

A Vision of the Eternal Kingdom

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[0 : 00] But we're going to turn now to our Bible reading this evening. You'll find that, I think, in your Bibles on page 485, if you have one of the church visitors' Bibles.

We're reading in the Psalms, and Edward Lobb is going to be preaching to us from Psalm number 72, a great Psalm speaking of the Son of God, the Son who will rule.

So I'm going to read the whole of Psalm 72, which we're told is a Psalm of Solomon. Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to the royal son.

May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice. Let the mountains bear prosperity for the people and the hills in righteousness.

May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the children of the needy, and crush the oppressor. May they fear you while the sun endures, and as long as the moon throughout all generations.

[1 : 10] May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass, like showers that water the earth. In his days may the righteous flourish, and peace abound till the moon be no more.

May he have dominion from sea to sea, and from the great river to the ends of the earth. May desert tribes buy down before him, and his enemies lick the dust.

May the kings of Tarshish and of the coastlands render him tribute. May the kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts. May all the kings fall down before him. May all nations serve him.

For he delivers the needy when he calls the poor and him who has no helper. He has pity on the weak and the needy, and saves the lives of the needy.

From oppression and violence he redeems their life, and precious is their blood in his sight. Long may he live. May gold of Sheba be given to him.

[2 : 12] May prayer be made for him continually, and blessings invoked for him all the day. May there be abundance of grain in the land. On the tops of the mountains may it wave.

May its fruits be like Lebanon. And may people blossom in the cities like the grass of the field. May his name endure forever. His fame continue as long as the sun.

May people be blessed in him. All nations call him blessed. Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things.

Blessed be his glorious name forever. May the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen and Amen. The prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended. Amen. And may God bless to us this reading of his word.

[3 : 12] Well, friends, let's turn in our Bibles back to Psalm 72, which you'll find on page 485, 485 in our hardback Bibles.

Psalm 72. I want to give it the title, A Vision of the Eternal Kingdom. Or perhaps a subtitle might be, Thy Kingdom Come.

Because when we pray that prayer, really, this psalm gives us the details of what we're praying for. Now, if you listen regularly and thoughtfully to the news on the radio or the television or wherever, you're almost certain to be slightly depressed.

You're almost certain to develop a rather gloomy outlook on the future. On your future, the country's future, and the world's future. The daily news is really very depressing, isn't it?

On most days of the week, I listen to it before breakfast as I'm getting up. I listen to it during breakfast. And I listen to it after breakfast. And the joyful, smiling face with which I leap out of bed becomes, two or three hours later, a face like a tombstone.

[4 : 36] According to the BBC in their presentation of the news, everything is always at breaking point, isn't it? The National Health Service is underfunded and at breaking point.

The Department of Education is underfunded and at breaking point. The armed forces are underfunded and have a recruitment crisis. The police are at breaking point. The Treasury has no money. Libraries are closing. High streets have nothing but betting shops and nail bars. And as for climate change and international terrorism, organized crime and gang murders, they all seem to be gaining momentum at very high speed. Even the farming program, which I love to listen to very early in the morning, is gloomy. Bovine tuberculosis being spread by badgers. Viruses in the honeybees. And the impoverishment of the soils of rural Britain. Now, I'm not suggesting that there are not problems in all these areas. There certainly are.

[5 : 37] We need to listen to the news. We need to keep in touch with what's going on. Christians are not ostriches that bury their heads in the sand. But my point is that if the news media form our total view of what lies ahead of us, our total view of the long-range future, the inside of our heads will be increasingly filled with fear and depression.

But the Bible gives us a very different view of the long-range future. A view of what is true at the deepest and furthest level. A view of reality which the BBC is incapable of understanding. Now, Psalm 72, our psalm for this evening, opens up a view of this long-range future. And it's God himself who gives us this view. The truth of it brings great comfort. And the exquisite details of it bring us great joy. So let's look at this together. First, we need to place this in Bible history. When you're looking at any Bible passage, you need to ask where does it come in the history of the Bible.

And there are two clues, two main clues to its historical context. First, the title at the beginning. And then the final verse, verse 20. You'll see the title says, There's another title given here in our ESV version, Give the King Your Justice.

[7 : 02] That's simply a modern editorial summary. It's not part of the ancient text. But the words of Solomon are part of the Hebrew text. So you immediately think, Aha, this psalm is written by Solomon.

But then you look on to verse 20. The prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended. And you scratch your head. Now, I think the right way to understand this probably is that the psalm is written by David about his son Solomon.

