

“King of all Nations”

Rev. Hobie Wood

Series: *Psalms*

Bible Text: Psalm 47

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Christ Presbyterian Church

Physical Address: 801 Roper Dr. Clarkesville, GA 30523

Website: www.cpcclarkesville.org

Online Sermons: www.cpcclarkesville.org/sermons

If you have a Bible, you can be making your way to Psalm 47 this morning. I'll say, welcome back Steve. Is he in here? I saw him. He was in here. Welcome back Steve, wherever you are. I do want to pose before you this question. How do we know that it's Steve? He had a beard when we left, when he left. The evil twin always has different facial hair. I'll just leave that with you. We did, in all seriousness, we did miss him a lot. We managed for the past month, but we had less fun. It was so boring around the office. We need him. We're looking at the song book for the people of God over the summer. That's what the Psalms are at a base level. Lots of different themes. This is a good opportunity for me to tell you that I never look at the calendar when I'm planning sermons in advance. That was evidenced enough by the kids wearing the tie-dye shirts a few weeks ago after fun camp and I preached Psalm 88, which is the Darkness is My Closest Friend Psalm. Maybe I look on Christmas and Easter, but I found myself Friday morning on the Fourth of July finishing a sermon defending monarchy. That's where we're at. It's in here. We're going to read it, Psalm 47, for free independent people on what it means that we have a king.

Clap your hands, all peoples. Shout to God with loud songs of joy. For the Lord, the Most High, is to be feared, a great king over all the earth. He subdued peoples under us and nations under our feet. He chose our heritage for us, the pride of Jacob whom he loves. God has gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet. Sing praises to God. Sing praises. Sing praises to our king. Sing praises. For God is the king of all the earth. Sing praises with a psalm. God reigns over the nations. God sits on his holy throne. The princes of the peoples gather as the people of the God of Abraham. For the shields of the earth belong to God. He is highly exalted.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Would you pray with me?

We ask now for your help. Our Father, as we look at your word, don't leave us to our own devices and mental abilities and affections. We can't do anything with your word apart from your help. We plead with you to send your spirit to make clear to us what we're reading. Not only that, but to press it into our hearts and to renew us. Lord Jesus, would you get glory as you give us your word? We pray in your name, amen.

As it was the Fourth of July week, I found myself thinking about this text and considering the past several years, the history of our own nation, and particularly thinking about political rallies. We have had rallies over the past several years where the attendees would use a particular term to describe themselves. I bet you could come up with it. Patriots, right? That's the word. It's an old word. It comes from people who, from the Revolutionary War period, desired to throw off the yoke of British monarchy. There have been other rallies held more recently that have a different kind of name. You might know that too. No kings. Okay. What are we supposed to do with that? Half of the people are calling themselves patriots. Half of them are saying no kings. What this proves to us, outside of whatever your political bent, is that either side will absolutely invoke that the other side are tyrants that want to take us back to monarchy so that they can win, at least a minimum. That's what we're saying. Neither side seems to understand that they're saying the same thing. This is not new throughout American political history. Every time there's an election, one party will appeal to the voters to say, this other party will take you back to something that is absolute and imposing and overreaching. That's just the way that it works.

One thing's for sure, as Americans, we at least love the idea of being independent and autonomous and of self-rule. Both sides can usually agree to that. We want no king, no queen. We want to rule by the people. This is America! It shouldn't surprise us when we really have no idea what to do when the Bible presents God as a king. We have no political context for it. We have well over 200 years of history that doesn't know what to do with it. It's confusing. We're not sure what it means. We have this passage in front of us where God doesn't ask us to vote for him. He tells us that he's the king and that we're going to have to bow. More than that, clap your hands, shout to him, and sing to him. Give all of your energy and praise to a king. We had better figure out what that means. If we're supposed to not only acknowledge a king but give praise to a king, we had better have good reasons for it. There's two that we see in this psalm. One is that God actually does rule locally. The other is that God actually does rule globally. Let's see what this psalm has to tell us about those two things.

First, he rules locally.

