

God Reigns

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[0 : 00] Well, Psalm 93 is the passage that we've been assigned today. I'm not sure who decided on that series, but that's where we're at. Most churches, I think, have their favorite songs. Would you agree with that?

I think you go to a church and you'll hear them sing the same repertoire of songs often. We came back from Canada, we sort of dropped in and out of a church, and it seemed for a period of time, and it seemed that every Sunday that we went, they sang the same song, so much so that my kids named that song, that church's theme song.

And even to this day, they'll say, oh, we're singing so-and-so's theme song today, even if we're not even in that church. It couldn't have been and wasn't any different in Old Testament temple worship.

There must have been psalms that were sung more frequently than others. And during the second temple period, and we've heard this morning a little bit about the building of the first temple, and then, of course, the Jews were carried off into exile, first by the Syrians and then later by the Babylonians.

And when they returned from exile, they rebuilt the temple. And it was rededicated, and some of them wept because it wasn't as glorious as the first temple and so on.

[1 : 23] But really, from that point onwards to the point of the Herod's temple, that period is known as the second temple period. And during the second temple period, there were set songs that were sung every morning.

For instance, on Sunday, the first day of the week, they sang Psalm 24. Monday, it was Psalm 48 every Monday morning.

Tuesday, Psalm 82. Wednesday, Psalm 94. And Thursday, Psalm 81. And on Friday, the day before the Sabbath, they sang Psalm 93, the psalm that we're looking at this morning.

So it would appear that Psalm 93 was a familiar psalm to anyone who spent any kind of time around the temple. Not only was it a familiar psalm, but it's interesting that it's also part of a little series of psalms.

So it begins here in Psalm 93, and it runs through to Psalm 100. It's a little block of psalms, a little question about Psalm 94. Does it fit in? Doesn't it fit in?

[2 : 32] But that aside, a little block of psalms from Psalm 93 to Psalm 100. And what this group of psalms does, really, is it celebrates, it affirms, if you like, the fact that the Lord, Yahweh, the God of Israel, reigns.

If you like, it celebrates the fact that God is king, and that he rules over all. And as God is king, he not only rules over all, but he watches over his people.

The structure of this little series of psalms is very interesting. I should have brought a PowerPoint so that you could see it, but very quickly, Psalm 93, the Lord reigns. And then you've got two psalms which begin with the word sing, sing.

And then Psalm 97 again, the Lord reigns. So the Lord reigns, sing, praise him, sing, praise him. And then the Lord reigns again in Psalm 97.

From Psalm 98 to Psalm 100, it's alternated a little bit. And you've got sing, and then you've got the Lord reigns, and then it finishes up with that great psalm, Psalm 100, sing to the Lord.

[3 : 37] So a little bit about the structure and a little bit about what's happening in terms of these psalms. But as I said, they are as a group. And when you read them as a group, it gives you a little indication of what the psalmist's point is.

If you just read Psalm 93, you might miss it a bit. But when you read the package, you get a sense of what the psalmist is trying to communicate and what he is trying to express as he writes these

songs and as they are recorded for us.

So this psalmist is really trying to affirm, celebrate the fact that God is king and that he reigns over everything.

Now, that conviction is based on a long-term view rather than a short-term view. Because if you just look at things from a short-term view, sometimes it will be difficult to see how God could possibly be reigning or how God could ultimately be in control.

But from time to time, we get glimpses of how God is at work. But not all of the time. Sometimes it's very difficult to see what God is doing and how God is working things together for our good and for his own glory.

[5 : 00] But in this group of psalms, the psalmist has come to the fresh conviction that God is not only on the throne, but he has come to the fresh conviction after the experiences that he has worked through that God has always been on the throne, even when he thought that God was absent, even when he thought God was distant, even when he thought that God had lost control.

He discovers afresh with renewed conviction that God has always been on the throne. Now, it's hard to know what the exact context of this little group of psalms is.

If you read through it, you'll see that there are references to the exile or to the exodus, rather, of the Hebrews out of Egypt. But it's more than likely to be tied to the exile and the return of the exiles from their Babylonian captivity.

