

A Royal Coronation

Psalm 110

Is there such a thing as a stable government these days? The French just had a turbulent Presidential race, and the English are gearing up for yet another round of elections for Parliament, just one year after they had a nation-wide vote on leaving the European Union. Of course, we Americans have little to boast about, with a Congress seemingly incapable of compromise and a President who is more than a little unpredictable.

Well, if you're tired of all the wrangling and all the struggle, today you should be able to breathe a big sigh of relief. That's because on Thursday we mark the next big event in the Christian calendar – Ascension Day comes forty days after Easter, and marks the day that Jesus ascended into Heaven – a fact to which we bear witness every time we repeat the Apostles' Creed.

Now, we know why the cross and the empty tomb are important. But why make such a big deal about Ascension Day? Well, in today's turbulent times, isn't it nice to take a step back and realize that, no matter what the politicians say, we are all really living in an absolute monarchy, and one whose king will never die or be overthrown. In Heaven, stable, righteous government is the order of the day for all eternity.

Now, our reading from Acts describes how Jesus rose up out of His disciples' sight, but they didn't see Him go all the way into Heaven – a cloud received Him out of their sight. That's why we have to turn to Psalm 110. For here, David describes the scene for us, straining forward to peer into the future from the past and into Heaven from Earth, describing Christ's coronation and celebrating His character.

And what do we learn about our King from this Psalm? Most obviously, we see His great authority. Now, Queen Elizabeth has 65 million subjects in the United Kingdom.

If you count all the countries in the Commonwealth, including Canada and Australia, she reigns over more than 140 million people. Pope Francis claims authority over all the 1.2 billion Roman Catholics worldwide. But the King of Kings will put them both to shame, along with all the kings and princes and popes who have ever claimed dominion over men.

Why? Because there's never been a king who hasn't had some people who refuse to recognize his authority. After all, none of us would feel obligated to observe the dictates of Queen Elizabeth – that's what the Revolutionary War was about, after all. And we Protestants by definition protest the Pope's claim to authority over the whole Church of Jesus Christ. And even before President Trump's inauguration, his opponents have been screaming for him to be impeached. There's never been a prince whose rule hasn't been limited by opponents of some sort.

But God tells David's lord that He will rule even over his enemies. They will be a footstool beneath his feet, which symbolizes his complete triumph over them. The empire of King Jesus will thus extend forever, without exception, throughout both space and time. Truly, all the saints will adore Him, giving to Him whatever authority they might have, casting their crowns at His feet.

And why will King Jesus be able to reign in such an unquestioned, universal way? In no small part because of the way He has received His absolute power. Human rulers like President Trump can win power by election – but then there are always the malcontents who didn't vote for them. Human kings like Elizabeth can inherit their power – but there are always those who reject their right to hereditary rule. No matter how a human king comes to power, some of their subjects are going to begrudge their authority.

But King Jesus is different. He will not have to advance His own claims to the throne. Instead, God Almighty will stretch out the staff of His strength; God Almighty will

put his enemies beneath his feet. Indeed, it is God the Father who tells King Jesus, using the imperative, "Rule in the midst of your enemies." Just before His ascension into Heaven, Jesus made the same point in the gospel of Matthew when He told His disciples, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth." While the Father still reigns and lives, He gives all authority to the Son.

This, of course, raises some interesting questions for us. We aren't Roman Catholics, and so we don't feel bound by the decrees of the Pope. We aren't citizens of the Commonwealth, and so what Queen Elizabeth says will carry very little weight with us. But on a daily basis, are we any more interested in what King Jesus has to say? Do we consider His Words as precious as silver and as binding as law? Do we order our steps according to the Scriptures, or do we live according to the dictates of our own feelings and of our own reason? In other words, we American Christians say we are loyal subjects of King Jesus. But are we living like it?

Well, whether we are or not, we can't deny the cosmic scope of our King's authority. But what we learn from this Psalm about our King's character makes that authority more accessible, even more palatable to us American Christians. For if King Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth, He only has that authority because the Father gave it to Him. Unlike human kings, The Father rejoices to give power and authority to the Son.

Now, in the case of Queen Elizabeth, it didn't exactly happen that way. She and Prince Philip were on a tour of the colonies when her father, King George VI, died – she certainly wasn't expecting to become Queen right then. And American Presidents sometimes lose elections, which means they have to hand over the White House to someone from a different party with very different priorities. Human rulers just don't give up their power very easily, and the greater the power they wield, the less likely they are to

let it go.

But in Psalm 110 we see the Father granting power to the Son. And we see the Son humbly receiving such power from the Father. Unlike Adam who grasped the forbidden fruit in an effort to be like God, the Second Adam existed in the form of God, but did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped. In other words, even though our King has all power, He rules and reigns in the form of an obedient servant. That's the sort of humble character our King possesses.