The call here is to give praise to God. There's clapping, shouting, and singing to be done. You know how this is. It's hard to be excited about something if you don't know why. We're allergic to manufactured energy and emotion being manipulated. We don't want that. I don't think the psalm is asking us to do that. He tells us why in verse 2. *The Lord, the Most High, is to be feared, a great king over all the earth.* God is king. Interestingly, he doesn't use just the ordinary God word. God here is called by his personal name Yahweh. He's also given a title here, The Most High. That title is used throughout the psalms. It is what it sounds like. Even when we talk about people who are high up in government, we talk about them as being, I just said it, high up, the upper level people. It's a kingly title. God is the highest of the high. The title was used for the first time in Genesis 14 when a man named Abraham, to whom God had made all these great promises, I'm going to give you land. I'm going to bless you. I'm going to bless the nations through you. Abraham has a victory in battle and meets this shadowy figure with a weird name, Melchizedek, who's called the king of Salem, Jerusalem, who's called the priest of the Most High. First time that phrase is used. Melchizedek comes out to meet Abraham and he blesses Abraham

and says, you have been blessed by the Most High. God has given you this victory and Melchizedek gives him a tithe. There's a lot going on in that passage, but it's this combination of two ideas. A God who shows up and makes promises, land, blessing, nation, family, families of the earth blessed through you, is also the Most High who has the power to accomplish it.

The promise maker can actually fulfill the promises. Then he proves it by recalling their history. Look at verse 3. He, God, *subdues people under us*. The Most High has actually put nations under our feet. This is conquest language. You read through the first five books of the Bible where all the promises are given and the law is given. Finally, you get to Joshua. In Joshua, peoples and nations are cast out and subdued under the feet of the people of God. Here's the list. Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, Jebusites. Moses says in Deuteronomy, seven nations more numerous and mightier than you, Israel. God did that. At the end of Joshua, the people have the land and the promises and the battle belonged to the Lord and he delivered and they're in the land. That seems to be what he primarily has in mind in verse 4, that *God chose our heritage for us, the pride of Jacob*. That's land. That's the same word for inheritance which is often used in describing the promised land. Here's what he's saying.

God is a king who not only promised you all of this but he actually showed up and conquered your enemies and gave you that which is your pride and joy.

Your allotment of the land where you can carve out a living and worship, and that's the other side is that the promise of land is never given where it's not, oh, and you need my inheritance. There's actually a place where God was mad at Israel and told them, I'm going to send you to the land. I'm going to give you that but I'm not going with you. You can have the land but you don't get me. Moses pleaded with the Lord and said, if you don't go with us, just kill us now. There's no point. It's not worth it. We have to have you.

That's the inheritance, not just a plot of land to farm but God's people in God's place with God himself, world without end, amen. That's the hope.

This conquest is why he says that *God has gone up with a shout* in verse five. That's a picture of victorious ascent. The king conquers and then he gets up on the throne and all are heralding and obeying and adoring him. For the Lord to go up with a shout and the sound of a trumpet probably also can't help but remind us of the paradigmatic conquest story, shouting, trumpets, Jericho. At Jericho, when the people finally get to the land, it's almost as if God set the whole thing up to show them, you're going to go in the land and you're going to have it. You will not be able to take credit for your strategy, for your military brilliance, for your great abilities. You're going to go and march around the city several times and at some point yell really loud and blow your trumpets and I will miraculously cause the walls of the city to fall down and you can have it.

God is king. He rules, and he rules over his covenant people that he made promises for and that he delivers and shows up for and he bears his arm all for their sake. He's a king who acts for the

good of his own. That, for an Israelite, would make sense out of the command to clap hands and shout and sing. A God who loves his people and acts on their behalf.

As modern day Americans, if we would ever make progress in that, we're going to have to do something to gain a vision that that's who God is and that that's how he operates and that he has that kind of power and ability. Because here's our problem, if I can be so bold. We are cynical of all of that in our lives and we have good reason to be cynical. Every single day people and products and companies knock on the door of your device and get your attention which has now been commodified and promise you either something. They promise you something that's going to make your life better and then they absolutely will fail to deliver. It's just going to happen. People fail you, products fail you, companies fail you and they're all after your attention and they're screaming at you. Over time you just decide, can't trust anybody, don't trust anything, I see through it.