Whatever the exact context and whatever the circumstances, the truth is we can't be sure. But we must camp on the thought of the psalmist, that God, the God of Israel, that he is king.

Sometimes it's hard to see that God reigns, isn't it? Have you found that in your life? Sometimes it's hard to see that God reigns.

[6 : 27] But he does reign. We don't always perceive it, but we walk by faith and not by sight. We cling to the fact that even when we can't see that God is in control, that somehow he will yet work it out.

It's not easy when you stand with a couple who have just laid to rest their little two-year-old girl and you hug them and feel them shake to the very core of their being.

It's not easy to believe that ultimately God is in control if you only take a short-term view. But the long-term view is that God is in control. And the psalmist has come out of some huge and significant upheaval.

I don't know what they are. Maybe it is the exile. But he has seen God miraculously at work. He has seen God intervene on behalf of his people. He has seen God work for the salvation of his people. And he responds now in praise. And he announces and celebrates the fact that God, the God of Israel, is king. That's what's going on here.

[7 : 29] It always strikes me in the Bible that worship is never static. It is almost always dynamic. God draws near.

People respond in praise. So God destroys the pursuing Egyptian army who are pursuing the Hebrews as they make their way out of Egypt.

And God destroys them in the Red Sea. And what happens? Miriam gets out her tambourine and leads the congregation in praise.

So God draws near and tells Mary, You are going to be the vehicle through whom God will enter the world. And what does Mary do? She responds, erupts with her great magnificat in praise and adoration.

Adoration. When I was a pastor of a church, I was aware that there were folks in our congregation who came really just for the sermon. And they couldn't be bothered with the first part of the service.

[8 : 28] They thought that was the fluff that they had to put up with until they got to the real part of the service, which was the sermon. Now, I agree with that in theory.

What we say to God is important, but what God ultimately says to us through His Word is much more important. And in many senses, the climax of a Sunday morning service is the reading of the Bible as God speaks to us.

How awesome is that? But I want to argue and want to just say as we begin to open up this psalm that the praise of God is not fluff.

It is no less and no more than He deserves. He is a great God. And He is greatly to be praised. And He is worthy of all of the adoration that we can give to Him.

And we will sing His praise for eternity. So we best get used to it whilst we're knocking around and rumbling around on earth. I have just five points that I want to lift out of this psalm.

[9 : 31] I'll be as quick as I can. I want you to think, first of all, that God reigns majestically. That's what the psalmist wants to tell us. Secondly, He wants to tell us that God reigns powerfully.

Thirdly, He wants to tell us that God reigns eternally. Fourthly, He wants to tell us that God reigns emphatically. He is mightier than the oceans or the floods.

And fifthly, He wants to tell us that God reigns over His people. He reigns righteously. So those are five things about the fact that the Lord reigns that this psalmist wants to tell us about.

First of all, God reigns majestically. God reigns majestically. Verse 1, The Lord reigns and He is robed in majesty.

The Lord is robed in majesty. Again, He repeats. The Lord reigns. What does that mean? If a king rules over a kingdom, if he reigns over a kingdom, it means that he is the final authority.

[10 : 37] Doesn't it? It means that that king is the one who is ultimately in control. And that's what the psalmist is telling us about God. God reigns.

Yahweh reigns. The Lord of Israel, the God of Israel reigns. He is the one who has ultimate control. The one who is the ultimate authority.

It's not the king of Israel. It's not the king of Syria or of the Persians or the Babylonians. This writer is convinced that the ultimate authority is none other than Yahweh himself.

That's comforting, I think, in this generation, at this point in history. We really don't know what the future will look like. The one who is ultimately in control the one who has ultimate authority in this world is not Vladimir Putin with all of his threats against the West.

And it's not Donald Trump. And it's not even Theresa May. The one who is ultimately in control of this world is God. I was talking to my wife yesterday as we drove along somewhere about the world that we now live in and how different it is from the world that she and I grew up in.

[12 : 03] And I was just lamenting to her about our children. What kind of a world will they have to navigate their way through? And as I listen to them talk about their experiences at school, you wonder, what will this world look like?

