

## King of kings?

Psalm 47, Colossians 1:15 – 20

Who have been the greatest kings on earth? Throughout history, there have been good leaders and bad leaders. There have been dictators, and there have been benevolent kings. I came across a list, supposedly, of the greatest, most benevolent monarchs in history – those rulers who made life better for their people.

<http://listverse.com/2010/08/11/top-10-greatest-monarchs/>

I won't go through the whole list but you will have heard of some of them:

10 Suleiman I reigned as Sultan of the Ottoman Empire for 69 years (1494 – 1566), longer than any other Sultan. During his golden age of the Ottoman Empire which encompassed most of the Middle East, South Eastern Europe and Rhodes. He made educational, legislative, taxation and criminal reforms.

1 Louis 14<sup>th</sup> reigned as King of France for 72 years (1643 – 1715), longer than any other European monarch. Under his reign, France became the most powerful country in Europe. Louis ended feudalism in France and modernized the country. The military and fine arts flourished. It seems odd though that because Louis believed strongly in the divine right of kings; he said that he was the sun and that his courtiers and France should revolve around him like planets.

My question is a very subjective one; the list I quoted from had Caesar Augustus on as 5<sup>th</sup> best ruler. I doubt the conquered peoples would have called him a great king, voluntarily anyway. Another list had Adolph Hitler at number 10!

Of course some kings were kind and benevolent. Whoever the best human king or queen was, they were still very flawed and their power was very limited. Scripture tells us that any power on earth only exists because the Lord has given it.

Romans 1:1

Psalm 47 is a celebration of God's power as King of the whole earth. It begins with a command to praise the Lord by clapping hands. Clapping hands is often done in joy or celebration. However the original language points to even more than this. Clapping hands could demonstrate a sign of agreement. When the people clapped their hands it meant they agreed that the Lord is King and they are his servants. He is the boss, the King and clapping their hands acknowledged this.

Verse two describes the Lord as awesome. Kevin and I once knew a person we called Mrs Awesome, because she used the word 'awesome' a lot. Overuse has devalued the word. However it is used rightly when it describes the Ruler of the whole earth; the one whom all nations submit to. He alone is the Lord Most High. He is awesome beyond words!

This awesome God, is the one who loves his people Israel so much, that he clears space for them, gives them the best by subduing the nations for them. He doesn't persecute the other nations or wipe them out but gives room for his chosen people, Israel, can do the job he has called them to do. That job is to bless all nations and reveal the Lord to them.

The nations are important to the Lord and are mentioned four times in Psalm 47 (1, 3, 8, 9). Though different versions use different words, the poem clearly points towards the reconciliation of all peoples to the Lord.

Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Society of -Jesus, wrote,

“Unity of prayer, unity of supplication, unity of mind, unity of expectancy in love and in blameless joy: this is -Jesus Christ and there is nothing greater than he. Flock together, all of you, as to one temple of God, as to one altar, to one -Jesus Christ, who proceeded from the one Father, who is in the one and returned to the one.”

Ignatius urges the faithful to flock to him but all people will flock to him. Paul writes: God raised him (Jesus) up to the heights of heaven and gave him a name which is above every other name, that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Phil 2:9 - 11

Back to the Psalm: verse 5 talks about trumpets blaring and people singing. This is the noise of worship. He is worthy of praise. The people are repeatedly urged to worship him:

Sing out your praises  
Sing highest praises  
Sing thoughtful praises

And again, in the final verse, the reminder that all nations, all peoples, will praise him. At the Tower of Babel the peoples were separated but we will be reunited as a common humanity and together we will give the Lord his due:

He is highly honoured everywhere.

Of course people everywhere have not always praised the Lord. He has not always been honoured or worshipped. Many have misunderstood the actions, the being and the character of God and have not followed him at all.

But Jesus came to show us who God really is; to show us how God acts, who God is and what he is like.

Turn to Colossians 1:15 – 20. The poem is beautifully and carefully laid out; not so we think Paul was a great writer. Paul writes to a group of people, the church, so they might know who they serve together. He writes to give them the tools they need to live in a difficult time. He writes so they might know Jesus and who they are in him. Paul wants the church to understand Christian growth means knowing Jesus Christ as the central figure; he is supreme in all things.

Look at all the words or phrases describing Christ as head or leader; revealing him as Lord of all. This amazing poem is written in praise of Jesus who is King of Kings. It's written so that the church will know the One they live for. The rest of Paul's letter explores and expands on the poem. It is worth mediating on

The first statement is “He is the visible image of the invisible God.” When we look at Jesus, at his life and character, we see God himself. The more we look at Jesus together with our spiritual eyes, the more we can discover of God himself. Jesus was equal with God and yet never grasped at equality. This is one way in which the King of Kings differs from earthly kings – he never uses abuses the power he has. Sure he bids us come, follow him and obey him but the choice is always ours.

