

The King and His People

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[0:00] Our Father, thank you for your words. Thank you for your words of power and love. Your words about your Son Jesus Christ. Pray that you would encourage us today with the Gospel. Pray that we would see your glory. We would be encouraged in our faith and our walk with you.

We live in a world where we struggle, where we need help. Please would you give that to us today. In Jesus name. Amen. Yidi will come and read a Psalm to us. So church, today the scripture reading is taken from Psalm 23. Please follow along your Bible. If you don't have one, please still grab the Bible at the front of the stage or at the back near the door.

Our passage is from page 428. Hear then God's word to us today. The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his namesake.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death. I will fear no evil. For you are with me. Your rod and your staff will comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil. My cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

[1:50] Let us believe and respond to God's truth and living words. Great. Thank you, Yidi.

I'm not actually going to be preaching from this text. I'm going to do more of an introduction to the next series. But it's a great psalm to illustrate that. Because we're starting, if you're new, or if you've been here for a while, we're starting a new sermon series today.

We're going to be doing psalms over the summer. Now, psalms in a way are a great book for the summer. Because people are in and out because of holiday. And so it's not great to kind of go through a book bit by bit. Psalms are nice and individual passages.

But we want to have a certain angle. The angle for this summer is praying the psalms. Praying, well, because the psalms are basically a collection of prayers, aren't they?

It's 150 songs and prayers. And a lot of the Bible is kind of God's word to us. Thus says the Lord, you know, the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, et cetera.

[2:52] But actually, these are words from people to God. And so they are prayers. And I don't know how you feel. I think praying is something that many Christians struggle with, right?

It's not the easiest part of the Christian life. Maybe Bible reading, people are okay. Even that is a struggle for many. But praying, how many of us would say we're really great at praying? Maybe we're disciplined, but how much is it really, you know, the way we want it to be?

Often it's not. I don't know why it's difficult. I think one thing is just that we often don't know what to pray. Many of our prayers, it's just basically a shopping list of lots of things that we request of God, right?

For ourselves, for our loved ones, for others. And there's absolutely nothing wrong with that.

Actually, we are broken, needy people. Of course, we need help. And so it's great to ask God for help.

And yet, when you see the Psalms, that feels like so much, they have such a richer prayer life, it feels like. The Psalms are so much richer, the language, you know, we envy them.

[3:56] We wish that we could pray like that. Well, why don't we learn from them? Why don't we spend seven weeks looking at different prayers and learn how to pray? Right? You may know, maybe if you've learned to pray in the past, you know the acronym ACTS.

A-C-T-S, right? Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication. Well, that's what we're going to do. We have a Psalm of Adoration and a Psalm of Confession and a Psalm of Thanksgiving. And, you know, those four.

And then meditation and lament and trust. You know, different Psalms to help us learn to pray. You know, here's a collection of divinely inspired prayers. What a gift. But actually, as I thought about it, that's not the thing.

I thought about it. That's not even the most, the biggest problem we have in praying. So often our most fundamental problem is that, you know, we don't feel worthy to pray. Right? We don't feel able.

We come to God, but we've had a terrible week. And we just feel awful. And we're so aware of our sin. And then, you know, we want to come to God. But, you know, he is so holy and we are so sinful.

[4:58] Why would he listen to us? Right? How? Why would he take notice of us? Why would he change the whole course of history just for us? I mean, if you're not a Christian, you may know Richard Dawkins.

He, yeah. He used to make fun of prayer. Right? He was someone and they claimed to God, okay, I don't deserve this. I'm unworthy, but please can you change the world just for me? What a ridiculous thing, right?

Actually, if you think about it. And maybe we feel that. We are aware of that. And yeah, then it makes it hard to pray, to come near to God. But then you read the Psalms and, wow, the relationship that they have with God, it feels like on another level.

Right? The closeness they have, the freedom, the way they can express their feelings. Yeah, that's amazing. And in a way, we would want that. I mean, some of the Psalms, can you pray them yourself?

Can you just make them, I mean, you know, the Lord's Prayer, right? You can pray that. Could you read out some of the Psalms yourself? Or would you feel, man, that's not me? Well, that's what I want to talk about today as an introduction to this series.

[6:06] Basically, address this issue. Why we struggle to pray the Psalms. Why do we struggle to pray in general? And that's gonna, actually, there is a great answer to that.

And I hope that will encourage us. That gives us real confidence to pray. Confidence for this series to pray the Psalms. Confidence in our relationship with God. That's what I'd love to do today.