Therefore, that title of Solomon means about Solomon or for Solomon, not by Solomon. And when you read the contents of the psalm, it's exactly the kind of prayer that David would have wanted to pray for his new son who was taking the kingship over from him towards the end of David's life.

As you know, David had many sons. And Solomon was by no means one of the older of his sons. But he appointed Solomon explicitly to succeed him as the king of Israel. And the dramatic story of how Solomon ascended the throne is told in the first chapter of one kings.

So here we have the elderly David getting towards the end of his life, praying for his inexperienced son Solomon. And he says in verse one, Who was in a better position to understand the needs of the kingdom than David?

[8 : 30] He had been king for 40 years. He loved the Lord and he loved the people of Israel. And he knew what the people of Israel needed if they were to live in prosperity and security.

So the psalm is a prayer for the kingdom. It's a prayer for the people. But overridingly, it is a prayer for the new king himself. David prays that as Solomon ascends the throne and takes the reins of government, he will rule with such wisdom and justice that the people will flourish.

Now, a little bit of Bible history dates. David reigned from about the year 1000 BC to about the year 960 BC. And Solomon, his son, reigned from about 960 to about 920.

They both had reigns of about 40 years. All this happened, therefore, some 3000 years ago. So we're bound to say this is very ancient history.

What does it have to do with us today? Well, it has a great deal to do with us. In fact, it has everything to do with us. Because the theme of the kingdom of God is one of the great themes of the Bible.

[9 : 41] God is the king. The Bible states that on every page. He is the king and the ruler of heaven and earth. And as Bible history unfolds, God exercises his kingly rule over his people through a man.

Now, initially, it was through Moses, the great prophet who gave the law of the Lord to Israel. But Moses, this great channel of the law of the Lord, the word of God, Moses said in Deuteronomy

chapter 17, that Israel one day would be ruled by a human king whose responsibility was to rule the people by God's law.

In other words, by the law of Moses. Israel was always understood to be a theocracy. That is a nation ruled by God. And that didn't change when a king came along to the throne.

So the king's job was to channel the rule of God into the people through governing them according to the law of Moses. So the king had to know the law.

He had to have his own copy. He had to study it day and night. But the human king, David or Solomon or their successors, that human king was always intended to point down the long road of history to a future human king who would reign not for 40 years, but would reign forever.

[11:02] Who would establish an everlasting kingdom, not a temporal and temporary kingdom, but an eternal kingdom, a perfect kingdom characterized by perfect peace and justice and happiness.

A kingdom to be inhabited by the redeemed people of God forever. A kingdom where death, pain, tears and mourning have no place.

Now, the eternal king, of course, is Jesus. And he is the human king because he's both man and God. And the citizens of that kingdom are everybody who belongs to him.

But, and this is where Psalm 72 comes in, the shape and character of that eternal kingdom begin to emerge throughout the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament.

And this is why Psalm 72 has both local and temporary and this worldly characteristics in it, but also marks of eternity. Just look with me at some of the marks of eternity.

[12:02] Verse 5. May they fear you while the sun endures and as long as the moon throughout all generations. Now, that's not just about the next 40 years, is it?

All generations. Look at verse 7. In his days, that's the days of the king, may the righteous flourish and peace abound till the moon be no more.

Now, that phrase about the moon being no more looks ahead to the book of Revelation. Chapter 21. Where we read the city. This is the new and eternal Jerusalem. The city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.

So, in the new creation, no sun and no moon. Now, I personally am rather fond of the moon. If I'm walking out on a dark night when there are no clouds, I look up at the moon, and the moon looks down at me.

We're friends. But we shall not miss the moon in the eternal kingdom, because everything there will be lit up by the glory of God himself. Look at verse 17.

[13:11] May his name endure forever. His fame continue as long as the sun. So, David has in mind here an everlasting kingdom, not just the reign of his son Solomon.

And David had good reason to think like this, because of what the Lord had said to him at the beginning of his reign some 40 years previously. The Lord had said to him through the prophet Nathan, Your house and your kingdom, David, shall be made sure forever before me.

Your throne shall be established forever. And David believed the word of the Lord, and he expresses his belief here at the end of his life. His reign has been nourished and sustained by his clear understanding that his kingly line, his household, will reign forever.

Now, before we look at some of the details of the kingdom as the psalm teaches them, we need to ask this question. Do we look for this eternal kingdom in this world, or do we have to wait until the return of Christ before we can expect to enjoy it?

Well, the Bible's answer to that question is clear and straightforward. The eternal kingdom in all its glory is in the future, after Christ returns. We cannot expect to see the full measure of peace and prosperity and happiness in this world.