It's just so easy to bring that mentality to God himself and to assume that he made these promises but he can't deliver. He's going to do something but it's not going to be what I want him to do. Or what we do is we set him up against our expectations of his promises and his deliverance. When he inevitably fails, whatever it is that we set up, then we put him on the hook for it. See, I told you. The problem is cynical people cannot worship, can't be done. How can you sing, shout, clap with sincerity when you see through it all? That's the heart of cynicism is I see through, I know better, I will not be made a fool of. We just need to acknowledge that as 21st century Americans that is the condition of the human heart.

Is it possible that you have a shred of that in your view of God?

Do you think he has any power?

Do you think that he's for you?

Do you think that he shows up locally in your life, in your business, in your situation and does things for your good if you belong to him?

We need a better vision. We have to see what he did in times past. This is why we need the scriptures, the stories of the promises made and the promises kept. We have to understand the exodus, wilderness, conquest, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, the history of the church, 2,000 years of God building a church in spite of her idiocy and failures and just ridiculousness. We need to hear stories of people who finish well because a lot of people don't finish well.

I was listening to an interview this week with Joni Erickson Tada, many of you know who she is. She became a quadriplegic after a diving accident at the age of 17 and the Lord saved her and used her to minister to so many people who have disabilities or are caring for those with disabilities. What was new in this interview was her talking about her chronic pain, which I don't think I knew about. She has scoliosis. She's had cancer bouts and she has just a ton of chronic pain issues due to her medical issues over the years. She talked about God as the sovereign king

who never wasted one moment of her suffering. She talked about God as the one who is so good that every morning when she wakes up and she can't physically move and all she can cry out is help, how God shows up and helps her and gets her through the day. She's been doing this for a long time. If anybody has a reason to be a cynic at this point, it's the quadriplegic who deals with chronic pain and would love to go home and be with the Lord. She bows to the king and looks a lot like Jesus. At the end of the interview, she was singing hymns to Jesus on the airwaves just because she's got the sense that this is just kind of what she does. She sings to Jesus because he is her inheritance, not good health.

Man, that's what I need to hear because I suspect that you, like me, are tempted to think that your inheritance is the amount in the bank account or success or to have good kids or your name or your health or whatever.

He is our inheritance.

I hope that's why you're here each Sunday, to hear from God, to see him as he is so that you can fight your own faithlessness and cynicism because we have it, but the Lord can meet us in the midst of it. I hope that you'll make use of the means where we can grow out of that. Join a small group of some setting where you can actually hear other people talk about what God is doing in their lives. We need to hear it so that you can talk about what God's doing in your life. We actually need to hear from each other. Can you see how he's been at work in your life?

I was reminded recently in my own life of, I was at a family event and it just struck me how there were many reasons why nobody in my family should be a Christian. At some point, God decided that, my mom was already a Christian, but he decided that my dad would become a Christian. It changed the trajectory for our family. I was just sitting there thinking about, we deserved nothing. We did not deserve such mercy, and he gave it, and it's changed things.

Can you see how the king acts locally for you? This psalm tells us that and then it also pulls us away from the known local inside of the church and forces us to look outside globally and to see that God rules there too.

Second point, the word all is used as a qualifier three times here. All peoples, all the earth, all the earth. What does it mean for God to be king over all the earth and all the peoples? That's not what we observe, is it? You don't observe God worshiped and adored as king by every single person on the face of the earth. If we were going to write it as what is actually happening in this moment, it would be, he reigns over some. This psalm and the rest of the Bible affirms that no,

actually God is actively ruling and reigning as the sovereign king over every single human being, whether they acknowledge him or not.

Over every nation, ruler, system and people group, whether they acknowledge him or not.

Over every system of government, even if that system of government says decidedly, we've all agreed there's no God, we're going to make a system of government around that. He rules over that too.