To talk about that. So a bit of a theological foundation. So we need to do a bit of work. I hope you've got your thinking caps on. But I think it's gonna be good. So yeah, that's what we're gonna do. Now, of course, there's lots of reasons why the Psalms aren't easy to pray.

One simple one is imagery, right? I mean, the Psalms are poetry. And they are full of images. I mean, we just read Psalm 23. And, you know, these are poems from 3,000 years ago.

Very different culture. And so we need to, you know, sometimes you need to think, what does this actually mean? Right? I mean, we can understand the shepherd imagery, yes? Still waters and green pasture.

[7:07] Okay, that makes sense. But, you know, verse 5. You anoint my head with oil. What does that even mean? Right? I don't know. What do you think?

Should I pray this? Oh, Lord, please anoint my head with oil. Is that something God has already done? Thank you for anointing my head with oil. I don't know. Well, I guess the best thing you can just do is read your Bible a lot.

I mean, the best way to understand the Bible is to read the rest of the Bible. Because it is its own context. You know, what is this about? You know, it's a banquet. And back then people didn't have deodorant.

They didn't have showers. So if you have guests, what do you do as a host? Well, you pour perfume on their head so that everyone smells nice and it's a much better banquet. That's basically it.

It's a sign of, you know, God's generosity, his lavishness in hosting. Something like that, right?

Okay, that is something that speaks to us. But yeah, that needs a bit of work.

[8:03] I guess often in the Psalms we get stuck with what's called biblical theology. Sometimes we know exactly what it means, but we're in a different time, right? So David in verse 6, he prays, I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Oh, it is the house of the Lord. I think we know it, right? It's the temple. Or back in David's day, it's the tent that they made in Exodus and where God kind of supposedly dwells.

I mean, should we pray that we would live in a tent forever with God? No, of course not, right? The Bible story has moved on. What is the tent about? It is God's presence.

God's presence. God, he was with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, but they sinned and it was lost and it was kind of restored in Israel, right? When God lived with people again, but there were still all these curtains in between.

But one day we will live with God forever in the new creation. That is what we should pray about, right? So that kind of stuff. Sometimes we need to do a bit of work with the Psalms. You know, this morning Colin read, the people of Zion.

[9:07] We're not the people of Zion. No, that's the Old Testament. For us, well, the church, right? But those are not the big issues. There are some things that we often, that some people find not easy about the Psalms.

But here is, I think, the biggest thing with the Psalms. It's going to come to what we struggle with the most. Who is praying in the Psalms? Who is praying in the Psalms?

We want to use the words of someone else. Well, they need to be someone like you. But some things in the Psalms are just very difficult to pray. So often, for example, the Psalmist says that he is so righteous, especially David.

So here is Psalm 18. I know a CG looked at it last Friday. Here is David. The Lord dealt with me according to my righteousness. According to the cleanness of my hands, he rewarded me.

For I have kept the ways of the Lord and have not wickedly departed from my God. These are quite brave words, right? Would you like me to pray that for you?

[10:11] Lord, I pray for the members of Watermark. Please would you reward them according to their righteousness. According to their clean hands. Like as many of us would say, no thank you. Right?

Because we don't like these words. That's not us. Or the previous Psalm, Psalm 17. Hear a just cause, O Lord. Attend to my cry.

Give ear to my prayer from lips free of deceit. From your presence let my vindication come. Let your eyes behold the right. And so he's really praying for justice, right?

Why? Well, you have tried my heart. You have visited me by night. You have tested me. And you will find nothing. I have purposed that my mouth will not transgress. I call upon you for you will answer me, O God.

He's very confident that God will rescue him. That God will answer him. Because, well, I've done nothing wrong. You know, look in my heart. There's nothing wrong there. Again, we struggle with those words, right?

[11:10] We're not... Yeah, we know we're sinners. How can we say these words? Or sometimes it's not even the righteousness.

Well, I mean... I mean, it's not just like we can cross some of these verses out. The whole psalm is about that, right? That whole appeal of David, please rescue me, is based on his righteousness.

So we need to cross the whole psalm out. Other psalms, they're just too big for us. Psalm 18 again. Here are some more words.

So here is again David. I pursued my enemies and overtook them and did not turn back till they were consumed. I thrust them through so that they were not able to rise.

They fell under my feet. I beat them fine as dust before the wind. I cast them out like the mire off the streets. You delivered me from strife with the people. You made me the head of the nations.

