

Psalm 93 builds on the theme of praise announced in Psalm 92 by proclaiming, “Yahweh reigns!” In this brief psalm the Lord is acknowledged as exalted over all time and eternity, over all nature and creation, and over all human law and conscience. The psalm heralds the news as an obvious fact and an incontestable truth. It is as succinct as it is encompassing of every moment, every place, and every person. Psalm 93 takes the centerpiece of Psalm 92, “You, Lord, are forever exalted,” and expands on the theme of Yahweh’s rule. This psalm is in the company of other psalms that proclaim the Lord’s sovereignty over all.¹

It is difficult to imagine a person knowingly praying Psalm 93 without experiencing some dissonance with the prevailing scientific, social, and political ideologies that shape us. We are immersed in a culture that prides itself on nature alone, the freedom of the individual, and self-government. Everywhere we look, in the family, in university, in the workplace, in pop culture, the messaging is the same. Self-rule in a sphere of random naturalness is the prevailing ideology. There is a clash between the popularly conceived American dream and the Kingdom of God.

To pray Psalm 93 is to proclaim that Yahweh is king, that he is robed in majesty, that he is sovereign over all. But when this psalm is embedded in routine worship and is used in a church sanctuary to lead us in praise, it is all too easy to evade this radical, subversive truth. The social and political impact of this psalm is obscured, forgotten as quickly as it is remembered. This is why the reality of God’s rule does little to alleviate our anxiety and agitation over political parties and personalities in power. We have not learned to write-off international conspiracies and the vain plotting of the peoples. We have not learned to laugh with the One enthroned in heaven (Ps 2:1-4). Instead, we blandly and unwittingly pray a revolutionary truth that truly has profound social, political, intellectual, and existential impact, but when we use it in worship it washes over us as only so much religious rhetoric. Eugene Peterson asks, “How much does our American pride in self-government unconsciously subvert our Christian commitment to God’s sovereignty?”²

Yet for many Christians around the world, Psalm 93 is a powerful statement declaring that the Lord is sovereign over the very political regimes that exploit and oppress them. Early Christians prayed Psalm 93 when the Caesars ruled with an iron fist and demanded to be worshiped. To pray this psalm in worship was for them an act of subversion that required courage. Emperor Domitian filled Rome with statues of himself and required officials to address him as “Our Lord and God.” Domitian executed Christians in 93 AD, including his nephew Flavius Clemens, for refusing to offer sacrifices to his image.³ Psalm 93 was not a rhetorical flourish designed to give color commentary to Christian worship but a declaration of praise to the King of kings and Lord of lords in defiance of the Roman Imperial cult.

What the psalmist intended for worship in Israel became for Christians all over the world a

¹ This group of psalms is known as the enthronement psalms (Psalms 29, 47, 93, 95, 96, 97, 99) because these psalms celebrate the reign of the Lord over all. Yahweh is King over creation and the nations.

² Eugene Peterson, *Earth & Altar: The Community of Prayer in a Self-Bound Society*, IVP, 1985, 54.

³ *Ibid.*, 292.

statement of faith in the Lord's governing authority both today and in the future. As the followers of King Jesus we pray this psalm in a new light: "In putting everything under him, God left nothing that is not subject to him. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him. But see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone" (Heb 2:8-9). The proclamation that "the Lord reigns," is a revolutionary truth that runs counter to every sphere of our pluralistic culture (intellectual, social, political, tribal).

Peter's experience at Caesara Philippi may help put Psalm 93 in perspective for us. At a critical turning point in his ministry, Jesus took the disciples to Mount Hermon and headwaters of the Jordan river (Matthew 16:13-28). As they walked along the gorge and up to the ancient pagan shrines at the base of Mount Herman he asked them a question, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" The setting was unusual. It was an active spiritual center for the worship of Pan (Πάν), the god of the wild, shepherds and flocks, the god of fields and wooded glens. Pan was associated with spring, fertility, sexuality and a companion of the nymphs. Pan is pictured as half goat, half human. The word "panic" is a tribute to the god. Greek mythology meets western man in Scottish playwright J. M. Barrie's creation of Peter Pan, a free spirited, mischievous young boy who can fly and who never grows up. Peter Pan spends his never-ending childhood having adventures on the mythical island of Neverland as the leader of the Lost Boys.

It is significant that Jesus had this particular conversation with his disciples in the vicinity of a temple to Zeus and Pan. Symbolically, Jesus has left his "home" culture and entered into the world-at-large culture. He does not ask this question in the temple courts in Jerusalem, but in the context of foreign gods and pagan religious pilgrims. It is as if Jesus deliberately set himself against the background of the world's religions in all their history and splendor, and demanded to be compared to them.⁴ The fact that this conversation took place here on the border between Israel and the world "hints of the world-missionary significance of the confession of Christ."