V 15 and 17 This Jesus existed before all things –ome translations say he is the ‘firstborn’ – that gives the sense of having all the privileges that a human firstborn has – inheritance, pre-eminence in the family etc. Jesus has always been alive as a member of the God head – Father, Son and Holy Spirit have always existed in relationship together.

Jesus is the Creator (v16). He brought everything else into being – everything in the natural world and spiritual world. Jesus dreamed up all the beauty and power in creation; he imagined it and followed through with wonderful workmanship. Tom Wright says that every time the beautiful in creation stops us in our tracks, we ought to give praise to Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

Jesus sustains this world. He holds all things together.(v17) Even though it is severely damage, it is not destroyed and never will be. And one day Jesus will restore all things. As the Psalm said, all nations, all people will be united in their praise of him.

This amazingly powerful Jesus, Creator and Sustainer God, is also head of the church. (v 18) Jesus is Lord of the church. The church was never meant to be an institution be his followers because of what he has done.

His resurrection cancelled the power of death. Jesus’ followers can live freely and abundantly. His followers are the church; his body.

The Lord wants to reconcile all people to himself though – he will not be satisfied until his total work of reconciliation is done:

Verse 20       It was through what his Son did that God cleared a path for everything to come to him—all things in heaven and on earth—for Christ’s death on the cross has made peace with God for all by his blood.

As an aside - Those of you who attended the Islam and Christianity will be aware that their central figure Muhammed, never claimed to be God. He claimed to be a prophet only. While Muhammed is central to Islam he does not have the power to bring salvation to anyone. In fact he said he didn’t know what would happen to him when he died so he certainly couldn’t claim salvation for anyone else.

Contrast that with Christ, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, who promised that by him and through him all people could experience fullness of life now and in eternity. He told one of the Jewish leaders that:

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<sup>1</sup> Paul for Everyone, The Prison Letters, Tom Wright, 152

God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only son so that all who believe in him will not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16

In us, his new creation has begun and we can live as human beings fully alive; revealing the glory of God to paraphrase St Irenaeus.

As a perfect human being Jesus shows us how to live. When he does what his Father tells him, he invites us also to obey our Father. When he welcomes children and vulnerable ones; we are enabled to do the same – to lay down any power we have in order to include the weakest among us. When Jesus refuses revenge eg in the Garden of Gethsemane he healed the soldiers ear cut off as one of his disciples tried to protect him. When Jesus brings healing in countless examples we are enabled also to pray for healing for ourselves and those around us.

The church at Colossae lived in a world similar to ours. There were multiple gods and kings – each one claiming the lives of the people.

What gods claim that kind of control over our lives in the West? How does advertising and keeping up with the Jones subtly infect our thinking? How do all the opportunities we have as individuals pull us away from each other and prevent us keeping Jesus on the throne of our lives? Are we in danger of trying to be king of our own lives?

Paul wants the Christian community at Colossae to understand that the more they know about Jesus Christ, the Supreme Lord, and the more they get to know Jesus personally, the more they will be able to live out a life of relationship with him. That life explored and tested together, will overflow to the community around them.

Is the Lord of all creation, the King of Kings, is he King of our lives – really?

One woman who understood what it meant for the Lord to truly be King of her life was the missionary Helen Roseveare. She was a medical missionary in the Congo and was attacked during the uprising of the Simba. This Godly woman was raped, assaulted, humiliated; hanging on for dear life with a faith in God that could not be defeated. While she was recovering from the trauma of that time, the Lord and her grow even closer together than they had been before. During that time she wrote a question she believed came from God. She could answer affirmatively to that question. Here is the question:

Can you thank me for trusting you with that experience, even if I never tell you why?

The greatest kings on earth are not a shadow of the King of Kings. Helen lived under Christ the King's reign. She knew that:

The glorious God is the only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of Lords.  
1 Timothy 6:15

How real is that truth in your life today?

**Reflection questions:**

What does it mean to say that God is 'King'?

What kind of King is God?

If 'his power holds everything together'; what does that say about our lives?

What does your daily life look like in relation to his Kingship?

What other demi-kings might need to be dethroned in our lives?

**Blessing**

May the peace of the Lord Christ go with you : wherever he  
may send you;

may he guide you through the wilderness : protect you through  
the storm;

may he bring you home rejoicing : at the wonders he has  
shown you;

may he bring you home rejoicing : once again into our doors.

And may the blessing ....