What will this country look like in 20 or 30 years from now? What will it be like to be a Christian 20 or 30 years from now? And my wife just reminded me, well, ultimately our children are in God's hands and so is this country.

And indeed, so is this world. And we'll just have to leave them there and leave it there. The Lord reigns, he says. And then he says twice, not once, but twice, he says, the Lord is robed in majesty.

He really wants us to get that. God is robed in majesty. Now majesty, it's not an easy thing to define. When we think about majesty from a human perspective, we think about things like dignity. We think about authority. We think about power, grandeur, glory, greatness. We have visions of our own queen's coronation. We have a picture in our minds that golden carriage that she travels in.

[13 : 19] That's the kind of her robes, her crown, the pomp and ceremony that goes with the official events surrounding our own monarch.

That's usually what we think of when we think of majesty. Even yesterday, I don't know if you saw the news of that cavalcade making its way through the little tiny town of Mabel.

I drive through their lots on the way to the ferry. And it's interesting to watch all those flashing lights and black cars and motorcycles and outriders and, you know, sirens going, policemen everywhere. And you think, well, there's someone significant passing through here. Here the psalmist is telling us that God is robed in majesty. In the many visions that are recorded, in the many visions of God that are recorded in scripture, one of the things that characterizes them is this overwhelming sense of the majesty of God.

So when Isaiah receives his vision of God in the temple in Isaiah chapter 6, the year that the king died, the thing that strikes you as you read through that story is the sense of awe, the sense of majesty that is associated with God.

[14 : 41] His train fills the temple. There are creatures around him crying, Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts. The sound of the creatures' voices is like the sound of many waters making their way down a stream.

And you get this sense that in all of the visions, I mean, think of the visions in John chapter, in the book of Revelation, that John receives of Jesus. His feet is like burnished, his face is like brighter than the sun and I fell at his feet as though I were dead.

Revelation 4, that picture of God on the throne and before him there's a crystal sea and there's colors and there's thunder and lightning. In all of the visions and pictures we get of God in the Bible, it's consistently majestic.

It's consistently majestic. And this is what the psalmist wants us to see, that our God is greater. Our God is stronger.

Our God is higher than any other. He reigns majestically. We sometimes see leaders of countries and the pomp and ceremony that accompanies them, but all of that pales in comparison to the majesty of God.

[16:00] I think it might be fair to say, I don't know if you'll agree with me, but I think it might be fair to say that people in a bygone generation had a greater sense of the majesty of God than we have now in the 21st century.

I don't know if that's a product of the time or what it is. Now, I want you not to misunderstand me. I believe passionately that God is our Father. And Jesus told us when we come to talk to God, we are to come to Him as children to our Father.

Our Father in Heaven. That's the invitation. That's the instruction of our Savior. We don't come to a tyrant in the sky. We come as children to a Father.

But I just want to say we also need to remember this is no ordinary Father. This is no ordinary Father. This is the majestic God of eternity.

This is the God before whom creatures veil their faces and before whom doorposts tremble. This is the majestic God that we come and call as Father.

[17:09] How privileged are we? The second thing is God not only reigns majestically but He reigns powerfully. It says in the NIV God is armed with strength.

He is armed with strength. I can't just remember how the ESV put it. But whatever. He is armed with strength.

The Hebrew word that's behind the word armed carries this sense of being guarded for battle. So the Lord is majestic and He is guarded with strength.

That's the belt that He puts on. It's a belt of strength. Strength is like garments that God wears.

Strength and power are just really synonymous with this God that this psalmist is telling us about.

And if you read the whole series of psalms you'll get a sense that this psalmist with his own eyes or at least with his own mind has perceived God's strength at work in the world working on behalf of His people.

[18:19] This is a God whose power is infinite. Can you even begin to understand that? I can't. God's power is infinite. There is no limit to God's power.

Don't ever think that the church the Christian church is a lost cause and don't ever imagine for one minute that prayer to this all powerful God is a useless pointless exercise.