Jesus sought to clarify the disciples' understanding of the Son of Man. In the popular opinion of the day, it was the greatest compliment to be compared to one of the prophets. There was no greater tribute than to be compared to Elijah or Jeremiah. But even this high view of Jesus would never have been compatible with Psalm 93. Jesus asked, "But what about you? Who do you say I am?" As happened so often, Peter spoke up for the disciples: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." In the Spirit, Peter suggested not simply a higher view of Jesus, but a radically different view of Jesus. Peter's confession and Jesus' response demonstrate that the difference between the highest human ideal (being like one of the prophets) and the Son of the living God was a difference not only in degree but in kind. Jesus was perceived by Peter as being on an altogether different plane than the prophets, even though much of Jesus' ministry was in continuity with the prophets. "Peter is the first to penetrate into one of the mysteries of the kingdom: the identity of the true king (Jesus)."⁵ The Christ is Israel's ultimate one, God's final King." The Person/Titles: Jesus, the Son of Man, the Messiah [Christ, the Anointed One], the Son of the Living God. There is an obvious contrast between an opinion reached by human

⁴ Bruner, Matthew, ?

⁵ McKnight, The Kingdom Conspiracy, 86.

insight and analogy and a confession based on God's revelation and personal encounter. Jesus is not one of the many "key figures" in Jewish history, Jesus is King.

Psalm 93 and Matthew 16 are crucial to our understanding of what it means to announce to the world, "Yahweh reigns!" When Jesus gave Peter the keys of the kingdom he was not inviting Christians to make something special of Peter, nor was he legitimizing ostentatious displays of worldly wealth and power. Instead he was weaving together the gospel mission of the church with the royal rule of Christ's kingdom. "There is no kingdom mission apart from submitting to Jesus as King and calling ourselves to surrender before King Jesus."⁶ The Kingdom of God is a people under the reign of Christ, the Anointed One, the Messiah, the Christ. This means that the "church and kingdom are indissolubly connected" and "kingdom mission is first and foremost church mission. . . .and there is no kingdom mission that is not church mission."⁷ To pray Psalm 93 is to announce to the world that Jesus is King. The kingdom of God is a people under the rule of Christ who are gathered together in local churches who bear witness to the world of a new worship, a new law, a new king, a new social order, a new peace, a new justice, a new economics, and a new way of life."⁸

Robed in Majesty

*The Lord reigns, he is robed in majesty;
the Lord is robed in majesty and armed with strength;
indeed, the world is established, firm and secure.
Your throne was established long ago;
you are from all eternity.*

Psalm 93:1-2

"Yahweh reigns!" is an exclamatory shout announcing the rule of God. Although we wait for the final consummation of the Kingdom of God, the psalmist's focus is on the present reality of God's sovereignty. The Lord is robed in majesty and armed with strength, as are his subjects. The apostle Paul developed this analogy when he spoke of Christians putting on the full armor of God. Out-of-uniform Christians are of little kingdom value. We need to intentionally prepare for spiritual combat. We have a responsibility to put on the full armor of God and a responsibility to help others put on their armor. This "putting on" requires an intentional discipline on our part ("jocking up" as the Navy SEALs say). Now is the time to put on the full armor of God ("so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground") and now is the time to determine that you will never give up no matter what ("after you have done everything, to stand"). Paul offers a "no excuse" strategy for spiritual preparedness.

Two fundamental facts are celebrated. The Lord established the world firm and secure and he established his throne from long ago, from all eternity. The psalmist begins, not with an expectation, but with a conviction. Whatever we long for in the future has already begun in the

⁶ McKnight, *The Kingdom Conspiracy*, 37.

⁷ McKnight, *The Kingdom Conspiracy*, 95-96.

⁸ McKnight, *The Kingdom Conspiracy*, 101

present. Believers consciously live under the Lord's rule and in some significant ways they live above politics not only at the end of time, but now, in time. Their destiny is not in the hands of presidents, dictators, rebels, and terrorists. The sovereignty of God over all creation has always been true, but how we think about that rule has changed since the coming of Jesus Christ. The early church proclaimed, "For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Col 1:16-17). In Christ, history has reached its tipping point and the crucified, risen, and ascended Lord has bound the devil for a thousand years and released the gospel to every tribe, nation, and people group.

In God's merciful and missional millennium, Satan is bound and unable to deceive the nations for a thousand years (Rev 20:1-6). One thousand symbolizes the perfection of God's mercy and the completeness of the church from Pentecost to the second coming of Christ. Martyred and witnessing saints in heaven and on earth continue to seek first Christ's kingdom in the fellowship of his suffering and in the power of his resurrection. At the end of the church age all the images of final judgment, including the battle of Armageddon and the great supper of God, come to fulfillment. The impact of the Lord's rule and reign from the ascension to the second coming of Christ frees the nations to hear the gospel. As the apostle Paul said to the people of Lystra, "We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them. In the past, he let all nations go their own way. Yet he has not left himself without testimony. . . (Acts 14:15-17).