[12:07] People whom I had not known served me. As soon as they heard of me, they obeyed me. Foreigners came cringing to me. I mean, again, these words are probably too big for us, right?

I mean, I know why David prays these words, because David is the king. He's the king of Israel.

That's why he writes a psalm as the king. But the thing is, I'm not the king, right?

David, he's God's chosen king. He's the savior. He's got a special place at the center of God's plan. And I don't, right? That is, I think, the problem.

You know, David is God's chosen, righteous king. And that's how he prays. And I'm not. Which, in a way, that's the problem with prayer, right? I'm not righteous.

I'm not important. Why would God listen to me? Why can I pray? Which is exactly, yeah, I can't pray these prayers because of this. David is just different from us.

[13:05] Even when he sins, he's still God's chosen king. He still can appeal to God based on his position. And just like, you know, in this world, presidents and CEOs, they have privileges that many

of us, that we just don't have.

Maybe you're a CEO here. Welcome. But, you know, you know what I mean, right? You can do things that other people can't. And that's the problem. So here is, yeah.

So Psalm 18, I think, is a very hard psalm to pray for me. And the thing is, it's not just a few psalms. The problem with the, what I mentioned earlier, the imagery, is that often we don't really see what a psalm is really about.

So we read Psalm 23 just now, right? Many people love this psalm because it's so lovely, right? So verses one to three, David's walk with God as a sheep with a shepherd.

And then verse four, how, you know, God's presence in suffering, the valley of the shadow of death. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for you are with me.

[14:08] And there are such precious words. Verse six, the hope. I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. But how about verse five? You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

What does that actually mean? Is that about that in the midst of difficulties, God is still with us and cares for us? And maybe you're in your office and your colleagues are really nasty to you, but God is providing for you and he's caring for you.

Well, I don't know. Let's look at that. Where do we see table and enemies in the rest of the Bible?

Well, here's a great passage from the book of Judges. Judges chapter one, when, you know, the Israelites conquered the promised land.

Then Judah went up and the Lord gave the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hands. And they defeated 10,000 of them at Bezek. They found Adonibazek at Bezek and fought against him and defeated the Canaanites and the Perizzites.

Adonibazek fled, but they pursued him and caught him and cut off his thumbs and his big toes. And Adonibazek said, Seventy kings with their thumbs and their big toes cut off used to pick up scraps under my table.

[15:22] As I have done, so God has repaid me. And they brought him to Jerusalem and he died there. And what's the, what does this king do? He would capture his enemies and kind of, they were his trophies under his table.

I mean, back then there was no press, right? There were no cameras. How would you know that you have defeat, how would people know that David had defeated the Moabites?

Well, he would capture the king of the Moabites and bring him to Israel and he'd have a big victory banquet and here's the king of Moab in chains, humiliated. That's the idea.

And everyone can see that David won the victory. Most commentators would say, well, that is verse 5. A table in the presence of my enemies, that is a victory banquet with David's enemies, humiliated in chains.

Do you want to pray that for your nasty colleagues? No, right? Again, actually Psalm 23 is not about an ordinary believer. This is about a king to whom God gives a great victory.

[16:25] All right? Which begs the question, how about the rest of Psalm 23? You know? Is this a psalm for us? Actually, it isn't. Actually, if you read the psalm, just read the flow of the psalm and it becomes so clear, right?

Here is a king who walks with God, who is righteous, and then he goes through the valley of the shadow of death. He goes towards death, but he's not afraid.

He knows God is with him, so he goes to death and he comes out victoriously and has a great victory with all his enemies defeated and then he is in God's presence forever. Who is that?

Who is that? It's Jesus, right? Jesus who lived and died and rose and ascended. David's experience here is Jesus' experience. David has a picture of Jesus.

Psalm 23, I'm sorry to say, actually if you read it carefully, it's about Jesus and it's not about us. And so actually there's a lot of those psalms.

[17:24] If you look carefully, a lot of the psalms are about a king, a righteous, victorious king. Certainly if it's written by David and that's most of the psalms. I mean there's other psalms like Asaph and Korah, those writers, they're ordinary guys.

That's easier. You can pray those. But the psalms of David are very hard to pray. Yeah, because I'm not God's chosen righteous king.

I'm not Jesus. They're the prayers of Jesus. And you know Psalm 23 gives you great insight into what Jesus went through. How he trusted his father as he went through the cross, as he came out

of the tomb.