You talk to a God who is girded with strength. In fact God's power is such that He can do whatever He wills to do. Whatever He wills to do He can do.

That is the nature of the God that we talk to and have come to worship. This morning many years ago a friend of mine was telling me that he went to a little prayer meeting for one of these I think it was European Christian Mission one of those prayer meetings for one of these European missionary organizations and they got a report from Albania that life was very difficult for Christians under Enva Hoxha's reign.

So a little group of women not many beginning of the summer they weren't going to be meeting until the end of the summer I can't remember the exact details but what I do remember is that they decided well we better pray for the removal of Enva Hoxha.

[19:37] I mean that's a bit of a silly prayer isn't it? A few little women praying in a place called Dunmurray in Northern Ireland praying for the removal of the leader of a country but do you know that by the time they came back to meet to pray again for their missionary friends Enva Hoxha had been removed?

See this is a God who is girded with strength and can accomplish his will whatever his will might be. I don't know what this means for you but for me it means that God can provide for a college as it builds itself into a center training people for gospel work across these islands and across this world. Like it's not easy trying to sustain a college faculty on the income from a handful of students but this psalm has reminded me that this God that I come and talk to this God that we've worshipped together this morning is well able to provide well able to take care of that college because he is

girded with strength.

I don't know what it means for you but I wonder if it means God could break into the life of your son or daughter who've kicked over the traces and now have no time for God.

Have you given up all hope? The God that you pray to is girded with strength can humble them and bring them to an end of themselves. Maybe it means that God can sustain you through a difficult illness.

[21 : 10] Are you going through difficulties with your health? The God who overarches your life with his providential care is a God who is girded with strength.

Well here's the third thing God reigns eternally that's what he says at the end of verse 2 isn't it? The world is established it shall never be moved your throne is established from of old you are from everlasting God reigns eternally.

The world is established that's obviously a reference back to creation God established the world it didn't come into being by accident or by chance it came about by the divine purposes of God he spoke we are told in the book of Genesis and it was and it is established that carries the sense that the world is stable it's firm it's fixed and that the earth we're told in the passage the earth will not be moved which is really interesting because maybe there were pagans who believed that there were sort of hostile forces arrayed against the world and one day they would be successful in overcoming the world and maybe the psalmist is meeting these kinds of comments and saying no no no the world will not be moved the world is established now everything in the world changes doesn't it?

I mean the sun is cooling and will eventually burn itself out the resources of the earth that we use to fuel our motor vehicles that too is finite and will be exhausted species that once roamed the earth no longer roamed the earth people even change I mean none of us were here a hundred years ago probably or let's be on the side of caution and say a hundred and twenty years ago none of us not one of us were here a completely different generation lived on this planet than us a hundred years from now we'll be gone and a new generation a completely new generation will live everything changes in the world but what we're told here is that the planet itself the world itself will not be moved until God deems that it should be moved and even then it will be swallowed up in the new heaven and the new earth and there'll be some continuity between this earth and the new heaven and the new earth but the psalmist's point here is that

God has established the world and that's why it won't be moved it won't be moved because the God who established it won't be moved he is the one who has been from all eternity he's always been around there has never been a time when God was not that's what the psalmist wants us to know somehow you get a sense that he's discovered this afresh as he's watched God at work as he's entertained the thought on occasions maybe God is absent maybe God isn't in control maybe God isn't watching over us maybe things are out of control you just get this sense that he's rediscovered actually God is eternal and if God is eternal it means he's always been and he's always been God it's not that he always existed in some kind of lesser way in the past he's always been God and he's always in control and this has given this writer the psalmist so much encouragement

[24 : 50] I think this is one of the great bedrocks of the Christian faith God never changes I mean it's a miracle to me that early Christians worshiped the same God and rallied around the same book that I worship and that I rally around here in the 21st century this book has been able to sustain them this God has never changed not an iota he's been the same he's the same now as he was then you'll never waken up one day and find that God has been dislodged from his throne or that his reign has come to an end or that he has changed in any way he will always be the God that he is this God that we serve is eternal it's interesting to read just recently a little story from Spurgeon he went to visit a farmer and the farmer's weather vane had God his love on it and Spurgeon said that's a strange phrase to put on a weather vane what are you trying to say to people that God's love is as changeable as the weather is that what you're trying to say oh no says the farmer