[14:39] On the contrary, this world, as we know so well, is a veil of tears. It's characterized by weeping and mourning and, above all, by death. But what we can see and do see in this world is foretastes or glimpses of the kingdom.

The kingdom was foreshadowed throughout the Old Testament period. And then, 2,018 years ago, the king himself arrived. And he began to call his people to follow him.

And he taught his people how to live according to his values. And then his apostles in the next generation developed his teaching and acted as his mouthpieces.

So that the words of the apostles carry all the force of Christ's authority. They're his speakers. He speaks through them. And as you know, he likened himself to a king who was going away to a far-off country but would eventually return.

He hasn't returned yet. But in this interim period, while we wait for him, he's entrusted each of us with gifts and abilities and talents to be used in his service.

[15 : 49] And the way in which we use our energies and talents speaks of King Jesus and what he values. And therefore, our lives and our conduct, as well as our words, draw people to him.

And thus, we demonstrate the qualities of the eternal kingdom in our here and now lives. Let me give a couple of examples of that. Do you, for example, work for the National Health Service?

No need to put up a hand. If you do, you're probably overstretched and underfunded. But you can still work cheerfully and work hard. Do the best you can in difficult circumstances.

Don't begrudge a bit of unpaid overtime. Don't be a grumbler or a groaner. Here's another example. Are you a student? Well, don't kill yourself with overwork.

Not likely, is it? But do work hard because hard work honors the Lord. Get to bed before 11 o'clock and get up very soon after 7.

[16 : 50] Did he say just after 7? Yes, he did say just after 7. Then you could put in a good 8 hours of study. And then you've got plenty of time left to have fun with your friends and be an enthusiastic member of the Christian Union and keep in touch with your mother.

And if we display the lifestyle of the kingdom in terms of our personal character and conduct, honesty, reliability, truthfulness, loyalty, love, caring for those who are struggling, sexual purity and self-control, then we are learning to please the king.

As Jesus himself said, let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and give glory to your father who is in heaven. So we certainly see marks, evidences of the kingdom of heaven in this world.

And when we see them, they are lovely to look at. In fact, this very gathering tonight is a foretaste of the kingdom of heaven. As we admit new members to the church and all of us together rejoice that we can belong to the Lord Jesus.

But friends, we're waiting. We're waiting for the Lord Jesus to return. And until he comes, we must expect tears and sorrow and death.

[18 : 05] The prince of this world, as Jesus calls him, the devil, is still exercising powerful, if limited, authority. But the time will come when he will be destroyed and banished forever.

And then the kingdom will be here in all its fullness, in its power and glory. So let's turn to our psalm and allow it to teach us what the eternal kingdom is like.

Let's notice five characteristics. First of all, it is a kingdom of justice. You'll see that in verse one.

And because it comes in the very first verse, we're to understand that justice is the foundation stone of the whole kingdom.

In fact, justice and righteousness in the Bible's teaching are really the same qualities. They are the first virtue of government. Look how David expresses it in verses one and two.

Give the king, this young king, your justice, O God, and your righteousness to the royal son. May he judge your people with righteousness and your poor with justice.

[19 : 12] Just notice how the adjective your is used there. Verse one, your justice, your righteousness. Verse two, your people and your poor.

It's the poor who need justice. And it's so often the rich and the powerful who deny it to them. This country that we live in is not entirely free of corruption and government.

But in many nations of the world, as we know, corruption is woven into the very fabric of government. People seek high office, not so as to benefit the people, but so as to line their own pockets with large sums of money.

And the nation's wealth, far from benefiting the people, gets siphoned off into their own bank accounts. It's the way of the world. And it's the constant temptation of those who have political power.

But justice is the foundation of God's kingdom. When I was at school, my friends and I learned a song which originated in the cotton plantations of the southern states of the United States of America.

[20 : 19] It's a song called I Got Shoes. The singers are clearly black slaves who are Christians and they're looking forward in time to what lies beyond this world.

And the song begins like this. I got shoes. You got shoes. All of God's children got shoes. When I get to heaven, I'm going to put on my shoes.

I'm going to dance all over God's heaven. And do you see the point of that song? We've got no shoes now. We're so poor. We've hardly got shirts to our backs.

But in the kingdom of heaven, we're going to dance because we're going to have real shoes on our feet. A dream of shoes is a dream about justice born out of desperate poverty.

Now, that's why David prays that his son Solomon will exercise justice in his kingdom. Justice for God's poor. And in fact, that's exactly what Solomon asked the Lord to give him when he first ascended to the throne as a very young man.