It's beautiful. It's just not a prayer for us. And yet, yet we can pray these psalms. We can pray these psalms confidently.

Yes, we are not the chosen righteous king. We can't come to God as little sinners. And yet, there is a way. And what is that way? Well, it is the king and his people.

[18 : 26] The relationship between the king and his people. That is the big thing in actually the whole Bible. The relationship between the king and his people. And I think the best way to, yeah, the big focus of that is, I think, representation.

The idea that you can, someone represents someone else. Now, what is, to give a silly example. So, on 30th of June, I was in the UK. And I woke up in the morning.

And I was told I had lost the World Cup. I'd just be sleeping. How could I lose the World Cup? But you know what it means, right? Representation.

There was a team representing the Netherlands. And they sadly lost on penalties against Morocco. And so, I lost because I'm part of the Netherlands. I'm united to them because they are kind of my team, right?

That's the idea. That's how representation works. As a team goes, so goes the nation. Now, you might think, okay, yeah, they lost. They were not very good. Usually, it's a great thing, right?

[19 : 27] Representation. Representation. I mean, they came to the last 32. I wouldn't even make it onto a single football team myself, right? Usually, it's a great idea that you take the best players and they get to represent you so that I have a chance to win the World Cup, right?

Does it make sense? That's the idea of representation. As the team goes, so goes the nation. Well, it's actually exactly the same in Israel. Not with a football team, but with the king.

The king is the people's representative. He is the one who, you know, he is the representative to God. And what he does, basically, that affects the nation, right?

If the king wins a victory, well, the nation wins a victory because he is the king of that nation. I mean, if you know the UK national anthem, God save the king. Why do they sing God save the king?

Well, because if the king gets saved, the nation gets saved, right? That makes sense. The king and the nation, they are united. The king wins the victory, and so the nation wins the victory.

[20 : 32] The king receives God's blessing, or the nation receives God's blessing, right? And the other way around. If the king sins and gets punished, the nation gets punished. That's the idea. And that's wonderful because the king, you know, hopefully, he's a great guy like David.

And if David gets rewarded for his righteousness, that's great for me because I'm not righteous. But David is righteous, and he gets God's blessing. That's the idea, right?

That's, it's the gospel. The gospel is that here is someone who can do what I can't, right? Jesus can do what I can't, and he gets God's blessing, and I benefit from that.

That is how the Psalms work. I mean, why would they collect all these Psalms about the king when they're not about us? Well, because they love to sing about the king because the king is the one who, you know, is their representative.

He gets God's blessing. He gets the victory, and they benefit from it. That's the idea, right? It's the gospel. And in the New Testament, that same idea continues.

[21 : 34] Now, it doesn't really talk about nation in the same way because the church is not like a geographical people in a piece of land and that kind of stuff. It's all different.

How does the New Testament talk about this? It talks about us being in Christ. And you've read that, you're at the New Testament, you get in Christ, in the king, in the Messiah.

We're in the Messiah. And yeah, everything comes in Christ. I mean, all these verses, you probably know them, right? Ephesians 1, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places.

Romans 8, there's therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For in Christ Jesus, you are all sons of God through faith. I mean, I can put hundreds of verses on here, right?

Actually, how do we get all the blessings of the Christian life? How do we get everything? By being in Christ. In Christ is a really weird expression. I don't know.

[22 : 35] I like this picture that really helps me. Think of this kangaroo and a little baby. It's called a joey. Is that right, Australians? Yeah, joey.

And so basically the joey is in the mummy. Right? And whatever happens to the mummy is what happens to the joey. Right? The mummy goes up the hill, the joey goes up the hill. The mummy goes into the desert, the joey goes into the desert.

The mummy is safe, the joey is safe. Right? You get the point. And that's the same for us. If you're a Christian, you are in Christ. Christ dies to sin.

That means you die to sin. Christ rises to new life. That means you rise to new life. Christ is exalted. That means you are exalted. Right? Christ receives God's blessing.

That means you receive God's blessing. Christ has an amazing relationship with God. That means you have an amazing relationship with God. Right? That is the gospel. You are in Christ and everything that Christ gets, you get.

[23 : 33] Because you are in him. That's the idea of the king and his people. And that's a wonderful thing, right? That is the gospel. Because again, I'm just a little rotten sinner.

I mean, I don't know. If you're here and you're not a Christian, I don't know how you think you would get anything from God. Right? Do you think you can come to God and just say, yeah, give me this, give me that?