I'm trying to tell people that no matter what way the wind blows God is love and that's the point of this writer God is eternal he's always been he always will be fourthly God rules emphatically talks about the surging floods I think it says in the ESV in the NIV it talks about the seas actually literally the Hebrew word could be translated rivers the roaring surging rivers as they lift up their voices and we've all heard the noise of the sea haven't we I remember being in Cairnbulg a few years ago way up on the northeast coast and just got out of my car one street from the shoreline to visit little lady in one of those little houses in Cairnbulg and the roar of the ocean was just deafening I'd never heard anything like it before and I'm an east coast boy I love the sea but the roar that day of the sea and

he says the sea is lifted up his voice as it's roaring and it's surging and it's pounding waves haven't we seen the pounding of the waves against the harbor wall as it hammers and pounds the coast line and then the psalmist says to us well let me just tell you something

God is greater mightier than the surging rivers God is mightier than the surging rivers no matter what forces are arrayed against him he is mightier than them all and there is an argument that maybe the surging rivers refer to hostile nations whatever it refers to the point remains the same God is mightier than everything that's arrayed against him finally we could say more about that but I better shift on God reigns righteously that's the last thing he reigns righteously and that's important that this little conclusion is in this psalm because might is not always right Hitler you could say he was mighty powerful and the army behind him but he exterminated six million innocent people you could say that Stalin was powerful and mighty but it's estimated that he was responsible for the deaths of twenty million people might is not always right but this

God who is mighty who is majestic who is eternal is also righteous his statutes we are told are trustworthy they are firm you can depend on them his statutes are dependable God's guidelines are always right and that is challenging in the 21st century because society has arrayed itself against the clear teachings of the Bible hasn't it like I'm not trying to be way out there I'm just trying to face facts as I listen to my kids talk about what they face at school I live in a bit of a Christian bubble but as I talk to people around me I sense that as I listen to the news society has you know if you believe things like marriages between one man and one woman you're weird in the 21st century you belong to the age of the dinosaurs but what the psalmist is saying to us is listen

God's statutes are true they are trustworthy and we will ignore them we will sideline them at our peril God's way is the right way it's the good way and God rules his people through his good word his trustworthy statutes I mean the Bible when it says the Bible is trustworthy I think the Bible is the most amazing book in the world when you sit down with 66 books written over 1500 years 39 books in the Old Testament 27 in the New written over a period of 1500 years written by kings scholars historians poets statesmen doctors authors all remotely removed from each other they didn't have the chance to sit in a room like this and say what will be our storyline what will be the main plot of this book and yet each book fits together like a hand in a glove and all points towards one climactic conclusion the Lord

[30 : 28] Jesus Voltaire said of the Bible and of Christians he said that they would be swept from the face of the earth and would fade into history what struck me about that was when he died the Geneva Bible study bought his house turned it into a printing press and from his home Bibles poured across Europe anyway the Bible is trust your statutes are trustworthy and holiness adorns your house for endless days holiness adorns your house for endless days God is a God of holiness the presence above the ark of the covenant in the holy of holies that was God's presence and it was so holy that people couldn't go in there only one man could go in once a year and that was something around his ankle so that they could pull him out if he was consumed in the presence of God God is a

God of holiness absolute purity and how glad we are that God is pure how awful it would be if God was a monster how awful it would be if God loved sin and delighted in sin and thought things like abuse and rape were fine how awful it would be God is not like that this God is not only majestic he's not only powerful he is not only triumphant he is not only eternal he is not only the one who rules emphatically his statutes are trustworthy and he is a God of absolute holiness and goodness we have a great God you know to praise I think sometimes we don't really appreciate how much how good he is how powerful he is and how we have every reason to praise him thank you for listening sorry I rambled on so long tell them not to invite me back and that will be the solution to that

Alistair you