It's a really stubborn thing if you're not a Christian to wrestle with that. That God says he's in charge of your life even if you vehemently deny his existence. Even if you think you're rising up against him when every molecule of your body just does whatever it wants for God to say, you didn't do anything that has somehow fallen outside of my absolute reign and rule. That's a stubborn thing. It's worth considering if you're not a Christian. If you will listen, you might hear good news.

He reigns over all. The psalmist says *he reigns over the nations and sits on his holy throne*. That's an interesting way to say it. His throne is different from other people's. The word holy means set apart, other. Not only morally pure, it's that, but it's different from the rulers of nations. Contextually, this would mean something to a good Israelite who knew some misery.

When the Philistines came and they took the Ark of the Covenant and they took it back to the land of the dirty heathen Philistines, the most sacred object in Israelite religion, the Lord reigns over the Philistines. They did nothing apart from his sovereign rule.

When the Assyrians came and sacked the northern kingdom, the Assyrians did nothing that fell outside of the rule and reign of Yahweh himself, the Most High.

When the Babylonians came and they took the southern kingdom and it seemed like all the Abrahamic promises are just null and void now. They're not in the land. They're scattered. They're not together. Nobody has the inheritance and they can't even sing the songs of the Lord in a foreign land. The Lord reigns over the Babylonians.

When Herod and Pilate conspired against God the Son himself, it's Jesus who said to Pilate, you would have no authority unless it had been given to you from above.

Throughout the Roman Empire when Christians were opposed and tortured and mocked and killed, the Lord reigned over the Roman Empire still today.

God sits on his holy throne and he reigns over every single name that you see scrolling across your newsfeed or that you hear mentioned over the news cycle.

He reigns over Jinping.

He reigns over Putin and Zelensky.

He reigns over the Ayatollah.

He reigns over Netanyahu.

He reigns over Trump.

He reigns over every single nation, ruler, person, subatomic particle, all of it. He's not like the gods of the nations or the rulers of the nations. He has global absolute good authority.

That's really important that his authority is good. We see something about the goodness of his power and rule in his purpose at the very end in verse 9. The promise made to Abraham was that *the families of the earth would be blessed through his family*. There's always been a global nation's focus to the redemptive purposes of God, so we shouldn't be surprised in verse 9 when the psalmist gives us a vision of the end of all things. The princes of the peoples, and just so we're clear, that is the nobility of the pagans. The leadership of those who are probably persecuting and opposing the people of God, are gathered as the people of the God of Abraham.

What? What is that? How are the princes of the peoples gathered as the people of the God of Abraham?

It's conversion. It's a vision of the very people who oppose God coming into the people of the God of Abraham and changing their identity. It's a vision of pagans and princes and oppressors bowing the knee to King Jesus. To put it in the language of Revelation, it's a people from every tongue, tribe, and nation singing praises to God who is king. How does that happen? Because it's not universalism. This is not the psalmist saying everybody's going to bow the knee, it doesn't matter, just everybody's going to believe and be happy in the end. No, no, no.

How do those who raise their shields against God end up bringing their shields and laying them down?

It has everything to do with how this king shows up and reigns, because he doesn't show up as the totalitarian authoritative tyrant. Verse five says that *God has gone up with a shout*.

There is ascension and victory and triumph, but first there is descension.

Before God goes up with a shout, he comes down in humility.

From heaven to earth, from glory to poverty, taking on a body like ours, living a simple but perfect life, descending into a state of humiliation, being subject to mockery and confrontation and misunderstanding and hatred and betrayal and arrest, not to mention a miscarriage of justice and being slapped around by people that he made, and being crowned not with glory but with a crown that is the symbol of the fall itself. The earth will not produce good things, it will produce thorns. That's what makes up his crown. His robe not in beauty but after being flogged, a robe that brought agony when it was brought off of him. Disowned by nearly all, deserted, crucified on the tool of death of the Roman Empire while simultaneously upholding and ruling over the same empire that crucified him.

