos and rebellion, but no word or action that challenges the rule of God will succeed. He is “mightier than the thunder of great waters” (Psalm 93:4).

I don’t know if any of you saw the pictures in the paper this week of the surf contest at Mavericks in Half Moon Bay. Those people are nuts. Forty to fifty foot swells dwarfing the tiny rider on a surf board. Waves are powerful. But at the end of the day, they come all the way to the shore, dissipate, and are replaced by another. Waves build, surge, break, and are gone. This is how the Jews understood the place of nations that honored false gods—each is impressive for a moment but it passes and is not remembered. When Israel rebelled in idolatry they were also diminished.

Economies, as we are too well aware these days, swell and grow. They grow fat and issue proclamations about how important they are; until they crest and crash, and are gone. Empires expand for a time, but they always decay. New ideas, prominent for a moment, cease to be new and become rigid protocols instead of revolutionary concepts. Bullies become dictators and eventually claim to be gods, then they die and are forgotten. Bureaucracies swallow good intentions over and over again.

No Caesar, Pharaoh, Emperor, CEO, president, or priest is sovereign. There is no lasting throne in Washington, Hollywood, Wall Street, Mecca, Beijing, London, Paris, or anywhere else in the world. The Lord reigns.

For that reason, Christmas rings with expressions of joy. “Let earth receive her King.”¹ But if we are honest, many of us will also say that Christmas is among the least joyful times of the year. We are raised up because we are children of the King, yet our experience contradicts the royal proclamation. For that reason Psalm 94 follows Psalm 93. Psalm 94 gives us language for questioning God. Consider some of the insights in Psalm 94:2-7:

**Rise up, O Judge of the earth;
pay back to the proud what they deserve.
How long will the wicked, O LORD,
how long will the wicked be jubilant?
They pour out arrogant words;
all the evildoers are full of boasting.
They crush your people, O LORD;
they oppress your inheritance.
They slay the widow and the alien;
they murder the fatherless.
They say, “The LORD does not see;
the God of Jacob pays no heed.”**

And Psalm 94: 20-22:

**Can a corrupt throne be allied with
you—
one that brings on misery by its decrees?
They band together against the righteous
and condemn the innocent to death.
But the LORD has become my fortress,
and my God the rock in whom I take
refuge.**

If the Lord reigns, why so much brokenness? Why are the poor destroyed at the whim of those who have power? Why is integrity scorned and kindness treated with contempt? Lord, if you are in charge, why isn’t the world a better place? The Lord reigns, the world

is a mess, where are you?

Recall the second chapter of Matthew. Because Jesus was born “king of the Jews” Herod slaughtered innocent children. “They band together against the righteous and condemn the innocent to death” (Psalm 94:21). And mothers and fathers wept. Herod of old was a murderer. ‘Herods’ are still around . . . and where are you, Lord?

Herod represents a powerful wave crashing against the rule of God, yet he failed. He was hated and reviled by his subjects, and would be forgotten to history except for the New Testament which cares nothing for his accomplishments and holds him in contempt.

Herod also brings into sharp focus the radical nature of Christ’s rule. Jesus is a King who will not allow his followers to fight for him; who will pray for those who crucify him. Jesus could not be killed by his enemies, but he chose to die for them. The great evidence of his power is sacrificial love.

Let me suggest two applications from what we have considered. First, Psalm 94 invites us to question and wrestle with God. The Christmas season is for many a season of sorrow and loneliness. The repetitions of ‘good cheer’ ring hollow. Hard family circumstances are felt at a deep level. “They crush your people, O LORD; they oppress your inheritance” (Psalm 94:5). Expressing honest doubt is crucial. God can only comfort those who will acknowledge the depth of their pain to him.

Then, wrestling is followed by kneeling. Moving on to Psalm 95, consider verses 6-7:

**Come, let us bow down in worship,
let us kneel before the LORD our Maker;
for he is our God
and we are the people of his pasture,
the flock under his care.**

Kneeling here is a picture of obedience. We meet him in our questions and confusion. He welcomes

them and will walk with us in them. But eventually, in his time, the questions give way to submission and gratitude. We will worship and obey him, by kneeling before him.

The announcement is clear. The Lord reigns. Because the world is filled with pretenders to the throne, it is also filled with conflict. We believe the truth and wrestle with a swirl of life experiences—giving them to God in prayer. And then we kneel. “He is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care” (Psalm 95:7).

NOTES

¹ Isaac Watts, text of *Joy to the World!* © 1986 WORD MUSIC.