[21 : 22] The Lord came to him in a vision and said to him, ask whatever you will as you take the throne and I will give it to you. And Solomon said to the Lord, I'm only a little child.

I'm so young. He might have been only 18 or 19. So he said, I'm only a child. I don't know how to go out or to come in. So please give your servant an understanding mind to govern your people that I may discern between good and evil.

That ability to distinguish good from evil is surely the foundation of justice. The apostle Peter, in his second letter, chapter 3, verse 13, says, We are waiting for a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

Righteousness and justice are not very much at home in this world. They're shy strangers. They're fleetingly glimpsed and often absent. But the kingdom of heaven is founded upon justice and righteousness.

Then second, the eternal kingdom is a kingdom of fruitful, fruitful prosperity. In other words, everybody will be fed, well fed. Look at verse 3.

[22 : 36] Let the mountains bear prosperity for the people and the hills in righteousness. And just notice in that verse the link between prosperity and righteousness.

The point is that righteous government will produce food for the people. The mountains and the hills there in verse 3 mean the hillsides covered with crops, covered with barley and wheat, olives and figs and avocado pears.

Where national populations in the world are hungry or even on the verge of starvation, it's almost always because government is corrupt. It's no accident that in our country, where the government is reasonably uncorrupt, there's plenty of food in our supermarkets.

Food prosperity is not just a matter of agricultural know-how or economic cleverness. It's fundamentally a matter of good government. You'll see how this theme is developed in verse 16.

May there be abundance of grain in the land. On the tops of the mountains may it wave. May its fruit be like Lebanon. On the tops of the mountains.

[23 : 48] That means that the land is so fruitful that there are fields of barley and wheat right up to the very tops of the mountains. Can you imagine that? In this lovely country we live in, imagine it's summertime, July or August.

Imagine you're driving up through Perthshire and Angus and up into Aberdeenshire. You'll see wonderful fields of corn waving in the summer sun in the valleys. But you don't see it growing on the tops of the mountains.

You would struggle to get a combine harvester to the top of Cairngorm, wouldn't you? But here in verse 16, the land is so fruitful that the corn is waving on the very tops of the mountains.

The eternal kingdom is prosperous and fruitful. There are no empty bellies there. Thirdly, the kingdom is characterized by compassion to the needy.

Look at verse 12. For he, this is the king, he delivers the needy when he calls, the poor and him who has no helper. Verse 14.

[24 : 52] From oppression and violence he redeems their life. And precious is their blood in his sight. That means that when a needy man is put to death by cruel oppression, by some cruel violence, the king himself feels the pain of it.

He's not indifferent to it. In this world, a good government will look after those who cannot look after themselves. In our country, the support systems that are set up in the welfare state are good in their original conception.

The problems arise when those systems get abused and misused by greedy and irresponsible people. That happens a lot, as we know. But to offer health care and psychiatric support and social care for the elderly and so on is enlightened thinking based upon biblical thinking.

The king has compassion on his people. He helps those who are in great need. Now, just how much Solomon himself had compassion on his people during his reign is rather open to question.

Just after he died, as the people were bringing his son to be crowned king after him, the people's verdict on Solomon was, he made our yoke heavy.

[26 : 07] How different from King Jesus, who says, take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I'm gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. Jesus is the compassionate king par excellence. That's why we who are needy are able to turn to him.

We who are needy because of our sin can turn to him for forgiveness. And we find comfort and peace for our restless souls. Then fourth, the kingdom is ultimately global.

David is not just thinking about the little tiny land of Israel, which is only about a quarter of the size of Great Britain. It's a very small area. Look at verse eight. It begins modestly.

May the king have dominion from sea to sea, which probably means from the Sea of Galilee to the Mediterranean Sea, a distance of about 30 miles. But the vision rapidly expands.

[27 : 09] And, says David, from the river, that's the Euphrates, right out to the ends of the earth.

And then in verses nine, ten, and eleven, David pictures the kings and rulers of the whole earth coming to Solomon and bowing down before him.

Let me read verse nine. May desert tribes bow down before him and his enemies lick the dust. May the kings of Tarshish and of the coastlands render him tribute. May the kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts.

May all kings fall down before him. May all nations serve him. What this means is that the king of Israel is to be the king of the world. The kings of Sheba are mentioned in verse 10.

And you'll see that the gold of Sheba is mentioned in verse 15. When you read in 1 Kings chapter 10 about the visit of the queen of Sheba to Solomon, you discover, I quote, that she came to Jerusalem with a very great retinue, with camels bearing spices and very much gold and precious stones.

