

**Sermon preached by Pastor Robert Barnett at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, October 3, 2010**

THE KING OF ALL THE EARTH

Psalm 47

This Sunday, we are emphasizing a missions theme in anticipation of our Missions Conference in three weeks. The conference theme will be “Building Bridges with Post-Modern Europe and Islam.” Please plan on joining us at all of the events you can on Friday, October 22 through Sunday, October 24.

In light of our missions emphasis, I will preach from Psalm 47. Before we read it together, let’s once again come before God in prayer and ask for the help and illumination to make these words known and clearer to us.

INTRODUCTION

There is a short documentary called *Powers of Ten* that was shown in schools in the 1960s. Maybe some of you remember seeing it. The film was interesting enough to keep around and is now available on the Internet via YouTube. *Powers of Ten* takes us on an adventure in magnitudes. Starting at a picnic by the lakeside in Chicago, this film transports us to the outer edges of the universe.

Every ten seconds we view the starting point from ten times farther out. So, you see Chicago. And then it moves another factor of ten, and what you see is the United States. And back another factor of ten, and you see the Earth, and a little further, you’re looking at the solar system, It keeps going until our own galaxy is visible only as a speck of light among many others.

Returning to Earth with breathtaking speed, we move inward – into the hand of the sleeping picnicker – with ten times more magnification every ten seconds. The journey ends inside a proton of a carbon atom within a DNA molecule in a white blood cell.

Can you see in this Psalm that something like that is happening? The Powers of Ten. It begins with a picture of some worshippers in Jerusalem – maybe they’re in the temple, maybe they’re in the streets of Jerusalem. And then it moves back and you see Israel – this tiny, little, insignificant land no greater than the size of Vermont. And eventually it moves back and back and back, and God is the King of all the Earth.

God is King of all the earth! Why do we need to be reminded of that truth? What does this ancient psalm have to do with us in the 21st century? Think for a moment of the times in which we live. War. The threat of terrorist attack. A recession. Unemployment. Government, whoever you want to blame, out-of-control. We meet these troubled times square in the face almost every day.

Our nation has become increasingly secular. We live in what is often called a “post-Christian society.” Christian faith has been removed from the public discourse. Biblical values are challenged every day. Following Jesus in today’s culture seems irrelevant. Theology professor David Wells calls this the weightlessness of God:

It is one of the defining marks of our time that God is now weightless. I do not mean by this that He is ethereal, but rather that He has become unimportant. He rests upon the world so inconsequentially as not to be noticeable. He has lost His saliency for human life.

Those who assure the pollsters of their belief in God’s existence may nonetheless consider Him less interesting than television, His commands less authoritative than their appetites for affluence and influence, His judgment no more awe-inspiring than the evening news, and His truth less compelling than the advertisers’ sweet fog of flattery and lies. That is weightlessness” (David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?*).

This is the culture to which we’ve been given the Great Commission to make disciples of all nations. In post-modern Europe and here in the United States, God has become weightless. In other parts of the world, other religions and beliefs dominate – Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and political ideology of Communism. If the Church has been given the task of evangelizing the world and the world is so post-Christian or anti-Christian, how can our commission be accomplished?

Psalm 47 helps us see the answer. Today, we will look at this psalm from three perspectives:

- Historical: What did it mean in the life of ancient Israel?
- Eschatological: In what way is Psalm 47 a prophecy of the future? How is that prophecy fulfilled in Jesus Christ?
- Missiological: What does this Psalm mean in light of the mission of the church?

WHAT DID PSALM 47 MEAN IN THE LIFE OF ANCIENT ISRAEL?

Look again at verses 1-4. See how the people rejoice in what God has done. Clapping hands, shouting to God with cries of joy, celebrating what God had done for Israel. He subdued nations – a reference to God’s deliverance of Israel from Egypt under Moses and His conquest of the Promised Land under Joshua. Remember Israel crossing the Red Sea, while the Egyptian army drowned? Remember how the walls of Jericho fell down at a trumpet’s blast? All this was done miraculously, by the Lord, so that He would give Israel their inheritance, the Promised Land. In verse 5, we see God ascending while the trumpets play and the people shout for joy.