The Lord Jesus, before he ever ascended, he descended in pain and death in the tomb so that Roman centurions and Jews and Ethiopians and Arabs and Asians and Germans and Brits and fiercely independent crotchety Americans and people from all over the globe would have their sins of rebellion against their creator atoned.

Of course, he's raised in triumph and glory. He does ascend back to the Father where he currently reigns until all of his enemies become a footstool for his feet. He is, verse 9, *highly exalted*, never to be humiliated again. If he came in power and just put us under his thumb, that would be one thing, but he came first to serve us in the way that we need most.

He came in humility so that we could gladly lay down our shields and stop fighting against him, but we must stop fighting against him. We must lay down our weapons. We must believe the promises and bow our knee to the king and believe that he does rule over all.

Are you one of the people of the God of Abraham? Another way to ask that is have you come to the king, Jesus Christ, by faith and put your entirety on him? Trusted that he's the son of God and savior of sinners. It's a good day to believe. We'd love to talk to you about that if you haven't.

If you do believe already, can you find fresh joy in what he's done for you?

Can you be amazed that you're a Christian?

You are thousands of miles away from where this psalm was written and where the Lord Jesus walked, and you believe the gospel? What is that? How does that happen? Can you appreciate that you are evidence of the global reign of the king himself? You are the nations. We don't think that way now, but from their perspective.

The other thing to say is don't fear suffering. We said the catechism earlier, how does Christ execute the office of the king? Not simply by subduing us to himself and ruling and defending us, but by restraining and conquering all his and our enemies. This means two things.

Some of your enemies will be conquered by Jesus because they will believe the gospel and justice will have been taken by Christ for them, just like it was taken for you. That's worth worshiping the Lord about anyway. And those who refuse to believe, they will bow too and justice will be served. The king of all the earth will prove to be just, and that's good news too. He wins. There will not be a single people group who fails to bow to Jesus as king in the end.

It's actually that reality that drives the mission of the church. It's the only reason why anybody would ever leave their house and uproot their family and go across an ocean and give their life away and learn a language that they don't know so that they might actually tell these people that they have nothing in common with, that Jesus is king, only if the mission is guaranteed to work, only if the king guarantees its success. This is why they do it. This is why churches have been planted. This is why we're trying to plant churches, not only this coming year, but in the future.

What if you could be a part of something that was guaranteed never to fail?

What if you could make an investment that was a certain lock?

What if you gave your life, in whatever particular gifting and calling, to something that absolutely could not miss?

The princes of the people will gather as the people of the God of Abraham, and the shields will be laid down. He wins. The mission won't fail.

And so he calls you to be a part of it in whatever way is unique to you. You can bank on it, give your life to it, give your money to it, go and be sent as a part of it.

You can be physically incapacitated, and you can sit at your house, in your bed if that's all you can do, and you can pray prayers of the kingdom that enlist you as a soldier in the mission that is just as much and even more effective than the person who got on the plane and went.

There is no season of our life where we are not useful in the kingdom and the mission that he's given. He wins.

In our land of no kings and all patriots, even as we do celebrate the goodness of our independence, which is a good gift, it's even better news for us and for the world that the Most High is the great king over all the earth, the covenant God who promises and delivers. He's worthy of the clapping, shouting, and singing. He reigns over us locally, promises to bless us, has the power to do it. You can trust that Jesus, the descended now ascended king, has given you his very self and his people, and one day a new heavens and a new earth where clapping, shouting, and singing will be just the most normal thing that we could possibly ever do because we'll see him as he is, and our hearts will respond rightly.

Until then, brothers and sisters, you and I have the great privilege of going to the nations, praying for the nations, and calling them to bow the knee to the one whose cross is empty and whose tomb is empty and will return in great power. Would you pray with me?

Lord Jesus, we do believe that you are the king, and you know the little stubborn parts of our own hearts, so we pray that you would help. What else can we say, Lord, but help? Convince us of your goodness and your power and your sovereignty, and help us to joyfully bow to you and give you praise. Show us about the ways that you've shown us mercy in the gospel, even as we come now to the table. Remind us of the certainty of your mission, and we pray in Jesus' name, amen.