

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS
Commentary by Michael Sigler
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God Is in Charge

Psalm 47

Key verses: “Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises. For God is the king of all the earth; sing praises with a psalm” (Psalm 47:6-7).

It was a job I will never forget and a conversation I will long remember. Between my graduation from college and the start of graduate school, I took a temporary job on a construction crew. One day I was working with three other men, roofing a house in 98-degree heat. It was hot, hard, thankless work. As a young man, I was learning how to offer praise to God in the moments when I least felt like it. And this was one of those moments.

As I stood on the roof of that house, shovel in hand, sweating profusely, I said in words that I thought only God and I could hear: “Praise the Lord!”

What I did not know was that one of my co-workers was close enough to hear those words. He was not a Christian, and he immediately said, with some disgust: “Praise the Lord? Why?!”

A door was unexpectedly opened, and I had the privilege of sharing with him my faith in Jesus Christ—and the difference it made in my life.

In Psalm 47, the psalmist essentially says, “Praise the Lord!” And then the psalmist says “Here’s why.”

Bible scholars believe that Psalm 47 was composed for use in temple worship, and probably as part of a liturgical procession into the temple. The psalm is essentially a call to worship: “Clap your hands, all you peoples; shout to God with loud songs of joy” (v. 1). “Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises” (v. 6).

The psalm also tells *why* we should offer God our worship and praise: “For the Lord, the Most High, is awesome, a great king over all the earth” (v. 2). “For God is the king of all the earth....God is king over the nations; God sits on his holy throne” (vv. 7 and 8).

Why should we praise and worship God? Because God is in ultimate control of all things. God is “king of all the earth.” This affirmation of God’s control raises questions, of course. If God is in control, then why is the world in such a mess? Does God’s sovereign control cancel out humanity’s free will?

Psalm 47 does not provide answers to these questions, but other Bible passages do. For example, Romans 8:28 assures us that “in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” Not all things that happen to us are good. But God is able, as we trust Him, to take even the bad things that happen to us and make them work for our good and His glory. So we can praise and worship the Lord, even when life is hard.

What about the question of God’s sovereignty or control versus humanity’s free will? Aren’t these two truths mutually exclusive? In *Knowledge of the Holy*, A.W. Tozer gives this helpful illustration:

“An ocean liner leaves New York bound for Liverpool. Its destination has been determined by proper authorities. Nothing can change it. This is at least a faint picture of [God’s] sovereignty. On board the liner are scores of passengers. These are not in chains, neither are their activities determined for them by decree. They are completely free to move about as they will. They eat, sleep, play, lounge about on the deck, read, talk, altogether as they please; but all the while the great liner is carrying them steadily onward toward a predetermined port. Both freedom and sovereignty are present here, and they do not contradict. So it is, I believe, with man’s freedom and the sovereignty of God. The mighty liner of God’s sovereign design keeps its steady course over the sea of history.”

Also, when Psalm 47 proclaims God as “a great king over all the earth,” it is clear that God’s rule and reign have not now been fully realized here on earth. So, in the great prayer, Jesus teaches us to pray: “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth even as it is in heaven.”

And God’s Word assures us that one day God’s rule and reign, through His son Jesus, will be fully realized on earth as in heaven. In that day, the vision of John’s revelation will become our blessed reality: “Then, I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband....He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (Revelation 21: 1,2 and 4).

One other truth from Psalm 47 is important for our lives. This psalm is known as one of the “enthronement” psalms. It celebrated God’s enthronement in the temple and in the hearts of God’s people. The psalm challenges us, as Christ followers, to ask: “Am I making King Jesus *my* King, the one who rules and reigns on the ‘throne’ of my life?”

Ken Langley illustrated this question with a scene from Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*: “Aragorn, the rightful king of the west, has long labored in obscurity, forgoing kingly comforts to serve his subjects and fight their battles, repeatedly risking his

life for them. At last he prevails over the forces of the dark lord, and is poised to enter the city where he will rule at last.

“When Aragorn enters the fortified city of Mina Tirith for the first time as king, the city’s steward proclaims Aragorn’s royal pedigree for all the citizens to hear: ‘Here is Aragorn son of Arathorn, chieftan of the Dunedain of Arnor, Captain of the Host of the West, bearer of the Star of the North, wielder of the Sword Reforged, victorious in battle, whose hands bring healing, the Elfstone, Elessar of the line of Valandil, Isilfur’s son, Elendil’s son of Numenor. Shall he be king and enter into the City and dwell there?’

“There was another King,” says Langley, “who long labored in obscurity: unheralded, humbly serving the people over whom he had every right to reign, laying down his life for them. Today he claims the throne of our lives. Here is Jesus the Christ, the Second Adam, the Bright and Morning Star, the First and the Last, victorious in battle, whose hands bring healing, Mighty Second Person of the Trinity, Son of David, Son of Man, Word of God Incarnate, the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace! Shall he enter our hearts—our church—and dwell there?” (from a sermon by Ken Langley)

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