Why would he listen to you? I feel the same way. But the Bible says the only way for that is Jesus. If you have Jesus, he lets you in.

He lets you into God's presence. And through him you can ask. Right? And so if you don't have Jesus, you really need him. Please come and talk to me afterwards if you want to know more.

But that's the idea. And I guess, yeah, that means three things. First, I guess, obviously, but I want to say it again. In Christ you have an amazing relationship with God.

[24 : 33] Right? If you read the Psalms and you think, wow, David has such an amazing relationship with God. Well, that relationship is yours in Christ. Maybe you don't feel like it.

Maybe you're just so aware of your sin and your brokenness. But you have that relationship. You can have that same closeness. That same security. That same freedom.

That same, you know, status. That same intimacy. That's all yours in Christ, the greater David. They're Jesus' prayers, but in Christ they become your prayers.

Right? Do you believe that? Most of us would say, yeah, I know that. I know through Jesus I have this amazing relationship. Actually, is that seen in your prayer life? Is the way you pray, does it reflect that you have this incredible closeness?

That you are, in God's eyes, as perfect as Jesus. And you can come to Him in the same way with just as much access as Jesus. Because that's the truth. And often we don't feel like that, right?

[25 : 34] But this is the truth. And it's not just in prayer. It's for all of life. I mean, why do people love the Psalms? Because they cover every situation, every emotion, every condition, every feeling.

Right? It's all there. And in all those feelings and situations, you know, you have this relationship with God. You have this closeness. God is your Father.

You are His Son. You have everything. And that changes every situation, right? No matter what you're going through. That is changed if you know you have God.

Second, I guess flowing out of that, we can pray. I mean, yeah, you can pray. You can come to God and He will listen to you and He will answer you. Because you are in Christ.

I mean, that's why Christians say, in Jesus' name, Amen, right? Christians always say that. I know some people at Watermark don't, but you know, you should. In Jesus' name, Amen.

[26 : 32] Why do we say that? It's not just a weird signal. No, you know, we pray in Jesus' name. Because I can't pray in my own name. I can't come to God by myself. No, I come in Christ.

I come through Jesus. I come in Jesus' name. And yeah, that's how we can pray. And if God always listens to Jesus and always answers Jesus, God will always listen to us and always answer us.

That's the foundation for prayer, is the being in Christ. And that's wonderful. And finally, that does mean we can pray the Psalms. And we don't need to shrink back from David's boldness.

They're the prayers of Christ and you are in Christ. You can, you know, when the Psalm talks about righteousness, you can pray that. Because you are perfectly righteous in Christ.

Right? Jesus died for all your sin. He's given you his obedience. You're in him. You are righteous and you can, you can pray about that. That's wonderful. And you can, you know, there's a victory and you think, who am I?

[27 : 37] Well, in Christ you have the victory. You are in the king's entourage. You are at the table. You will reign with Christ forever because you're in him. You can pray those things.

Now these, that's the key. If we're in Christ, the Psalms become ours. They can become our prayers. Of course, at the back of our minds, we know, it's not by ourselves. It's not by my righteousness.

It's not by my greatness. It's all God's gift in Jesus. But God has given us that gift for a reason. Let's use it. Let's use the wonderful access we have, the wonderful privilege we have of being in Christ. As we pray, as we pray the Psalms, as we pray in general, as we live our Christian life, we are in Christ. That's the wonderful truth. So yeah, that's the foundation. So the next seven weeks, we're going to look at different Psalms and pray them.

But I hope we will pray them with so much joy and confidence because of what we have in Christ. A deep, intimate prayer coming out of a deep, intimate relationship.

[28:41] Why don't I pray and then we'll sing. Our Father, we know we are not worthy.

We know the only thing we deserve from you is judgment for our sin. Thank you for the wonderful gift of your son, Jesus. How he died, how he rose. And how we're united to him if we trust in him. Lord, we often don't realize that privilege we have. We kind of know we are saved and yet in practice we often feel hesitant in our prayers, in our relationship with you.

Help us to realize again what we have in Christ. Would we know our position? Would we know our freedom and closeness? And would that change our life? Would that change how we feel? Would that change how we relate to you? Would it change how we pray? Father, I pray for each of us here, no matter what we're going through, that we would draw close to you without any hesitancy, without anything holding us back.

[29:44] Because we know we're in Christ. Lord, we pray that this whole series would be so good for us to grow in our relationship with you, to realize more in practice what we already have in principle, in theory, in spiritual reality in Christ.

And we ask it in his name. Amen.