The psalmist uses three quick metaphors to describe the character and nature of God. The Lord is robed in majesty, armed with strength, and enthroned for all eternity. The psalmist repeats for emphasis that the Lord is robed in majesty. "Not with emblems of majesty," wrote Spurgeon, "but with majesty itself: everything which surrounds him is majestic. His is not the semblance but the reality of sovereignty. In nature, providence, and salvation the Lord is infinite in majesty."⁹ To be clothed in majesty and armed with strength corresponds to the apostle John's vision of "someone like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest" (Rev 1:13). His eyes were like blazing fire; his feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace; his voice was like the sound of rushing waters (Rev 1:14-15). The apostle and the psalmist invoke meaning through metaphor by using royal and priestly images to shape and inspire our understanding of the Lord's majesty. To worship the King is to remember that he established the world firm and immovable and his throne is forever from all eternity.

Mightier than Breakers of the Sea

*The seas have lifted up, Lord,
the seas have lifted up their voice;
the seas have lifted up their pounding waves.
Mightier than the thunder of the great waters,
mightier than the breakers of the sea –*

⁹ Spurgeon, Treasury of David, Psalm 93:1 <http://www.romans45.org/spurgeon/treasury/ps093.htm>.

*the Lord on high is mighty.
Your statutes, Lord, stand firm;
holiness adorns your house
for endless days.*

Psalm 93:3-5

The churning, tumultuous, raging seas represent the unleashed powers of chaos. The psalmist takes this single image, the pounding waves of the seas, to symbolize all that threatens the sovereignty of God. The Hebrew people found in the raging sea an apt metaphor for natural disaster, social upheaval, and political chaos. All that threatens to overwhelm the world is captured in “this master metaphor for anarchy.”¹⁰ The prophet Isaiah wrote, “Woe to many nations that rage – they rage like the raging sea! Woe to the people who roar – they roar like the roaring of great waters!” Nevertheless the Lord is able to quell the storm with a simple rebuke, “Although the peoples roar like the roar of surging waters, when he rebukes them they flee far away. . .” (Isaiah 17:12-13). Jeremiah likened the sound of an advancing army to the sound of the roaring sea (Jer 6:23; 50:42).

The meaning of the metaphor persists in our reference to the storms of life, when the waves come crashing down and we are powerless before forces beyond our control. If God is not sovereign, then we do in fact live in chaos. If “randomness and chance permeate the universe,” then we are all caught in life’s rip currents and we are paddling desperately to stay afloat as we drift out to sea.¹¹ The psalmist reminds us that the Lord is “mightier than the thunder of the great waters, mightier than the breakers of the sea – the Lord on high is mighty” (Ps 93:4).

In the new heaven and the new earth, the apostle John announces that there will no longer be any sea. But if your son like mine is an ocean life guard who loves surfing and can’t imagine living away from the beach, it is important to understand what the metaphor meant to ancient Israel and to the early church. What John meant to emphasize was that what is missing in the new order is any hint of evil or the threat of tribulation. What is missing in the new order are drownings, storms, and shark attacks. What remains in the new heaven and the new earth are beautiful ocean vistas, great swells, and a sea teaming with God’s creation. We can hardly imagine what life will be like without the threat of chaos.

The abrupt transition from the thunder of great waves to the statues of the Lord ought to remind us that the forces of nature have and will always meet their match with the word of the Lord. Kidner writes, “Here is God’s true glory, not of mere strength but of character: wholly reassuring, wholly demanding.”¹² The defining word of God that issues out of the integrity of God is holy and true. This is the word that creates the household of faith that is one with the kingdom of God. Genesis begins with the earth “formless and empty, with darkness over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God is hovering over the waters” (Gen 1:2). And then God spoke creation into existence and he continues to sustain creation by his powerful word (Heb 1:3). While Job was

¹⁰ Peterson, *Earth & Altar*, 59.

¹¹ Peterson, *Earth & Altar*, 60.

¹² Kidner, *Psalms*, 339.

still on the ash heap, the Lord spoke to him out of the storm and said, “Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me” (Job 42:4). When Jesus and the disciples were crossing the Sea of Galilee, a sudden squall swept down on the lake and threatened to swamp the boat. In a panic, the disciples woke Jesus, saying, “Master, Master, we’re going to drown!” But the one who is “mightier than the thunder of the great waters,” simply “got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters” and storm subsided and “all was calm.” Luke adds, “In fear and amazement they asked one another, ‘Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him’” (Luke 8:22-25). We know this person to be King Jesus. Yahweh reigns!