And knowing about the character of our King can help us independent-minded Americans learn how to submit to His absolute authority with enthusiasm. Verse three is, like much great poetry, difficult to pin down precisely, but it points to the way that the King's subjects should respond to our Lord. Most translators foreshadow the martial imagery of verses 5 through 7 by saying that the people are willing volunteers to serve in the King's army. But the Hebrew says that the people are, literally, freewill offerings. In the day that David's Lord is revealed in His power, His people will offer themselves freely to Him.

But the subjects of the King are also described "in the beauties of holiness" or "the ornaments of holiness." This refers us back to the description of the garments of the priests in the temple. David's lord will thus rule over "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation," as God said to Moses just before giving the Ten Commandments.

The rest of the imagery in this verse is obscure but vivid: the womb, the dawn, the dew, and youth all have one thing in common. They speak of beginnings and of freshness. It is not too much to say that the Day of the Lord will be a day of a new start for His people, who will be washed clean of their sins, and stand before Him clothed in sparkling robes of righteousness, fresh as babes from the womb, fresh as the dew in the early morning.

Willing volunteers, priests rendering holy prayers and praise to God, people who have been washed clean. All of these things describe what we will be like when Jesus comes again in power and might. But they should also describe the way we respond to Him each and every day of our lives. For if we believe that Our Lord already has all power in heaven and on earth, should we not express our willing loyalty to Him now? Shouldn't we pursue holiness by obeying His Will now? Shouldn't we remember the grace by which He has cleansed us of our sins now, living lives that are clean and new now?

For the psalm goes on to celebrate not only the Authority of the King and the Character of the King but the Salvation of the King. For David indicates that Jesus will be not only a King, but a priest. Jesus is thus able to cleanse His people and make us fresh and new, because He will be a priest forever, in the same way as was Melchizedek. Melchizedek, you see, was both a priest of the Most High God and a King over Jerusalem in the days of Abraham. Just so, David's Lord rules as king over His people by being their priest, interceding for them, and cleansing them from their sins, so that they will stand before God in holiness and freshness.

But how did Jesus accomplish all this? The amazing truth is that just as He rules and reigns in humility, He has accomplished the salvation of all His people in the same way. Just as Christ humbled Himself before His Father, who gave Him all authority, so he offered His blood and died for His people, taking on the form of a servant, and becoming obedient even to the point of death on the cross. In fact, it is in His death that He displays His power most clearly, for it was on the cross that He conquered Sin and Death. Christ's very conquest is achieved through humble submission. Thus, David can say in verse 3 that the Day of Christ's priesthood is in fact the day of His power and strength.

And it's knowing what Christ has done for us that gives us all the more reason to

respond to His power and grace as He deserves. Because Christ offered Himself up to the Father on behalf of His people, we can see why Christ's people would offer themselves to him as freewill offerings. Because Christ had to die that we might live lives that are free of sin, we can see why we should pursue purity, living not for ourselves, but for the One Who gave everything for us. When we hear the joyful news of sins forgiven, of hell subdued and peace with heaven, we should indeed sit in willing bonds beneath the feet of Christ.

But the sad truth is that everyone doesn't feel the same way. There are lots of people throughout the world who deny Jesus' authority as King, living only for themselves or serving all kinds of false gods. There are lots of people in the world who claim to be Christians, but whose lives render their professions of faith unbelievable. There are many people for whom the return of Christ will not be good news at all, but an occasion of fear and dread.

And David echoes this sobering truth as well. For if this Psalm tells us about the absolute authority of our King, and about the humble character of our King, and about the salvation of our King, it also tells us about the Judgment of our King.

Notice the objects of His wrath in verses five and six: He will shatter kings and the chief men over a broad country. In contrast to Christ's people, who freely offer themselves to Him, these kings set themselves up as rulers over the earth. They will not bow before Him willingly, so He will impose His rule over them. We see in verses five and six, then, the fate of the rebellious. The nations will be judged, and the sentence will be death. On the day Jesus returns, everyone will acknowledge the authority of the King of Kings, whether they want to or not.

But that day has not yet come, and so there's still a chance for those who are in rebellion against the King's righteous rule to repent, to turn from whatever they are

worshipping, from whatever they have placed at the center of their lives, and bow before the One Who offers Himself to us as humbly as He offered Himself to His Father. Today, we all still have a chance to surrender to the One Who came to take power not with a crown but with a cross. And as the people of God offer ourselves to Him willingly, living fresh new lives, we live out the humble and holy character of our King, and we will thus draw others to share our love for Him.

And so let us give us ourselves willingly to God in the day of His power. This, morning, let us clothe ourselves in the beauties of holiness, having been born again by the grace of God through the blood of Jesus Christ, shed for all who trust in Him. And let us proclaim our allegiance to our sovereign King, singing His praise.