The land of Sheba was as famous for its gold as Scotland is for its tartan plaid. Don't you think verses 8 to 11 is a wonderful paragraph? Isn't it echoed in the visit of the wise men to Jesus as they came from a faraway country bringing gold and frankincense and myrrh?

[28 : 33] It's about the acknowledgement of the glory and power of the true king. The king of the Jews is the king of the world. And the acknowledgement of his kingship is something which has been progressing throughout the world now for 2,000 years.

So much so that there are churches from the far north of Canada, where it snows all the time, right down to Tasmania. Is there a single country in the world where there is not at least an outpost of the kingdom of Christ?

But what we see in part now will one day after Christ's return be a total global reality as the new heavens and the new earth are brought in.

The prophet Isaiah echoes these words in his 60th chapter where he says to Israel, And nations shall come to your light and kings to the brightness of your rising.

All the treasures and power of the world will one day be poured into the lap of King Jesus and all people will delight to bow down before him. The Old Testament was always intended to speak to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews.

[29 : 45] Just in case anybody here is thinking, The Old Testament? Isn't it just a Jewish document? Look at verse 11 again. May all kings fall down before him.

All nations serve him. And verse 17. May people be blessed in him. All nations call him blessed. When God first called Abraham, right back in Genesis chapter 12, to be the father of the Jewish nation, he promised him that all the families of the earth, all the nations, would eventually be blessed through his people.

We who are Gentile Christians are the children of Abraham. We are the inheritors of what God promised to the patriarch of the Jews. This kingdom is a global kingdom.

And then fifth, this is a glorious kingdom. Look at the final two verses of the Psalm. Verse 18.

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things.

Blessed be his glorious name forever. May the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen and amen.

One amen is not enough to express David's sense of wonder and delight.

[30 : 57] There has to be a second amen and amen. And it's the whole earth that is to be filled with the glory of God, the God of Israel. His glory means his dazzling brilliance, his splendor, his power, his brightness, the weight of his beautiful and awesome presence.

David writes in Psalm 29 that in God's temple, everyone cries out glory. Moses once prayed to God, now, Lord, show me your glory.

But God did not allow Moses to see more than the aftermath, the trailing edge of his glory as he passed by him. But God has revealed his glory on the earth.

John the evangelist writes in his first chapter, we have seen his glory, glory as of the only son from the father, full of grace and truth. John saw Jesus transfigured on the mountain.

He saw Jesus as he really is, dazzling, his glory for a moment no longer veiled. But finally, the most striking thing about this song of the kingdom is the figure of the king himself.

[32 : 13] It is all about him. Yes, it's about his justice and his compassion and his glory, but it's supremely about him. God is saying to us, look at the king, my king, my royal son.

He and he only is the source of your safety and joy and security. Rejoice in his justice, delight in his lavish provision. Thank him for meeting your need of forgiveness and bow down before him like the kings of Tarshish.

Was this prayer of David's for his son Solomon answered? Well, in part, it certainly was. When the queen of Sheba came and visited him, she had the breath knocked out of her when she saw Solomon's splendor and power and wisdom.

Jesus spoke of Solomon in all his glory. But Jesus also said to his adversaries, the queen of the south, that's the queen of Sheba, came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon. And behold, something greater than Solomon is here. That is some understatement. It's because of the one who is greater than Solomon that we are here tonight.

[33 : 29] And Psalm 72 is a foreshadowing, it's a prophecy of the everlasting and glorious kingdom to which everyone who bows the knee to Jesus is admitted to membership.

So let's not allow the BBC's gloom-laden reading of the world's future to fill us with fear and foreboding. The real news is the news that we have in a psalm like this.

Let's allow our imagination to be filled with the Bible's sure promises about our eternal and wonderful future and about our King, our King Jesus, whose just and glorious rule we shall all enjoy, provided we repent and submit to him.

Let's bow our heads in prayer. Lord Jesus, born so humbly in the manger, in the stable, and yet now glorified and seated at the place of greatest authority at the right hand of God the Father, we look forward to your coming again and we ask you indeed to hasten it, come thou long-expected Jesus.

And we pray that you'll give us grace so that all of us who are here tonight may, through trusting in you, through turning our backs upon everything we know to be wrong, through loving you and accepting you as our wonderful Lord and Savior, that all of us may be part of that eternal and glorious kingdom one day.

[35 : 08] We pray that you'll keep us trusting, keep us faithful, keep us serving you, keep us telling the good news about you. And we ask it all for your name's sake.

Amen. Amen.