Some scholars believe that this psalm was composed at the time when the Ark of the Covenant was carried into the temple in Jerusalem. That would be entirely appropriate. The building of the temple by Solomon was the culmination of God’s delivering Israel from Egypt and giving them the Promised Land. The Ark was placed in the innermost part of the temple, the “Holy of Holies.” In it were the tablets given to Moses with the Ten Commandments. Upon the Ark was

the mercy seat, where the Shekinah glory of God rested in the form of a cloud. Listen to 1 Kings 8:9-11 when the first temple was dedicated:

There was nothing in the ark except the two stone tablets that Moses had placed in it at Horeb, where the LORD made a covenant with the Israelites after they came out of Egypt. When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the LORD. And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled His temple.

Isn't that awesome? The glory of the Lord filled the temple so much that the priests could not go about their duties. The Lord had ascended. That was worthy of celebration.

Other scholars see this as God's going out to meet Israel's enemies and defeating them, during either the reign of Jehoshaphat or Hezekiah. Since the Shekinah glory of God has departed, there is no longer the cloud in the temple. Yet God's presence is real and the victory won.

Whatever the reason, it's a great occasion. This is no ordinary day; this is an extraordinary day. Israel celebrates! They speak of the Lord, not just as the God of Israel, but of the whole earth. The Lord Most High. God reigns over all the nations.

Israel knows the Lord as the ruler and creator of the universe. Not long after the miracle at the Red Sea, God gave the Law through Moses at Mount Sinai. Not only were the Ten Commandments given, but the first five books of the Old Testament, beginning with Genesis. The very people who saw God part the Red Sea would learn that He made everything that is. The God who delivered them from Egypt was not just some tribal deity, not just the God of Israel alone. He is the sovereign Creator of the universe. God reigns! He is King of All the Earth.

HOW DID PSALM 47 PROPHECY GOD'S COMING KINGSHIP?

Whatever Psalm 47 might have been saying about God in the context of the life of ancient Israel, it actually has something far greater in mind. It actually looks forward into the future centuries and centuries and centuries.

Like the Powers of Ten, you go flying past the destruction of the first temple and the rebuilding of the second temple. You fly past the coming of Jesus – His incarnation, His death and resurrection, His ascension and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. You fly past the emergence of the church and the Acts of the Apostles. And on and on and on it goes, and it comes right up to our time, but it doesn't stop. It goes past our time and on and on and on into the future.

Kings come and go. Rulers and presidents are here and then forgotten. But the reign of God lasts forever. There is a Kingdom and this Kingdom belongs to God. This Kingdom was growing, and this Kingdom is coming. God rules and God reigns! We pray in the Lord's Prayer, "Thy Kingdom come." There's something about this psalm that opens up history far beyond what we can see and know today.

God took His own powers of ten in reverse: the great God of heaven became a man, smaller and smaller and smaller, and became a human being named Jesus Christ, both fully God and fully man. Verse 9 seems to be the climax of the Psalm: “The princes of the people have assembled themselves as the people of the God of Abraham.”

The psalm looks back, first of all, to Abraham, and it’s talking about a people of God that have been gathered who are the people of the God of Abraham. God gave a promise to Abraham, beginning in Genesis 12:

The LORD had said to Abram, “Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

We know from Scripture that this promise to Abraham was fulfilled in Jesus. Do you remember the extraordinary claim the Apostle Paul makes in his letter to the Galatians? The covenant promise to Abraham was made not with many, but with One, that is Jesus Christ. At the heart of that covenant promise to Abraham is the coming of Jesus Christ.

God is a King and a Ruler, and that Ruler is Jesus Christ. He is the only King there is. One day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess Jesus as Lord. Jesus reigns!

WHAT DOES CHRIST’S RULE MEAN TO US?

What does Christ’s rule mean for us? One place we will find application is in the Great Commission. Let me read this passage in its entirety. Matthew 28:18-20:

Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

All authority in heaven and earth! John Piper describes this in terms of Christ’s authority and the promise that the mission will not fail. Says Piper, “Authority is the right and power to hold sway in a given relationship.” Parents have authority over their children, employers over their employees, military commanders over their troops. The lieutenant has authority over his platoon, but he does not have authority over his commander.

But Jesus has total authority. He spoke with authority; He had authority over nature, over disease, over demons, even over death. As His words say in John 10:18:

“No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again.”

Jesus has the authority to give eternal life and the authority to execute judgment.

Jesus Christ reigns! He is King of All the Earth.

Jesus lays claim to the whole world. He demands that every person from every nation, tribe and tongue become His disciple. But the way He pursues that claim is by sending His followers to make disciples of all nations. Jesus says all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Him. On that basis, as a result of His authority, we are to go and make disciples of all nations.

Not “come and see” but “go and tell.” We are commanded to evangelize and make disciples of every people, group and religion: Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, animists, atheists and agnostics. Everybody!

Across the street and across the world, we are to be at our Savior’s business with our time, talent, and treasure. And notice, the mission does not end until Christ comes at the end of the age.

People out there are perishing. They have been misled; they are lost. They live lives of quiet desperation. Some endure intense suffering. Joni Erickson Tada describes human anguish and suffering as “A spoonful of Hell come early.” Anyone without Jesus will spend eternity in Hell, separated from God!

You know, the Bible tells us Jesus exercises His authority over their eternal situation through us, as we pray for and speak to unbelievers, with our family and friends, in our neighborhoods and workplaces, as we pray for and support missionaries (and sometimes go ourselves). Where do you find yourself with respect to Christ’s authority over you, over the nations?

Is He seated on the throne of your life so that you are actively involved in evangelism and missions? Or do you sit on the sidelines of the Christian life, content to let others fulfill the Great Commission?

John Piper goes on to explain that our mission to make disciples will not fail. When Jesus came to be the light of the world, He made His focus to be Israel, but made it clear that the kingdom He was bringing would bless the nations. Jesus came to save people from all nations, not just the Jews. Concerning the final judgment, we read in Matthew 25:

When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, He will sit on His throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on His right and the goats on His left.

Piper wrote: “The criterion of judgment will not be Jewishness, but how people have related to Him in the ministry of His messengers.” The mission Jesus gave to His followers will come to pass! Christ will build His church! The gates of Hell will not prevail against it! (Matt 16:18). The gospel will be proclaimed to every nation, and then the end will come (Matt 24:14).

When the Bible speaks of the nations, think of people groups, ethnic groups and not political boundaries that change over time. The gospel will be proclaimed to every ethnic group. When the nations assemble, we will see folks from every race and tribe, of every complexion and color, of every language ever uttered on this planet. Jesus is King of all the earth!

Now this truth should give us confidence in our witnessing. If Jesus has authority, if He is the sovereign ruler over the planet, then our witness for Him will not be in vain. When we share our faith or head for the mission field, we may have no idea of God's sovereign plan in the election and calling of the people to whom we speak.

We may be used by Jesus to plant seeds that will eventually bring faith. We may actually be the one who reaps the fruit of evangelism. Many times we will be talking to those who will reject the gospel and stand as goats at the judgment. We just don't know. But we can be assured that when we share our faith, we proclaim Christ as King and He gets glory. What a guarantee! Our mission will not fail!

CONCLUSION

Knowing that Jesus is King of all the Earth, particularly in the Great Commission, should give us a new freedom as we approach evangelism and missions. The primary purpose of missions is not to see others come to Christ, as important as that is. The primary reason we share our faith here and abroad, is for His glory. Piper wrote: "Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exist because worship doesn't."

The purpose of our outreach and missions is to bring more worshippers to our Savior. Worshippers from every nation because the kings of the earth belong to God; He is greatly exalted. The promise of Psalm 47 finds its fulfillment in the book of Revelation:

Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns" (Rev 19:6).

Jesus Christ reigns over the nations! He is King of all the Earth. How will you respond? How will I?